ENGLISH POEMS
TO THE READER

Art was a palace once, things great and fair,
And strong and holy, found a temple there:
Now 'tis a lazaret-house of leprous men.
O shall we hear an English song again!
Still English larks mount in the merry morn,
An English May still brings an English thorn,
Still English daisies up and down the grass,
Still English love for English lad and lass—
Yet youngsters blush to sing an English song!

Thou nightingale that for six hundred years
Sang to the world—O art thou hush'd at last!
For, not of thee this new voice in our ears,
Music of France that once was of the spheres;
And not of thee these strange green flowers that
spring
From daisy roots and seem to bear a sting.

Thou Helicon of numbers ' undefiled,'
Forgive that 'neath the shadow of thy name,
England, I bring a song of little fame;
Not as one worthy but as loving thee,
Not as a singer, only as a child.
PAOLO AND FRANCESCA
To R. K. Leather

(July 16th, 1892.)
PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

It happened in that great Italian land
Where every bosom beateth with a star—
At Rimini, anigh that crumbling strand
The Adriatic filcheth near and far—
In that same past where Dante’s dream-days are,
That one Francesca gave her youthful gold
Unto an aged carle to bolt and bar;
Though all the love which great young hearts
can hold,
How could she give that love unto a miser old?

Nay! but young Paolo was the happy lad,
A youth of dreaming eye yet dauntless foot,
Who all Francesca’s wealth of loving had;
One brave to scale a wall and steal the fruit,
Nor fear because some dotard owned the root;
Yea! one who wore his love like sword on thigh
And kept not all his valour for his lute;
One who could dare as well as sing and sigh.
Ah! then were hearts to love, but they are long
gone by.
Ye lily-wives so happy in the nest,
Whose joy within the gates of duty springs,
Blame not Love's poor, who, if they would be blest,
Must steal what comes to you with marriage rings:

Ye pity the poor lark whose scarce-tried wings
Faint in the net, while still the morning air
With brown free throats of all his brethren sings,
And can it be ye will not pity her,
Whose youth is as a lark all lost to singing there.

In opportunity of dear-bought joy
Rich were this twain, for old Lanciotto, he
Who was her lord, was brother of her boy,
And in one home together dwelt the three,
With brothers two beside; and he and she
Sat at one board together, in one fane
Their voices rose upon one hymn, ah me!
Beneath one roof each night their limbs were lain,
As now in death they share the one eternal pain.

As much as common men can love a flower
Unto Lanciotto was Francesca dear,
'Tis not on such Love wields his jealous power;
And therefore Paolo moved him not to fear,
Though he so green with youth and he so sere,
Nor yet indeed was wrong, the hidden thing
Grew at each heart, unknown of each, a year,—
Two eggs still silent in the nest through spring,
May draws so near to June, and not yet time to sing!

Yet oft, indeed, through days that gave no sign
Had but Francesca turned about and read
Paolo’s bright eyes that only dared to shine
On the dear gold that glorified her head;
Ere all the light had from their circles fled
And the grey Honour darkened all his face:
They had not come to June and nothing said,
Day followed day with such an even pace,
Nor night succeeded night and left no starry trace.

Or, surely, had the flower Paolo pressed
In some sweet volume when he put it by,
Told how his mistress drew it to her breast
And called upon his name when none was nigh;
Had but the scarf he kissed with piteous cry
But breathed again its secret unto her,
Or had but one of every little sigh
Each left for each—been love’s true messenger:
They surely had not kept that winter all the year.
Yea! love lay hushed and waiting like a seed,
   Some laggard of the season still abed
Though the sun calls and gentle zephyrs plead,
   And Hope that waited long must deem it dead;
Yet lo! to-morrow sees its shining head
Singing at dawn 'mid all the garden throng:
   Ah, had it known, it had been earlier sped—
Was it for fear of day it slept so long,
Or were its dreams of singing sweeter than the song?

But what poor flower can symbol all the might
   And all the magnitude, great Love, of thee?
Ah, is there aught can image thee aright
   In earth or heaven, how great or fair it be?
We watch the acorn grow into the tree,
We watch the patient spark surprise the mine,
   But what are oaks to thy Ygdrasil-tree?
What the mad mine's convulsive strength to thine,
That wrecks a world but bids heaven's soaring steeples shine

A god that hath no earthly metaphor,
   A blinding word that hath no earthly rhyme,
Love! we can only call and no name more;
   As the great lonely thunder rolls sublime,
As the great sun doth solitary climb,
And we have but themselves to know them by,
Just so Love stands a stranger amid Time:
The god is there, the great voice speaks on high,
We pray, 'What art thou, Lord?' but win us no reply.

So in the dark grew Love, but feared to flower,
Dreamed to himself, but never spake a word,
Burned like a prisoned fire from hour to hour,
Sang his dear song like an unheeded bird;
Waiting the summoning voice so long unheard,
Waiting with weary eyes the gracious sign
To bring his rose, and tell the dream he dared,
The tremulous moment when the star should shine,
And each should ask of each, and each should answer
——'Thine.'

Winter to-day, but lo! to-morrow spring!
They waited long, but O at last it came,
Came in a silver hush at evening;
Francesca toyed with threads upon a frame,
Hard by young Paolo read of knight and dame
That long ago had loved and passed away:
• He had no other way to tell his flame,
She dare not listen any other way——
But even that was bliss to lovers poor as they.

The world grew sweet with wonder in the west
The while he read and while she listened there,
And many a dream from out its silken nest
Stole like a curling incense through the air;
Yet looked she not on him, nor did he dare:
But when the lovers kissed in Paradise
His voice sank and he turned his gaze on her,
Like a young bird that flutters ere it flies,—
And lo! a shining angel called him from her eyes

Then from the silence sprang a kiss like flame,
And they hung lost together; while around
The world was changed, no more to be the same
Meadow or sky, no little flower or sound
Again the same, for earth grew holy ground:
While in the silence of the mounting moon
Infinite love throbbed in the straining bound
Of that great kiss, the long-delaying boon,
Granted indeed at last, but ended, ah! so soon.

As the great sobbing fulness of the sea
Fills to the throat some void and aching cave,
Till all its hollows tremble silently,
Pressed with sweet weight of softly-lapping wave:
So kissed those mighty lovers glad and brave.
And as a sky from which the sun has gone
Trembles all night with all the stars he gave—
PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

A firmament of memories of the sun,—
So thrilled and thrilled each life when that great kiss was done.

But coward shame that had no word to say
In passion's hour, with sudden icy clang
Slew the bright morn, and through the tarnished day
An iron bell from light to darkness rang:
She shut her ears because a throstle sang,
She dare not hear the little innocent bird,
And a white flower made her poor head to hang—
To be so white! once she was white as curd,
But now—'Alack!' 'Alack!' She speaks no other word.

The pearly hue on yonder hills afar
*Within the dawn, where mounts the lark and sings
By the great angel of the morning star,—
That was his love, and all free fair fresh things
That move and glitter while the daylight springs:
To thus know love, and yet to spoil love thus!
To lose the dream—O silly beating wings—
Great dream so splendid and miraculous:
O Lord. O Lord, have mercy, have mercy upon us.
She turned her mind upon the holy ones
Whose love lost here was love in heaven tenfold,
She thought of Lucy, that most blessed of nuns
Who sent her blue eyes on a plate of gold
To him who wooed her daily for her love—
'Mine eyes!' 'Mine eyes!' 'Here,— go in peace,'
they are!'

But ever love came through the midnight grove;
Young Love, with wild eyes watching from afar,
And called and called and called until the morning star

Ah, poor Francesca, 'tis not such as thou
That up the stony steeps of heaven climb,
Take thou thy heaven with thy Paolo now—
Sweet saint of sin, saint of a deathless rhyme,
Song shall defend thee at the bar of Time,
Dante shall set thy fair young glowing face
On the dark background of his theme sublime,
And Thou and He in your superb disgrace
Still on that golden wind of passion shall embrace.

So loved this pair, but whither have they passed?
Ah me, that dark must always follow day,
That Love's last kiss is surely kissed at last,
How'er so wildly the poor lips may pray;
Merciful God, is there no other way?
And pen, O must thou of the ending write,
The hour Lanciotto found them where they lay,
Folded together, weary with delight,
Within the sumptuous petals of the rose of night.

Yea, for Lanciotto found them: many an hour,
Ere their dear joy had run its doomed date,
Had they, in silken nook and blossomed bower,
All unsuspect the blessed apple ate,
Who now must grind its core predestinate.
Kiss, kiss, poor losing lovers, nor deny
One little tremor of its bliss, for Fate
Cometh upon you, and the dark is nigh
Where all, un kissed, un kissing, learn at length to lie.

Bent on some journey of the state's concern
They deemed him, and indeed he rode thereon:
But questioned Paolo—'What if he return?'
'Nay, love, indeed he is securely gone
As thou art surely here, beloved one,
He went ere sundown, and our moon is here—
A fear, love, in this heart that yet knew none!
How could he fright that little velvet ear
With last night's dream and all its ghostly fear!
So did he yield him to her eager breast,
And half forgot, but could not quite forget,
No sweetest kiss could put that fear to rest,
And all its haggard vision chilled him yet;
Their warder moon in nameless trouble set,
There seemed a traitor echo in the place,
A moaning wind that moaned for lovers met,
And once above her head's deep sunk embrace.

He saw—Death at the window with his yellow face.

Had that same dream caught old Lanciotto's reins,
Bent in a weary huddle on his steed,
In darkling haste along the blindfold lanes,
Making a clattering halt in all that speed:
'Fool! Fool!' he cried, 'O dotard fool, indeed,
So ho! they wanton while the old man rides,'
And on the night flashed pictures of the deed.
'Come!'—and he dug his charger's panting sides,
And all the homeward dark tore by in roaring tidos.

As some great lord of acres when a thief
Steals from his park some flower he never sees,
Calls it a lily fair beyond belief,
Prisons the wretch, and fines before he frees;
Such jealous madness did Lanciotto seize;
All in an instant is Francesca dear,
He claims the wife he never cared to please,
All in an instant seems his castle near,—
And those poor lovers sleep, forgot at last their fear.

His horse left steaming at his journey's end,
Up through his palace stairs with springing tread
He strode; the silence met him like a friend,
Fain to dissuade him from that deed of dread,
Making a breeze about his burning head,
Laying large hands of comfort on his soul;
Within the ashes of his cheek burned red
A long-shut rose of youth, as to the goal
Of death he sped, as once to love's own tryst he stole.

He caught a sound as of a rose's breath,
He caught another breath of deeper lung,
Rose-leaves and oak-leaves on the wind of death;
He drew aside the arras where they clung
In the dim light, so lovely and so young—
They lay in sin as in a cradle there,
Twin babes that in one bosom nestling hung:
Even Lanciotto paused, ah, will he spare?
Who could not quite forgive a wrong that is so fair!

The grave old clock ticked somewhere in the gloom,
A dozen waiting seconds rose and fell
Ere his pale dagger flickered in the room,
Then quenched its corpse-light in their bosoms' swell—

'Thus, dears, I mate you evermore in hell.'
Their blood ran warm about them and they sighed,
For the mad smiter did his work too well,
Just drew together softly and so died,
Fell very still and strange, and moved not side by side.

Yea, moved not, though two hours he watched the twain
And heard their blood drip drip upon the floor,
Twice with stern voice he spake to them again,
And then, a little tenderly, once more,—
'Thus, dears, in hell I mate you evermore.'
And when the curious fingers of the day
Unravelled all the dark, and morning wore,
And the young light played round them where they lay,
The souls were many leagues upon the hellward way.
LOVE PLATONIC
Surely at last, O Lady, the sweet moon
That bringeth in the happy singing weather
Groweth to pearly queendom, and full soon
Shall Love and Song go hand in hand together;
For all the pain that all too long hath waited
In deep dumb darkness shall have speech at last,
And the bright babe Death gave the Love he mated
Shall leap to light and kiss the weeping past.

For all the silver morning is a-glimmer
With gleaming spears of great Apollo’s host,
And the night fadeth like a spent out swimmer
Hurled from the headlands of some shining coast.
O, happy soul, thy mouth at last is singing,
Drunken with wine of morning’s azure deep,
Sing on, my soul, the world beneath thee swinging,
A bough of song above a sea of sleep.

2

Who is the lady I sing?
Ah, how can I tell thee her praise
LOVE PLATONIC

For whom all my life's but the string
    Of a rosary painful of days;

Which I count with a curious smile
    As a miser who hoardeth his gain,
Though, a madhearted spendthrift the while,
    But gather to waste again.

Yea, I pluck from the tree of the years,
    As a country maid greedy of flowers,
Each day brimming over with tears,
    And I scatter like petals its hours;

And I trample them under my feet
    In a frenzy of cloven-hoofed sunne,
And the breath of their dying is sweet,
    And the blood of their hearts is as wine.

O, I throw me down on the ground
    And I bury my face in their death,
And only I rise at the sound
    Of a wind as it scattereth,

As it scattereth sweetly the dried
    Leaves withered and brittle and sere
Of days of old years that have died—
    And, O, it is sweet in my ear!
And I rise me and build me a pyre
    Of the whispering skeleton things,
And my heart laugheth low with the fire,
    Laugheth high with the flame as it springs;

And above in the flickering glare
    I mark me the boughs of my tree,
My tree of the years, growing bare,
    Growing bare with the scant days to be.

Then I turn to my beads and I pray
    For the arc at the root of the tree—
Last flower, last bead—ah! last day
    That shall part me, my darling, from thee!

And I pray for the knape on the string
    Of this rosary painful of days:
But who is the Lady I sing?
    Ah, how can I tell thee her praise!

I make this rhyme of my lady and me
To give me ease of my misery,
Of my lady and me I make this rhyme
For lovers in the aftertime.
And I weave its warp from day to day
In a golden loom deep hid away
LOVE PLATONIC

In my secret heart, where no one goes
But my lady’s self, and—no one knows.

With bended head all day I pore
On a joyless task, and yet before
My eyes all day, through each weary hour,
Breathes my lady’s face, like a dewy flower.
Like rain it comes through the dusty air,
Like sun on the meadows to think of her;
O sweet as violets in early spring
The flower-girls to the city bring,
O, healing-bright to wintry eyes
As primrose-gold ’neath northern skies—
But O for fit thing to compare
With the joy I have in the thought of her!
So all day long doth her holy face
Bring fragrance to the barren place,
And whensoe’er it comes nearest me,
My loom it weaveth busily.

Some days there be when the loom is still
And my soul is sad as an autumn hill,
But how to tell the blessed time
When my heart is one glowing prayer of rhyme!
Think on the humming afternoon
Within some busy wood in June,
When nettle patches, drunk with the sun,
LOVE PLATONIC

Are fiery outposts of the shade;
While gnats keep up a dizzy reel,
And the grasshopper, perched upon his blade,
Loud drones his fairy threshing-wheel:—
Hour when some poet-wit might feign
The drowsy tune of the throbbing air
The weaving of the gossamer
In secret nooks of wood and lane—
The gossamer, silk night-robèses of the flowers,
Fluttered apart by amorous morning hours.
Yea, as the weaving of the gossamer,
If truly that the mystic golden boom,
Is the strange rapture of my hidden loom,
As I sit in the light of the thought of her;
And it weaveth, weaveth, day by day,
This parti-coloured roundelay;
Weaving for ease of misery,
Weaving this rhyme of my lady and me,
Weaving, weaving this warp of rhyme
For lovers in the after-time.

My lady, lover, may never be mine
In the same sweet way that thine is thine,
My lady and I may never stand
By the holy altar hand in hand,
My lady and I may never rest
Through the golden midnight breast to breast,
Nor share long days of happy light
Sweet moving in each other's sight:
Yea, even must we ever miss
The honey of the chastest kiss.

But, Song, arise thee on a greater wing,
Nor twitter robin-like of love, nor sing
A pretty dalliance with grief—but try
Some metre like a sky,
Wherein to set
Stars that may linger yet
When I, thy master, shall have come to die.

Twitter and tweet
Thy carollings
Of little things,
Of fair and sweet;
For it is meet,
O robin red!

That little theme
Hath little song,
That little head
Hath little dream,
And long.

But we have starry business, such a grief
As Autumn's, dead by some forgotten sheaf,
While all the distance echoes of the wain;
Grief as an ocean's for some sudden isle
Of living green that stayed with it awhile,
Then to oblivious deluge plunged again!
Grief as of Alps that yearn but never reach,
Grief as of Death for Life, of Night for Day:
Such grief, O Song, how hast thou strength to teach,
How hope to make assay?

IV

ONCE

Once we met, and then there came
Like a Pentecostal flame,
A word;
All I said not,
Only thought,
She heard!
All I never say but sing,
Worshipping;
Wrapt in the hidden tongue
Of an ambiguous song.

How we met what need to say?
When or where,
Years ago or yesterday,
Here or there.
LOVE PLATONIC

All the song is—once we met,
She and I;
Once, but never to forget,
Till we die.

All the song is that we meet
Never now—
‘Hast thou yet forgotten, sweet?’
‘Love, hast thou?’

THE DAY OF THE TWO DAFFODILS

‘The daffodils are fine this year,’ I said;
‘O yes, but see my crocuses,’ said she.
And so we entered in and sat at talk
Within a little parlour bowered about
With garden-noises, filled with garden scent,
As some sweet sea-shell rings with pearly chimes
And sighs out fragrance of its mother’s breast.

We sat at talk, and all the afternoon
Whispered about in changing silences
Of flush and sudden light and gathering shade,
As though some Maestro drew out organ stops
Somewhere in heaven. As two within a boat
LOVE PLATONIC

On the wide sea we sat at talk, the hours
Lapping unheeded round us as the waves.
And as such two will oft-times pause in speech,
Gaze at high heaven and draw deep to their hearts
The infinite azure, then meet eyes again
And flash it to each other; without words
First, and then with voice trembling as trumpets
Tremble with fierce breath, voice cadence too
As deep as the deep sea, Æolian voice,
Voice of star-spaces, and the pine-wood's voice
In dewy mornings, Life's own awful voice:
So did we talk, gazing with God's own eyes
Into Life's deeps—ah, how they throbbed with stars!
And were we not ourselves like pulsing suns
Who, once an æon met within the void,
So fiery close, forget how far away
Each orbit sweeps, and dream a little space
Of fiery wedding. So our hearts made answering
Lightnings all that afternoon through purple mists
Of riddled speech; and when at last the sun,
Our sentinel, made sign beneath the trees
Of coming night, and we arose and passed
Across the threshold to the flowers again,
We knew a presence walking in the grove,
And a voice speaking through the evening's cool
Unknown before: though Love had wrought no
wrong,
His rune was spoken, and another rhyme
Writ in his poem by the master Life.

'Pray, pluck me some, I said. She brought me two,
For daffodils were very fine that year,—
O very fine, but daffodils no more.

WHY DID SHE MARRY HIM?

Why did she marry him? Ah, say why!
How was her fancy caught?
What was the dream that he drew her by,
Or was she only bought?
Gave she her gold for a girlish whim,
A freak of a foolish mood?
Or was it some will, like a snake in him,
Lay a charm upon her blood?

Love of his limbs, was it that, think you?
Body of bullock build,
Sap in the bones, and spring in the thew,
A lusty youth unspilled?
But is it so that a maid is won,
Such a maiden maid as she?
Her face like a lily all white in the sun,
For such mere male as he!
LOVE PLATONIC

Ah, why do the fields with their white and gold
To Farmer Clod belong,
Who though he hath reaped and stacked and sold
Hath never heard their song?
Nay, seek not an answer, comfort ye,
The poet heard their call,
And so, dear Love, will I comfort me—
He hath thy lease, that's all.

vii

THE LAMP AND THE STAR

Yea, let me be 'thy bachelere,'
'Tis sweeter than thy lord;
How should I envy him, my dear,
The lamp upon his board.
Still make his little circle bright
With boon of dear domestic light,
While I afar,
Watching his windows in the night,
Worship a star
For which he hath no bolt or bar.
Yea, dear,
Thy 'bachelere.'
VIII

ORBITS

Two stars once on their lonely way
Met in the heavenly height,
And they dreamed a dream they might shine alway,
With undivided light;
Melt into one with a breathless throë,
And beam as one in the night.

And each forgot in the dream so strange
How desolately far
Swept on each path, for who shall change
The orbit of a star?
Yea, all was a dream, and they still must go
As lonely as they are.

NEVER—EVER

My mouth to thy mouth
Ah never, ah never!
My breast from thy breast
Eternities sever;
But my soul to thy soul
For ever and ever.
LOVE PLATONIC

x

LOVE'S POOR

Yea, love, I know, and I would have it thus,
I know that not for us
Is springtide Passion with his fire and flowers,
I know this love of ours,
Lives not, nor yet may live,
By the dear food that lips and hands can give.
Not, Love, that we in some high dream despise
The common lover's common Paradise;
Ah, God, if Thou and I
But one short hour their blessedness might try,
How could we poor ones teach
Those happy ones who half forget them rich:
For if we thus endure,
'Tis only, love, because we are so poor.

xi

COMFORT OF DANTE

Down where the unconquered river still flows on,
One strong free thing within a prison's heart,
I drew me with my sacred grief apart,
That it might look that spacious joy upon:
And as I mused, lo! Dante walked with me,
And his face spake of the high peace of pain.
Till all my grief glowed in me throbbingly
As in some lily's heart might glow the rain.

So like a star I listened, till mine eye
Caught that lone land across the water-way
Wherein my lady breathed,—now breathing is—
'O Dante,' then I said, 'she more than I
Should know thy comfort, go to her, I pray'
'Nay!' answered he, 'for she hath Beatrice.'

xii

A LOST HOUR

God gave us an hour for our tears,
One hour out of all the years,
For all the years were another's gold,
Given in a cruel troth of old.

And how did we spend his boon?
That sweet miraculous flower
Born to die in an hour,
Late born to die so soon.

Did we watch it with breathless breath
By slow degrees unfold?
Did we taste the innermost heart of it
The honey of each sweet part of it?
Suck all its hidden gold
To the very dregs of its death?
LOVE PLATONIC

Nay, this is all we did with our hour—
We tore it to pieces, that precious flower;
Like any daisy, with listless mirth,
We shed its petals upon the earth;
And, children-like, when it all was done,
We cried unto God for another one.

MET ONCE MORE

O Lady, I have looked on thee once more,
Thou too hast looked on me, as thou hadst said,
And though the joy was pain, the pain was bliss,
Bliss that more happy lovers well may miss:
Captives feast richly on a little bread,
So are we very rich who are so poor.

A JUNE LILY

[The poet dramatises his Lady's loneliness]

Alone! once more alone! how like a tomb
My little parlour sounds which only now
Yearned like some holy chancel with his voice.
So still! so empty! Surely one might fear
The walls should meet in ruinous collapse
That held no more his music. Yet they stand
Firm in a foolish firmness, meaningless
As frescoed sepulchre some Pharaoh built
But never came to sleep in; built, indeed,
For—that grey moth to flit in like a ghost!

Alone! another feast-day come and gone,
Watched through the weeks as in my garden there
I watch a seedling grow from blade to bud
Impatient for its blossom. So this day
Has bloomed at last, and we have plucked its flower
And shared its sweetness, and once more the time
Is as that stalk from which but now I plucked
Its last June-lily as a parting sign.
Yea, but he seemed to love it! yet if he
But craved it in deceit of tenderness
To make my heart glow brighter with a lie!
Will it indeed be cherished as he said,
Or will he keep it near his book awhile,
And when grown rank forget it in his glass,
And leave it for the maid who dusts his room
To clear away and cast upon the heap?
Or, may be, will he bury it away
In some old drawer with other mummy-flowers?

Nay, but I wrong thee, dear one, thinking so,
My boy, my love, my poet! Nay, I know
Thy lonely room, tomb-like to thee as mine,
Tomb-like as tomb of some returning ghost
Seems only bright about my lily-flower.
And, mayhap, while I wrong thee thus in thought
Thou bendest o'er it, feigning for some ease
Of parted ache conceits of poet-wit
On petal and on stamen—let me try!
If lilies be alike thine is as this,
I wonder if thy reading tallies too.

Six petals with a dewdrop in their heart,
Six pure brave years, an ivory cup of tears;
Six pearly-pillared stamens golden-crowned
Growing from out the dewdrop, and a seventh
Soaring alone trilobed and mystic green;
Six pearl-bright years aflower with gold of joy,
Sprung from the heart of those brave tear-fed years:
But what that seventh single stamen is
My little wit must leave for thee to tell.

But neither poet nor a sibyl thou!
What brave conceit had he, my poet, built;
No jugglery of numbers that mean nought,
That can mean nought for ever, unto us.

REGRET
One asked of Regret,
And I made reply:
LOVE PLATONIC

To have held the bird,       
   And let it fly;          
To have seen the star       
   For a moment nigh,      
And lost it                 
   Through a slothful eye; 
To have plucked the flower  
   And cast it by;        
To have one only hope—      
   To die.


LOVE AFAR

Love, art thou lonely to-day?  
Lost love that I never see,   
Love that, come noon or come night,  
Comes never to me;            
Love that I used to meet      
   In the hidden past, in the land,   
Of forbidden sweet.

Love! do you never miss        
The old light in the days?     
Does a hand
LOVE PLATONIC

Come and touch thee at while
Like the wand of old smile
Like the breath of old bliss
Or hast thou forgot,
And is all as if not?

What was it we swore?
'Evermore!
I and Thou,'

Ah, but Fate held the pen
And wrote N
Just before:
So that now,
See, it stands,
Our seals and our hands,
'I and Thou, '
'Nevermore!'

We said 'It is best'
And then, dear, I went
And returned not again.
Forgive that I stir,
Like a breath in thy hair,
The old pain,
'Twas unmeant.
I will strive, I will wrest
Iron peace—it is best.
LOVE PLATONIC

But, O for thy hand
   Just to hold for a space,
   For a moment to stand
   In the light of thy face;
Translate Then to Now,
To hear 'Is it Thou?'
   And reply
   'It is I!'
Then, then I could rest,
Ah, then I could wait
   Long and late.

XVII

Canst thou be true across so many miles,
   So many days that keep us still apart?
Ah, canst thou live upon remembered smiles,
   And ask no warmer comfort for thy heart?

I call thy name right up into the sky,
   Dear name, O surely she shall hear and hark
Nay, though I toss it singing up so high,
   It drops again, like yon returning lark.

O be a dove, dear name, and find her breast,
   There croon and croodle all the lonely day;
Go tell her that I love her still the best,
   So many days, so many miles, away.
POSTSCRIPT

So sang young Love in high and holy dream
Of a white Love that hath no earthly taint,
So rapt within his vision he did seem
Less like a boyish singer than a saint.

Ah, Boy, it is a dream for life too high,
It is a bird that hath no feet for earth:
Strange wings, strange eyes, go seek another sky
And find thy fellows of an equal birth.

For many a body-sweet material thing,
What canst thou give us half so dear as these?
We would not soar amid the stars to sing,
Warm and content amid the nested trees.

Young Seraph, go and take thy song to heaven,
We would not grow unhappy with our lot,
Leave us the simple love the earth hath given—
Sing where thou wilt, so that we hear thee not.
COR CORDIUM
TO MY WIFE, MILDRED

Dear m'fe, there is no word in all my songs
But unto thee belongs:
Though I indeed before our true day came
Mistook thy star in many a wandering flame,
Singing to thee in many a fair disguise,
Calling to thee in many another's name,
Before I knew thine everlasting eyes.

Faces that fled me like a hunted fawn
I followed singing, deeming it was Thou,
Seeking this face that on our pillow now
Glimmers behind thy golden hair like dawn,
And, like a setting moon, within my breast
Sinks down each night to rest.

• Moon follows moon before the great moon flowers,
Moon of the wild wild honey that is ours;
Long must the tree strive up in leaf and root,
Before it bear the golden-hearted fruit:
And shall great Love at once perfected spring,
Nor grow by steps like any other thing?
The lawless love that would not be denied,
The love that waited, and in waiting died,
The love that met and mated, satisfied.

Ah, love, 'twas good to climb forbidden walls,
Who would not follow where his Juliet calls?
'Twas good to try and love the angel's way,
With starry souls untainted of the clay;
But, best the love where earth and heaven meet,
The god made flesh and dwelling in us, sweet.

(October 22, 1891)
THE DESTINED MAID: A PRAYER

(Chant Royal)

O mighty Queen, our Lady of the fire,
The light, the music, and the honey, all
Blent in one Power, one passionate Desire
Man calleth Love—'Sweet love,' the blessed call—:
I come a sad-eyed suppliant to thy knee,
If thou hast pity, pity grant to me;
If thou hast bounty, here a heart I bring
For all that bounty 'thirst and hungering.
O Lady, save thy grace, there is no way
For me, I know, but lonely sorrowing—
Send me a maiden meet for love I pray!

I lay in darkness, face down in the mire,
And prayed that darkness might become my pall;
The rabble rout roared round me like some quire
Of filthy animals primordial;
My heart seemed like a toad eternally
Prisoned in stone, ugly and sad as he;
   Sweet sunlight seemed a dream, a mythic thing,
   And life some beldam's dotard gossiping.
Then, Lady, I bethought me of thy sway,
   And hoped again, rose up this prayer to wing—
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

Lady, I bear no high resounding lyre
   To hymn thy glory, and thy foes appal
With thunderous splendour of my rhythmic ire;
   A little lute I lightly touch and small
My skill thereon: yet, Lady, if it be
I ever woke ear-winning melody,
   'Twas for thy praise I sought the throbbing string,
   Thy praise alone—for all my worshipping
Is at thy shrine, thou knowest, day by day,
   Then shall it be in vain my plaint to sing?—
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

Yea! why of all men should this sorrow dire
   Unto thy servant bitterly befall?
For, Lady, thou dost know I ne'er did tire
   Of thy sweet sacraments and ritual;
In morning meadows I have knelt to thee,
In noontide woodlands hearkened hushedly
   Thy heart's warm beat in sacred slumbering,
And in the spaces of the night heard ring
Thy voice in answer to the spherical lay:
Now 'neath thy throne my suppliant life I fling—
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

I ask no maid for all men to admire,
Mere body's beauty hateth in me no thrall,
And noble birth, and sumptuous attire,
Are gauds I crave not—yet shall have withal,
With a sweet difference, in my heart's own She,
Whom words speak not but eyes know when they see.

Beauty beyond all glass's mirroring,
And dream and glory hers for garmenting;
Her birth—O Lady, wilt thou say me nay?—
Of thine own womb, of thine own nurturing—
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

**ENVOI**

_Sweet Queen who sittest at the heart of spring,_
_My life is thine, barren or blossoming;_
'Tis thine to flush it gold or leave it grey:
And so unto thy garment's hem I cling—
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

_(January 13, 1888.)_
WITH SOME OLD LOVE VERSES

Dear Heart, this is my book of boyish song,
The changing story of the wandering quest
That found at last its ending in thy breast—
The love it sought and sang astray so long
With wild young heart and happy eager tongue.

Much meant it all to me to seek and sing,
Ah, Love, but how much more to-day to bring
This 'rhyme that first of all he made when young.'

Take it and love it, 'tis the prophecy
For whose poor silver thou hast given me gold;
Yea! those old faces for an hour seemed fair
Only 'cause some hints of Thee they were:

Judge then, if I so loved weak types of old,
How good, dear Heart, the perfect gift of Thee.
IN A COPY OF MR. SWINBURNE'S
TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE

Dear Heart, what thing may symbolise for us
A love like ours, what gift, whate’er it be,
Hold more significance ’twixt thee and me
Than paltry words a truth miraculous;
Or the poor signs that in Astronomy
Tell giant splendidours in their gleaming might:
Yet love would still give such, as in delight
To mock their impotence—so this for thee.

This song for thee! our sweetest honeycomb
Of lovesome thought and passion-hearted rhyme,
Builded of gold and kisses and desire,
By that wild poet who so many a time
Our hungering lips have blessed, until a fire
Burnt speech up and the wordless hour had come.
COMFORT AT PARTING

O little Heart,
So much I see
Thy hidden smart,
So much I long
To sing some song
To comfort thee.

For, little Heart,
Indeed, indeed,
The hour to part
Makes cruel speed;
Yet, dear, think thou
How even now,
With happy haste,
With eager feet,
The hour when we
Again shall meet
Cometh across the waste.
HAPPY LETTER

Fly, little note,
And know no rest
Till warm you lie
Within that nest
Which is her breast;
Though why to thee
Such joy should be
Who carest not,
While I must wait
Here desolate,
I cannot wot.
O what I'd do
To come with you!
PRIMROSE AND VIOLET

Primrose and Violet—
May they help thee to forget
All that love should not remember,
Sweet as meadows after rain
When the sun has come again,
As woods awakened from December.
How they wash the soul from stain!
How they set the spirit free!
Take them dear, and pray for me.
‘JULIET AND HER ROMEO’

(With Mr. Dicksee’s Picture)

Take ‘this of Juliet and her Romeo;

Dear Heart of mine, for though yon budding sky
Yearns o’er Verona, and so long ago

That kiss was kissed; yet surely Thou and I,

Surely it is, whom morning tears apart,

As ruthless men tear tendrilled ivy down:

Is not Verona warm within thy gown,

And Mantua all the world save where thou art?

O happy grace of lovers of old time,

Living to love like gods, and dead to live

Symbols and saints for us who follow them;

Even bitter Death must sweets to lovers give:

See how they wear their tears for diadem,

Throned on the star of an unshaken rhyme.
IN HER DIARY

Go, little book, and be the looking-glass
Of her dear soul,
The mirror of her moments as they pass,
Keeping the whole;
Wherein she still may look on yesterday
To-day to cheer,
And towards To-morrow pass upon her way
Without a fear.
For yesterday hath never won a crown,
However fair,
But that To-day a better for its own
Might win and wear;
And yesterday hath never joyed a joy,
However sweet,
That this To-day or that To-morrow too
May not repeat.
Think too, To-day is trustee for to-morrow,
And present pain
That’s bravely borne shall ease the future sorrow;
Nor cry in vain
‘Spare us To-day, To-morrow bring the rod,’
For then again
To-morrow from To-morrow still shall borrow,
A little ease to gain:
But bear to-day whate’er To-day may bring,
‘Tis the one way to make To-morrow sing.
DEAR Love, you ask if I be true,
If other women move
The heart that only beats for you
With pulses all of love.

Out in the chilly dew one morn
I plucked a wild sweet rose,
A little silver bud new-born
And longing to unclose.

I took it, loving new-born things,
I knew my heart was warm,
'O little silver rose, come in
And shelter from the storm.'

And soon, against my body pressed,
I felt its petals part,
And, looking down within my breast,
I saw its golden heart.

O such a golden heart it has,
Your eyes may never see,
To others it is always shut,
It opens but for me.
But that is why you see me pass
The honeysuckle there,
And leave the lilies in the grass,
Although they be so fair;

Why the strange orchid half-accurst—
Circe of flowers she grows—
Can tempt me not: see! in my heart,
Silver and gold, my rose.

II

Deep in a hidden lane we were,
My little love and I;
When lo! as we stood kissing there—
A flower against the sky!

Frayl as a tear its beauty hung—
O spare it, little hand.
But innocence like its, alas!
Desire may not withstand.

And so I clambered up the bank
And threw the blossom down,
But we were sadder for its sake
As we walked back to town.
A LOVE-LETTER

Darling little woman, just a little line,
Just a little silver word
For that dear gold of thine,
Only a whisper you have so often heard:

Only such a whisper as hidden in a shell
Holds a little breath of all the mighty sea,
But think what a little of all its depth and swell,
And think what a little is this little note of me.

'Darling, I love thee, that is all I live for'—
There is the whisper stealing from the shell,
But here is the ocean, O so deep and boundless,
And each little wave with its whisper as well.
IN THE NIGHT

‘Kiss me, dear Love!’—
But there was none to hear,
Only the darkness round about my bed
And hollow silence, for thy face had fled,
Though in my dreaming it had come so near.

I slept again and it came back to me,
Burning within the hollow arch of night
Like some fair flame of sacrificial light,
And all my soul sprang up to mix with thee—
‘Kiss me, my love!
Ah, Love, thy face how fair!’
So did I cry, but still thou wert not there.
THE CONSTANT LOVER

I see fair women all the day,
They pass and pass—and go;
I almost dream that they are shades
Within a shadow-show.

Their beauty lays no hand on me,
They talk—I hear no word;
I ask my eyes if they have seen,
My ears if they have heard.

For why—within the north countree
A little maid, I know,
Is waiting through the days for me,
Drear days so long and slow.
THE WONDER-CHILD

`Our little babe,' each said, `shall be
Like unto thee'—`Like unto thee!
`Her mother's'—`Nay, his father's'—`eyes,'
`Dear curls like thine'—but each replies,
`As thine, all thine, and nought of me.'

What sweet solemnity to see
The little life upon thy knee,
And whisper as so soft it lies,—
`Our little babe!'

For, whether it be he or she,
A David or a Dorothy,
`As mother fair,' or `father wise,'
Both when it's `good,' and when it cries,
One thing is certain,—it will be
Our little babe.
MISCELLANEOUS
AN EPITHALAMIUM

Somewhere safe-hidden away
    In a meadow of mortals untrod,
I saw in my dreaming to-day
    A wonderful flower of God;
Somewhere deep buried in air,
    In a flashing abyss afar,
I came in my dreaming aware
    Of the beam of a mystical star:
And I knew that each wonderful thing
Was the song that I never may sing.

Song of a love such as rang
    Through the strings of the lyres of old,
Such song as the makers sang
    When the world was all morning and gold;
Too great for a silken time
    Fain of lutists and liers-at-ease,
Builders of honeycomb rhyme,
    Soft slaves of an opiate peace—
Such lovers were strange for these years,
Too mean for the greatness of tears.

E
Yet, might I but stretch forth my hand
And gather that wonderful bloom,
Might I pluck and set over our land
That star as a sign in the doom:
Then never a story of old
Were more as a rainbow in heaven,
Were more as a water outrolled
From a rock in the wilderness even,
Were more as a sheltering tree
Than this story of Her and of Thee.

O where might we look for a song,
We lovers who faint in the way,
In a way ne'er so bitter and long
As the thorns and the miles of your day
We lovers who drown in the stress
Of a sea that had made you but strong,
In the hour of our weariness,
O where might we look for a song
Such comfort and courage to bring
As your song which I never may sing.

But vain is the breath of desire,
And the voice of complaining is weak
To call back the soul to the lyre
And give us the singer we seek;
High song must await the High Singer
Though we thirst through a desert of years,
And the lyre must await its Apollo,
Though it grow all arust with our tears.
Let thy voice then no longer complain,
Thou mouth that may never attain!

So I, who were fam'd of your story
To be its high-priest to the throng,
To embody its mystical glory
In a great eucharistical song,
May know all the strength and the healing
Of its bread and its wonderful wine,
But none other may know the revealing
Through unsanctified singing of mine;
Never another of me shall take
Its wine of my chalice, its bread that I break.

Yet still may it be for my glory,
Though never the priesthood to bear,
To bend in the shrine of your story,
As the lowliest acolyte there;
And would that the rhyme I am bringing,
A censer incuriously wrought,
Might seem not too poor for the swinging,
Nor too simple the gums I have brought:
No marvel of gold-carven censer,
No frankincense fragrance or myrrh.
And O if some light from the splendour
Of mystical Host might strike through
These wreaths as they rise and transfigure
Their grey to a glory for you,
A glory for you as the sunrise
Of the years that to night have begun,
What singer would ask for his songcraft
Boon richer than that I had won?
What token to augur were given
More bright with the blessing of Heaven!

And O that these faint-breathing spices
Might seem for a moment as sweet
As the hearts of those roses of Isis
To blossom at last as you meet,
Great flowers of a far-away sowing
Of seeds that long bided the years,
In a horror of darkness safe-growing,
Fed of ashes and suckled of tears;
Or sweet as the breath of the dawn-light
Soft flushing the fields of your love-night.

O love-night too sacred for bride-song,
For nuptial rabble and rite,
The eyes and the tongues of a guest-throng,
What have they to do with your night?
Your night of the Star in the Silence,
The Rose in a trance of hushed breath,
Of God in a chariot of incense,
And the transfiguration of Death;
Blest guide on the travel eternal
From love unto love, ever-ternal.

Do the stars crave a priest for their wedding,
Or the flowers of the woodland way?
And shall man need a priestly bestedding,
Doth he marry less sweetly than they?
Yea, the cattle miscallèd our men-folk,
Rank waves of a wallowing sea,
May need such a ring and a neck yoke,
But never such lovers as ye!
Splendid as stars in their shining,
Fragrant as blossoms entwining.

But, censer, have done with thy swinging,
With incense that growth so pale,
And, song, make an end of thy singing
With voice that beginneth to fail;
No glory of sunrise is in thec,
No fragrance as breath of the day,
But a hand-grasp of loving you may be,
A kiss on the forehead—O may
You come as a whisper of blessing
In some pause of a happy caressing.
THE HOUSE OF VENUS

Not that Queen Venus of adulterous fame,
Whose love was lust's insatiable flame—
Not hers the house I would be singer in
Whose loose-lipped servants seek a weary sin:
But mine the Venus of that morning flood
With all the dawn's young passion in her blood,
With great blue eyes and unpressed bosom sweet.
Her would I sing, and of the shy retreat
Where Love first kissed her wondering maidenhood,
And He and She first stood, with eyes afraid,
In the most golden House that God has made.
SATIETY

The heart of the rose—how sweet
Its fragrance to drain,
Till the greedy brain
Reels and grows faint
With the garnered scent,
Reels as a dream on its silver feet.

Sweet thus to drain—then to sleep
For, beware how you stay
Till the joy pass away,
And the jaded brain
Seeketh fragrance in vain,
And hates what it may not reap.
HESPERIDES

Dear little Heart,

May I whisper a prayer
For a boon ’ere we part,
For a kiss—may I dare
'Say—say—where?

'Tis a valley, dear Heart,

With two hills soft as snow,

'Tis a garden where one,

Only one, dear, may go,
A garden where wonderful
Gold apples grow.

And the shade of the hills
Is an infinite rest,
And a mouth to those apples
' May ever be pressed,
Yet their honey live on: for,
They grow—in thy Breast.

Dear flower that standest
Sweet sentinel there,
May I come
To my home?
Understandest?
    My home,
Flower;
Our
Home!
May I dare?

O Love! love! I fear,
    For the air is too sweet—
Softly, love—O my dear—
    Yea, too sweet
On a sudden to meet
    Mortal mouth!
O my sweet! O my sweet!
    The long drought!
And at last, dear,
    O think—
The long drink!
WHAT OF THE DARKNESS?

What of the Darkness? Is it very fair?
Are there great calms and find ye silence there?
Like soft-shut lilies all your faces glow
With some strange peace our faces never know.
With some great faith our faces never dare.
Dwells it in Darkness? Do ye find it there?

Is it a Bosom where tired heads may lie?
Is it a Mouth to kiss our weeping dry?
Is it a Hand to still the pulse's leap?
Is it a Voice that holds the runes of sleep?
Day shows us not such comfort anywhere.
Dwells it in darkness? Do ye find it there?

Out of the Day's deceiving light we call,
Day that shows man so great and God so small,
That hides the stars and magnifies the grass;
O is the Darkness too a lying glass,
Or, undistracted, do ye find truth there?
What of the Darkness? Is it very fair?
AD CIMMERIOS

(A Prefatory Sonnet for Santa Lucia, the Misses Hodgkin's Magazine for the Blind)

We, deeming day-light fair, and loving well
Its forms and dyes, and all the motley play
Of lives that win their colour from the day,
Are fain some wonder of it all to tell
To you that in that elder kingdom dwell
Of Ancient Night, and thus we make assay
Day to translate to Darkness, so to say,
To talk Cimmerian for a little spell.

Yet, as we write, may we not doubt lest ye
Should smile on us, as once our fathers smiled,
When we made vaunt of joys they knew no more;
Knowing great dreams young eyes can never see,
Dwelling in peace unguessed of any child—
Will ye smile thus upon our daylight lore?
OLD LOVE-LETTERS

You ask and I send. It is well, yea! best:
A lily hangs dead on its stalk, ah me!
A dream hangs dead on a life it blest.
Shall it flaunt its death where sad eyes may see
In the cold dank wind of our memory?
Shall we watch it rot like an empty nest?
Nay, send the poor ghost to Mnemosyne,
Bury these shreds and behold it shall rest.

And shall life fail if one dream be sped?
For loss of one bloom shall the lily pass?
Nay, bury these deep round the roots, for so
In soil of old dreams do the new dreams grow,
New 'Hail' is begot of the old 'Alas.'
See, here are our letters, so sweet—so dead.
AN OLD MAN'S SONG

Ye are young, ye are young,
I am old, I am old;
And the song has been sung
And the story been told.
Your locks are as brown
As the mavis in May,
Your hearts are as warm
As the sunshine to-day,
But mine white and cold
As the snow on the brae.

And Love, like a flower;
Is growing for you,
Hands clasping, lips meeting
Hearts beating so true;
While Fame like a star
In the midnight star
Is flashing for you.

For you the To-come,
But for me the Gone-by,
You are panting to live,
I am waiting to die;
MISCELLANEOUS

The meadow is empty,
   No flower groweth high,
And nought but a socket
   The face of the sky.

Yea, howso we dream,
   Or how bravely we do,
The end is the same,
   Be we traitor or true
And after the bloom
   And the passion is past,
Death cometh at last
DEATH IN A LONDON LODGING

'Yes, Sir, she's gone at last—'twas only five minutes ago
We heard her sigh from her corner,—she sat in the kitchen, you know:
We were all just busy on breakfast, John cleaning the boots, and I
Had just gone into the larder—but you could have heard that sigh
Right up in the garret, sir, for it seemed to pass one by
Like a puff of wind—may be 'twas her soul, who knows—
And we all looked up and ran to her—just in time to see her head
Was sinking down on her bosom and 'she's gone at last,' I said.'

So Mrs. Powneeby, meeting on the stairs
Her second-floor lodger, me, bound citywards,
Told of her sister's death, doing her best
To match her face's colour with the news:
While I in listening made a running gloss
Beneath her speech of all she left unsaid.
As—'in the kitchen,' rather in the way,
Poor thing; 'busy on breakfast,' awkward time,
Indeed, for one must live and lodgers' meals,
You know, must be attended to what comes—
(Or goes, I added for her) yes! indeed.
"She's gone at last," I said, 'and better perhaps,
For what had life for her but suffering?
And then, we're only poor, sir, John and I,
And she indeed was somewhat of a strain:
O! yes, it's for the best for all of us.
And still beneath all else methought I read
What will the lodgers think, having the dead
Within the house! how inconvenient!'

What did the lodgers think? Well, I replied
In grief's set phrase, but 'the first floor,'
I fancy, frowned at first, as though indeed
Landladies' sisters had no right to die
And taint the air for nervous lodger folk;
Then smoothed, his brow out into decency,
And said, 'how sad!' and presently inquired
The day of burial, ending with the hope
His lunch would not be late like yesterday.
The maiden-lady living near the roof
Quoted Isaiah may be, or perhaps Job—
How the Lord gives, and likewise takes away,
And how exceeding blessed is the Lord!—
For she has pious features; while downstairs