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LAST POEMS

LAST POEMS

By
EDWARD THOMAS

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I NEVER SAW THAT LAND BEFORE

I NEVER saw that land before,
And now can never see it again ;
Yet, as if by acquaintance hoar
Endeared, by gladness and by pain,
Great was the affection that I bore

To the valley and the river small,
The cattle, the grass, the bare ash trees,
The chickens from the farmsteads, all
Elm-hidden, and the tributaries
Descending at equal interval ;

The blackthorns down along the brook
With wounds yellow as crocuses
Where yesterday the labourer's hook
Had sliced them cleanly ; and the breeze
That hinted all and nothing spoke.

I neither expected anything
Nor yet remembered : but some goal
I touched then ; and if I could sing
What would not even whisper my soul
As I went on my journeying,

I should use, as the trees and birds did,
A language not to be betrayed ;
And what was hid should still be hid
Excepting from those like me made
Who answer when such whispers bid.

THE DARK FOREST

DARK is the forest and deep, and overhead
Hang stars like seeds of light
In vain, though not since they were sown was bred
Anything more bright.

And evermore mighty multitudes ride
About, nor enter in ;
Of the other multitudes that dwell inside
Never yet was one seen.

The forest foxglove is purple, the marguerite
Outside is gold and white,
Nor can those that pluck either blossom greet
The others, day or night.

CELANDINE

THINKING of her had saddened me at first,
Until I saw the sun on the celandines lie
Redoubled, and she stood up like a flame,
A living thing, not what before I nursed,
The shadow I was growing to love almost,
The phantom, not the creature with bright eye
That I had thought never to see, once lost.

She found the celandines of February
Always before us all. Her nature and name
Were like those flowers, and now immediately
For a short swift eternity back she came,
Beautiful, happy, simply as when she wore
Her brightest bloom among the winter hues
Of all the world ; and I was happy too,
Seeing the blossoms and the maiden who
Had seen them with me Februarys before,
Bending to them as in and out she trod
And laughed, with locks sweeping the mossy sod.

But this was a dream : the flowers were not true,
Until I stooped to pluck from the grass there
One of five petals and I smelt the juice
Which made me sigh, remembering she was no more,
Gone like a never perfectly recalled air.

THE ASH GROVE

HALF of the grove stood dead, and those that yet
lived made

Little more than the dead ones made of shade.

If they led to a house, long before they had seen
its fall :

But they welcomed me ; I was glad without cause
and delayed.

Scarce a hundred paces under the trees was the
interval—

Paces each sweeter than sweetest miles—but
nothing at all,

Not even the spirits of memory and fear with
restless wing,

Could climb down in to molest me over the wall

That I passed through at either end without
noticing.

And now an ash grove far from those hills can bring
The same tranquillity in which I wander a ghost
With a ghostly gladness, as if I heard a girl sing

The song of the Ash Grove soft as love uncrossed,
And then in a crowd or in distance it were lost,
But the moment unveiled something unwilling
to die

And I had what most I desired, without search or
desert or cost.

OLD MAN

OLD Man, or Lad's-love,—in the name there's
nothing

To one that knows not Lad's-love, or Old Man,
The hoar-green feathery herb, almost a tree,
Growing with rosemary and lavender.

Even to one that knows it well, the names
Half decorate, half perplex, the thing it is :
At least, what that is clings not to the names
In spite of time. And yet I like the names.

The herb itself I like not, but for certain
I love it, as some day the child will love it
Who plucks a feather from the door-side bush
Whenever she goes in or out of the house.
Often she waits there, snipping the tips and
shrivelling

The shreds at last on to the path, perhaps
Thinking, perhaps of nothing, till she sniffs
Her fingers and runs off. The bush is still
But half as tall as she, though it is as old ;
So well she clips it. Not a word she says ;
And I can only wonder how much hereafter
She will remember, with that bitter scent,
Of garden rows, and ancient damson-trees
Topping a hedge, a bent path to a door,
A low thick bush beside the door, and me
Forbidding her to pick.

As for myself,
Where first I met the bitter scent is lost.

I, too, often shrivel the grey shreds,
Sniff them and think and sniff again and try
Once more to think what it is I am remembering,
Always in vain. I cannot like the scent,
Yet I would rather give up others more sweet,
With no meaning, than this bitter one.

I have mislaid the key. I sniff the spray
And think of nothing ; I see and I hear nothing ;
Yet seem, too, to be listening, lying in wait
For what I should, yet never can, remember :
No garden appears, no path, no hoar-green bush
Of Lad's-love, or Old Man, no child beside,
Neither father nor mother, nor any playmate ;
Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end.

THE THRUSH

WHEN Winter's ahead,
What can you read in November
That you read in April
When Winter's dead ?

I hear the thrush, and I see
Him alone at the end of the lane
Near the bare poplar's tip,
Singing continuously.

Is it more that you know
Than that, even as in April,
So in November,
Winter is gone that must go ?

Or is all your lore
Not to call November November,
And April April,
And Winter Winter—no more ?

But I know the months all,
And their sweet names, April,
May and June and October,
As you call and call

I must remember
What died into April
And consider what will be born
Of a fair November ;

And April I love for what
It was born of, and November
For what it will die in,
What they are and what they are not,

While you love what is kind,
What you can sing in
And love and forget in
All that's ahead and behind.

I BUILT MYSELF A HOUSE OF GLASS.

I BUILT myself a house of glass :
It took me years to make it :
And I was proud. But now, alas,
Would God someone would break it.
But it looks too magnificent.
No neighbour casts a stone
From where he dwells, in tenement
Or palace of glass, alone.

FEBRUARY AFTERNOON

MEN heard this roar of parleying starlings, saw,
A thousand years ago even as now,
Black rooks with white gulls following the plough
So that the first are last until a caw
Commands that last are first again,—a law
Which was of old when one, like me, dreamed
how
A thousand years might dust lie on his brow
Yet thus would birds do between hedge and shaw.

Time swims before me, making as a day
A thousand years, while the broad ploughland
oak
Roars mill-like and men strike and bear the
stroke
Of war as ever, audacious or resigned,
And God still sits aloft in the array
That we have wrought him, stone-deaf and
stone-blind.

DIGGING

WHAT matter makes my spade for tears or mirth,
Letting down two clay pipes into the earth ?
The one I smoked, the other a soldier
Of Blenheim, Ramillies, and Malplaquet
Perhaps. The dead man's immortality
Lies represented lightly with my own,
A yard or two nearer the living air
Than bones of ancients who, amazed to see
Almighty God erect the mastodon,
Once laughed, or wept, in this same light of day.

TWO HOUSES

BETWEEN a sunny bank and the sun
The farmhouse smiles
On the riverside plat :
No other one
So pleasant to look at
And remember, for many miles,
So velvet-hushed and cool under the warm tiles.

Not far from the road it lies, yet caught
Far out of reach
Of the road's dust
And the dusty thought
Of passers-by, though each
Stops, and turns, and must
Look down at it like a wasp at the muslined peach.

But another house stood there long before :
And as if above graves
Still the turf heaves
Above its stones :
Dark hangs the sycamore,
Shadowing kennel and bones
And the black dog that shakes his chain and moans.

And when he barks, over the river
Flashing fast,
Dark echoes reply,
And the hollow past
Half yields the dead that never
More than half hidden lie :
And out they creep and back again for ever.

THE MILL-WATER

ONLY the sound remains
Of the old mill ;
Gone is the wheel ;
On the prone roof and walls the nettle reigns.

Water that toils no more
Dangles white locks
And, falling, mocks
The music of the mill-wheel's busy roar.

Pretty to see, by day
Its sound is naught
Compared with thought
And talk and noise of labour and of play.

Night makes the difference.
In calm moonlight,
Gloom infinite,
The sound comes surging in upon the sense :

Solitude, company,—
When it is night,—
Grief or delight
By it must haunted or concluded be.

Often the silentness
Has but this one
Companion ;
Wherever one creeps in the other is :

Sometimes a thought is drowned
By it, sometimes
Out of it climbs ;
All thoughts begin or end upon this sound,

Only the idle foam
Of water falling
Changelessly calling,
Where once men had a work-place and a home.

A DREAM

OVER known fields with an old friend in dream
I walked, but came sudden to a strange stream.
Its dark waters were bursting out most bright
From a great mountain's heart into the light.
They ran a short course under the sun, then back
Into a pit they plunged, once more as black
As at their birth ; and I stood thinking there
How white, had the day shone on them, they were,
Heaving and coiling. So by the roar and hiss
And by the mighty motion of the abyss
I was bemused, that I forgot my friend
And neither saw nor sought him till the end,
When I awoke from waters unto men
Saying : " I shall be here some day again."

SEDGE-WARBLERS

THIS beauty made me dream there was a time
Long past and irrecoverable, a clime
Where any brook so radiant racing clear
Through buttercup and kingcup bright as brass
But gentle, nourishing the meadow grass
That leans and scurries in the wind, would bear
Another beauty, divine and feminine,
Child to the sun, a nymph whose soul unstained
Could love all day, and never hate or tire,
A lover of mortal or immortal kin.

And yet, rid of this dream, ere I had drained
Its poison, quieted was my desire
So that I only looked into the water,
Clearer than any goddess or man's daughter,
And hearkened while it combed the dark green hair
And shook the millions of the blossoms white
Of water-crowfoot, and curdled to one sheet
The flowers fallen from the chestnuts in the park
Far off. And sedge-warblers, clinging so light
To willow twigs, sang longer than the lark,
Quick, shrill, or grating, a song to match the heat
Of the strong sun, nor less the water's cool,
Gushing through narrows, swirling in the pool.
Their song that lacks all words, all melody,
All sweetness almost, was dearer then to me
Than sweetest voice that sings in tune sweet words.
This was the best of May—the small brown birds
Wisely reiterating endlessly
What no man learnt yet, in or out of school.

UNDER THE WOODS

WHEN these old woods were young
The thrushes' ancestors
As sweetly sung
In the old years.

There was no garden here,
Apples nor mistletoe ;
No children dear
Ran to and fro.

New then was this thatched cot,
But the keeper was old,
And he had not
Much lead or gold.

Most silent beech and yew :
As he went round about
The woods to view
Seldom he shot.

But now that he is gone
Out of most memories,
Still lingers on,
A stoat of his,

But one, shrivelled and green,
And with no scent at all,
And barely seen
On this shed wall.

WHAT WILL THEY DO ?

What will they do when I am gone ? It is plain
That they will do without me as the rain
Can do without the flowers and the grass
That profit by it and must perish without.
I have but seen them in the loud street pass ;
And I was naught to them. I turned about
To see them disappearing carelessly.
But what if I in them as they in me
Nourished what has great value and no price ?
Almost I thought that rain thirsts for a draught
Which only in the blossom's chalice lies,
Until that one turned back and lightly laughed.

TO-NIGHT

HARRY, you know at night
The larks in Castle Alley
Sing from the attic's height
As if the electric light
Were the true sun above a summer valley :
Whistle, don't knock, to-night.

I shall come early, Kate :
And we in Castle Alley
Will sit close out of sight
Alone, and ask no light
Of lamp or sun above a summer valley :
To-night I can stay late.

A CAT

She had a name among the children ;
But no one loved though someone owned
Her, locked her out of doors at bedtime
And had her kittens duly drowned.

In Spring, nevertheless, this cat
Ate blackbirds, thrushes, nightingales,
And birds of bright voice and plume and flight,
As well as scraps from neighbours' pails.

I loathed and hated her for this ;
One speckle on a thrush's breast
Was worth a million such ; and yet
She lived long, till God gave her rest.

THE UNKNOWN

SHE is most fair,
And when they see her pass
The poets' ladies
Look no more in the glass
But after her.

On a bleak moor
Running under the moon
She lures a poet,
Once proud or happy, soon
Far from his door.

Beside a train,
Because they saw her go,
Or failed to see her,
Travellers and watchers know
Another pain.

The simple lack
Of her is more to me
Than others' presence,
Whether life splendid be
Or utter black.

I have not seen,
I have no news of her ;
I can tell only
She is not here, but there
She might have been.

She is to be kissed
Only perhaps by me ;
She may be seeking
Me and no other ; she
May not exist.

SONG

At poet's tears,
Sweeter than any smiles but hers,
She laughs ; I sigh ;
And yet I could not live if she should die.

And when in June
Once more the cuckoo spoils his tune,
She laughs at sighs ;
And yet she says she loves me till she dies.

SHE DOTES

SHE dotes on what the wild birds say
Or hint or mock at, night and day,—
Thrush, blackbird, all that sing in May,
 And songless plover,
Hawk, heron, owl, and woodpecker.
They never say a word to her
 About her lover.

She laughs at them for childishness,
She cries at them for carelessness
Who see her going loverless
 Yet sing and chatter
Just as when he was not a ghost,
Nor ever ask her what she has lost
 Or what is the matter.

Yet she has fancied blackbirds hide
A secret, and that thrushes chide
Because she thinks death can divide
 Her from her lover ;
And she has slept, trying to translate
The word the cuckoo cries to his mate
 Over and over.

FOR THESE

AN acre of land between the shore and the hills,
Upon a ledge that shows my kingdoms three,
The lovely visible earth and sky and sea,
Where what the curlew needs not, the farmer tills :

A house that shall love me as I love it,
Well-hedged, and honoured by a few ash-trees
That linnets, greenfinches, and goldfinches
Shall often visit and make love in and flit :

A garden I need never go beyond,
Broken but neat, whose sunflowers every one
Are fit to be the sign of the Rising Sun :
A spring, a brook's bend, or at least a pond :

For these I ask not, but, neither too late
Nor yet too early, for what men call content,
And also that something may be sent
To be contented with, I ask of fate.

MARCH THE THIRD*

HERE again (she said) is March the third
And twelve hours singing for the bird
'Twixt dawn and dusk, from half past six
To half past six, never unheard.

'Tis Sunday, and the church-bells end
When the birds do. I think they blend
Now better than they will when passed
Is this unnamed, unmarked godsend.

Or do all mark, and none dares say,
How it may shift and long delay,
Somewhere before the first of Spring,
But never fails, this singing day ?

And when it falls on Sunday, bells
Are a wild natural voice that dwells
On hillsides ; but the birds' songs have
The holiness gone from the bells.

This day unpromised is more dear
Than all the named days of the year
When seasonable sweets come in,
Because we know how lucky we are.

* The author's birthday.

THE NEW HOUSE

Now first, as I shut the door,
I was alone
In the new house ; and the wind
Began to moan.

Old at once was the house,
And I was old ;
My ears were teased with the dread
Of what was foretold,

Nights of storm, days of mist, without end ;
Sad days when the sun
Shone in vain : old griefs and griefs
Not yet begun.

All was foretold me ; naught
Could I foresee ;
But I learned how the wind would sound
After these things should be.

MARCH

Now I know that Spring will come again,
Perhaps to-morrow : however late I've patience
After this night following on such a day.

While still my temples ached from the cold burning
Of hail and wind, and still the primroses
Torn by the hail were covered up in it,
The sun filled earth and heaven with a great light
And a tenderness, almost warmth, where the hail
dripped,

As if the mighty sun wept tears of joy.
But 'twas too late for warmth. The sunset piled
Mountains on mountains of snow and ice in the
west :

Somewhere among their folds the wind was lost,
And yet 'twas cold, and though I knew that
Spring
Would come again, I knew it had not come,
That it was lost too in those mountains chill.

What did the thrushes know? Rain, snow, sleet,
hail,

Had kept them quiet as the primroses.
They had but an hour to sing. On boughs they
sang,

On gates, on ground ; they sang while they
changed perches

And while they fought, if they remembered to
fight :

So earnest were they to pack into that hour
Their unwilling hoard of song before the moon
Grew brighter than the clouds. Then 'twas
no time
For singing merely. So they could keep off silence
And night, they cared not what they sang or
screamed ;
Whether 'twas hoarse or sweet or fierce or soft ;
And to me all was sweet : they could do no wrong.
Something they knew—I also, while they sang
And after. Not till night had half its stars
And never a cloud, was I aware of silence
Stained with all that hour's songs, a silence
Saying that Spring returns, perhaps to-morrow.

THE CUCKOO

THAT'S the cuckoo, you say. I cannot hear it.
When last I heard it I cannot recall ; but I know
Too well the year when first I failed to hear it—
It was drowned by my man groaning out to his
sheep " Ho ! Ho ! "

Ten times with an angry voice he shouted
" Ho ! Ho ! " but not in anger, for that was his
way.

He died that Summer, and that is how I remember
The cuckoo calling, the children listening, and me
saying, " Nay."

And now, as you said, " There it is," I was hearing
Not the cuckoo at all, but my man's " Ho ! Ho ! "
instead.

And I think that even if I could lose my deafness
The cuckoo's note would be drowned by the voice
of my dead.

OVER THE HILLS

OFTEN and often it came back again
To mind, the day I passed the horizon ridge
To a new country, the path I had to find
By half-gaps that were stiles once in the hedge,
The pack of scarlet clouds running across
The harvest evening that seemed endless then
And after, and the inn where all were kind,
All were strangers. I did not know my loss
Till one day twelve months later suddenly
I leaned upon my spade and saw it all,
Though far beyond the sky-line. It became
Almost a habit through the year for me
To lean and see it and think to do the same
Again for two days and a night. Recall
Was vain : no more could the restless brook
Ever turn back and climb the waterfall
To the lake that rests and stirs not in its nook,
As in the hollow of the collar-bone,
Under the mountain's head of rush and stone.

HOME

OFTEN I had gone this way before :
But now it seemed I never could be
And never had been anywhere else ;
'Twas home ; one nationality
We had, I and the birds that sang,
One memory.

They welcomed me. I had come back
That eve somehow from somewhere far :
The April mist, the chill, the calm,
Meant the same thing familiar
And pleasant to us, and strange too,
Yet with no bar.

The thrush on the oaktop in the lane
Sang his last song, or last but one ;
And as he ended, on the elm
Another had but just begun
His last ; they knew no more than I
The day was done.

Then past his dark white cottage front
A labourer went along, his tread
Slow, half with weariness, half with ease ;
And, through the silence, from his shed
The sound of sawing rounded all
That silence said.

THE HOLLOW WOOD

Out in the sun the goldfinch flits
Along the thistle-tops, flits and twits
Above the hollow wood
Where birds swim like fish—
Fish that laugh and shriek—
To and fro, far below
In the pale hollow wood.

Lichen, ivy, and moss .
Keep evergreen the trees
That stand half-flayed and dying,
And the dead trees on their knees
In dog's-mercury and moss :
And the bright twit of the goldfinch drops
Down there as he flits on thistle-tops.

WIND AND MIST

THEY met inside the gateway that gives the view,
A hollow land as vast as heaven. "It is
A pleasant day, sir." "A very pleasant day."
"And what a view here. If you like angled fields
Of grass and grain bounded by oak and thorn,
Here is a league. Had we with Germany
To play upon this board it could not be
More dear than April has made it with a smile.
The fields beyond that league close in together
And merge, even as our days into the past,
Into one wood that has a shining pane
Of water. Then the hills of the horizon—
That is how I should make hills had I to show
One who would never see them what hills were
like."

"Yes. Sixty miles of South Downs at one glance.
Sometimes a man feels proud at them, as if
He had just created them with one mighty
thought."

"That house, though modern, could not be better
planned
For its position. I never liked a new
House better. Could you tell me who lives in
it?"

"No one." "Ah—and I was peopling all
Those windows on the south with happy eyes,
The terrace under them with happy feet;
Girls—" "Sir, I know. I know. I have seen
that house

Through mist look lovely as a castle in Spain,
And airier. I have thought : ' 'Twere happy there
To live.' And I have laughed at that
Because I lived there then." "Extraordinary."

"Yes, with my furniture and family
Still in it, I, knowing every nook of it
And loving none, and in fact hating it."

"Dear me! How could that be? But pardon
me."

"No offence. Doubtless the house was not to
blame,

But the eye watching from those windows saw,
Many a day, day after day, mist—mist
Like chaos surging back—and felt itself
Alone in all the world, marooned alone.

We lived in clouds, on a cliff's edge almost
(You see), and if clouds went, the visible earth
Lay too far off beneath and like a cloud.

I did not know it was the earth I loved
Until I tried to live there in the clouds
And the earth turned to cloud." "You had a
garden

Of flint and clay, too." "True; that was real
enough.

The flint was the one crop that never failed.
The clay first broke my heart, and then my back;
And the back heals not. There were other things
Real, too. In that room at the gable a child
Was born while the wind chilled a summer dawn:
Never looked grey mind on a greyer one
Than when the child's cry broke above the groans."

“ I hope they were both spared.” “ They were.

Oh yes.

But flint and clay and childbirth were too real
For this cloud-castle. I had forgot the wind.

Pray do not let me get on to the wind.

You would not understand about the wind.

It is my subject, and compared with me

Those who have always lived on the firm ground

Are quite unreal in this matter of the wind.

There were whole days and nights when the wind
and I

Between us shared the world, and the wind ruled

And I obeyed it and forgot the mist.

My past and the past of the world were in the
wind.

Now you may say that though you understand

And feel for me, and so on, you yourself

Would find it different. You are all like that

If once you stand here free from wind and mist :

I might as well be talking to wind and mist.

You would believe the house-agent's young man

Who gives no heed to anything I say.

Good morning. But one word. I want to admit

That I would try the house once more, if I
could ;

As I should like to try being young again.”

THE UNKNOWN BIRD

THREE lovely notes he whistled, too soft to be
heard

If others sang ; but others never sang
In the great beech-wood all that May and June.
No one saw him : I alone could hear him
Though many listened. Was it but four years
Ago ? or five ? He never came again.

Oftenest when I heard him I was alone,
Nor could I ever make another hear.
La-la-la ! he called, seeming far-off—
As if a cock crowed past the edge of the world,
As if the bird or I were in a dream.
Yet that he travelled through the trees and some-
times
Neared me, was plain, though somehow distant
still
He sounded. All the proof is—I told men
What I had heard.

I never knew a voice,
Man, beast, or bird, better than this. I told
The naturalists ; but neither had they heard
Anything like the notes that did so haunt me,
I had them clear by heart and have them still.
Four years, or five, have made no difference.

Then

As now that La-la-la ! was bodiless sweet :
Sad more than joyful it was, if I must say

That it was one or other, but if sad
'Twas sad only with joy too, too far off
For me to taste it. But I cannot tell
If truly never anything but fair
The days were when he sang, as now they seem.
This surely I know, that I who listened then,
Happy sometimes, sometimes suffering
A heavy body and a heavy heart,
Now straightway, if I think of it, become
Light as that bird wandering beyond my shore.

THE LOFTY SKY

TO-DAY I want the sky,
The tops of the high hills,
Above the last man's house,
His hedges, and his cows,
Where, if I will, I look
Down even on sheep and rook,
And of all things that move
See buzzards only above :—
Past all trees, past furze
And thorn, where nought deters
The desire of the eye
For sky, nothing but sky.
I sicken of the woods
And all the multitudes
Of hedge-trees. They are no more

Than weeds upon this floor
Of the river of air
Leagues deep, leagues wide, where
I am like a fish that lives
In weeds and mud and gives
What's above him no thought.
I might be a tench for aught
That I can do to-day
Down on the wealden clay.
Even the tench has days
When he floats up and plays
Among the lily leaves
And sees the sky, or grieves
Not if he nothing sees :
While I, I know that trees
Under that lofty sky
Are weeds, fields mud, and I
Would arise and go far
To where the lilies are.

AFTER RAIN

THE rain of a night and a day and a night
Stops at the light
Of this pale choked day. The peering sun
Sees what has been done.
The road under the trees has a border new
Of purple hue
Inside the border of bright thin grass :
For all that has
Been left by November of leaves is torn
From hazel and thorn
And the greater trees. Throughout the copse
No dead leaf drops
On grey grass, green moss, burnt-orange fern,
At the wind's return :
The leaflets out of the ash-tree shed
Are thinly spread
In the road, like little black fish, inlaid,
As if they played.
What hangs from the myriad branches down there
So hard and bare
Is twelve yellow apples lovely to see
On one crab-tree.
And on each twig of every tree in the dell
Uncountable
Crystals both dark and bright of the rain
That begins again.

DIGGING

To-DAY I think

Only with scents,—scents dead leaves yield,
And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
And the square mustard field ;

Odours that rise

When the spade wounds the root of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery ;

The smoke's smell, too,

Flowing from where a bonfire burns
The dead, the waste, the dangerous,
And all to sweetness turns.

It is enough

To smell, to crumble the dark earth,
While the robin sings over again
Sad songs of Autumn mirth.

BUT THESE THINGS ALSO

BUT these things also are Spring's—
On banks by the roadside the grass
Long-dead that is greyer now
Than all the Winter it was ;

The shell of a little snail bleached
In the grass ; chip of flint, and mite
Of chalk ; and the small birds' dung
In splashes of purest white :

All the white things a man mistakes
For earliest violets
Who seeks through Winter's ruins
Something to pay Winter's debts,

While the North blows, and starling flocks
By chattering on and on
Keep their spirits up in the mist,
And Spring's here, Winter's not gone.

APRIL

THE sweetest thing, I thought
At one time, between earth and heaven
Was the first smile
When mist has been forgiven
And the sun has stolen out,
Peered, and resolved to shine at seven
On dabbled lengthening grasses,
Thick primroses and early leaves uneven,
When earth's breath, warm and humid, far sur
 passes
The richest oven's, and loudly rings "cuckoo"
And sharply the nightingale's "tsoo, tsoo, tsoo,
 tsoo":
To say "God bless it" was all that I could do.

But now I know one sweeter
By far since the day Emily
Turned weeping back
To me, still happy me,
To ask forgiveness,—
Yet smiled with half a certainty
To be forgiven,—for what
She had never done; I knew not what it might be,
Nor could she tell me, having now forgot,
By rapture carried with me past all care
As to an isle in April lovelier
Than April's self. "God bless you" I said to her.

THE BARN

THEY should never have built a barn there, at all—
Drip, drip, drip !—under that elm tree,
Though then it was young. Now it is old
But good, not like the barn and me.

To-morrow they cut it down. They will leave
The barn, as I shall be left, maybe.
What holds it up ? 'Twould not pay to pull down.
Well, this place has no other antiquity.

No abbey or castle looks so old
As this that Job Knight built in '54,
Built to keep corn for rats and men.
Now there's fowls in the roof, pigs on the floor.

What thatch survives is dung for the grass,
The best grass on the farm. A pity the roof
Will not bear a mower to mow it. But
Only fowls have foothold enough.

Starlings used to sit there with bubbling throats
Making a spiky beard as they chattered
And whistled and kissed, with heads in air,
Till they thought of something else that mattered.

But now they cannot find a place,
Among all those holes, for a nest any more.
It's the turn of lesser things, I suppose.
Once I fancied 'twas starlings they built it for.

THE BARN AND THE DOWN

It stood in the sunset sky
Like the straight-backed down,
Many a time—the barn
At the edge of the town,

So huge and dark that it seemed
It was the hill
Till the gable's precipice proved
It impossible.

Then the great down in the west
Grew into sight,
A barn stored full to the ridge
With black of night ;

And the barn fell to a barn
Or even less
Before critical eyes and its own
Late mightiness.

But far down and near barn and I
Since then have smiled,
Having seen my new cautiousness
By itself beguiled

To disdain what seemed the barn
Till a few steps changed
It past all doubt to the down ;
So the barn was avenged.

THE CHILD ON THE CLIFFS

MOTHER, the root of this little yellow flower
Among the stones has the taste of quinine.
Things are strange to-day on the cliff. The sun
shines so bright,
And the grasshopper works at his sewing-machine
So hard. Here's one on my hand, mother, look ;
I lie so still. There's one on your book.

But I have something to tell more strange. So
leave

Your book to the grasshopper, mother dear,—
Like a green knight in a dazzling market-place,—
And listen now. Can you hear what I hear
Far out ? Now and then the foam there curls
And stretches a white arm out like a girl's.

Fishes and gulls ring no bells. There cannot be
A chapel or church between here and Devon,
With fishes or gulls ringing its bell,—hark.—
Somewhere under the sea or up in heaven.
“ It's the bell, my son, out in the bay
On the buoy. It does sound sweet to-day.”

Sweeter I never heard, mother, no, not in all Wales.
I should like to be lying under that foam,
Dead, but able to hear the sound of the bell,
And certain that you would often come
And rest, listening happily.
I should be happy if that could be.

GOOD-NIGHT.

THE skylarks are far behind that sang over the
down ;

I can hear no more those suburb nightingales ;
Thrushes and blackbirds sing in the gardens of the
town .

In vain : the noise of man, beast, and machine
prevails.

But the call of children in the unfamiliar streets
That echo with a familiar twilight echoing,
Sweet as the voice of nightingale or lark, completes
A magic of strange welcome, so that I seem a king

Among man, beast, machine, bird, child, and the
ghost

That in the echo lives and with the echo dies.
The friendless town is friendly ; homeless, I am
not lost ;

Though I know none of these doors, and meet but
strangers' eyes.

Never again, perhaps, after to-morrow, shall
I see these homely streets, these church windows
alight,

Not a man or woman or child among them all :
But it is All Friends' Night, a traveller's good
night.

THE WASP TRAP

THIS moonlight makes
The lovely lovelier
Than ever before lakes
And meadows were.

And yet they are not,
Though this their hour is, more
Lovely than things that were not
Lovely before.

Nothing on earth,
And in the heavens no star,
For pure brightness is worth
More than that jar,

For wasps meant, now
A star—long may it swing
From the dead apple-bough,
So glistening.

JULY

NAUGHT moves but clouds, and in the glassy lake
Their doubles and the shadow of my boat.
The boat itself stirs only when I break
This drowse of heat and solitude afloat
To prove if what I see be bird or mote,
Or learn if yet the shore woods be awake.

Long hours since dawn grew,—spread,—and passed
on high
And deep below,—I have watched the cool reeds
hung
Over images more cool in imaged sky :
Nothing there was worth thinking of so long ;
All that the ring-doves say, far leaves among,
Brimms my mind with content thus still to lie.

A TALE

THERE once the walls
Of the ruined cottage stood.
The periwinkle crawls
With flowers in its hair into the wood.

In flowerless hours
Never will the bank fail,
With everlasting flowers
On fragments of blue plates, to tell the tale

PARTING

THE Past is a strange land, most strange.
Wind blows not there, nor does rain fall :
If they do, they cannot hurt at all.
Men of all kinds as equals range

The soundless fields and streets of it.
Pleasure and pain there have no sting,
The perished self not suffering
That lacks all blood and nerve and wit,

And is in shadow-land a shade.
Remembered joy and misery
Bring joy to the joyous equally ;
Both sadden the sad. So memory made

Parting to-day a double pain :
First because it was parting ; next
Because the ill it ended vexed
And mocked me from the Past again,

Not as what had been remedied
Had I gone on,—not that, oh no !
But as itself no longer woe ;
Sighs, angry word and look and deed

Being faded : rather a kind of bliss,
For there spiritualized it lay
In the perpetual yesterday
That naught can stir or stain like this.

LOVERS

THE two men in the road were taken aback.
The lovers came out shading their eyes from the
sun,
And never was white so white, or black so black,
As her cheeks and hair. "There are more things
than one
A man might turn into a wood for, Jack,"
Said George; Jack whispered: "He has not got
a gun.
It's a bit too much of a good thing, I say.
They are going the other road, look. And see her
run."—
She ran.—"What a thing it is, this picking may."

THAT GIRL'S CLEAR EYES

THAT girl's clear eyes utterly concealed all
Except that there was something to reveal.
And what did mine say in the interval ?
No more : no less. They are but as a seal
Not to be broken till after I am dead ;
And then vainly. Every one of us
This morning at our tasks left nothing said,
In spite of many words. We were sealed thus,
Like tombs. Nor until now could I admit
That all I cared for was the pleasure and pain
I tasted in the stony square sunlit,
Or the dark cloisters, or shade of airy plane,
While music blazed and children, line after line,
Marched past, hiding the "SEVENTEEN THIRTY-
NINE."

THE CHILD IN THE ORCHARD

“ HE rolls in the orchard : he is stained with moss
And with earth, the solitary old white horse.
Where is his father and where is his mother
Among all the brown horses ? Has he a brother ?
I know the swallow, the hawk, and the hern ;
But there are two million things for me to learn.

“ Who was the lady that rode the white horse
With rings and bells to Banbury Cross ?
Was there no other lady in England beside
That a nursery rhyme could take for a ride ?
The swift, the swallow, the hawk, and the hern.
There are two million things for me to learn.

‘ Was there a man once who straddled across
The back of the Westbury White Horse
Over there on Salisbury Plain’s green wall ?
Was he bound for Westbury, or had he a fall ?
The swift, the swallow, the hawk, and the hern.
There are two million things for me to learn.

“ Out of all the white horses I know three,
At the age of six ; and it seems to me
There is so much to learn, for men,
That I dare not go to bed again.
The swift, the swallow, the hawk, and the hern.
There are millions of things for me to learn.”

THE SOURCE

ALL day the air triumphs with its two voices
Of wind and rain
As loud as if in anger it rejoices,
Drowning the sound of earth
That gulps and gulps in choked endeavour vain
To swallow the rain.

Half the night, too, only the wild air speaks
With wind and rain,
Till forth the dumb source of the river breaks
And drowns the rain and wind,
Bellows like a giant bathing in mighty mirth
The triumph of earth.

THE MOUNTAIN CHAPEL

CHAPEL and gravestones, old and few,
Are shrouded by a mountain fold
From sound and view
Of life. The loss of the brook's voice
Falls like a shadow. All they hear is
The eternal noise
Of wind whistling in grass more shrill
Than aught as human as a sword,
And saying still :
“ 'Tis but a moment since man's birth
And in another moment more
Man lies in earth
For ever ; but I am the same
Now, and shall be, even as I was
Before he came ;
Till there is nothing I shall be.”
Yet there the sun shines after noon
So cheerfully
The place almost seems peopled, nor
Lacks cottage chimney, cottage hearth :
It is not more
In size than is a cottage, less
Than any other empty home
In homeliness.
It has a garden of wild flowers
And finest grass and gravestones warm
In sunshine hours
The year through. Men behind the glass
Stand once a week, singing, and drown

The whistling grass
Their ponies munch. And yet somewhere,
Near or far off, there's a man could
Be happy here,
Or one of the gods perhaps, were they
Not of inhuman stature dire,
As poets say
Who have not seen them clearly; if
At sound of any wind of the world
In grass-blades stiff
They would not startle and shudder cold
Under the sun. When gods were young
This wind was old.

FIRST KNOWN WHEN LOST

I NEVER had noticed it until
'Twas gone,—the narrow copse
Where now the woodman lops
The last of the willows with his bill.

It was not more than a hedge overgrown.
One meadow's breadth away
I passed it day by day.
Now the soil was bare as a bone,

And black betwixt two meadows green,
Though fresh-cut faggot ends
Of hazel made some amends
With a gleam as if flowers they had been.

-Strange it could have hidden so near !
And now I see as I look
That the small winding brook,
A tributary's tributary, rises there.

THE WORD

THERE are so many things I have forgot,
That once were much to me, or that were not,
All lost, as is a childless woman's child
And its child's children, in the undefiled
Abyss of what can never be again.
I have forgot, too, names of the mighty men
That fought and lost or won in the old wars,
Of kings and fiends and gods, and most of the stars.
Some things I have forgot that I forget.
But lesser things there are, remembered yet,
Than all the others. One name that I have not—
Though 'tis an empty thingless name—forgot
Never can die because Spring after Spring
Some thrushes learn to say it as they sing.
There is always one at midday saying it clear
And tart—the name, only the name I hear.
While perhaps I am thinking of the elder scent
That is like food, or while I am content
With the wild rose scent that is like memory,
This name suddenly is cried out to me
From somewhere in the bushes by a bird
Over and over again, a pure thrush word.

THESE THINGS THAT POETS SAID

THESE things that poets said
Of love seemed true to me
When I loved and I fed
On love and poetry equally.

But now I wish I knew
If theirs were love indeed,
Or if mine were the true
And theirs some other lovely wee t :

For certainly not thus,
Then or thereafter, I
Loved ever. Between us
Decide, good Love, before I die.

Only, that once I loved
By this one argument
Is very plainly proved :
I, loving not, am different.

HOME

Not the end : but there's nothing more.
Sweet Summer and Winter rude
I have loved, and friendship and love,
The crowd and solitude :

But I know them : I weary not ;
But all that they mean I know.
I would go back again home
Now. Yet how should I go ?

This is my grief. That land,
My home, I have never seen ;
No traveller tells of it,
However far he has been.

And could I discover it,
I fear my happiness there,
Or my pain, might be dreams of return
Here, to these things that were.

Remembering ills, though slight
Yet irremediable,
Brings a worse, an impurer pang
Than remembering what was well.

No : I cannot go back,
And would not if I could.
Until blindness come, I must wait
And blink at what is not good.

ASPENS

ALL day and night, save winter, every weather,
Above the inn, the smithy, and the shop,
The aspens at the cross-roads talk together
Of rain, until their last leaves fall from the top.

Out of the blacksmith's cavern comes the ringing
Of hammer, shoe, and anvil; out of the inn
The clink, the hum, the roar, the random singing—
The sounds that for these fifty years have been.

The whisper of the aspens is not drowned,
And over lightless pane and footless road,
Empty as sky, with every other sound
Not ceasing, calls their ghosts from their abode, ❀

A silent smithy, a silent inn, nor fails
In the bare moonlight or the thick-furred gloom,
In tempest or the night of nightingales,
To turn the cross-roads to a ghostly room.

And it would be the same were no house near.
Over all sorts of weather, men, and times,
Aspens must shake their leaves and men may hear
But need not listen, more than to my rhymes. ♪

Whatever wind blows, while they and I have leaves
We cannot other than an aspen be
That ceaselessly, unreasonably grieves,
Or so men think who like a different tree.

AN OLD SONG

I WAS not apprenticed nor ever dwelt in famous
Lincolnshire ;

I've served one master ill and well much more than
seven year ;

And never took up to poaching as you shall quickly
find ;

But 'tis my delight of a shiny night in the season
of the year.

I roamed where nobody had a right but keepers and
squires, and there

I sought for nests, wild flowers, oak sticks, and
moles, both far and near.

And had to run from farmers, and learnt the
Lincolnshire song :

“ Oh, 'tis my delight of a shiny night in the
season of the year.”

I took those walks years after, talking with friend
or dear,

Or solitary musing ; but when the moon shone clear
I had no joy or sorrow that could not be expressed

By “ 'Tis my delight of a shiny night in the
season of the year.”

Since then I've thrown away a chance to fight a
gamekeeper ;

And I less often trespass, and what I see or hear
Is mostly from the road or path by day : yet still

I sing :

“ Oh, 'tis my delight of a shiny night in the
season of the year.”

For if I am contented, at home or anywhere,
Or if I sigh for I know not what, or my heart
 beats with some fear,
It is a strange kind of delight to sing or whistle just :
 “ Oh, 'tis my delight of a shiny night in the
 season of the year.”

And with this melody on my lips and no one by to
 care,
Indoors, or out on shiny nights or dark in open air,
I am for a moment made a man that sings out of
 his heart :
 “ Oh, 'tis my delight of a shiny night in the
 season of the year.”

THERE WAS A TIME

THERE was a time when this poor frame was whole
And I had youth and never another care,
Or none that should have troubled a strong soul.
Yet, except sometimes in a frosty air
When my heels hammered out a melody
From pavements of a city left behind,
I never would acknowledge my own glee
Because it was less mighty than my mind
Had dreamed of. Since I could not boast of strength
Great as I wished, weakness was all my boast.
I sought yet hated pity till at length
I earned it. Oh, too heavy was the cost.
But now that there is something I could use
My youth and strength for, I deny the age,
The care and weakness that I know—refuse
To admit I am unworthy of the wage
Paid to a man who gives up eyes and breath
For what can neither ask nor heed his death.

AMBITION

UNLESS it was that day I never knew
Ambition. After a night of frost, before
The March sun brightened and the South-west blew,
Jackdaws began to shout and float and soar
Already, and one was racing straight and high
Alone, shouting like a black warrior
Challenges and menaces to the wide sky.
With loud long laughter then a woodpecker
Ridiculed the sadness of the owl's last cry.
And through the valley where all the folk astir
Made only plumes of pearly smoke to tower
Over dark trees and white meadows happier
Than was Elysium in that happy hour,
A train that roared along raised after it
And carried with it a motionless white bower
Of purest cloud, from end to end close-knit,
So fair it touched the roar with silence. Time
Was powerless while that lasted. I could sit
And think I had made the loveliness of prime,
Breathed its life into it and were its lord,
And no mind lived save this 'twixt clouds and rime.
Omnipotent I was, nor even deplored
That I did nothing. But the end fell like a bell :
The bower was scattered ; far off the train roared.
But if this was ambition I cannot tell.
What 'twas ambition for I know not well.

NO ONE CARES LESS THAN I

“ No one cares less than I,
Nobody knows but God,
Whether I am destined to lie
Under a foreign clod,”
Were the words I made to the bugle call in the
morning.

But laughing, storming, scorning,
Only the bugles know
What the bugles say in the morning,
And they do not care, when they blow
The call that I heard and made words to early this
morning.

ROADS

I LOVE roads :
The goddesses that dwell
Far along invisible
Are my favourite gods.

Roads go on
While we forget, and are
Forgotten like a star
That shoots and is gone.

On this earth 'tis sure
We men have not made
Anything that doth fade
So soon, so long endure :

The hill road wet with rain
In the sun would not gleam
Like a winding stream
If we trod it not again.

They are lonely
While we sleep, lonelier
For lack of the traveller
Who is now a dream only.

From dawn's twilight
And all the clouds like sheep
On the mountains of sleep
They wind into the night.

The next turn may reveal
Heaven : upon the crest
The close pine clump, at rest
And black, may Hell conceal.

Often footsore, never
Yet of the road I weary,
Though long and steep and dreary
As it winds on for ever.

Helen of the roads,
The mountain ways of Wales
And the Mabinogion tales,
Is one of the true gods,

Abiding in the trees,
The threes and fours so wise,
The larger companies,
That by the roadside be,

And beneath the rafter
Else uninhabited
Excepting by the dead ;
And it is her laughter

At morn and night I hear
When the thrush cock sings
Bright irrelevant things,
And when the chanticler

Calls back to their own night
Troops that make loneliness
With their light footsteps' press,
As Helen's own are light.

Now all roads lead to France
And heavy is the tread
Of the living ; but the dead
Returning lightly dance :

Whatever the road bring
To me or take from me,
They keep me company
With their pattering,

Crowding the solitude
Of the loops over the downs,
Hushing the roar of towns
And their brief multitude.

THIS IS NO CASE OF PETTY RIGHT
OR WRONG

THIS is no case of petty right or wrong
That politicians or philosophers
Can judge. I hate not Germans, nor grow hot
With love of Englishmen, to please newspapers.
Beside my hate for one fat patriot
My hatred of the Kaiser is love true :—
A kind of god he is, banging a gong.
But I have not to choose between the two,
Or between justice and injustice. Dinned
With war and argument I read no more
Than in the storm smoking along the wind
Athwart the wood. Two witches' cauldrons roar.
From one the weather shall rise clear and gay ;
Out of the other an England beautiful
And like her mother that died yesterday.
Little I know or care if, being dull,
I shall miss something that historians
Can rake out of the ashes when perchance
The phoenix broods serene above their ken.
But with the best and meanest Englishmen
I am one in crying, God save England, lest
We lose what never slaves and cattle blessed.
The ages made her that made us from the dust :
She is all we know and live by, and we trust
She is good and must endure, loving her so :
And as we love ourselves we hate her foe.

THE CHALK-PIT

“ Is this the road that climbs above and bends
Round what was once a chalk-pit : now it is
By accident an amphitheatre.

Some ash-trees standing ankle-deep in brier
And bramble act the parts, and neither speak
Nor stir.” “ But see : they have fallen, every one,
And brier and bramble have grown over them.”

“ That is the place. As usual no one is here.
Hardly can I imagine the drop of the axe,
And the smack that is like an echo, sounding here.”

“ I do not understand.” “ Why, what I mean is
That I have seen the place two or three times
At most, and that its emptiness and silence
And stillness haunt me, as if just before
It was not empty, silent, still, but full
Of life of some kind, perhaps tragical.

Has anything unusual happened here ? ”

“ Not that I know of. It is called the Dell.
They have not dug chalk here for a century.
That was the ash-trees' age. But I will ask.”

“ No. Do not. I prefer to make a tale,
Or better leave it like the end of a play,
Actors and audience and lights all gone ;
For so it looks now. In my memory
Again and again I see it, strangely dark,
And vacant of a life but just withdrawn.

We have not seen the woodman with the axe.
Some ghost has left it now as we two came.”

“ And yet you doubted if this were the road ? ”

“ Well, sometimes I have thought of it and failed
To place it. No. And I am not quite sure,
Even now, this is it. For another place,
Real or painted, may have combined with it.
Or I myself a long way back in time . . . ”

“ Why, as to that, I used to meet a man—
I had forgotten,—searching for birds’ nests
Along the road and in the chalk-pit too.
The wren’s hole was an eye that looked at him
For recognition. Every nest he knew.
He got a stiff neck, by looking this side or that,
Spring after spring, he told me, with his laugh,—
A sort of laugh. He was a visitor,
A man of forty,—smoked and strolled about.
At orts and crosses Pleasure and Pain had played
On his brown features ;—I think both had lost ;—
Mild and yet wild too. You may know the kind.
And once or twice a woman shared his walks,
A girl of twenty with a brown boy’s face,
And hair brown as a thrush or as a nut,
Thick eyebrows, glinting eyes— ” “ You have
said enough.

A pair,—free thought, free love,—I know the
breed :

I shall not mix my fancies up with them.”

“ You please yourself. I should prefer the truth
Or nothing. Here, in fact, is nothing at all
Except a silent place that once rang loud,
And trees and us—imperfect friends, we men
And trees since time began ; and nevertheless
Between us still we breed a mystery.”

HEALTH

FOUR miles at a leap, over the dark hollow land,
To the frosted steep of the down and its junipers
black,
Travels my eye with equal ease and delight :
And scarce could my body leap four yards.

This is the best and the worst of it—
Never to know,
Yet to imagine gloriously, pure health.

To-day, had I suddenly health,
I could not satisfy the desire of my heart
Unless health abated it,
So beautiful is the air in its softness and clearness,
while Spring
Promises all and fails in nothing as yet ;
And what blue and what white is I never knew
Before I saw this sky blessing the land.

For had I health I could not ride or run or fly
So far or so rapidly over the land
As I desire : I should reach Wiltshire tired ;
I should have changed my mind before I could be
in Wales.

I could not love ; I could not command love.
Beauty would still be far off
However many hills I climbed over ;
Peace would still be farther.

Maybe I should not count it anything
To leap these four miles with the eye ;
And either I should not be filled almost to bursting
with desire,
Or with my power desire would still keep pace.

Yet I am not satisfied
Even with knowing I never could be satisfied.
With health and all the power that lies
In maiden beauty, poet and warrior,
In Cæsar, Shakespeare, Alcibiades,
Mazeppa, Leonardo, Michelangelo,
In any maiden whose smile is lovelier
Than sunlight upon dew,
I could not be as the wagtail running up and down
The warm tiles of the roof slope, twittering
Happily and sweetly as if the sun itself
Extracted the song
As the hand makes sparks from the fur of a cat :

I could not be as the sun.
Nor should I be content to be
As little as the bird or as mighty as the sun.
For the bird knows not of the sun,
And the sun regards not the bird.
But I am almost proud to love both bird and sun,
Though scarce this Spring could my body leap
four yards.

BEAUTY

WHAT does it mean? Tired, angry, and ill at ease,
No man, woman, or child alive could please
Me now. And yet I almost dare to laugh
Because I sit and frame an epitaph—
“Here lies all that no one loved of him
And that loved no one.” Then in a trice that
whim

Has wearied. But, though I am like a river
At fall of evening while it seems that never
Has the sun lighted it or warmed it, while
Cross breezes cut the surface to a file,
This heart, some fraction of me, happily
Floats through the window even now to a tree
Down in the misting, dim-lit, quiet vale,
Not like a pewit that returns to wail
For something it has lost, but like a dove
That slants unswerving to its home and love.
There I find my rest, and through the dusk air
Flies what yet liyes in me. Beauty is there.

SNOW

IN the gloom of whiteness,
In the great silence of snow,
A child was sighing
And bitterly saying : " Oh,
They have killed a white bird up there on her nest,
The down is fluttering from her breast."
And still it fell through that dusky brightness
On the child crying for the bird of the snow.

THE NEW YEAR

HE was the one man I met up in the woods
That stormy New Year's morning ; and at first
sight,

Fifty yards off, I could not tell how much
Of the strange tripod was a man. His body,
Bowed horizontal, was supported equally
By legs at one end, by a rake at the other :
Thus he rested, far less like a man than
His wheel-barrow in profile was like a pig.
But when I saw it was an old man bent,
At the same moment came into my mind
The games at which boys bend thus, *Hig-*
cockolorum,

Or *Fly-the-garter*, and *Leap-frog*. At the sound
Of footsteps he began to straighten himself ;
His head rolled under his cape like a tortoise's ;
He took an unlit pipe out of his mouth
Politely ere I wished him " A Happy New Year,"
And with his head cast upward sideways
muttered—

So far as I could hear through the trees' roar—
" Happy New Year, and may it come fastish, too,"
While I strode by and he turned to raking leaves.

THE BROOK

SEATED once by a brook, watching a child
Chiefly that paddled, I was thus beguiled.
Mellow the blackbird sang and sharp the thrush
Not far off in the oak and hazel brush,
Unseen. There was a scent like honeycomb
From mugwort dull. And down upon the dome
Of the stone the cart-horse kicks against so oft
A butterfly alighted. From aloft
He took the heat of the sun, and from below.
On the hot stone he perched contented so,
As if never a cart would pass again
That way ; as if I were the last of men
And he the first of insects to have earth
And sun together and to know their worth.
I was divided between him and the gleam,
The motion, and the voices, of the stream,
The waters running frizzled over gravel,
That never vanish and for ever travel.
A grey flycatcher silent on a fence
And I sat as if we had been there since
The horseman and the horse lying beneath
The fir-tree-covered barrow on the heath,
The horseman and the horse with silver shoes,
Galloped the downs last. All that I could lose
I lost. And then the child's voice raised the dead.
" No one's been here before " was what she said
And what I felt, yet never should have found
A word for, while I gathered sight and sound,

THE OTHER

THE forest ended. Glad I was
To feel the light, and hear the hum
Of bees, and smell the drying grass
And the sweet mint, because I had come
To an end of forest, and because
Here was both road and inn, the sum
Of what's not forest. But 'twas here
They asked me if I did not pass
Yesterday this way? "Not you? Queer."
"Who then? and slept here?" I felt fear.

I learnt his road and, ere they were
Sure I was I, left the dark wood
Behind, kestrel and woodpecker,
The inn in the sun, the happy mood
When first I tasted sunlight there.
I travelled fast, in hopes I should
Outrun that other. What to do
When caught, I planned not. I pursued
To prove the likeness, and, if true,
To watch until myself I knew.

I tried the inns that evening
Of a long gabled high-street grey,
Of courts and outskirts, travelling
An eager but a weary way,
In vain. He was not there. Nothing
Told me that ever till that day
Had one like me entered those doors,
Save once. That time I dared: "You may
Recall"—but never-foamless shores
Make better friends than those dull boors.

Many and many a day like this
Aimed at the unseen moving goal
And nothing found but remedies
For all desire. These made not whole ;
They sowed a new desire, to kiss
Desire's self beyond control,
Desire of desire. And yet
Life stayed on within my soul.
One night in sheltering from the wet
I quite forgot I could forget.

A customer, then the landlady
Stared at me. With a kind of smile
They hesitated awkwardly :
Their silence gave me time for guile.
Had anyone called there like me,
I asked. It was quite plain the wile
Succeeded. For they poured out all.
And that was naught. Less than a mile
Beyond the inn, I could recall
He was like me in general.

He had pleased them, but I less.
I was more eager than before
To find him out and to confess,
To bore him and to let him bore.
I could not wait : children might guess
I had a purpose, something more
That made an answer indiscreet.
One girl's caution made me sore,
Too indignant even to greet
That other had we chanced to meet.

I sought then in solitude.
The wind had fallen with the night ; as still
The roads lay as the ploughland rude,
Dark and naked, on the hill.
Had there been ever any feud
'Twixt earth and sky, a mighty will
Closed it : the crocketed dark trees,
A dark house, dark impossible
Cloud-towers, one star, one lamp, one peace
Held on an everlasting lease :

And all was earth's, or all was sky's ;
No difference endured between
The two. A dog barked on a hidden rise ;
A marshbird whistled high unseen ;
The latest waking blackbird's cries
Perished upon the silence keen.
The last light filled a narrow firth
Among the clouds. I stood serene,
And with a solemn quiet mirth,
An old inhabitant of earth.

Once the name I gave to hours
Like this was melancholy, when
It was not happiness and powers
Coming like exiles home again,
And weaknesses quitting their bowers,
Smiled and enjoyed, far off from men,
Moments of everlastingness.
And fortunate my search was then
While what I sought, nevertheless,
That I was seeking, I did not guess.

That time was brief : once more at inn
And upon road I sought my man
Till once amid a tap-room's din
Loudly he asked for me, began
To speak, as if it had been a sin,
Of how I thought and dreamed and ran
After him thus, day after day :
He lived as one under a ban
For this : what had I got to say ?
I said nothing. I slipped away.

And now I dare not follow after
Too close. I try to keep in sight,
Dreading his frown and worse his laughter.
I steal out of the wood to light ;
I see the swift shoot from the rafter
By the inn door : ere I alight
I wait and hear the starlings wheeze
And nibble like ducks : I wait his flight.
He goes : I follow : no release
Until he ceases. Then I also shall cease.

HOUSE AND MAN

ONE hour : as dim he and his house now look
As a reflection in a rippling brook,
While I remember him ; but first, his house.
Empty it sounded. It was dark with forest boughs
That brushed the walls and made the mossy tiles
Part of the squirrels' track. In all those miles
Of forest silence and forest murmur, only
One house—"Lonely!" he said, "I wish it were
lonely"—
Which the trees looked upon from every side,
And that was his.

He waved good-bye to hide
A sigh that he converted to a laugh.
He seemed to hang rather than stand there, half
Ghost-like, half like a beggar's rag, clean wrung
And useless on the brier where it has hung
Long years a-washing by sun and wind and rain.

But why I call back man and house again
Is that now on a beech-tree's tip I see
As then I saw—I at the gate, and he
In the house darkness,—a magpie veering about,
A magpie like a weathercock in doubt.

THE GYPSY

A FORTNIGHT before Christmas Gypsies were everywhere :

Vans were drawn up on wastes, women trailed to the fair.

“ My gentleman,” said one, “ You’ve got a lucky face.”

“ And you’ve a luckier,” I thought, “ if such a grace And impudence in rags are lucky.” “ Give a penny For the poor baby’s sake.” “ Indeed I have not any Unless you can give change for a sovereign, my dear.”

“ Then just half a pipeful of tobacco can you spare ? ”

I gave it. With that much victory she laughed content.

I should have given more, but off and away she went

With her baby and her pink sham flowers to rejoin
The rest before I could translate to its proper coin.
Gratitude for her grace. And I paid nothing then,
As I pay nothing now with the dipping of my pen
For her brother’s music when he drummed the
tambourine

And stamped his feet, which made the workmen
passing grin,

While his mouth-organ changed to a rascally
Bacchanal dance

“ Over the hills and far away.” This and his glance
Outlasted all the fair, farmer and auctioneer,

Cheap-jack, balloon-man, drover with crooked
stick, and steer,

Pig, turkey, goose, and duck, Christmas Corpses
to be.

Not even the kneeling ox had eyes like the Romany.
That night he peopled for me the hollow wooded
land,

More dark and wild than stormiest heavens, that I
searched and scanned

Like a ghost new-arrived. The gradations of the
dark

Were like an underworld of death, but for the spark
In the Gypsy boy's black eyes as he played and
stamped his tune,

“ Over the hills and far away,” and a crescent moon

MAN AND DOG

“ ’Twill take some getting.” “ Sir, I think ’twill so.”

The old man stared up at the mistletoe
That hung too high in the poplar’s crest for plunder
Of any climber, though not for kissing under :
Then he went on against the north-east wind—
Straight but lame, leaning on a staff new-skinned,
Carrying a broolly, flag-basket, and old coat,—
Towards Alton, ten miles off. And he had not
Done less from Chilgrove where he pulled up docks.
’Twere best, if he had had “ a money-box,”
To have waited there till the sheep cleared a field
For what a half-week’s flint-picking would yield.
His mind was running on the work he had done
Since he left Christchurch in the New Forest, one
Spring in the ’seventies,—navvying on dock and
line

From Southampton to Newcastle-on-Tyne,—
In ’seventy-four a year of soldiering
With the Berkshires,—hoeing and harvesting
In half the shires where corn and couch will grow.
His sons, three sons, were fighting, but the hoe
And reap-hook he liked, or anything to do with
trees.

He fell once from a poplar tall as these :
The Flying Man they called him in hospital.

“ If I flew now, to another world I’d fall.”

He laughed and whistled to the small brown bitch
With spots of blue that hunted in the ditch.

Her foxy Welsh grandfather must have paired
Beneath him. He kept sheep in Wales and scared
Strangers, I will warrant, with his pearl eye
And trick of shrinking off as he were shy,
Then following close in silence for—for what ?
“ No rabbit, never fear, she ever got,
Yet always hunts. To-day she nearly had one :
She would and she wouldn't. 'Twas like that. The
bad one !

She's not much use, but still she's company,
Though I'm not. She goes everywhere with me.
So Alton I must reach to-night somehow :
I'll get no shakedown with that bedfellow
From farmers. Many a man sleeps worse to-night
Than I shall.” “ In the trenches.” “ Yes, that's
right.

But they'll be out of that—I hope they be—
This weather, marching after the enemy.”
“ And so I hope. Good luck.” And there I nodded
“ Good-night. You keep straight on.” Stiffly he
plodded ;

And at his heels the crisp leaves scurried fast,
And the leaf-coloured robin watched. They
passed,
The robin till next day, the man for good,
Together in the twilight of the wood.

A PRIVATE

THIS ploughman dead in battle slept out of doors
Many a frozen night, and merrily
Answered staid drinkers, good bedmen, and all
bores :

“ At Mrs. Greenland’s Hawthorn Bush,” said he,
“ I slept.” None knew which bush. Above the
town,

Beyond “ The Drover,” a hundred spot the down
In Wiltshire. And where now at last he sleeps
More sound in France—that, too, he secret keeps,

OUT IN THE DARK

Out in the dark over the snow
The fallow fawns invisible go
With the fallow doe ;
And the winds blow
Fast as the stars are slow.

Stealthily the dark haunts round
And, when a lamp goes, without sound
At a swifter bound
Than the swiftest hound,
Arrives, and all else is drowned ;

And I and star and wind and deer,
Are in the dark together,—near,
Yet far,—and fear
Drums on my ear
In that sage company drear.

How weak and little is the light,
All the universe of sight,
Love and delight,
Before the might,
If you love it not, of night.



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