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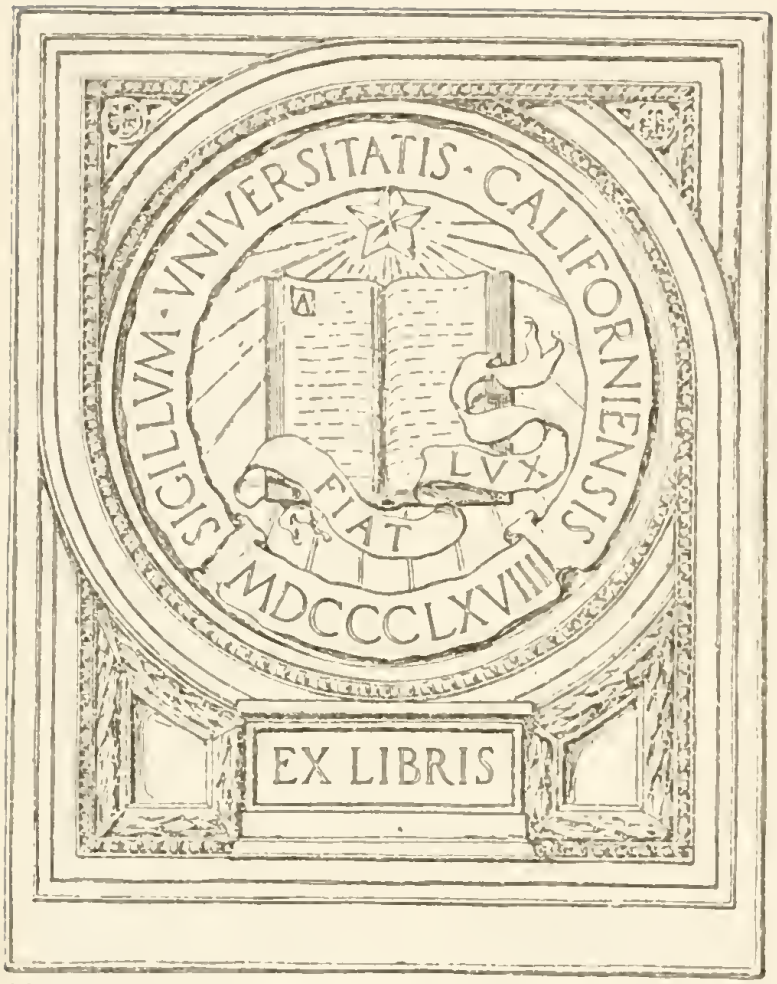
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# POEMS BY
# ISAAC ROSENBERG

SONGS IN CAPTIVITY

*By R. H. Sauter*

BALLAD OF THE "ROYAL ANN"

*By Crosbie Garston*

DOWN HERE THE HAWTHORN

*By Thomas Moult*

---

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

ISAAC ROSENBERG.

# POEMS BY
# ISAAC ROSENBERG

SELECTED AND EDITED BY

GORDON BOTTOMLEY

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR BY

LAURENCE BINYON


LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

*Youth is still childhood: when we cast off every cloudy vesture, and our thoughts are clear and mature; when every act is a conscious thought, every thought an attempt to arrest feeling; our feelings strong and overwhelming, our sensitiveness awakened by insignificant things in life; when the skies race tumultuously with our blood, and the earth shines and laughs; when our blood hangs suspended at the rustling of a gown. Our vanity loves to subdue—battle, aggressive. How we despise those older and duller—we want life, newness, excitement.*

(*Circa* 1916.)



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## POEMS BY ISAAC ROSENBERG

EARLIER POEMS—*continued:*

EARLIER POEMS—*continued:*

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The poems whose titles are marked * appeared in a privately issued pamphlet, "Night and Day. By Isaac Rosenberg. 1912" (pp. 24); those marked § in "Youth. By Isaac Rosenberg. London, I. Narodiczky, Printer, 48 Mile End Road, E. 1915" (pp. 18); and those marked † in "Moses. A Play. By Isaac Rosenberg. London, Printed By The Paragon Printing Works, 8 Ocean Street, Stepney Green, E. 1916" (pp. ii+26).

These pamphlets were the only work issued by the author, in addition to the following single pieces which appeared in various periodicals:

"In the Workshop," in *A Piece of Mosaic* (for a Jewish Bazaar).

"Our Dead Heroes," in *South African Women in Council*, December, 1914.

"Essay on Art," Part I. (prose), prefaced by a poem, "Beauty," in *South African Women in Council*, December, 1914.

"Essay on Art," Part II., *South African Women in Council*, January, 1915.

"Marching," and "Break of Day in the Trenches," in *Poetry* (Chicago), December, 1916.

The following pieces have appeared posthumously :

"In Piccadilly," "If You are Fire," "Heart's First Word, II ," "Wedded," "I Did Not Pluck at All," in *Art and Letters*, Summer, 1919 ; with an "In Memoriam" notice by Annie Rosenberg.

"Killed in Action," in *Colour*, October, 1919.

"Savage Song" ("A Naked African" from "Moses"), "God," in *Rainbow* (New York), October, 1920 ; with an "In Memoriam" notice by Horace Brodzky.

"I Mingle with Your Bones"; with an article by Samuel Roth, in *Voices*, Summer, 1921.

# INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

## I

Of the many young poets who gave their lives in the war, Isaac Rosenberg was not the least gifted. Adverse circumstances, imperfect education, want of opportunity, impeded and obscured his genius; but whatever criticism be made of his poetry, its faults are plainly those of excess rather than deficiency. His writing was often difficult and obscure, because he instinctively thought in images and did not sufficiently appreciate the limitations of language. Also, a continual fear of being empty or thin led him to an over-intricate complexity. But there was no incoherence in his mind. And the main object of these notes, beyond recording the facts of his life, is to illustrate the growth and workings of his mind from his own letters, which will be the best commentary on his poems.

I cannot precisely fix the date, but it must have been some time in 1912, when one morning there came to me a letter in an untidy hand from an

address in Whitechapel, enclosing some pages of verse on which criticism was asked, and signed "Isaac Rosenberg." It was impossible not to be struck by something unusual in the quality of the poems. Thoughts and emotions of no common nature struggled for expression, and at times there gushed forth a pure song which haunted the memory.

I answered at once, and the next day received another letter which told me something about my unknown correspondent. In this letter, which, like nearly all his letters, is undated, he wrote:

"I must thank you very much for your encouraging reply to my poetical efforts. . . . As you are kind enough to ask about myself, I am sending a sort of autobiography I wrote about a year ago. . . . You will see from that that my circumstances have not been very favourable for artistic production; but generally I am optimistic, I suppose because I am young and do not properly realize the difficulties. I am now attending the Slade, being sent there by some wealthy Jews who are kindly interested in me, and, of course, I spend most of my time drawing. I find writing interferes with drawing a good deal, and is far more exhausting."

He went on to tell of his admirations, Rossetti coming first for him among modern artists. He had seen very little of early Italian art, but divined that theirs was the type of art which he thought the only kind worth having—"expression through passionate colour and definite design"—not "a moment frozen on to canvas," but "the spontaneity of un-selfconscious and childlike nature—infinity of suggestion—that is as much part and voice of the artist's soul as the song to the bird." As to modern poets, they were "difficult to get hold of" (their volumes being expensive), but he had an immense admiration for Francis Thompson—"that is the sort of poetry that appeals most to me." He had done nothing yet in painting which he would care to show. He aspired to do imaginative work, but at present was practising portraiture, as it was necessary to earn a living.

At my invitation Rosenberg came to see me. Small in stature, dark, bright-eyed, thoroughly Jewish in type, he seemed a boy with an unusual mixture of self-reliance and modesty. Indeed, no one could have had a more independent nature. Obviously sensitive, he was not touchy or aggressive. Possessed of vivid enthusiasms, he was shy in speech. One found in talk how strangely little

of second-hand (in one of his age) there was in his opinions, how fresh a mind he brought to what he saw and read. There was an odd kind of charm in his manner which came from his earnest, transparent sincerity.

The "sort of autobiography," which I have never seen since I returned it to him, and has perhaps been destroyed, was the story of a youth, mentally ambitious, introspective, dissatisfied with his surroundings, consumed by secret desires for liberation and self-expression.

The external facts of his life are briefly told. For these I am mainly indebted to his sister, Mrs. Wynick, whose devotion to her brother and his work was at all times unwearied. She gave much of a scanty leisure-time to typing copies of his poems, and many of them would have been lost but for her care in preserving them.

Isaac Rosenberg was born at Bristol on the 25th of November, 1890. When he was seven he came to London with his parents. The family settled in the East End. The boy was sent to the Board School of St. George's in the East, and afterwards to the Stepney Board School. From childhood he showed a natural gift both for drawing and for writing. While at the Stepney school his promise

appeared so remarkable that the headmaster allowed him to spend all his time in these pursuits. Out of school he would draw with chalks on the street pavement. Reading poetry was a passion with him. At the age of fourteen he was reluctantly obliged to leave school. His parents were poor; and though they took great pride in his gifts, he was one of a family of eight, and he must now earn his living. He was apprenticed, therefore, to the firm of Carl Hentschel, in Fleet Street. A trade connected with art was chosen for him as a stepping-stone to a painter's career, and as something to fall back upon in case his resources failed him. But he hated trade, and felt in bondage. In his meal-times he consoled himself by writing poems; in the evenings he went to classes at the Art School of Birkbeck College. He worked hard and won many prizes. Mr. Frank Emanuel, the painter, who befriended and encouraged him at this time, describes him as having been made "bitter and despondent by his circumstances"; and his letters reveal fits of the deepest dejection against which his will contended.

The uncongenial work came at last to an end. The sense of liberation was at first intoxicating. Yet work had to be found, and Isaac was deter-

mined to pursue art and nothing else. He met at first with disappointment, and endured many privations. But before long he found good friends. Mr. Amschewitz, an artist, and Mr. Samuels warmly interested themselves in his behalf. Through them he made the acquaintance of three ladies, Mrs. Josephs, Mrs. Herbert Cohen, and Mrs. Lowy, who undertook to provide the means for his training at the Slade School.

Through Mr. Emanuel's friendship he had become a member of "The Limners," a club of artists and art teachers, which met at Mr. Emanuel's studio. Here he had the opportunity of meeting other artists and exchanging ideas. Prizes were given, which young Rosenberg occasionally won. In spite, therefore, of his poverty and unpropitious surroundings, he had now won sympathetic friends, and received both encouragement and material help from discerning compatriots. But with his sensitive artist's pride and jealous independence of spirit, he was not always easy to understand; and those who, with the sole desire to help him, advanced his circumstances sometimes felt that their efforts did not seem to be appreciated. The case is not unfamiliar to readers of artists' biographies.

Rosenberg went to the Slade School in October, 1911, and remained till March, 1914. He won prizes at the school and praise from his teachers. Thrown among contemporaries, all occupied with the problems of art and the discussion of them, he became tinged with the temper and the prevalent ideas of his own generation of students. His natural bent, I think, was in another direction. He showed me drawings and studies from time to time, and I saw a few of his paintings when they were exhibited one summer at the Whitechapel Gallery. He was full of ideas, was a capable draughtsman, and could conceive an interesting design. Yet, to judge from what I have seen of his work, it did not seem to be for him the inevitable means of expression. He once showed me at his studio a large, ambitious composition—an oil-painting—which I fancy was never completed. I cannot recall the nominal subject, but it was saturated with symbolism and required a good deal of explanation. I liked the mysteriousness of it, and the ideas which inspired the painting had suggested figures and groups and visionary glimpses of landscape which had passages of real beauty, though the whole work had grown impossibly complex with its convolutions of symbolic meaning. It reminded me

of his poetry; and I think that represented his natural bent in art. Had he been born half a century earlier, he would have been an ardent disciple of Rossetti. But he could not escape from the mental atmosphere of his own generation, in which so "literary" a conception of painting was bound to wither in discouragement. Later, he showed me some studies of landscape and portrait which he had made in South Africa. These were in a more "modern" vein of realism, but they seemed to fail in the quality of force, to which all other qualities had been, in intention, sacrificed. They had no personal savour. Like every generous and ambitious youth, Rosenberg wished his own generation to do glorious things, and wished to belong to it as a comrade. Whether he would have emerged and found himself as a painter is a doubtful conjecture. I think it possible that he would have abandoned painting. For his true vocation was poetry, and he thought of himself as a poet rather than as a painter.

He had begun to write verse at a very early age. Mr. Morley Dainow, who was at the time librarian in the Whitechapel Public Library, was approached one day by a Jewish girl who wanted advice and help for her young brother. His aim

in life, she said, was to be a poet. The next day the boy was brought to the library. Isaac then seemed to be between ten and twelve years of age. He had already determined to be a poet and a painter. He interested and impressed Mr. Dainow, and in return for his friendly encouragement sent him a poem called "David's Harp." These are the earliest verses of Rosenberg's that Mr. Bottomley or I have seen. They are not printed in this book, but they are interesting because they show how, even as a young boy, Rosenberg cherished the traditions of his race and aspired to become a representative poet of his own nation. Moses and Judas Maccabæus were intended to be themes of his maturer poetry. "David's Harp" is in fluent stanzas, and shows the passing influence of Byron.

The pamphlet called "Night and Day," printed in 1912, contains probably all that Rosenberg cared to preserve of his early verse, though no doubt it represented but a small selection from what he had written.

After leaving the Slade School, he found himself faced with a harder struggle than ever. But he never admitted defeat. He sold a few pictures and got a few poems into print, but his health

was now a cause for anxiety. His lungs were thought to be affected, and he was advised to try a warmer climate. Having a married sister in Cape Town, he thought of South Africa, and in June, 1914, he sailed for the Cape. Here he made one or two friends, painted some pictures, taught a little, gave a few lectures, and published some poems and articles. But the visit was not a material success, and he returned disappointed and despondent. Soon after his return, in 1915, he printed a second pamphlet of verse, "Youth." But he was restless and unhappy, and could not work. It was now that he enlisted in the Army. From this date onward he had practically no time for painting, but he continued to write till the end. "Moses" was printed in 1916. He was first in a Bantam regiment, then in the King's Own Royal Lancasters, and after a period of training at Bury St. Edmunds and at Farnborough went out, early in 1916, to France. No one could have been less fitted for a military life. He suffered not only from physical disability, bad health, and sensitiveness, but from the absent-mindedness of one whose imagination was possessed by his poetic schemes. "My mind will not relinquish its poetical yearnings," he wrote, "and concentration

on alien things and dull has strained my memory." But he endured the inhuman horror of modern war with a great heart; he would not have liked to be called a hero, but his fortitude was truly heroic. On the first of April, 1918, he was killed in action.

## II

The poems collected in this volume speak for themselves. The obscurities, the straining and tormenting of language in the effort to find right expression, the immaturities of style and taste, are apparent on the surface. The imaginative conceptions and the frequent gleam of imaginative phrasing should be equally apparent. But what does not appear on the surface is the fine intention, the ardent toil, and the continual self-criticism which underlay his work. Rosenberg's aim was, in his own words, a kind of poetry "where an interesting complexity of thought is kept in tone and right value to the dominating idea so that it is understandable and still ungraspable." The sentence occurs in one of his letters, and from this point on I wish to let Rosenberg speak for himself. His letters give a picture both of his mind and character, far more vivid than anything one

could write about him. He very rarely dated a letter, but the address and internal evidence give a clue to the date. The first extract is from a letter written, while he was still an apprentice, to Miss Winifreda Seaton, a friend to whom Mr. Amschewitz introduced him. Miss Seaton lent him books, encouraged him to write, discussed art and literature with him, and criticized his poems.

"It is horrible to think that all these hours, when my days are full of vigour and my hands and soul craving for self-expression, I am bound, chained to this fiendish mangling-machine, without hope and almost desire of deliverance, and the days of youth go by. . . . I have tried to make some sort of self-adjustment to circumstances by saying, 'It is all *experience*'; but, good God! it is *all* experience, and nothing else. . . . I really would like to take up painting seriously; I think I might do something at that; but poetry—I despair of ever writing excellent poetry. I can't look at things in the simple, large way that great poets do. My mind is so cramped and dulled and fevered, there is no consistency of purpose, no oneness of aim; the very fibres are torn apart, and

application deadened by the fiendish persistence of the coil of circumstance."

At last the apprenticeship is over and Rosenberg writes* exulting:

"Congratulate me! I've cleared out of the —— shop, I hope for good and all. I'm free—free to do anything, hang myself or anything except work. . . . I'm very optimistic, now that I don't know what to do, and everything seems topsy-turvy."

A little later comes the reaction:

"I am out of work. I doubt if I feel the better for it, much as the work was distasteful, though I expect it's the hankering thought of the consequences, pecuniary, etc., that bothers me. . . . All one's thoughts seem to revolve round to one point—death. It is horrible, especially at night, 'in the silence of the midnight'; it seems to clutch at your thought—you can't breathe. Oh, I think, work, work, any work, only to stop one thinking."

But such moods are resisted. At another time he is writing:

"One conceives one's lot (I suppose it's the

* This and the following extracts are from letters to the same correspondent.

same with all people, no matter what their condition) to be terribly tragic. You are the victim of a horrible conspiracy; everything is unfair. The gods have either forgotten you or made you a sort of scapegoat to bear all the punishment. I believe, however hard one's lot is, one ought to try and accommodate oneself to the conditions; and except in a case of purely physical pain, I think it can be done. Why not make the very utmost of our lives? . . . I'm a practical economist in this respect. I endeavour to waste nothing. . . . Waste words! Not to talk is to waste words. . . .

"To most people life is a musical instrument on which they are unable to play: but in the musician's hands it becomes a living thing. . . . The artist can see beauty everywhere, anywhere. . . ."

In what is perhaps an earlier letter he excuses his neglect of serious reading by his lack of leisure and the worries that make him crave for amusing books as an antidote:

"You mustn't forget the circumstances I have been brought up in, the little education I have

had. Nobody ever told me what to read, or ever put poetry in my way. I don't think I knew what real poetry was till I read Keats a couple of years ago. True, I galloped through Byron when I was about fourteen, but I fancy I read him more for the story than for the poetry. I used to try to imitate him. Anyway, if I didn't quite take to Donne at first, you understand why. Poetical appreciation is only newly bursting on me. I always enjoyed Shelley and Keats. The 'Hyperion' ravished me. . . .

"Whenever I read anything in a great man's life that pulls him down to me, my heart always pleads for him, and my mind pictures extenuating circumstances.

* * * *

"Have you ever picked up a book that looks like a Bible on the outside, but is full of poetry or comic within? My Hood is like that, and, I am afraid, so am I. Whenever I feel inclined to laugh, my visage assumes the longitude and gravity of a church spire.

* * * *

"I can't say I have ever experienced the power of one spirit over another, except in books, of

course, at least in any intense way that you mean. Unless you mean the interest one awakes in us, and we long to know more, and none other. I suppose we are all influenced by everybody we come in contact with, in a subconscious way, if not direct, and everything that happens to us is experience; but only the few know it. Most people can only see and hear the noisy sunsets, mountains and waterfalls; but the delicate greys and hues, the star in the puddle, the quiet sailing cloud, is nothing to them. Of course, I only mean this metaphorically, as distinguishing between obvious experiences and the almost imperceptible. I still have no work to do. I think, if nothing turns up here, I will go to Africa. I could not endure to live upon my people; and up till now I have been giving them from what I had managed to save up when I was at work. It is nearly run out now, and if I am to do nothing, I would rather do it somewhere else. Besides, I feel so cramped up here, I can do no drawing, reading, or anything. . . .

"Create our own experience! We can, but we don't. Very often it's only the trouble of a word, and who knows what we miss through not having spoken? It's the man with impudence who has

more experience than anybody. He not only varies his own, but makes other people's his own.

* * * *

"Do I like music, and what music I like best? I know nothing whatever about music. Once I heard Schubert's 'Unfinished Symphony' at the band; and—well, I was in heaven. It was a blur of sounds—sweet, fading and blending. It seemed to draw the sky down, the whole spirit out of me; it was articulate feeling. The inexpressible in poetry, in painting, was there expressed. But I have not heard much, and the sensation that gave me I never had again. I should like very much to be one of the initiated.

* * * *

"Some more confidences. I've discovered I'm a very bad talker: I find it difficult to make myself intelligible at times; I can't remember the exact word I want, and I think I leave the impression of being a rambling idiot."

In 1910 he went to see the wonderful collection of Japanese paintings lent by Japan to the Exhibition at Shepherd's Bush.

"The thoroughness is astounding. No slipshod,

tricky slickness, trusting to chance effects, but a subtle suggestiveness, and accident that is the consequence of intention."

Here are a few sentences from some "Notes on Art":

"Life stales and dulls; the mind demands noble excitement, half-apprehended surmises, the eternal desire, the beautiful. It is a vain belief that Art and Life go hand-in-hand; Art is, as it were, another planet.

"Mere representation is unreal, is fragmentary. The bone taken from Adam remains a bone. To create is to apply pulsating rhythmic principles to the part; a unity, another nature, is created."

*To Miss Seaton.*

"Thanks so much for the Donne. I had just been reading Ben Jonson again, and from his poem to Donne he must have thought him a giant. I have read some of the Donne; I have certainly never come across anything so choke-full of profound meaningful ideas. It would have been very difficult for him to express something commonplace, if he had to."

*To Miss Seaton.*

"I forgot to ask you to return my poetry, as I mean to work on some [of the poems]. I agree the emotions are not worth expressing, but I thought the things had some force, and an idea or so I rather liked. Of course, I know poetry is a far finer thing than that, but I don't think the failure was due to the subject—I had nothing to say about it, that's all. Crashaw, I think, is sometimes very sexual in his religious poems, but it is always new and beautiful. I believe we are apt to fix a standard (of subject) in poetry. We acknowledge the poetry in subjects not generally taken as material, but I think we all (at least I do) prefer the poetical subject — "Kubla Khan," "The Mistress of Vision," "Dream-Tryst"; Poe, Verlaine. Here feeling is separated from intellect; our senses are not interfered with by what we know of facts: we know infinity through melody."

After leaving the Slade School, at a loss for work and anxious about his health, Rosenberg thought for a time of going to Russia. But it was difficult for a Jew to get a passport, and he reverted to the African journey which he had contemplated already some years before.

*To Miss Seaton.*

"So I've decided on Africa, the climate being very good, and I believe plenty to do. . . . I won't be quite lost in Africa. . . . I dislike London for the selfishness it instils into one, which is a reason of the peculiar feeling of isolation I believe most people have in London. I hardly know anybody whom I would regret leaving (except, of course, the natural ties of sentiment with one's own people); but whether it is that my nature distrusts people, or is intolerant, or whether my pride or my backwardness cools people, I have always been alone. Forgive this little excursion into the forbidden lands of egotism."

The next letter was written to Mr. Edward Marsh, in the midst of packing for the voyage to the Cape. Mr. Marsh was interested in Rosenberg both as an artist and as a poet; he printed one of his poems in "Georgian Poetry, 1916-1917," and befriended him in many ways. The letter throws light on Rosenberg's use of language in poetry. As the piece referred to—"Midsummer Frost"—is not in the present selection, it may be given here:

A July ghost, aghast at the strange winter,
Wonders, at burning noon, all summer-seeming,

How, like a sad thought buried in light [woven] words,
Winter, an alien presence, is ambushed here.
See from the fire-fountained noon there creep
Lazy yellow ardours towards pale evening,
Dragging the sun across the shell of thought ;
A web threaded with fading fire ;
Futile and fragile lure, a July ghost
Standing with feet of fire on banks of ice,
My frozen heart, the summer cannot reach—
Hidden as a root from air, or star from day,
A frozen pool whereon mirth dances,
Where the shining boys would fish.

*To Edward Marsh* (1914).

"I believe that all poets who are personal see things genuinely—have their place. One needn't be a Shakespeare and yet be quite as interesting. I have moods when Rossetti satisfies me more than Shakespeare, and I am sure I have enjoyed some things of Francis Thompson more than the best of Shakespeare. Yet I never meant to go as high as these. I know I've come across things by people of far inferior vision that were as important in their results to me. I am not going to refute your criticisms ; in literature I have no judgment, at least for style. If in reading a thought has expressed itself to me in beautiful words, my ignorance of grammar, etc., makes me accept that.

I should think you are right mostly, and I may yet work away your chief objections. You are quite right in the way you read my poems, but I thought I could use the 'July Ghost' to mean the summer, and also an ambassador of the summer, without interfering with the sense. The 'shell of thought' is man; you realize a shell has an opening, the 'ardours'; the sense of heat forms a web; this signifies a sense of summer; the web again becomes another metaphor, a July Ghost. But, of course, I mean it for summer right through. I think your suggestion of taking out 'woven' is very good."

The next letter is from Cape Town.

*To Edward Marsh* (1914).

"I should like you to do me a favour if it's not putting you to too much bother. I am in an infernal city by the sea. This city has men in it—and these men have souls in them—or at least have the passages to souls. Though they are millions of years behind time, they have yet reached the stage of evolution that knows ears and eyes. But these passages are dreadfully clogged up: gold dust, diamond dust, stocks and shares, and Heaven knows what other flinty muck. Well, I've made up

my mind to clear through all this rubbish, but I want your help. Now, I'm going to give a series of lectures on modern art (I'm sending you the first, which I gave in great style. I was asked whether the Futurists exhibited at the Royal Academy). But I want to make the lectures interesting and intelligible by reproductions or slides. Now, I wonder whether you have reproductions which you could lend me till I returned or was finished with them. I want to talk about John, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Innes, the early Picasso (not the cubistic one), Spencer, Gertler, Lamb, Puvis de Chavannes, Degas. A book of reproductions of the P.-Impressionists would do, and I could get them transferred on slides. I hope this would not put you to any great trouble, but if you could manage to do it you don't know how you would help me. Stanley gave me a little job to paint two babies, which helped me to pay my way for a bit. I expect to get pupils and kick up a row with my lectures. But nobody seems to have money here, and not an ounce of interest in Art. The climate's fine, but the Sun is a very changeable creature and I can't come to any sort of understanding with this golden beast. He pretends to keep quiet for half an hour, and just as I think, 'Now I've got it,'

the damned thing has frisked about. There's a lot of splendid stuff to paint. We are walled in by the sharp upright mountain and the bay. Across the bay the piled-up mountains of Africa look lovely and dangerous. It makes one think of savagery and earthquakes—the elemental lawlessness."

The next extract is from a letter written in 1915, just after hearing the news of Rupert Brooke's death.

*To Miss Seaton.*

"Do you know Emerson's poems? I think they are wonderful. 'Each and All' I think is deep and beautiful. There is always a kind of beaminess, like a dancing of light in light, in his poems. I do think, though, that he depends too much on inspiration; and though they always have a solid texture of thought, they sometimes seem thin in colour or sensuousness."

*To Miss Seaton.*

"I saw Olive Schreiner last night. She's an extraordinary woman—full of life. I had a little picture for her from a dear friend of hers in Africa I stayed with while I was there. She was so pleased with my pictures of Kaffirs. Who is your best living

English poet? I've found somebody miles and miles above everybody—a young man, Lascelles Abercrombie — a mighty poet and brother to Browning."

Other references in letters show how deep at this time Mr. Abercrombie's influence was. Rosenberg calls his "Hymn of Love" the finest poem of our time.

He has now joined the Army, and writes from Bury St. Edmunds.

*To Edward Marsh* (1915).

"I have just joined the Bantams, and am down here amongst a horrible rabble. Falstaff's scarecrows were nothing to these. Three out of every four have been scavengers, the fourth is a ticket-of-leave. But that is nothing; though while I'm waiting for my kit I'm roughing it a bit, having come down without even a towel. I dry myself with my pocket-handkerchief. I don't know whether I will be shifted as soon as I get my rig-out."

The next was written in hospital at Bury.

*To Edward Marsh.*

"First, not to alarm you by this heading, I must tell you that while running before the Colonel I

started rather excitedly and tripped myself, coming down pretty heavily in the wet grit, and am in hospital with both my hands cut. I've been here since last Saturday, and expect to be out by about the beginning of the week. It is a dull kind of life in the hospital, and I'm very anxious to get out and be doing some rough kind of work. Mr. Shiff sent me some water-colours, and I amuse myself with drawing the other invalids. Of course, I must give them what I do, but I can see heaps of material for pictures here. The landscape, too, seems decent, though I haven't seen anything but from the barracks, as this accident happened pretty near at the start. I hope you were not annoyed at that fib of mine, but I never dreamt they would trouble to find out at home. I have managed to persuade my mother that I am for home service only, though, of course, I have signed on for general service. I left without saying anything because I was afraid it would kill my mother or I would be too weak and not go. She seems to have got over it, though, and as soon as I can get leave I'll see her, and I hope it will be well. It is very hard to write here, so you must not expect interesting letters; there is always behind or through my object some pressing sense of foreign matter,

immediate and not personal, which hinders and disjoints what would otherwise have coherence and perhaps weight. I have left all my poems, including a short drama, with a friend, and I will write to him for them, when I shall send them either direct to Abercrombie or to you first. I believe in myself more as a poet than a painter; I think I get more depth into my writing. I have only taken Donne with me, and don't feel for poetry much in this wretched place. There is not a book or paper here; we are not allowed to stir from the gate, have little to eat, and are not allowed to buy any if we have money, and are utterly wretched. (I mean the hospital.) If you could send me some novel or chocolates, you would make me very happy."

*To Edward Marsh (from Bury St. Edmunds).*

"I received a letter to-day (sent over a week ago) from Abercrombie, and I feel very flushed about it. He says no one who tries to write poetry would help envying some of my writing. Since I wrote you I have had more mishaps. My feet now are the trouble. Do you know what privates' military boots are? You are given a whole armourer's shop to wear; but, by God! in a

few hours my heels were all blistered, and I've been marching and drilling in most horrible pain. I drew three weeks' pay and had some money sent me from home, and bought a pair of boots three or four sizes too large for me, my feet had swelled so. Besides this trouble I have a little impudent schoolboy pup for an officer, and he has me marked; he has taken a dislike to me: I don't know why."

*To Miss Seaton (from Bury St. Edmunds).*

"Thanks for your letter and your books which they sent me from home. It is impossible to read as we are, and I don't expect to get proper leisure for reading till this rotten affair is over. My feet are pretty nigh better, and my hands, and I am put down for a Lance-Corporal. The advantage is, though you have a more responsible position, you are less likely to be interfered with by the men, and you become an authority. I expect to be home for four days shortly. I don't know whether I told you Lascelles Abercrombie sent me a fine letter about my work, which made me very bucked. There is nobody living whose praise could have pleased me so much. I have some pictures at the N.E.A.C., one of which is likely to be sold."

*To Edward Marsh (from Bury St. Edmunds).*

"I suppose my troubles are really laughable, but they do irritate at the moment. Doing coal fatigues and cookhouse work with a torn hand, and marching ten miles with a clean hole about an inch round in your heel, and bullies swearing at you, is not very natural. I think when my hands and feet get better I'll enjoy it. Nobody thinks of helping you—I mean those who could. Not till I had been made a thorough cripple an officer said it was absurd to think of wearing those boots, and told me to soak them thoroughly in oil to soften them. Thank you for your note; we get little enough, you know, and I allow half of that to my mother (I rather fancy she is going to be swindled in this rat-trap affair), so it will do to get to London with. You must now be the busiest man in England, and I am sure would hardly have time to read my things; besides, you won't like the formlessness of the play. If you like you can send them to Abercrombie, and read them when you have more time. I don't think I told you what he said: 'A good many of your poems strike me as experimental and not quite certain of themselves. But, on the other hand, I always find a vivid and original impulse; and what I like most

in your songs is your ability to make the concealed poetic power in words come flashing out. Some of your phrases are remarkable ; no one who tries to write poetry would help envying some of them.' I have asked him to sit for me—a poet to paint a poet. All this must seem to you like a blur on the window, or hearing sounds without listening while you are thinking."

*To Miss Seaton (from Blackdown Camp, Farnborough).*

"Thanks very much for the bread and biscuits, which I enjoyed very much. I am in another regiment now, as the old one was smashed up on account of most of the men being unfit. We that were left have been transferred here. The food is much better, but conditions are most unsettling. Every other person is a thief, and in the end you become one yourself, when you see all your most essential belongings go, which you must replace somehow. I also got into trouble here the first day. It's not worth while detailing what happened and exposing how ridiculous, idiotic, and meaningless the Army is, and its dreadful bullyisms, and what puny minds control it. I am trying to get our Passover off, which falls Easter. If I do I'll let

you know. The bother is that we will be on our ball-firing then, and also this before-mentioned affair may mess it up. This ball-firing implies we will be ready for the front. I have been working on 'Moses'—in my mind, I mean—and it was through my absent-mindedness while full of that that I forgot certain orders, and am now undergoing a rotten and unjust punishment. I'm working a curious plot into it, and of course, as I can't work here, I jot little scraps down and will piece it together the first chance I get."

The remaining letters are all from France.

*To Miss Seaton* (1916).

"We made straight for the trenches, but we've had vile weather, and I've been wet through for four days and nights. I lost all my socks and things before I left England, and hadn't the chance to make it up again, so I've been in trouble, particularly with bad heels; you can't have the slightest conception of what such an apparently trivial thing means. We've had shells bursting two yards off, bullets whizzing all over the show, but all you are aware of is the agony of your heels. . . . I had a letter from R. C. Trevelyan,

the poet. . . . He writes: 'It is a long time since I have read anything that has impressed me so much as your "Moses" and some of your short poems. . . .' He confesses parts are difficult, and he is not sure whether it's my fault or his."

The next letter is the first of a series to Mr. Bottomley, whom he was only to know by correspondence. He was now for a time working with the Salvage Corps.

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*Postmark, June* 12, 1916).

"If you really mean what you say in your letter, there is no need to tell you how proud I am. I had to read your letter many times before I could convince myself you were not 'pulling my leg.' People are always telling me my work is promising —incomprehensible, but promising, and all that sort of thing, and my meekness subsides before the patronizing knowingness. The first thing I saw of yours was last year in the Georgian Book, 'The End of the World.' I must have worried all London about it—certainly everybody I know. I had never seen anything like it. After that I got hold of 'Chambers of Imagery.' Mr. Marsh told me of your plays, but I joined the Army and have

never been able to get at them. It is a great thing to me to be able to tell you now in this way what marvellous pleasure your work has given me, and what pride that my work pleases you. I had ideas for a play called 'Adam and Lilith' before I came to France, but I must wait now."

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*Postmark*, *July* 23, 1916).

"Your letter came to-day with Mr. Trevelyan's, like two friends to take me for a picnic. Or rather like friends come to release the convict from his chains with his innocence in their hands, as one sees in the twopenny picture palace. You might say, friends come to take you to church, or the priest to the prisoner. Simple *poetry*,—that is where an interesting complexity of thought is kept in tone and right value to the dominating idea so that it is understandable and still ungraspable. I know it is beyond my reach just now, except, perhaps, in bits. I am always afraid of being empty. When I get more leisure in more settled times I will work on a larger scale and give myself room; then I may be less frustrated in my efforts to be clear, and satisfy myself too. I think what you say about getting beauty by phrasing of

passages rather than the placing of individual words very fine and very true."

*To Miss Seaton (written in Hospital*, 1916).

"I was very glad to have your letter and know there is no longer a mix-up about letters and such-like. Always the best thing to do is to answer at once, that is the likeliest way of catching one, for we shift about so quickly; how long I will stay here I cannot say: it may be a while or just a bit. I have some Shakespeare: the Comedies and also 'Macbeth.' Now I see your argument and cannot deny my treatment of your criticisms, but have you ever asked yourself why I always am rude to your criticisms? Now, I intended to show you ——'s letters and why I value his criticisms. I think anybody can pick holes and find unsound parts in any work of art; anyone can say Christ's creed is a slave's creed, the Mosaic is a vindictive, savage creed, and so on. It is the unique and superior, the illuminating qualities one wants to find—discover the direction of the impulse. Whatever anybody thinks of a poet he will always know himself: he knows that the most marvellously expressed idea is still nothing; and it is stupid to think that praise can do him harm. I

know sometimes one cannot exactly define one's feelings nor explain reasons for liking and disliking; but there is then the right of a suspicion that the thing has not been properly understood or one is prejudiced. It is much my fault if I am not understood, I know; but I also feel a kind of injustice if my idea is not grasped and is ignored, and only petty cavilling at form, which I had known all along was so, is continually knocked into me. I feel quite sure that form is only a question of time. I am afraid I am more rude than ever, but I have exaggerated here the difference between your criticisms and ——'s. Ideas of poetry can be very different too. Tennyson thought Burns' love-songs important, but the 'Cottar's S. N.' poor. Wordsworth thought the opposite."

*To Miss Seaton* (*November* 15, 1916; *written in Hospital*).

"London may not be the place for poetry to keep healthy in, but Shakespeare did most of his work there, and Donne, Keats, Milton, Blake—I think nearly all our big poets. But, after all, that is a matter of personal likings or otherwise. Most of the French country I have seen has been

devastated by war, torn up—even the woods look ghastly with their shell-shattered trees ; our only recollections of warm and comfortable feelings are the rare times amongst human villages, which happened about twice in a year ; but who can tell what one will like or do after the war? If the twentieth century is so awful, tell me what period you believe most enviable. Even Pater points out the Renaissance was not an outburst—it was no simultaneous marked impulse of minds living in a certain period of time—but scattered and isolated."

*To Edward Marsh* (*Postmark, January* 30, 1917).

"I think with you that poetry should be definite thought and clear expressions, however subtle ; I don't think there should be any vagueness at all, but a sense of something hidden and felt to be there. Now, when my things fail to be clear, I am sure it is because of the luckless choice of a word or the failure to introduce a word that would flash my idea plain, as it is to my own mind. I believe my Amazon poem to be my best poem. If there is any difficulty, it must be in words here and there, the changing or elimination of which may make the poem clear. It has taken

me about a year to write; for I have changed and rechanged it and thought hard over that poem, and striven to get that sense of inexorableness the human (or unhuman) side of this war has. It even penetrates behind human life; for the 'Amazon' who speaks in the second half of the poem is imagined to be without her lover yet, while all her sisters have theirs, the released spirits of the slain earth-men; her lover yet remains to be released."

*To Miss Seaton* (1916).

"Many thanks for book and chocolate. Both are being devoured with equal pleasure. I can't get quite the delight in Whitman as from one poem of his I know—'Captain, my Captain.' I admire the vigour and independence of his mind, but his diction is so diffused. Emerson and not Whitman is America's poet. You will persist in refusing to see my side of our little debate on criticism. Everybody has agreed with you about the faults, and the reason is obvious; the faults are so glaring that nobody can fail to see them. But how many have seen the beauties? And it is here more than the other that the true critic shows himself. And I absolutely disagree that it

is blindness or carelessness; it is the brain succumbing to the herculean attempt to enrich the world of ideas."

*To Laurence Binyon* (1916).

"It is far, very far, to the British Museum from here (situated as I am, Siberia is no further and certainly no colder), but not too far for that tiny mite of myself, my letter, to reach there. Winter has found its way into the trenches at last, but I will assure you, and leave to your imagination, the transport of delight with which we welcomed its coming. Winter is not the least of the horrors of war. I am determined that this war, with all its powers for devastation, shall not master my poeting; that is, if I am lucky enough to come through all right. I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on. I have thoughts of a play round our Jewish hero, Judas Maccabeus. I have much real material here, and also there is some parallel in the savagery of the invaders then to this war. I am not decided whether truth of period is a good quality or a negative one. Flaubert's 'Salambo'

proves, perhaps, that it is good. It decides the tone of the work, though it makes it hard to give the human side and make it more living. However, it is impossible now to work and difficult even to think of poetry, one is so cramped intellectually."

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*February*, 1917).

"Your letters always give me a strange and large pleasure; and I shall never think I have written poetry in vain, since it has brought your friendliness in my way. Now, feeling as I am, cast away and used up, you don't know what a letter like yours is to me. Ever since November, when we first started on our long marches, I have felt weak; but it seems to be some inscrutable mysterious quality of weakness that defies all doctors. I have been examined most thoroughly several times by our doctor, and there seems to be nothing at all wrong with my lungs. I believe I have strained my abdomen in some way, and I shall know of it later on. We have had desperate weather, but the poor fellows in the trenches where there are no dug-outs are the chaps to pity. I am sending a very slight sketch of a louse-hunt. It may be a bit vague, as I could not work it out here, but if you can keep it till I get back I can

work on it then. I do believe I could make a fine thing of Judas. Judas as a character is more magnanimous than Moses, and I believe I could make it very intense and write a lot from material out here. Thanks very much for your joining in with me to rout the pest out, but I have tried all kinds of stuff; if you can think of any preparation you believe effective I'd be most grateful for it."

The "louse hunt" refers to a night scene in which Rosenberg took part, and which forcibly struck his imagination as a subject for a Goya picture or for a poem like the "Jolly Beggars": a barn full of naked soldiers—Scottish and others—singing, swearing, and laughing, in mad antics as they pursued the chase.

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*Postmark*, *April* 8, 1917).

"All through this winter I have felt most crotchety, all kinds of small things interfering with my fitness. My hands would get chilblains or bad boots would make my feet sore; and this aggravating a general run-down-ness, I have not felt too happy. I have gone less warmly clad during the winter than through the summer, because of the increased liveliness on my clothes. I've been stung to what we call 'dumping' a great

part of my clothing, as I thought it wisest to go cold than lousy. It may have been this that caused all the crotchetiness. However, we've been in no danger—that is, from shell-fire—for a good long while, though so very close to most terrible fighting. But as far as houses or sign of ordinary human living is concerned, we might as well be in the Sahara Desert. I think I could give some blood-curdling touches if I wished to tell all I see, of dead buried men blown out of their graves, and more, but I will spare you all this."

*To Edward Marsh* (*Postmark, May*, 1917).

"Regular rhythms I do not like much, but, of course, it depends on where the stress and accent are laid. I think there is nothing finer than the vigorous opening to 'Lycidas' for music; yet it is regular. . . . It is only when we get a bit of a rest and the others might be gambling or squabbling I do a line or two and continue this way. The weather is gorgeous now, and we are bivouacked in the fields."

*To Edward Marsh* (1917).

"I hope you have not yet got my poem, 'The Amulet,' I've asked my sister to send you. If you

get it, please don't read it, because it's the merest sketch and the best is yet to come. If I am able to carry on with it, I'll send you it in a more presentable fashion. I believe I have a good idea at bottom. It's a kind of 'Rape of the Sabine Women' idea: some strange race of wanderers have settled in some wild place and are perishing out for lack of women. The prince of these explores some country near where the women are most fair. But the natives will not hear of foreign marriages; and he plots another Rape of the Sabines, but is trapped in the act."

*To Edward Marsh* (1917).

"I am now fearfully rushed, but find energy enough to scribble this in the minute I plunder from my work. I believe I can see the obscurities in the 'Daughters,' but hardly hope to clear them up in France. The first part, the picture of the Daughters dancing and calling to the spirits of the slain before their last ones have ceased among the boughs of the tree of life, I must still work on. In that part obscure the description of the voice of the Daughter I have not made clear, I see; I have tried to suggest the wonderful sound of her voice, spiritual and voluptuous at the same time.

The end is an attempt to imagine the severance of all human relationship and the fading away of human love. Later on I will try and work on it, because I think it a pity if the ideas are to be lost for want of work. My 'Unicorn' play is stopped because of my increased toil, and I forget how much or little I told you of it. I want to do it in one Act, although I think I have a subject here that could make a gigantic play. I have not the time to write out the sketch of it as far as it's gone, though I'd like to know your criticism of it very much. The most difficult part I shrink from; I think even Shakespeare might:—the first time Tel, the chief of the decaying race, sees a woman (who is Lilith, Saul's wife), and he is called upon to talk. Saul and Lilith are ordinary folk into whose ordinary lives the Unicorn bursts. It is to be a play of terror—terror of hidden things and the fear of the supernatural. But I see no hope of doing the play while out here. I have a way, when I write, to try and put myself in the situation, and I make gestures and grimaces."

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*Postmark, July* 20, 1917).

"My sister wrote me of your note, and it made me very glad to feel you thought in that way about my

poem, because I liked it myself above anything I have yet done. I know my letters are not what they should be; but I must take any chance I get of writing for fear another chance does not come, so I write hastily and leave out most I should write about. I wished to say last time a lot about your poem, but I could think of nothing that would properly express my great pleasure in it; and I can think of nothing now. If anything, I think it is too brief—although it is so rare and compressed and full of hinted matter. I wish I could get back and read your plays; and if my luck still continues, I shall. Leaves have commenced with us, but it may be a good while before I get mine. We are more busy now than when I last wrote, but I generally manage to knock something up if my brain means to, and I am sketching out a little play. My great fear is that I may lose what I've written, which can happen here so easily. I send home any bit I write, for safety, but that can easily get lost in transmission. However, I live in an immense trust that things will turn out well."

*To Gordon Bottomley* (1917).

"The other poems I have not yet read, but I will

follow on with letters and shall send the bits of —or rather the bit of—a play I've written. Just now it is interfered with by a punishment I am undergoing for the offence of being endowed with a poor memory, which continually causes me trouble and often punishment. I forgot to wear my gas-helmet one day; in fact, I've often forgotten it, but I was noticed one day, and seven days' pack drill is the consequence, which I do between the hours of going up the line and sleep. My memory, always weak, has become worse since I've been out here."

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*Postmark, August* 3, 1917).

"I don't think I'll get my play complete for it in time, though it will hardly take much space, it's so slight. If I could get home on leave I'd work at it and get it done, no doubt, but leaves are so chancy. It's called 'The Unicorn.' Now, it's about a decaying race who have never seen a woman; animals take the place of women, but they yearn for continuity. The chief's Unicorn breaks away and he goes in chase. The Unicorn is found by boys outside a city and brought in, and breaks away again. Saul, who has seen the Unicorn on his way to the city for the week's victuals,

gives chase in his cart. A storm comes on, the mules break down, and by the lightning he sees the Unicorn race by; a naked black like an apparition rises up and easily lifts the wheels from the rut, and together they ride to Saul's hut. There Lilith is in great consternation, having seen the Unicorn and knowing the legend of this race of men. The emotions of the black (the Chief) are the really difficult part of my story. Afterwards a host of blacks on horses, like centaurs and buffaloes, come rushing up, the Unicorn in front. On every horse is clasped a woman. Lilith faints, Saul stabs himself, the Chief places Lilith on the Unicorn, and they all race away."

In the late summer of this year (1917) Rosenberg came to England on leave.

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*dated September* 21, 1917).

"The greatest thing of my leave after seeing my mother was your letter which has just arrived. . . . I wish I could have seen you, but now I must go on and hope that things will turn out well, and some happy day will give me the chance of meeting you. . . . I am afraid I can do no writing or reading; I feel so restless here and un-

anchored. We have lived in such an elemental way so long, things here don't look quite right to me somehow; or it may be the consciousness of my so limited time here for freedom—so little time to do so many things bewilders me. 'The Unicorn,' as will be obvious, is just a basis; its final form will be very different, I hope."

On returning to France he was taken ill and sent down the line. The time in hospital was a relief, especially as his restlessness in England had prevented writing or reading.

*To Miss Seaton* (*dated February* 14, 1918).

"We had a rough time in the trenches with the mud, but now we're out for a bit of a rest, and I will try and write longer letters. You must know by now what a rest behind the line means. I can call the evenings—that is, from tea to lights out—my own; but there is no chance whatever for seclusion or any hope of writing poetry now. Sometimes I give way and am appalled at the devastation this life seems to have made in my nature. It seems to have blunted me. I seem to be powerless to compel my will to any direction, and all I do is without energy and interest."

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*Postmark, February* 26, 1918).

"I wanted to send some bits I wrote for the 'Unicorn' while I was in hospital, and if I find them I'll enclose them. I tried to work on your suggestion and divided it into four acts, but since I left the hospital all the poetry has gone quite out of me. I seem even to forget words, and I believe if I met anybody with ideas I'd be dumb. No drug could be more stupefying than our work (to me anyway), and this goes on like that old torture of water trickling, drop by drop unendingly, on one's helplessness."

*To Gordon Bottomley* (*Dated, March* 7, 1918).

"I believe our interlude is nearly over, and we may go up the line any moment now, so I answer your letter straightaway. If only this war were over our eyes would not be on death so much: it seems to underlie even our underthoughts. Yet when I have been so near to it as anybody could be, the idea has never crossed my mind, certainly not so much as when some lying doctor told me I had consumption. I like to think of myself as a poet; so what you say, though I know it to be extravagant, gives me immense pleasure."

*To Miss Scaton* (*March* 8, 1918).

"I do not feel that I have much to say, but I do know that unless I write now it will be a long time before you hear from me again, without something exceptional happens. It is not very cold now, but I dread the wet weather, which is keeping off while we are out, and, I fear, saving itself up for us. We will become like mummies —look warm and lifelike, but a touch and we crumble to pieces. Did I send you a little poem, 'The Burning of the Temple'? I thought it was poor, or rather, difficult in expression, but G. Bottomley thinks it fine. Was it clear to you? If I am lucky, and come off undamaged, I mean to put all my innermost experiences into the 'Unicorn.' I want it to symbolize the war and all the devastating forces let loose by an ambitious and unscrupulous will. Last summer I wrote pieces for it and had the whole of it planned out, but since then I've had no chance of working on it and it may have gone quite out of my mind."

*To Edward Marsh* (*dated March* 28, 1918).

"I think I wrote you I was about to go up the line again after our little rest. We are now in

the trenches again, and though I feel very sleepy, I just have a chance to answer your letter, so I will while I may. It's really my being lucky enough to bag an inch of candle that incites me to this pitch of punctual epistolary. I must measure my letter by the light. . . ."

The date of the postmark on this letter is April 2, when the writer was already dead.

LAURENCE BINYON.

# MOSES

## A Play (1916)

## PERSONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Moses - - - | *An Egyptian Prince* |
| Abinoah - - - | *An Overseer* |
| Two Hebrews | |
| Koelue - - - | *Abinoah's Daughter* |
| Messenger | |

# MOSES

SCENE I. : *Outside a college in Thebes. Egyptian students pass by.* MOSES *alone in meditation.*

[*Enter* MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER

[*Handing papyrus.*] Pharaoh's desires.

MOSES

[*Reads.*] To our beloved son, greeting. Add to our thoughts of you, if possible to add, but a little, and you are more than old heroes—not to bemean your genius, who might cry "Was that all!" We pile barriers everywhere: we give you idiots for tools, tree stumps for swords, skin sacks for souls. The sixteenth pyramid remains to be built: we give you the last draft of slaves. Move! Forget not the edict. PHARAOH.

MOSES

[*To* MESSENGER.] What is the edict?

MESSENGER

The royal paunch of Pharaoh dangled worriedly,
Not knowing where the wrong: viands once giant-
like
Came to him thin and thinner — what rats
gnawed?
Horror, the swarm of slaves! The satraps swore
Their wives' bones hurt them when they lay abed,
That before were soft and plump: the people
howled
They'd boil the slaves three days to get their fat,
Ending the famine. A haggard council held
Decrees the two hind molars, those two staunchest
Busy labourers in the belly's service, to be drawn
From out each slave's greased mouth, which soon
From incapacity will lose the habit
Of eating.

MOSES

Well, should their bones stick out to find the air,
I'll make a use of them for pleasantness—
Droll demonstrations of anatomy.

MESSENGER

And when you've ended find 'twas one on sharks.

[MOSES *signs to* MESSENGER *to go.*
*Exit* MESSENGER.]

MOSES

Fine! Fine!
See, in my brain
What madmen have rushed through
And like a tornado
Torn up the tight roots
Of some dead universe:
The old clay is broken
For a power to soak in and knit
It all into tougher tissues
To hold life;
Pricking my nerves till the brain might crack
It boils to my finger-tips,
Till my hands ache to grip
The hammer—the lone hammer
That breaks lives into a road
Through which my genius drives.
Pharaoh well peruked and oiled,
And your admirable pyramids,
And your interminable procession
Of crowded kings,
You are my little fishing rods
Wherewith I catch the fish
To suit my hungry belly.
I am rough now, and new, and will have no tailor.

Startlingly,
As a mountain-side
Wakes aware of its other side
When from a cave a leopard comes,
On its heels the same red sand,
Springing with acquainted air,
Sprang an intelligence
Coloured as a whim of mine,
Showed to my dull outer eyes
The living eyes underneath.
Did I not shrivel up and take the place of air,
Secret as those eyes were,
And those strong eyes call up a giant frame?
And I am that now.

Pharaoh is sleek and deep;
And where his love for me is set—under
The deeps, on their floor, or in the shallow ways,
Though I have been as a diver—never yet
Could I find. . . . I have a way, a touchstone!
A small misdemeanour, touch of rebelliousness;
To prick the vein of father, monitor, foe,
Will tell which of these his kingship is.
If I shut my eyes to the edict,
And leave the pincers to rust

And the slaves' teeth as God made them,
Then hide from the summoning tribunal,
Pharaoh will speak; and I'll seize that word to act.
Should the word be a foe's I can use it well
As a poison to soak into Egypt's bowels;
A wraith from old Nile will cry
"For his mercy they break his back"
And I shall have a great following for this,
The rude, touched heart of the mauled, sweaty horde,
Their rough tongues fawn at my hands, their red-streaked eyes
Glitter with sacrifice. Well! Pharaoh bids me act. . . .
Hah! I'm all a-bristle. . . . Lord, his eyes would go wide
If he knew the road my rampant dreams would race!
I am too much awake now—restless, so restless.
Behind white mists invisibly
My thoughts stood like a mountain;
But Power, watching as a man,
Saw no mountain there—
Only the mixing mist and sky
And the flat earth.

What shoulder pushed through those mists
Of gay fantastic pastimes
And startled hills of sleep?

[*He looks in a mirror.*]

Oh, apparition of me,
Ruddy flesh soon hueless,
Fade and show to my eyes
The lasting bare body;
Soul-sack fall away
And show what you hold!
Sing! Let me hear you sing.

A Voice

[*Sings.*]

Upon my lips, like a cloud
To burst on the peaks of light,
Sit cowled impossible things
To tie my hands at their prime and height.
Power, break through their shroud;
Pierce them so thoroughly,
Thoroughly enter me,
Know me for one dead;
Break the shadowy thread,
The cowering spirit's bond
Writ by illusions blond!

Ah! Let the morning pale

Throb with a wilder pulse:
No delicate flame shall quail
With terror at your convulse.
Thin branches whip the white skies
To lips and spaces of song
That chant a mood to my eyes. . . .
Ah! Sleep can be overlong.

MOSES

Voices thunder, voices of deeds not done:
Lo, on the air are scrawled in abysmal light
Old myths never known and yet already forgone,
And songs more lost, more secret than desert light:
Martyrdoms of uncreated things,
Virgin silences waiting a breaking voice—
As in a womb they cry, in a cage beat vain wings
Under life, over life: is their unbeing my choice?

Dull wine of torpor—the unsoldered spirit lies
limp.
Ah! If she would run into a mould,
Some new idea unwalled
To human by-ways, an apocalyptic camp
Of utterest and ulterior dreaming,
Understood only in its gleaming,
To flash stark naked the whole girth of the world.

I am sick of priests and forms,
This rigid dry-boned refinement:
As ladies' perfumes are
Obnoxious to stern natures,
This miasma of a rotting god
Is to me.
Who has made of the forest a park?
Who has changed the wolf to a dog?
And put the horse in harness?
And man's mind in a groove?

I heard the one spirit cry in them,
"Break this metamorphosis,
Disenchant my lying body;
Only putrefaction is free,
And I, Freedom, am not.
Moses! Touch us, thou!"

There shall not be a void or calm,
But a fury fill the veins of time—
Whose limbs had begun to rot,
Who had flattered my stupid torpor
With an easy and mimic energy,
And drained my veins with a paltry marvel
More monstrous than battle;
For the soul ached and went out dead in
pleasure.

Is not this song still sung in the streets of me?

A naked African
Walked in the sun
Singing—singing
Of his wild love.

I slew the tiger
With your young strength
(My tawny panther)
Rolled round my life.

Three sheep, your breasts
And my head between,
Grazing together
On a smooth slope.

Ah! Koelue!
Had you embalmed your beauty, so
It could not backward go
Or change in any way,
What were the use if on my eyes
The embalming spices were not laid
To keep us fixed,
Two amorous sculptures passioned endlessly?
What were the use if my sight grew
And its far branches were cloud-hung,

You small at the roots like grass ;
While the new lips my spirit would kiss
Were not red lips of flesh,
But the huge kiss of power ?
Where yesterday soft hair through my fingers fell
A shaggy mane would entwine ;
And no slim form work fire to my thighs,
But human Life's inarticulate mass
Throb the pulse of a thing
Whose mountain flanks awry
Beg my mastery—mine !
Ah ! I will ride the dizzy beast of the world
My road—my way.

SCENE II.: *Evening before Thebes. The Pyramids are being built. Swarms of Hebrews labouring. Priests and Taskmasters. Two Hebrews are furtively talking.* KOELUE *passes by singing.*

KOELUE

The vague viols of evening
Call all the flower clans
To some abysmal swinging
And tumult of deep trance;
He may hear, flower of my singing,
And come hither winging.

OLD HEBREW

[*Gazing after her in a muffled frenzy.*]

Hateful harlot! Boils cover your small cruel face.
O, fine champion Moses: O, so good to us:
O, grand begetter on her of a whip and a torturer,
Her father, born to us since you kissed her.
Our champion, O so good to us!

YOUNG HEBREW

For shame! Our brothers' twisted blood-smeared
gums
Tell we only have more room for wreck curtailed:
For you, having no teeth to draw, it is no mercy
Perhaps; but they might mangle your gums
Or touch a nerve somewhere. He barred it now;
And that is all his thanks, he, too, in peril.
Be still, old man; wait a little.

OLD HEBREW

Wait!
All day some slow dark quadruped beats
To pulp our springiness:
All day some hoofed animal treads our veins,
Leisurely—leisurely our energies flow out:
All agonies created from the first day
Have wandered hungry searching the world for us,
Or they would perish like disused Behemoth.
Is our Messiah one to unleash these agonies
As Moses does, who gives us an Abinoah?

YOUNG HEBREW

Yesterday as I lay nigh dead with toil
Underneath the hurtling crane oiled with our
blood,

Thinking to end all and let the crane crush me,
He came by and bore me into the shade:
O, what a furnace roaring in his blood
Thawed my congealed sinews and tingled my own
Raging through me like a strong cordial.
He spoke! Since yesterday
Am I not larger grown?
I've seen men hugely shapen in soul,
Of such unhuman shaggy male turbulence
They tower in foam miles from our neck-strained
sight,
And to their shop only heroes come;
But all were cripples to this speed
Constrained to the stables of flesh.
I say there is a famine in ripe harvest
When hungry giants come as guests:
Come knead the hills and ocean into food,
There is none for him.
The streaming vigours of his blood erupting
From his halt tongue are like an anger thrust
Out of a madman's piteous craving for
A monstrous balked perfection.

OLD HEBREW

He is a prince, an animal
Not of our kind; who perhaps has heard

Vague rumours of our world, to his mind
An unpleasant miasma.

YOUNG HEBREW

Is not Miriam his sister, Jochabed his mother?
In the womb he looked round and saw
From furthermost stretches our wrong:
From the palaces and schools
Our pain has pierced dead generations
Back to his blood's thin source.
As we lie chained by Egyptian men
He lay in nets of their women,
And now rejoices he has broken their meshes.
O! His desires are fleets of treasure
He has squandered in treacherous seas,
Sailing mistrust to find frank ports;
He fears our fear and tampers mildly
For our assent to let him save us.
When he walks amid our toil
With some master-mason
His tense brows, critical
Of the loose enginery,
Hint famed devices flat, his rod
Scratching new schemes on the sand:
But read hard the scrawled lines there—
Limned turrets and darkness, chinks of light,

Half beasts snorting into the light,
A phantasmagoria, wild escapade
To our hearts' clue; just a daring plan
To the honest mason. What swathed meanings peer
From his work-a-day council, washed to and from
Your understanding till you doubt
That a word was said—
But a terror wakes and forces your eyes
Into his covertly, to search his searching;
Startled to life, starved hopes slink out
Cowering, incredulous.

OLD HEBREW

[*To himself.*] His youth is flattered at Moses' kind speech to him.

[*To the* YOUNG HEBREW.]

I am broken and grey, have seen much in my time,
And all this gay grotesque of childish man
Long passed; half blind, half deaf, I only grumble
I am not blind or deaf enough for peace.
I have seen splendid young fools cheat themselves
Into a prophet's frenzy; I have seen
So many crazèd shadows puffed away,
And conscious cheats with such an ache for fame

They'd make a bonfire of themselves to be
Mouthed in the squares, broad in the public eye:
And whose backs break, whose lives are mauled, after
It all falls flat? His tender airs chill me—
As thoughts of sleep to a man tiptoed night-long
Roped round his neck, for sleep means death to him.
Oh, he is kind to us!
Your safe teeth chatter when they hear a step:
He left them yours because his cunning way
Would brag the wrong against his humane act
By Pharaoh; so gain more favour than he lost.

YOUNG HEBREW

Help him not then, and push your safety away:
I for my part will be his backward eye,
His hands when they are shut. Ah! Abinoah!
Like a bad smell from the soul of Moses dipt
In the mire of lust he hangs round him;
And if his slit-like eyes could tear right out
The pleasure Moses on his daughter had,
She'd be as virgin as ere she came nestling
Into that fierce unmanageable blood,
Flying from her loathed father. O, that slave
Has hammered from the anvil of her beauty

A steel to break his manacles : hard for us
Moses has made him overseer. O, his slits
Pry—pry. . . . For what? . . . To sell to Imra. . . .

[ABINOAH *is seen approaching.*]

Sh ! The thin-lipped abomination !
Zig-zagging haschish tours in a fine style :
It were delightful labour making bricks,
Knowing they would kiss friendly with his head.

ABINOAH

[*Who has been taking haschish ; and who has one obsession, hatred of Jews.*]

Dirt-draggled mongrels, circumcised slaves,
You puddle with your lousy gibberish
The holy air, Pharaoh's own tributary :
Filthy manure for Pharaoh's flourishing,
I'll circumcise and make holy your tongues,
And stop one outlet to your profanation.

[*To the* OLD HEBREW.]

I've never seen one beg so for a blow ;
Too soft am I to resist such entreaty.

[*Beats him.*]

Your howling holds the earnest energies
You cheat from Pharaoh when you make his bricks.

## An Aged Minstrel

[*Sings from a distance.*]

Taut is the air and tied the trees,
The leaves lie as on a hand;
God's unthinkable imagination
Invents new tortures for nature.

And when the air is soft and the leaves
Feel free and push and tremble,
Will they not remember and say
How wonderful to have lived?

[*The* Old Hebrew *is agitated and murmurs.*]

Messiah, Messiah. . . . That voice . . .
O, he has beaten my sight out. . . . I see
Like a rain about a devouring fire. . . .

[*The Minstrel sings.*]

Ye who best God awhile, O hear: your wealth
Is but His cunning to see to make death more
hard,
Your iron sinews take more pain in breaking;
And he has made the market for your beauty
Too poor to buy although you die to sell.

OLD HEBREW

I am crazed with whips. . . . I hear a Messiah.

YOUNG HEBREW

The venerable man will question this.

ABINOAH

[*Overhearing.*] I'll beat you more, and he'll question
The scratchiness of your whining; or, may be,
Thence may be born deep argument
With reasons from philosophy,
That this blow, taking longer, yet was but one,
Or perhaps two; or that you felt this one—
Arguing from the difference in your whine—
Exactly, or not, like the other.

MINSTREL

You labour hard to give pain.

ABINOAH

[*Still beating.*] My pain is . . . not . . . to labour so.

MINSTREL

What is this greybeard worth to you now,
All his dried-up blood crumbled to dust?

[*Motions* Abinoah *to desist, but not in time to prevent the old man fainting into the hands of the* Young Hebrew.]

Abinoah

Harper, are you envious of the old fool?
Go! Hug the rat who stole your last crumbs,
And gnawed the hole in your life which made time wonder
Who it was saved labour for him the next score of years.
We allowed them life for their labour—they haggled.
Food they must have, and (god of laughter!) even ease;
But mud and lice and Jews are very busy
Breeding plagues in ease.

[*The Minstrel pulls his beard and robe off.*]

Abinoah

Moses!

Moses

You drunken rascal!

Abinoah

A drunken rascal! Isis, hear the Prince!
Drunken with duty, and he calls me rascal.

MOSES

You may think it your duty to get drunk ;
But get yourself bronze claws before
You would be impudent.

ABINOAH

When a man's drunk he'll kiss a horse or king,
He's so affectionate. Under your words
There is strong wine to make me drunk ; you think,
The lines of all your face say, "Her father, Koelue's father."

MOSES

This is too droll and extraordinary.
I dreamt I was a prince—a queer droll dream
Where a certain slave of mine, a thing, a toad,
Shifting his belly, showed a diamond
Where he had lain ; and a blind dumb messenger
Bore syllabled messages soaked right through with glee :
I paid the toad, the blind man ; afterwards
They spread a stench and snarling. O, droll dream !

I think you merely mean to flatter me,
You subtle knave, that, more than prince, I'm *man*
And worth to listen to your bawdy breath.

ABINOAH

Yet my breath was worth your mixing with.

MOSES

A boy at college flattered so by a girl
Will give her what she asks for.

ABINOAH

Osiris! Burning Osiris!
Of thee desirable, for thee, her hair. . . .

[*He looks inanely at* MOSES, *saying to himself.*]

Prince Imra vowed his honey-hives and vineyards:
Isis, to let a Jew have her for nothing!

[*He sings under his breath.*]

Night by night in a little house
A man and woman meet;
They look like each other,
They are sister and brother;
And night by night at that same hour
A king calls for his son in vain.

MOSES

[*To himself.*] So, sister Miriam, it is known
then. Slave, you die.
[*Aloud.*] O, you ambiguous stench,
You'll be more interesting as a mummy
I have no doubt.

ABINOAH

I'm drunk, yes—drenched with the thought
Of a certain thing. [*Aside.*] I'll sleep sounder
to-night
Than all the nights I've followed him about
Worrying each slight clue, each monosyllable
To give the word to Imra: the prince is near,
And Moses' eyes shall blink before next hour
To a hundred javelins. I'll tease him till they
come.
[*Aloud.*] On Koelue's tears I swam to you, in a mist
Of her sighs I hung round you;
As in some hallucination I've been walking
A white waste world, we two only in it.

MOSES

Doubtless the instinct balked to bully the girl,
Making large gapings in your haschish dreams,

Led you to me in whom she was thoroughly lost.
Pah, you sicken me!

[*He is silent awhile, then turns away.*]

ABINOAH

Prince Imra is Pharaoh's choice now, and Koelue's.

[MOSES *turns back menacingly.*]

MOSES

Silence, you beast!

[*He changes his tone to a winning softness.*]

I hate these family quarrels: it is so
Like fratricide. I am a rebel, well?
Soft! You are not, and we are knit so close
It would be shame for a son to be so honoured
And the father still unknown: come, Koelue's (so *my*) father,
I'll tell my plans—you'll beg to be rebel then.
Look round on the night—
Old as the first, bleak, even her wish is done;
She has never seen, though dreamt perhaps of the sun,
Yet only dawn divides; could a miracle

Destroy the dawn, night would be mixed with
light,
No night or light would be, but a new thing:
So with these slaves, who perhaps have dreamt of
freedom,
Egypt was in the way; I'll strike it out
With my ways curious and unusual.
I have a trouble in my mind for largeness,
Rough-hearted, shaggy, which your grave ardours
lack:
Here is the quarry quiet for me to hew;
Here are the springs, primeval elements,
The roots' hid secrecy, old source of race,
Unreasoned reason of the savage instinct.
I'd shape one impulse through the contraries
Of vain ambitious men, selfish and callous,
And frail life-drifters, reticent, delicate—
Litheness thread bulk, a nation's harmony:
These are not lame nor bent awry, but placeless
With the rust and stagnant. All that's low I'll
charm,
Barbaric love sweeten to tenderness,
Cunning run into wisdom, craft turn to skill;
Their meanness, threaded right and sensibly,
Change to a prudence envied and not sneered;
Their hugeness be a driving wedge to a thing

Ineffable and useable, as near
Solidity as human life can be :
So grandly fashion these rude elements
Into some newer nature, a consciousness
Like naked light seizing the all-eyed soul,
Oppressing with its gorgeous tyranny
Until they take it thus—or die.

[*While speaking, he places his hand on the unsuspecting Egyptian's head and gently, caressingly, pulls his hair back until his chin is above his forehead, and holds him so till he is suffocated. In the darkness ahead is seen the glimmer of javelins and spears : it is Prince Imra's cohorts come to arrest* Moses.]

The End.

# POEMS FROM CAMP AND TRENCH

And like the artist who creates
From dying things what never dies. . . .

*Fragment.*

## DAUGHTERS OF WAR

Space beats the ruddy freedom of their limbs,
Their naked dances with man's spirit naked
By the root side of the tree of life
(The under side of things
And shut from earth's profoundest eyes).

I saw in prophetic gleams
These mighty daughters in their dances
Beckon each soul aghast from its crimson corpse
To mix in their glittering dances:
I heard the mighty daughters' giant sighs
In sleepless passion for the sons of valour
And envy of the days fo flesh,
Barring their love with mortal boughs across—
The mortal boughs, the mortal tree of life.
The old bark burnt with iron wars
They blow to a live flame
To char the young green days
And reach the occult soul; they have no softer lure,
No softer lure than the savage ways of death.

We were satisfied of our lords the moon and the sun
To take our wage of sleep and bread and warmth—
These maidens came—these strong everliving
Amazons,
And in an easy might their wrists
Of night's sway and noon's sway the sceptres brake,
Clouding the wild, the soft lustres of our eyes.

Clouding the wild lustres, the clinging tender lights;
Driving the darkness into the flame of day
With the Amazonian wind of them
Over our corroding faces
That must be broken—broken for evermore,
So the soul can leap out
Into their huge embraces.
Though there are human faces
Best sculptures of Deity,
And sinews lusted after
By the Archangels tall,
Even these must leap to the love-heat of these
maidens
From the flame of terrene days,
Leaving grey ashes to the wind—to the wind.

One (whose great lifted face,
Where wisdom's strength and beauty's strength

And the thewed strength of large beasts
Moved and merged, gloomed and lit)
Was speaking, surely, as the earth-men's earth fell
away;
Whose new hearing drank the sound
Where pictures, lutes, and mountains mixed
With the loosed spirit of a thought,
Essenced to language thus—

"My sisters force their males
From the doomed earth, from the doomed glee
And hankering of hearts.
Frail hands gleam up through the human quag-
mire, and lips of ash
Seem to wail, as in sad faded paintings
Far-sunken and strange.
My sisters have their males
Clean of the dust of old days
That clings about those white hands
And yearns in those voices sad:
But these shall not see them,
Or think of them in any days or years;
They are my sisters' lovers in other days and
years."

## ON RECEIVING THE FIRST NEWS OF THE WAR

Snow is a strange white word;
No ice or frost
Has asked of bud or bird
For Winter's cost.

Yet ice and frost and snow
From earth to sky
This Summer land doth know;
No man knows why.

In all men's hearts it is:
Some spirit old
Hath turned with malign kiss
Our lives to mould.

Red fangs have torn His face,
God's blood is shed:
He mourns from His lone place
His children dead.

O ancient crimson curse !
Corrode, consume ;
Give back this universe
Its pristine bloom.

*Cape Town*, 1914.

## SPRING, 1916

Slow, rigid, is this masquerade
That passes as through a difficult air:
Heavily—heavily passes.
What has she fed on? Who her table laid
Through the three seasons? What forbidden fare
Ruined her as a mortal lass is?

I played with her two years ago,
Who might be now her own sister in stone;
So altered from her May mien,
When round the pink a necklace of warm snow
Laughed to her throat where my mouth's touch
had gone.
How is this, ruined Queen?

Who lured her vivid beauty so
To be that strained chill thing that moves
So ghastly midst her young brood
Of pregnant shoots that she for men did grow?
Where are the strong men who made these their
loves?
Spring! God pity your mood!

## THE TROOP SHIP

Grotesque and queerly huddled
Contortionists to twist
The sleepy soul to a sleep,
We lie all sorts of ways
And cannot sleep.
The wet wind is so cold,
And the lurching men so careless,
That, should you drop to a doze,
Winds' fumble or men's feet
Are on your face.

## MARCHING

(AS SEEN FROM THE LEFT FILE).

My eyes catch ruddy necks
Sturdily pressed back—
All a red-brick moving glint.
Like flaming pendulums, hands
Swing across the khaki—
Mustard-coloured khaki—
To the automatic feet.

We husband the ancient glory
In these bared necks and hands.
Not broke is the forge of Mars;
But a subtler brain beats iron
To shoe the hoofs of death
(Who paws dynamic air now).
Blind fingers loose an iron cloud
To rain immortal darkness
On strong eyes.

## BREAK OF DAY IN THE TRENCHES

The darkness crumbles away—
It is the same old druid Time as ever.
Only a live thing leaps my hand—
A queer sardonic rat—
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies
(And God knows what antipathies).
Now you have touched this English hand
You will do the same to a German—
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes
Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.

What do you see in our eyes
At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurled through still heavens?
What quaver—what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
But mine in my ear is safe,
Just a little white with the dust.

## KILLED IN ACTION

Your " Youth "* has fallen from its shelf,
And you have fallen, you yourself.
They knocked a soldier on the head,
I mourn the poet who fell dead.
And yet I think it was by chance,
By oversight you died in France.
You were so poor an outward man,
So small against your spirit's span,
That Nature, being tired awhile,
Saw but your outward human pile;
And Nature, who would never let
A sun with light still in it set,
Before you even reached your sky,
In inadvertence let you die.

* " Youth," a volume of poems by I. Rosenberg.

## RETURNING, WE HEAR THE LARKS

Sombre the night is:
And, though we have our lives, we know
What sinister threat lurks there.

Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know
This poison-blasted track opens on our camp—
On a little safe sleep.

But hark! Joy—joy—strange joy.
Lo! Heights of night ringing with unseen larks:
Music showering on our upturned listening faces.

Death could drop from the dark
As easily as song—
But song only dropped,
Like a blind man's dreams on the sand
By dangerous tides;
Like a girl's dark hair, for she dreams no ruin lies
there,
Or her kisses where a serpent hides.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM BY THE BABYLONIAN HORDES

They left their Babylon bare
Of all its tall men,
Of all its proud horses;
They made for Lebanon.

And shadowy sowers went
Before their spears to sow
The fruit whose taste is ash,
For Judah's soul to know.

They who bowed to the Bull god,
Whose wings roofed Babylon,
In endless hosts darkened
The bright-heavened Lebanon.

They washed their grime in pools
Where laughing girls forgot
The wiles they used for Solomon.
Sweet laughter, remembered not!

Sweet laughter charred in the flame
That clutched the cloud and earth,
While Solomon's towers crashed between
To a gird of Babylon's mirth.

## THE BURNING OF THE TEMPLE

Fierce wrath of Solomon,
Where sleepest thou? O see,
The fabric which thou won
Earth and ocean to give thee—
O look at the red skies.

Or hath the sun plunged down?
What is this molten gold—
These thundering fires blown
Through heaven, where the smoke rolled?
Again the great king dies.

His dreams go out in smoke.
His days he let not pass
And sculptured here are broke,
Are charred as the burnt grass,
Gone as his mouth's last sighs.

## HOME-THOUGHTS FROM FRANCE

Wan, fragile faces of joy,
Pitiful mouths that strive
To light with smiles the place
We dream we walk alive,

To you I stretch my hands,
Hands shut in pitiless trance
In a land of ruin and woe,
The desolate land of France.

Dear faces startled and shaken,
Out of wild dust and sounds
You yearn to me, lure and sadden
My heart with futile bounds.

## THE IMMORTALS

I killed them, but they would not die.
Yea, all the day and all the night
For them I could not rest nor sleep,
Nor guard from them nor hide in flight!

Then in my agony I turned
And made my hands red in their gore.
In vain—for faster than I slew
They rose more cruel than before.

I killed and killed with slaughter mad;
I killed till all my strength was gone;
And still they rose to torture me,
For Devils only die for fun.

I used to think the Devil hid
In women's smiles and wine's carouse;
I called him Satan, Balzebub;
But now I call him dirty louse.

## LOUSE HUNTING

Nudes, stark and glistening,
Yelling in lurid glee. Grinning faces
And raging limbs
Whirl over the floor one fire ;
For a shirt verminously busy
Yon soldier tore from his throat
With oaths
Godhead might shrink at, but not the lice,
And soon the shirt was aflare
Over the candle he'd lit while we lay.

Then we all sprang up and stript
To hunt the verminous brood.
Soon like a demons' pantomime
This plunge was raging.
See the silhouettes agape,
See the gibbering shadows
Mixed with the baffled arms on the wall.

See Gargantuan hooked fingers
Pluck in supreme flesh
To smutch supreme littleness.
See the merry limbs in that Highland fling
Because some wizard vermin willed
To charm from the quiet this revel
When our ears were half lulled
By the dark music
Blown from Sleep's trumpet.

## GIRL TO SOLDIER ON LEAVE

I love you, Titan lover,
My own storm-days' Titan.
Greater than the son of Zeus,
I know whom I would choose.

Titan—my splendid rebel—
The old Prometheus
Wanes like a ghost before your power:
His pangs were joys to yours.

Pallid days, arid and wan,
Tied your soul fast:
Babel-cities' smoky tops
Pressed upon your growth

Weary gyves. What were you
But a word in the brain's ways,
Or the sleep of Circe's swine?
One gyve holds you yet.

It held you hiddenly on the Somme
Tied from my heart at home:
O must it loosen now? I wish
You were bound with the old, old gyves.

Love! You love me—your eyes
Have looked through death at mine.
You have tempted a grave too much.
I let you—I repine.

## SOLDIER: TWENTIETH CENTURY

I love you, great new Titan!
Am I not you?
Napoleon and Cæsar
Out of you grew.

Out of unthinkable torture,
Eyes kissed by death,
Won back to the world again,
Lost and won in a breath,

Cruel men are made immortal.
Out of your pain born,
They have stolen the sun's power
With their feet on your shoulders worn.

Let them shrink from your girth,
That has outgrown the pallid days
When you slept like Circe's swine
Or a word in the brain's ways.

## THE JEW

Moses, from whose loins I sprung,
Lit by a lamp in his blood
Ten immutable rules, a moon
For mutable lampless men.

The blonde, the bronze, the ruddy,
With the same heaving blood,
Keep tide to the moon of Moses.
Then why do they sneer at me?

## THE DYING SOLDIER

"Here are houses," he moaned,
"I could reach, but my brain swims."
Then they thundered and flashed,
And shook the earth to its rims.

"They are gunpits," he gasped,
"Our men are at the guns.
Water! . . . Water! . . . Oh, water!
For one of England's dying sons."

"We cannot give you water,
Were all England in your breath."
"Water! . . . Water! . . . Oh, water!"
He moaned and swooned to death.

## DEAD MAN'S DUMP

The plunging limbers over the shattered track
Racketed with their rusty freight,
Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old
To stay the flood of brutish men
Upon our brothers dear.

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched;
Their shut mouths made no moan.
They lie there huddled, friend and foeman,
Man born of man, and born of woman;
And shells go crying over them
From night till night and now.

Earth has waited for them,
All the time of their growth
Fretting for their decay:

Now she has them at last!
In the strength of their strength
Suspended—stopped and held.

What fierce imaginings their dark souls lit?
Earth! Have they gone into you?
Somewhere they must have gone,
And flung on your hard back
Is their souls' sack,
Emptied of God-ancestralled essences.
Who hurled them out? Who hurled?

None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,
Or stood aside for the half used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed
mouth,
When the swift iron burning bee
Drained the wild honey of their youth.

What of us who, flung on the shrieking pyre,
Walk, our usual thoughts untouched,
Our lucky limbs as on ichor fed,
Immortal seeming ever?
Perhaps when the flames beat loud on us,
A fear may choke in our veins
And the startled blood may stop.

The air is loud with death,
The dark air spurts with fire,
The explosions ceaseless are.
Timelessly now, some minutes past,
These dead strode time with vigorous life,
Till the shrapnel called "An end!"
But not to all. In bleeding pangs
Some borne on stretchers dreamed of home,
Dear things, war-blotted from their hearts.

A man's brains splattered on
A stretcher-bearer's face;
His shook shoulders slipped their load,
But when they bent to look again
The drowning soul was sunk too deep
For human tenderness.

They left this dead with the older dead,
Stretched at the cross roads.

Burnt black by strange decay
Their sinister faces lie,
The lid over each eye;
The grass and coloured clay
More motion have than they,
Joined to the great sunk silences.

Here is one not long dead.
His dark hearing caught our far wheels,
And the choked soul stretched weak hands
To reach the living word the far wheels said;
The blood-dazed intelligence beating for light,
Crying through the suspense of the far torturing
wheels
Swift for the end to break
Or the wheels to break,
Cried as the tide of the world broke over his
sight,
"Will they come? Will they ever come?"
Even as the mixed hoofs of the mules,
The quivering-bellied mules,
And the rushing wheels all mixed
With his tortured upturned sight.

So we crashed round the bend,
We heard his weak scream,
We heard his very last sound,
And our wheels grazed his dead face.

## IN WAR

Fret the nonchalant noon
With your spleen
Or your gay brow,
For the motion of your spirit
Ever moves with these.

When day shall be too quiet,
Deaf to you
And your dumb smile,
Untuned air shall lap the stillness
In the old space for your voice—

The voice that once could mirror
Remote depths
Of moving being,
Stirred by responsive voices near,
Suddenly stilled for ever.

No ghost darkens the places
Dark to One ;
But my eyes dream,
And my heart is heavy to think
How it was heavy once.

In the old days when death
Stalked the world
For the flower of men,
And the rose of beauty faded
And pined in the great gloom,

One day we dug a grave :
We were vexed
With the sun's heat.
We scanned the hooded dead :
At noon we sat and talked.

How death had kissed their eyes
Three dread noons since,
How human art won
The dark soul to flicker
Till it was lost again :

And we whom chance kept whole—
But haggard,

Spent—were charged
To make a place for them who knew
No pain in any place.

The good priest came to pray ;
Our ears half heard,
And half we thought
Of alien things, irrelevant ;
And the heat and thirst were great.

The good priest read : "I heard . . ."
Dimly my brain
Held words and lost. . . .
Sudden my blood ran cold. . . .
God ! God ! It could not be.

He read my brother's name ;
I sank—
I clutched the priest.
They did not tell me it was he
Was killed three days ago.

What are the great sceptred dooms
To us, caught
In the wild wave ?
We break ourselves on them,
My brother, our hearts and years.

## THE DEAD HEROES

Flame out, you glorious skies,
Welcome our brave;
Kiss their exultant eyes;
Give what they gave.

Flash, mailèd seraphim,
Your burning spears;
New days to outflame their dim
Heroic years.

Thrills their baptismal tread
The bright proud air;
The embattled plumes outspread
Burn upwards there.

Flame out, flame out, O Song!
Star ring to star;
Strong as our hurt is strong
Our children are.

Their blood is England's heart;
By their dead hands
It is their noble part
That England stands.

England—Time gave them thee;
They gave back this
To win Eternity
And claim God's kiss.

# FRAGMENTS OF "THE UNICORN"

# FRAGMENTS OF "THE UNICORN"

## I

## THE AMULET

LILITH. SAUL. AMAK. NUBIAN.

LILITH *sits under pomegranate trees watching her child* AMAK *playing with Saul his father's helm and spear. A light smoke is ascending from the chimney of their hut, and through the doorway a naked Nubian man is seen stirring the embers.* SAUL *sleeps.*

LILITH

Amak, you'll break your father's sleep :
Come here and tell me what those spices are
This strange man bakes our cakes with.
It makes the brain wild. Be still, Amak :
I'll give you the strange man your father brought,
And he will run with you upon his back to-day.

Come from your father or you'll get no cake;
He's been a long journey.
Bring me the pictured book he brought for you.
What! Already cut to pieces?
Put away that horn from your father's ear,
And stay that horrid noise: come, Amak.

[*Amak runs to his mother with a jade amulet, shouting.*]

AMAK

Look, mother, what I've found.

[*He runs back again, making great shouts.*]

LILITH

It dances with my blood: when my eyes caught it first
I was like lost, and yearned and yearned and yearned,
And strained like iron to stay my head from falling
Upon that beggar's breast where the jade stone hung.
Perhaps the spirit of Saul's young love lies here
Strayed far and brought back by this stranger near.
Saul said his discourse was more deep than Heaven.

For the storm trapped him ere he left the town
Loaded with our week's victuals: the slime clung
And licked and clawed and chewed the clogged dragging wheels
Till they sunk right to the axle: Saul, sodden and vexed,
Like fury smote the mules' mouths, pulling but sweat
From his drowned hair and theirs, while the thunder knocked
And all the air yawned water, falling water,
And the light cart was water, like a wrecked raft,
And all seemed like a forest under the ocean.
Sudden the lightning flashed upon a figure
Moving as a man moves in the slipping mud,
Singing, but not as a man sings, through the storm,
Which could not drown his sounds. Saul bawled "Hi! Hi!"
And the man loomed, naked, vast, and gripped the wheels;
Saul fiercely dug from under; he tugged the wheels;
The mules foamed straining, straining.
Suddenly they went.
Saul and the man leaped in: Saul, miserably sodden,

Marvelled at the large cheer in a naked glistening
man ;
Yet soon fell in with that contented mood,
That when our hut's light broke on his new mind
He could not credit it—too soon it seemed :
The stranger man's talk was witchery.
I pray his baking be as magical ;
The cakes should be nigh burnt.

[*She calls the* NUBIAN. *He answers from within.*]

NUBIAN

They are laid by to cool, housewife.

LILITH

Bring me the sherbet from the ledge and the fast-
dried figs.

[*The* NUBIAN *brings sherbet, figs, and a bowl of ice,
and lays them down.*]

[*She looks curiously at him. He is an immense
man with squat, mule-skinned features : his jet-
black curled beard, crisp hair, glistening nude
limbs, appear to her like some heathen idol of
ancient stories.*]

[*She thinks to herself.*]

Out of the lightning
In a dizzying cloven wink
This apparition stood up,
Of stricken trunk or beast's spirit,
Stirred by Saul's blasphemies;
So Saul's heart feared, aghast.
But lo, he touched the mischance and life ran straight!
Was it the storm-spirit, storm's pilot,
With all the heaving débris of Noah's sunken days
Dragged on his loins;
Law's spirit wandering to us
Through Nature's anarchy,
Wandering towards us when the Titans yet were young?
Perhaps Moses and Buddha he met.

[*She speaks aloud.*]

The shadow of these pomegranate boughs
Is sweet and restful; sit and ease your feet. Eat of these figs;
You have journeyed long.

NUBIAN

All my life, housewife.

LILITH

You have seen men and women,
Soaked yourself in powers and old glories,
In broken days and tears and glees,
And touched cold hands—
Hands shut in pitiless trances where the feast is high.
I think there is more sorrow in the world
Than man can bear.

NUBIAN

None can exceed their limit, lady:
You either bear or break.

LILITH

Can one choose to break? To bear,
Wearily to bear, is misery.
Beauty is this corroding malady.

NUBIAN

Beauty is a great paradox—
Music's secret soul creeping about the senses
To wrestle with man's coarser nature.
It is hard when beauty loses.

## Lilith

I think beauty is a bad bargain made of life.
Men's iron sinews hew them room in the world
And use deceits to gain them trophies:
O, when our beauty fails us did we not use
Deceits, where were our room in the world—
Only our room in the world?
Are not the songs and devices of men
Moulds they have made after my scarlet mouth,
Of cunning words and contours of bronze
And viols and gathered air?
They without song have sung me
Boldly and shamelessly.
I am no wanton, no harlot;
I have been pleased and smiled my pleasure,
I am a wife with a woman's natural ways.
Yet through the shadow of the pomegranates
Filters a poison day by day,
And to a malady turns
The blond, the ample music of my heart:
Inward to eat my heart
My thoughts are worms that suck my softness all
away.
I watch the dumb eyeless hours
Drop their tears, then shapeless moaning drop.

Unfathomable is my mouth's dream
Do not men say?
So secret are my far eyes,
Weaving for iron men profound subtleties.

Sorceress they name me;
And my eyes harden, and they say,
"How may those eyes know love
If God made her without a heart?

"Her tears, her moaning,
Her sad profound gaze,
The dishevelled lustres of her hair
Moon-storm like" they say,
"These are her subtleties" men say.
My husband sleeps,
The ghosts of my virgin days do not trouble him:
His sleep can be over-long,
For there is that in my embers
Pride and blushes of fire, the outraged blood,
His sleep makes me remember.

Sleep, hairy hunter; sleep!
You are not hungry more,
Having fed on my deliciousness;
Your sleep is not adultery to me,

For you were wed to a girl
And I am a woman.
My lonely days are not whips to my honour.

[*She dries her tears with her hair, then fingers the amulet at her throat.*]

Yours, friend.

NUBIAN

[*Eagerly.*] My amulet! My amulet!

[*He speaks gravely.*] Small comfort is counsel to
broken lives;
But tolerance is medicinal.
In all our textures are loosed
Pulses straining against strictness
Because an easy issue lies therefrom.
(Could they but slink past the hands holding whips
To hunt them from the human pale
Where is the accident to cover? Spite fears bias.)
I am justified at my heart's plea;
He is justified also.

For the eyes of vanity are sleepless—are suspicious.
Are mad with imaginings
Of secret stabs in words, in looks, in gestures.

Man is a chimera's eremite,
That lures him from the good kindness of days
Which only ask his willingness.

There is a crazed shadow from no golden body
That poisons at the core
What smiles may stray :
It mixes with all God-ancestralled essences,
And twists the brain and heart.
This shadow sits in the texture of Saul's being,
Mauling your love and beauty with its lies :
I hold a power like light to shrivel it—
There, in your throat's hollow—that green jade.

[*He snatches at it as she lets it fall. He grows white and troubled, and walks to where* AMAK *is playing, and sees minutely strewn pieces of paper.*]

[*He mutters.*] Lost—lost.
The child has torn the scroll in it,
And half is away. It cannot be spelt now.

LILITH

God, restore me his love.
Ah ! Well !

[*She rises.*]

I will go now; prepare our evening meal;
And waken my husband, my love once.

NUBIAN

[*Musing.*] The lightning of the heavens
Lifts an apocalypse:
The dumb night's lips are scared and wide,
The world is reeling with sound:
Was I deaf before, mute, tied?
What shakes here from lustre-seeded pomegranates
Not in the great world,
More vast and terrible?
What is this ecstasy in form,
This lightning
That found the lightning in my blood,
Searing my spirit's lips aghast and naked?
I am flung in the abyss of days,
And the void is filled with rushing sound
From pent eternities:
I am strewn as the cypher is strewn.
A woman—a soft woman!
Our girls have hair
Like heights of night ringing with never-seen larks,
Or blindness dim with dreams:
Here is a yellow tiger gay that blinds your night.
Mane—Mane—Mane!

Your honey spilt round that small dazzling face
Shakes me to golden tremors;
I have no life at all,
Only thin golden tremors.
Light tender beast!
Your fragile gleaming wrists
Have shaken the scaled glacier from under me,
And bored into my craft
That is now with the old dreamy Adam
With other things of dust.

LILITH

You lazy hound! See my poor child.

[*He turns to see* LILITH *drop the bowl and cakes and run to* AMAK—*who is crying, half stifled under* SAUL'S *huge shield.*]

[SAUL *opens his eyes.*]

* * * * *

## II

## THE SONG OF TEL THE NUBIAN

Small dazzling face!
I shut you in my soul;
How can I perish now?

But thence a strange decay—
Your fragile gleaming wrists
Waver my days and shake my life
To golden tremors. I have no life at all,
Only thin golden tremors
That shudder over the abyss of days
Which hedged my spirit, my spirit your prison walls
That shrunk like phantasms with your vivid beauty—

Towering and widening till
The sad moonless place
Throngs with a million torches
And spears of flaming wings.

## III

## THE TOWER OF SKULLS

### Mourners

These layers of piled-up skulls,
These layers of gleaming horror—stark horror!
Ah me! Through my thin hands they touch my
eyes.

Everywhere, everywhere is a pregnant birth,
And here in death's land is a pregnant birth.
Your own crying is less mortal
Than the amazing soul in your body.
Your own crying yon parrot takes up
And from your empty skull cries it afterwards.

Thou whose dark activities unenchanted
Days from gyrating days, suspending them
To thrust them far from sight, from the gyrating
days
Which have gone widening on and left us here,
Cast derelicts lost for ever.

When aged flesh looks down on tender brood;
For he knows between his thin ribs' walls
The giant universe, the interminable
Panorama—synods, myths and creeds,
He knows his dust is fire and seed.

# EARLIER POEMS

I have heard the Gods
In their high conference
As I lay outside the world
Quiet in sleep. . . .

*Fragment.*

He was an artist and a dreamer—that is, one whose delight in the beauty of life was an effective obstacle to the achievement of the joy of living.

(*Circa* 1913.)

## EXPRESSION

Call—call—and bruise the air:
Shatter dumb space!
Yea! We will fling this passion everywhere;
Leaving no place

For the superb and grave
Magnificent throng,
The pregnant queens of quietness that brave
And edge our song

Of wonder at the light
(Our life-leased home),
Of greeting to our housemates. And in might
Our song shall roam

Life's heart, a blossoming fire
Blown bright by thought,
While gleams and fades the infinite desire,
Phantasmed naught.

Can this be caught and caged?
Wings can be clipt
Of eagles, the sun's gaudy measure gauged,
But no sense dipt

In the mystery of sense:
The troubled throng
Of words break out like smothered fire through
dense
And smouldering wrong.

## FROM "NIGHT AND DAY"

### I

### IN THE WORKSHOP

Dim watery lights gleaming on gibbering faces,
Faces speechful, barren of soul and sordid,
Huddled and chewing a jest, lewd and gabbled insidious:
Laughter, born of its dung, flashes and floods like sunlight,
Filling the room with a sense of a soul lethargic and kindly,
Touches my soul with a pathos, a hint of a wide desolation.

### II

I saw the face of God to-day,
I heard the music of His smile,
And yet I was not far away,
And yet in Paradise the while.

I lay upon the sparkling grass,
And God's own mouth was kissing me,
And there was nothing that did pass
But blazèd with divinity.

Divine—divine—upon my eyes,
Upon mine hair—divine—divine,
The fervour of the golden skies,
The ardent gaze of God on mine.

## III

Then spake I to the tree,
"Were ye your own desire
What is it ye would be?"

Answered the tree to me,
"I am my own desire,
I am what I would be.

"If you were your desire
Would you lie under me,
And see me as you see?"

"I am my own desire
While I lie under you,
And that which I would be
Desire will sing to you."

## IV

I wander—I wander—O will she wander here
Where'er my footsteps carry me I know that she
is near,
A jewelled lamp within her hand and jewels in
her hair ;
I lost her in a vision once and seek her everywhere.

My spirit whispers she is near, I look at you and
you :
Surely she has not passed me, I sleeping as she flew.
I wander—I wander, and yet she is not here,
Although my spirit whispers to me that she is
near.

## ZION *

She stood—a hill-ensceptred Queen,
The glory streaming from her ;
While Heaven flashed her rays between,
And shed eternal summer.

The gates of morning opened wide
On sunny dome and steeple ;
Noon gleamed upon the mountain-side
Thronged with a happy people ;

And twilight's drowsy, half closed eyes
Beheld that virgin splendour
Whose orbs were as her darkening skies,
And as her spirit, tender.

Girt with that strength, first-born of right,
Held fast by deeds of honour,
Her robe she wove with rays more bright
Than Heaven could rain upon her.

* Written at the age of sixteen.

Where is that light—that citadel ?
That robe with woof of glory ?
She lost her virtue and she fell,
And only left her story.

## SPIRITUAL ISOLATION: A FRAGMENT

My Maker shunneth me:
Even as a wretch stricken with leprosy,
So hold I pestilent supremacy.
Yea! He hath fled far as the uttermost star,
Beyond the unperturbed fastnesses of night
And dreams that bastioned are
By fretted towers of sleep that scare His light.

Of wisdom writ, whereto
My burdened feet may haste withouten rue,
I may not spell—and I am sore to do.
Yea, all (seeing my Maker hath such dread),
Even mine own self-love, wists not but to fly
To Him, and sore besped
Leaves me, its captain, in such mutiny.

Will, deemed incorporate
With me, hath flown ere love, to expiate
Its sinful stay where He did habitate.

Ah me, if they had left a sepulchre ;
But no—the light hath changed not, and in it
Of its same colour stir
Spirits I see not but phantasmed feel to flit.

Air, legioned with such, stirreth,
So that I seem to draw them with my breath,
Ghouls that devour each joy they do to death,
Strange glimmering griefs and sorrowing silences
Bearing dead flowers unseen whose charnel smell
Great awe to my sense is
Even in the rose-time when all else is well.

* * * * *

## FAR AWAY

By what pale light or moon-pale shore
Drifts my soul in lonely flight?
Regions God had floated o'er
Ere He touched the world with light?

Not in Heaven and not in earth
Is this water, is this moon;
For there is no starry birth,
And no dawning and no noon.

Far away—O far away,
Mist-born—dewy vapours rise
From the dim gates of the day
Far below in earthly skies.

## SPRING

I walk and I wonder
To hear the birds sing;
Without you, my lady,
How can there be Spring?
I see the pink blossoms
That slept for a year,
But who could have waked them
While you were not near?

Birds sing to the blossoms,
Blind, dreaming your pink;
These blush to the songsters,
Your music they think:
So well had you taught them
To look and to sing,
Your bloom and your music,
The ways of the Spring.

## SONG

A silver rose to show
Is your sweet face;
And like the heavens' white brow,
Sometime God's battle-place,
Your blood is quiet now.

Your body is a star
Unto my thought;
But stars are not too far,
And can be caught—
Small pools their prisons are.

## HEART'S FIRST WORD. I.

To sweeten a swift minute so
With such rare fragrance of sweet speech,
And make the after hours go
In a blank yearning each on each ;
To drain the springs till they be dry,
And then in anguish thirst for drink ;
So but to glimpse her robe thirst I,
And my soul hungers and I sink.

There is no word that we have said
Whereby the lips and heart are fire ;
No look the linkèd glances read
That held the springs of deep desire.
And yet the sounds her glad lips gave
Are on my soul vibrating still ;
Her eyes that swept me as a wave
Shine my soul's worship to fulfil.

Her hair, her eyes, her throat and chin—
Sweet hair, sweet eyes, sweet throat, so sweet,

So fair because the ways of sin
Have never known her perfect feet—
By what far ways and marvellous
May I such lovely heaven reach?
What dread, dark seas and perilous
Lie 'twixt love's silence and love's speech?

## HEART'S FIRST WORD. II.

And all her soft dark hair
Breathed for him like a prayer,
And her white lost face
Was prisoned to some far place.
Love was not denied—
Love's ends would hide,
And flower and fruit and tree
Were under its sea.
Yea, its abundance knelt
Where the nerves felt
The springs of feeling flow
And made pain grow!
There seemed no root or sky,
But a pent infinity
Where apparitions dim
Sculptured each whim
In flame and wandering mist
Of kisses to be kist.

## LADY, YOU ARE MY GOD

Lady, you are my God—
Lady, you are my Heaven.

*If I am your God*
*Labour for your Heaven.*

Lady, you are my God,
And shall not love win Heaven?

*If love made me God*
*Deeds must win my Heaven.*

If my love made you God,
What more can I for Heaven?

## IF YOU ARE FIRE

If you are fire and I am fire,
Who blows the flame apart
So that desire eludes desire
Around one central heart?

A single root and separate bough,
And what blind hands between
That make our longing's mutual glow
As if it had not been?

## IN THE UNDERWORLD

I have lived in the underworld so long:
How can you, a creature of light,
Without terror understand the song
And unmoved hear what moves in night?

I am a spirit that yours has found,
Strange, undelightful, obscure,
Created by some other God, and bound
In terrible darkness, breathing breath impure.

Creature of light and happiness,
Deeper the darkness was when you,
With your bright terror eddying the distress,
Grazed the dark waves and shivering further flew.

## O, IN A WORLD OF MEN AND WOMEN

O, in a world of men and women,
Where all things seemed so strange to me,
And speech the common world called human
For me was a vain mimicry,

I thought—O, am I one in sorrow ?
Or is the world more quick to hide
Their pain with raiment that they borrow
From pleasure in the house of pride ?

O joy of mine, O longed-for stranger,
How I would greet you if you came :
In the world's joys I've been a ranger,
In my world sorrow is their name.

## A GIRL'S THOUGHTS

Dim apprehension of a trust
Comes over me this quiet hour,
As though the silence were a flower,
And this, its perfume, dark like dust.

My individual self would cling
Through fear, through pride, unto its fears:
It strives to shut out what it hears,
The founts of being murmuring.

O! Need, whose hauntings terrorize;
Whether my maiden ways would hide,
Or lose and to that need subside,
Life shrinks and instinct dreads surprise.

## A BALLAD OF WHITECHAPEL

God's mercy shines;
And our full hearts must make record of this,
For grief that burst from out its dark confines
Into strange sunlit bliss.

I stood where glowed
The merry glare of golden whirring lights
Above the monstrous mass that seethed and flowed
Through one of London's nights.

I watched the gleams
Of jaggèd warm lights on shrunk faces pale:
I heard mad laughter as one hears in dreams
Or Hell's harsh lurid tale.

The traffic rolled,
A gliding chaos populous of din,
A steaming wail at doom the Lord had scrawled
For perilous loads of sin.

And my soul thought:
"What fearful land have my steps wandered to?
God's love is everywhere, but here is naught
Save love His anger slew."

And as I stood
Lost in promiscuous bewilderment,
Which to my mazèd soul was wonder-food,
A girl in garments rent

Peered 'neath lids shamed
And spoke to me and murmured to my blood.
My soul stopped dead, and all my horror flamed
At her forgot of God.

Her hungered eyes,
Craving and yet so sadly spiritual,
Shone like the unsmirched corner of a jewel
Where else foul blemish lies.

I walked with her
Because my heart thought, "Here the soul is clean,
The fragrance of the frankincense and myrrh
Is lost in odours mean."

She told me how
The shadow of black death had newly come

And touched her father, mother, even now
Grim-hovering in her home,

Where fevered lay
Her wasting brother in a cold, bleak room,
Which theirs would be no longer than a day,
And then—the streets and doom.

Lord ! Lord ! Dear Lord !
I knew that life was bitter, but my soul
Recoiled, as anguish-smitten by sharp sword,
Grieving such body's dole.

Then grief gave place
To a strange pulsing rapture as she spoke ;
For I could catch the glimpses of God's grace,
And a desire awoke

To take this trust
And warm and gladden it with love's new fires,
Burning the past to ashes and to dust
Through purified desires.

We walked our way,
One way hewn for us from the birth of Time ;
For we had wandered into Love's strange clime
Through ways sin waits to slay.

Love's euphony,
In Love's own temple that is our glad hearts,
Makes now long music wild deliciously;
Now Grief hath used his darts.

Love infinite,
Chastened by sorrow, hallowed by pure flame—
Not all the surging world can compass it.
Love—Love—O tremulous name!

God's mercy shines;
And my full heart hath made record of this,
Of grief that burst from out its dark confines
Into strange sunlit bliss.

## TESS

The free fair life that has never been mine, the glory that might have been,
If I were what you seem to be and what I may not be!
I know I walk upon the earth, but a dreadful wall between
My spirit and your spirit lies, your joy and my misery.

The angels that lie watching us, the little human play,
What deem they of the laughter and the tears that flow apart?
When a word of man is a woman's doom do they turn and wonder and say,
"Ah! Why has God made love so great that love must burst her heart?"

## THE NUN

So thy soul's meekness shrinks,
Too loth to show her face—
Why should she shun the world?
It is a holy place.

Concealèd to itself
If the flower kept its scent,
Of itself amorous,
Less rich its ornament.

Use—utmost in each kind—
Is beauty, truth in one,
While soul rays light to soul
In one God-linkèd sun.

## IN PICCADILLY

Lamp-lit faces, to you
What is your starry dew?
Gold flowers of the night blue!

Deep in wet pavement's slime
Mud-rooted is your fierce prime,
To bloom in lust's coloured clime.

The sheen of eyes that lust,
Which dew-time made your trust,
Lights your passionless dust.

## A MOOD

You are so light and gay,
So slight, sweet maid—
Your limbs like leaves in play,
Or beams that grasses braid:
O! Joys whose jewels pray
My breast to be inlaid.

Frail fairy of the streets;
Strong, dainty lure;
For all men's eyes the sweets
Whose lack makes hearts so poor;
While your heart loveless beats.
Light, laughing, and impure.

O! Fragrant waft of flesh,
Float through me so—
My limbs are in your mesh,
My blood forgets to flow;
Ah! Lilied meadows fresh,
It knows where it would go.

## FIRST FRUIT

I did not pluck at all,
And I am sorry now :
The garden is not barred
But the boughs are heavy with snow,
The flake-blossoms thickly fall
And the hid roots sigh, " How long will
    our flowers be marred ?"

Strange as a bird were dumb,
Strange as a hueless leaf.
As one deaf hungers to hear,
Or gazes without belief,
The fruit yearned " Fingers, come !"
O, shut hands, be empty another year.

## A CARELESS HEART

A little breath can make a prayer,
A little wind can take it
And turn it back again to air:
Then say, why should you make it?

An ardent thought can make a word,
A little ear can hear it,
A careless heart forget it heard:
Then why keep ever near it?

## DAWN

O tender first cold flush of rose,
O budded dawn, wake dreamily ;
Your dim lips as your lids unclose
Murmur your own sad threnody.
O as the soft and frail lights break
Upon your eyelids, and your eyes
Wider and wider grow and wake,
The old pale glory dies.

And then, as sleep lies down to sleep
And all her dreams lie somewhere dead,
The iron shepherd leads his sheep
To pastures parched whose green is shed.
Still, O frail dawn, still in your hair
And your cold eyes and sad sweet lips,
The ghosts of all the dreams are there,
To fade like passing ships.

## AT NIGHT

Crazed shadows, from no golden body
That I can see, embrace me warm ;
All is purple and closed
Round by night's arm.

A brilliance wings from dark-lit voices,
Wild lost voices of shadows white :
See the long houses lean
To the weird flight.

Star-amorous things that wake at sleep-time
(Because the sun spreads wide like a tree
With no good fruit for them)
Thrill secrecy.

Pale horses ride before the morning,
The secret roots of the sun to tread,
With hoofs shod with venom
And ageless dread ;

To breathe on burning emerald grasses
And opalescent dews of the day,
And poison at the core
What smiles may stray.

## CREATION

As the pregnant womb of night
Thrills with imprisoned light,
Misty, nebulous-born,
Growing deeper into her morn,
So man, with no sudden stride,
Bloomed into pride.

In the womb of the All-spirit
The universe lay; the will
Blind, an atom, lay still.
The pulse of matter
Obeyed in awe
And strove to flatter
The rhythmic law.
But the will grew; nature feared,
And cast off the child she reared,
Now her rival, instinct-led,
With her own powers impregnated.

Brain and heart, blood-fervid flowers,
Creation is each act of yours.

Your roots are God, the pauseless cause,
But your boughs sway to self-windy laws.
Perception is no dreamy birth
And magnifies transfigured earth.
With each new light, our eyes receive
A larger power to perceive.

If we could unveil our eyes,
Become as wise as the All-wise,
No love would be, no mystery :
Love and joy dwell in infinity.
Love begets love ; reaching highest
We find a higher still, unseen
From where we stood to reach the first ;
Moses must die to live in Christ,
The seed be buried to live to green.
Perfection must begin from worst.
Christ perceives a larger reachless love,
More full, and grows to reach thereof.
The green plant yearns for its yellow fruit.
Perfection always is a root,
And joy a motion that doth feed
Itself on light of its own speed,
And round its radiant circle runs,
Creating and devouring suns.

## OF ANY OLD MAN

Wreck not the ageing heart of quietness
With alien uproar and rude jolly cries,
Which (satyr-like to a mild maiden's pride)
Ripen not wisdom but a large recoil ;
Give them their withered peace, their trial grave,
Their past youth's three-scored shadowy effigy.
Mock them not with your ripened turbulence,
Their frost-mailed petulance with your torrid wrath,
When, edging your boisterous thunders, shivers one word
(Pap to their senile sneering, drug to truth,
The feignèd rampart of bleak ignorance)
" Experience "—crown of naked majesties,
That tells us naught we know not, but confirms.
O think, you reverend shadowy austere,
Your Christ's youth was not ended when he died.

## THE ONE LOST

I mingle with your bones;
You steal in subtle noose
This lighted dust Jehovah loans
And now I lose.

What will the Lender say
When I shall not be found,
Safe-sheltered at the Judgment Day,
Being in you bound?

He'll hunt through wards of Heaven,
Call to uncoffined earth
"Where is this soul, unjudged, not given
Dole for good's dearth?"

And I, lying so safe
Within you, hearing all,
To have cheated God shall laugh,
Freed by your thrall.

## WEDDED

They leave their love-lorn haunts,
Their sigh-warm floating Eden ;
And they are mute at once,
Mortals by God unheeden,
By their past kisses chidden.

But they have kist and known
Clear things we dim by guesses—
Spirit to spirit grown :
Heaven, born in hand-caresses .
Love, fall from sheltering tresses.

And they are dumb and strange :
Bared trees bowed from each other.
Their last green interchange
What lost dreams shall discover ?
Dead, strayed, to love-strange lover.

## DON JUAN'S SONG

The moon is in an ecstasy,
It wanes not nor can grow ;
The heavens are in a mist of love,
And deepest knowledge know :
What things in nature seem to move
Bear love as I bear love ?
And bear my pleasures so ?

I bear my love as streams that bear
The sky still flow or shake :
Though deep within, too far on high.
Light blossoms kiss and wake
The waters sooner than the sky ;
And if they kiss and die
God made them frail to break.

## ON A LADY SINGING

She bade us listen to the singing lark
In tones far sweeter than its own:
For fear that she should cease and leave us dark
We built the bird a feignèd throne,
Shrined in her gracious glory-giving ways
From sceptred hands of starred humility—
Praising herself the more in giving praise
To music less than she.

## BEAUTY

As a sword in the sun—
A glory calling a glory—
Our eyes, seeing it run,
Capture its gleam for our story.

Singer, marvellous gleam
Dancing in splendid light,
Here you have brought us our dream—
Ah, but its stay is its flight!

## A QUESTION

What if you shut your eyes and look,
Yea, look with all the spirit's eyes,
While mystic unrevealèd skies
Unfold like pages of a book

Wherein new scenes of wonder rare
Are imaged, till the sense deceives
Itself, and what it sees believes—
Even what the soul has pictured there?

## CHAGRIN

Caught still as Absalom,
Surely the air hangs
From the swayless cloud-boughs
Like hair of Absalom
Caught and hanging still.

From the imagined weight
Of spaces in a sky
Of mute chagrin my thoughts
Hang like branch-clung hair
To trunks of silence swung,
With the choked soul weighing down
Into thick emptiness.
Christ, end this hanging death,
For endlessness hangs therefrom!

Invisibly branches break
From invisible trees:
The cloud-woods where we rush
(Our eyes holding so much),

Which we must ride dim ages round
Ere the hands (we dream) can touch,
We ride, we ride—before the morning
The secret roots of the sun to tread—
And suddenly
We are lifted of all we know,
And hang from implacable boughs.

## THE BLIND GOD

Streaked with immortal blasphemies,
Betwixt His twin eternities
The Shaper of mortal destinies
Sits in that limbo of dreamless sleep,
Some nothing that hath shadows deep.

The world is only a small pool
In the meadows of Eternity,
And men like fishes lying cool;
And the wise man and the fool
In its depths like fishes lie.
When an angel drops a rod
And he draws you to the sky
Will you bear to meet your God
You have streaked with blasphemy?

## THE FEMALE GOD

We curl into your eyes—
They drink our fires and have never drained;
In the fierce forest of your hair
Our desires beat blindly for their treasure.

In your eyes' subtle pit,
Far down, glimmer our souls;
And your hair like massive forest trees
Shadows our pulses, overtired and dumb.

Like a candle lost in an electric glare
Our spirits tread your eyes' infinities:
In the wrecking waves of your tumultuous locks
Do you not hear the moaning of our pulses?

Queen! Goddess! Animal!
In sleep do your dreams battle with our souls?
When your hair is spread like a lover on the pillow
Do not our jealous pulses wake between?

You have dethroned the ancient God,
You have usurped his Sabbath, his common days;
Yea, every moment is delivered to you,
Our Temple, our Eternal, our one God!

Our souls have passed into your eyes,
Our days into your hair;
And you, our rose-deaf prison, are very pleased
with the world,
Your world.

## GOD

In his malodorous brain what slugs and mire,
Lanthorned in his oblique eyes, guttering burned!
His body lodged a rat where men nursed souls:
The world flashed grape-green eyes of a foiled cat
To him. On fragments of an old shrunk power,
On shy and maimed, on women wrung awry,
He lay—a bullying hulk—to crush them more;
But when one fearless turned and clawed like bronze,
Cringing was easy to blunt these stern paws,
And he would weigh the heavier on those after.

Who rests in God's mean flattery now? Your wealth
Is but his cunning to make death more hard,
Your iron sinews take more pain in breaking;
And he has made the market for your beauty
Too poor to buy although you die to sell.

Only that he has never heard of sleep,
And when the cats come out the rats are sly,
Here we are safe till he slinks in at dawn.

But he has gnawed a fibre from strange roots,
And in the morning some pale wonder ceases.
Things are not strange; and strange things are
forgetful.
Ah! If the day were arid, somehow lost
Out of us; but it is as hair of us,
And only in the hush no wind stirs it,
And in the light vague trouble lifts and breathes,
And restlessness still shadows the lost ways.
The fingers shut on voices that pass through
Where blind farewells are taken easily.

Ah, this miasma of a rotting God!

## SLEEP

Godhead's lip hangs
When our pulses have no golden tremors,
And his whips are flicked by mice
And all star-amorous things.

Drops, drops of shivering quiet
Filter under my lids.
Now only am I powerful.
What though the cunning gods outwit us here
In daytime and in playtime,
Surely they feel the gyves we lay on them
In our sleep.

O, subtle gods lying hidden!
O, gods with your oblique eyes!
Your elbows in the dawn, and wrists
Bright with the afternoon,
Do you not shake when a mortal slides
Into your own unvexed peace?

When a moving stillness breaks over your knees
(An emanation of piled æons' pressures),
From our bodies flat and straight,
And your limbs are locked,
Futilely gods',
And shut your sinister essences ?

## MY DAYS

My days are but the tombs of buried hours ;
Which tombs are hidden in the pilèd years ;
But from the mounds there spring up many flowers,
Whose beauty well repays their cost of tears.
Time, like a sexton, pileth mould on mould,
Minutes on minutes till the tombs are high ;
But from the dust there fall some grains of gold,
And the dead corpse leaves what will never die—
It may be but a thought, the nursling seed
Of many thoughts, of many a high desire ;
Some little act that stirs a noble deed,
Like breath rekindling a smouldering fire :
They only live who have not lived in vain,
For in their works their life returns again.

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