



P o e m s

Maurice Maeterlinck





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POEMS BY  
MAURICE MAETERLINCK



THE WORKS OF MAURICE MAETERLINCK

ESSAYS

THE TREASURE OF THE HUMBLE  
WISDOM AND DESTINY  
THE LIFE OF THE BEE  
THE BURIED TEMPLE  
THE DOUBLE GARDEN  
THE MEASURE OF THE HOURS  
DEATH  
ON EMERSON, AND OTHER ESSAYS  
OUR ETERNITY  
THE UNKNOWN GUEST

PLAYS

SISTER BEATRICE AND ARDIANE AND BARBE  
BLEUE  
JOYZELLE AND MONNA VANNA  
THE BLUE BIRD, A FAIRY PLAY  
MARY MAGDALENE  
PÉLLÉAS AND MÉLISANDE, AND OTHER PLAYS  
PRINCESS MALEINE  
THE INTRUDER, AND OTHER PLAYS  
AGLAVAINE AND SELYSETTE

HOLIDAY EDITIONS

OUR FRIEND THE DOG  
THE SWARM  
THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE FLOWERS  
CHRYSANTHEMUMS  
THE LEAF OF OLIVE  
THOUGHTS FROM MAETERLINCK  
THE BLUE BIRD  
THE LIFE OF THE BEE  
NEWS OF SPRING AND OTHER NATURE  
STUDIES  
POEMS



✓  
**Poems**

BY  
MAURICE MAETERLINCK

*Done into English Verse*

BY  
BERNARD MIALL ✓

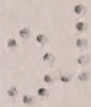


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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE . . . . .	9-17
HOT-HOUSES:	
THE HOT-HOUSE . . . . .	21-22
PRAYER . . . . .	23
THE HOUSE OF LASSITUDE . . . . .	25
TEMPTATIONS . . . . .	27-28
THE BELL-GLASSES . . . . .	29-31
THE HUMBLE OFFERING . . . . .	33
THE HEART'S FOLIAGE . . . . .	35
A FEVERED SOUL . . . . .	37
THE SOUL . . . . .	39-41
LASSITUDE . . . . .	43
THE WEARY HUNTING . . . . .	45
THE PASSIONS . . . . .	47
PRAYER . . . . .	49
STAGNANT HOURS . . . . .	51
THE WHITE BIRDS . . . . .	53
THE HOSPITAL . . . . .	55-58
NIGHT PRAYER . . . . .	59-60
WINTRY DESIRES . . . . .	61
LISTLESSNESS . . . . .	63



## Contents

HOT-HOUSES— <i>Continued.</i>	PAGE
AMEN . . . . .	65-66
THE DIVING-BELL . . . . .	67-70
AQUARIUM . . . . .	71-72
THE BURNING-GLASS . . . . .	73
REFLECTIONS . . . . .	75
VISIONS . . . . .	77
PRAYER . . . . .	79
GLANCES . . . . .	81-84
VIGIL . . . . .	85
AFTERNOON . . . . .	87
THE SOUL . . . . .	89
INTENTIONS . . . . .	91
CONTACTS . . . . .	93-97
NIGHT . . . . .	99-100

### FIFTEEN SONGS:

I SHE CHAINED HER IN A CAVERN FRORE	103-104
II IF HE ONE DAY COME AGAIN . . . .	105-106
III THREE LITTLE MAIDS THEY HAVE DONE TO DEATH . . . . .	107
IV MAIDENS WITH BOUNDEN EYES . . . .	109
V THE THREE BLIND SISTERS . . . . .	111-112
VI THERE CAME ONE HERE TO SAY . . . .	113-114
VII ORLAMONDE HAD SEVEN DAUGHTERS . . . .	115
VIII SHE HAD THREE CROWNS OF GOLD . . . .	117



## Contents

FIFTEEN SONGS— <i>Continued.</i>	PAGE
IX TOWARD THE CASTLE SHE MADE HER WAY . . . . .	119-120
X HER LOVER WENT HIS WAY . . . . .	121
XI MOTHER, MOTHER, DO YOU NOT HEAR?	123-124
XII NOW YOUR LAMPS ARE ALL ALIGHT .	125-126
XIII SISTERS, SISTERS, THIRTY YEARS . . . .	127
XIV THERE WERE THREE SISTERS FAIN TO DIE . . . . .	129-130
XV CANTICLE OF THE VIRGIN . . . . .	131



Et torpenti multa relinquitur miseria.—*De Imitatione.*



## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

### I

ONCE in a generation an author surpasses the bounds of nationality. Of such cosmopolitan artists Maurice Maeterlinck is perhaps the most shining example. Twenty years ago I was vainly endeavouring to interest English publishers in his plays. To-day I am asked to produce a version of one of his earlier and less familiar works, because the time is approaching for that monument to his fame which so few writers enjoy in their lifetime—the complete edition. Maeterlinck is not a Belgian writer merely or chiefly; above all he is an English, an American author. His readers in England and the United States far outnumber those who read the original French. His books are published in England and



## Translator's Preface

America almost as soon as they appear in France and Belgium, and in at least one case the English publication was the earlier. More and more do his lovers demand every word that his pen has formed. Sooner or later, therefore, it was inevitable that these *Poems* should appear in translation.

### II

The poems contained in this volume form part of a movement long defunct—the Belgian Symbolist movement, an offshoot of that Belgian renaissance which produced so remarkable a body of great and noble poetry. I cannot say, however, that the perusal of the other poets of the period will assist the reader to appreciate the volume in hand. Eekhoud, Elskamp, Gilkin, Rodenbach, Verhaeren—none of these wrote verse which could possibly be confounded with that of Maeterlinck;



## Translator's Preface

twenty years ago the latter was no less original than he is to-day.

Many poets of the late nineteenth century were, without being symbolists, affected by the Symbolist movement—a movement very loosely named, since the actual symbolists connected with it could be counted on the fingers of one hand. More particularly were they influenced by the tendency to put music before matter, beauty before sense, which is expressed by the so familiar lines of Verlaine:

*De la musique avant toute chose,  
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair,  
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,  
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou pose . . .*

*De la musique encor et toujours!*

But musical as Maeterlinck's verses are, and rich in sheer beauty, we are very seldom in doubt as to what the poet says, how-



## Translator's Preface

ever little we may in some cases understand what he means. His statements are concrete and lucid; it is the inner meaning, the soul of his verse, that sometimes threatens to elude us. Had this volume been cast upon the late Victorian world, this preface would perhaps have been longer. But I cannot believe that these poems will present any difficulties to a generation which has degustated such phenomena as Cubism and its kindred manifestations.

### III

It is safe to assert that the writer of these poems had read his Verlaine, his Rimbaud, his Mallarmé and his Baudelaire, and, of English-speaking poets, Blake, Poe, Emerson, perhaps Rossetti, and above all, Whitman. But he is no disciple: and his essential originality, and the keynote of his æsthetics, is a system of symbolism.



## Translator's Preface

Now here at once we are on dangerous ground. When a poet makes use of a symbol it is because that symbol enables him to say something that he cannot say so well, or so beautifully, or perhaps at all, in plain language. He is a rash man, therefore, who will attempt to elucidate another's symbolism. However, I have already been rash, in venturing to translate, not a few selected lyrics, but an entire volume of verse from cover to cover, than which there is no more appalling task in literature. But I am not therefore going to court disaster by attempting any detailed or positive explanation. I could, indeed, have asked M. Maeterlinck for such, but at the moment of writing his country is being crucified by the powers of darkness, and he has other and sterner matters to think of.

This machinery of hot-houses, bell-glasses, hospitals, and what not—what are



## Translator's Preface

we to make of it? I do not think we shall go far wrong in supposing the hot-house, the bell-glass, the diving-bell, the hospital, to typify that isolation and insulation which is caused by a false civilisation and an unreal religion, so productive of hypocrisy, fear and confusion that each man is a prisoner within himself, unable to reach his fellow. And the inmates of the hot-house—the strange growths, the fantastic visions, the violent antitheses and incongruities—these, we may take it, are the morbidities fostered by a life which protects us and them from the agencies by which Nature makes her own children perfect in strength and beauty and service. That is my reading of it; the reader is perfectly free to differ from me, and will lose little by so doing if I have succeeded in preserving a tithe of the original beauty of the verse.

If here and there—more particularly in



## Translator's Preface

the unrhymed pieces—the violent and intentional incongruities and antitheses seem startling and incomprehensible, and a little apt to tickle the risibility of the frivolous Anglo-Saxon, let us remember that to read a symbolic poem literally is as foolish as to seek for a cipher in Shakespeare, or to set about interpreting a melody in terms of its notation, in the hope of spelling out a message.

One peculiarity of Maeterlinck's which may at first confuse the English reader is only a simple convention. All poetry is full of similes; the simile confuses no one. If a poet tells us that his heart is like a singing-bird, we do not seriously suppose him to mean that his heart has feathers and two legs; but merely that it possesses some other essential quality of a singing-bird. Now, Maeterlinck constantly, in his verse, uses what is merely a modification of the



## Translator's Preface

simile, and which has precisely the same significance, but which takes the form of a positive assertion of identity. He would say: My heart *is* a singing-bird, or a plant in a green-house, or anything else that seemed to be illuminating; and this apparent literalness of statement, which is carried very far, is, and must always be understood as, a mere variant of the familiar simile.

### IV

A word as to the work of translation. Most of the lyrics in *Serres Chaudes* are written in the metre familiar to English readers as that of "In Memoriam." It is, in English, rather a dull metre, the stanza being in reality no stanza at all, but merely a line of thirty-two syllables with interior rhymes. It is greatly improved and enlivened by the omission of four syllables, or, rather, by their replacement by pauses



## Translator's Preface

of one syllable's value. This change I have sometimes made; and in one case I have, in order to avoid a verbal obscurity, extended the line to ten syllables. Apart from these exceptions, all the poems in this volume are translated into their original metres, and it has always been my first object to produce a literal, almost a word for word translation. Whatever the faults of my version, it is strictly faithful. If I am deemed to have also preserved something of the beauty of the original, I shall feel more than rewarded for a task that has presented many difficulties.

BERNARD MIALL.

Ilfracombe, N. Devon, *September*, 1914.







HOT-HOUSES



And in his hand a glass which shows us many more.

—SHAKESPEARE.



## THE HOT-HOUSE

O hot-house deep in the forest's heart!

O doors forever sealed!

Lo, all that lives beneath thy dome,

And in my soul, and the likeness of these  
things!

The thoughts of a princess who is sick with  
hunger,

The listless mood of a mariner in the  
desert,

And brazen music at the windows

Of men who are sick to death!

Seek out the coolest corners—

And you think of a woman who has  
swooned on a day of harvest.

Postillions have entered the courtyard of  
the hospital,

And yonder goes an Uhlan who has turned  
sick-nurse.



## The Hot-house

Behold it all by moonlight !  
(Nothing, nothing is in its rightful place !)  
And you think of a madwoman haled be-  
fore the judges,  
A warship in full sail on the waters of a  
canal,  
Birds of the night perched among lilies,  
And the knell of a passing-bell at the mid-  
day hour of Angelus.  
And yonder—beneath those domes of  
glass—  
A group of sick folk halted amid the  
meadows,  
An odour of ether abroad on the sunny air !  
  
My God, my God, when shall we feel the  
rain  
And the snow, and the wind, in this close  
house of glass ?



## PRAYER

O pity me that wander hence  
To haunt the precincts of intent;  
My soul is pale with impotence,  
Colorless and indolent.

A soul for action all too weak,  
Pallid with tears, it vainly heeds  
The weary hands that idly seek  
To grapple with abortive deeds.

Forth from my slumbering heart exhale  
The purple bubbles of its dream;  
My soul, with waxen hands and frail,  
Pours forth a drowsy lunar gleam,

A listless light that dimly shows  
The faded lilies of days unborn;  
A languid light that only throws  
The shadows of those hands forlorn.







## THE HOUSE OF LASSITUDE

O blue monotony of my heart!  
Blue with languor are my dreams,  
When the mournful moonlight seems  
Clearer vision to impart:

Blue as is the house of shade,  
Close within whose lofty green  
Casements whose pellucid screen  
Seems of crystal moonlight made,

Mighty vegetations rise,  
Whose nocturnal shadow deep,  
Silent as a charméd sleep,  
Over passion's roses lies;

Where slow-rising waters gleam,  
Mingling moon and heaven, and throb  
In one eternal glaucous sob,  
Monotonously as in a dream.







## TEMPTATIONS

Green as the sea, temptations creep  
Thro' the shadows of the mind,  
Where with flaming flowers entwined  
Dark ejaculations leap—

Stems obscure that coil and thrust  
In the moon's unhallowed glow,  
And autumnal shadows throw  
Of their auguries of lust.

And the moon may hardly shine  
Thro' their fevered fast embrace:  
Limb and slimy limb enlace,  
Emerald and serpentine.

Sacrilegiously they grow,  
And their secret will reveal,  
Dismal as regrets that steal  
O'er men dying in the snow;



## Temptations

And their mournful shadows hide  
Tangled wounds that mark the thrust  
Of the azure swords of lust  
In the crimson flesh of pride.

When will the dreams of earth, alas,  
Find in my heart their final tomb?  
O let Thy glory, Lord, illumine  
This dark and evil house of glass,

And that oblivion nought may win!  
The dead leaves of their fevers fall,  
The stars amid their lips, and all  
The viscerae of woe and sin!



## BELL-GLASSES

O domes of crystal!

O curious plants forever sheltered,

While the wind stirs my senses here with-  
out!

A valley of the soul forever undisturbed!

O humid warmth at noon!

O shifting pictures glimpsed in the crystal  
walls!

Never lift one of these!

Some have been set on ancient pools of  
moonlight.

Peer through the prisoned foliage:

There you may see a beggar upon a throne,

Or maybe pirates, lurking upon a pond,

Or antediluvian beasts about to invade the  
cities!



## Bell-Glasses

Some have been set on ancient drifts of  
snow,  
And some on pools of rain long fallen.  
(O pity the imprisoned air!)  
I hear them keeping Carnival on a Sabbath  
in time of famine,  
I see an ambulance in the midst of the fields  
of harvest,  
And all the king's daughters, on a day of  
fast,  
Are wandering through the meadows!

Mark more especially those on the horizon!  
Carefully they cover the tempests of long  
ago.

Somewhere, I think, you will see a great  
armada, sailing across a swamp!  
And there the brooding swans have hatched  
a nest of crows!

(It is hard to see through the veil of  
moisture.)



## Bell-Glasses

And a maiden is watering the heath with  
steaming water,

A troop of little girls is watching the her-  
mit in his cell,

And I see my sisters asleep in the depth of  
a poisonous cavern!

Wait until the moonlight, wait until the  
winter

Shall cover these domes of crystal set amid  
ice and snow!







## THE HUMBLE OFFERING

I bring my piteous work, in form  
Like the dreaming of a corse,  
And the moon illumes the storm  
O'er the creatures of remorse.

There the purple snakes of dream  
Writhing twine till sleep be done;  
Crowned with swords, my longings gleam;  
Lions whelméd in the sun,

Lilies in waters desolate,  
Clenched hands that may not move,  
And the ruddy stems of hate,  
'Mid the emerald woes of love—

Lord, pity our mortal speech!  
O that my prayers, morose and dim,  
And the dishevelled moon may reach  
And reap the night to the world's rim!







## THE HEART'S FOLIAGE

'Neath the azure crystal bell  
Of my listless melancholy  
All my formless sorrows slowly  
Sink to rest, and all is well;

Symbols all, the plants entwine:  
Water lilies, flowers of pleasure,  
Palms desirous, slow with leisure,  
Frigid mosses, pliant vine.

'Mid them all a lily only,  
Pale and fragile and unbending,  
Imperceptibly ascending  
In that place of leafage lonely

Like a moon the prisoned air  
Fills with glimmering light wherethro'  
Rises to the crystal blue,  
White and mystical, its prayer.







## THE FEVERED SOUL

The dark brings vision to mine eyes:  
Through my desires they seek their goal.  
O nights within my humid soul,  
O heart to dreams that open lies!

With azure reveries I bedew  
The roses of attempts undone;  
My lashes close the gates upon  
The longings that will ne'er come true.

My pallid indolent fingers plant  
Ever in vain, at close of day,  
The emerald bells of hope that lay  
Over the purple leaves of want.

Helpless, my soul beholds with dread  
The bitter musings of my lips,  
Amid the crowding lily-tips:  
O that this wavering heart were dead!







## THE SOUL

My soul!

O my soul, verily too closely sheltered!  
And the flocks of my desires, imprisoned in  
a house of glass!  
Waiting until the tempest shall break over  
the meadows!

Come first to these, so sick and fragile:  
From these a strange effluvium rises,  
And lo, it seems I am with my mother,  
Crossing a field of battle.  
They are burying a brother-in-arms at  
noon,  
While the sentinels are snatching a meal.

Now let us go to the feeblest:  
They are covered with a strange sweat.  
Here is an ailing bride,  
And a treacherous act, committed upon a  
Sabbath,



## The Soul

And little children in prison,  
And yonder, yonder through the mist,  
Do I see there a woman, dying at the door  
of a kitchen,  
Or a Sister of Charity shelling peas at the  
bedside of a dying patient?

Last of all let us go to the saddest:  
(Last of all, for these are venom'd.)  
Oh, my lips are pressed by the kisses of a  
wounded man!

In the castles of my soul this summer all the  
chatelaines have died of hunger!

Now it is twilight on the morning of a day  
of festival!

I catch a glimpse of sheep along the quays,  
And there is a sail by the windows of the  
hospital.

The road is long from my soul to my heart,  
And all the sentinels have died at their  
post!



## The Soul

One day there was a poor little festival in  
the suburbs of my soul:

They were mowing the hemlock there, one  
Sunday morning.

And all the maiden women of the convent  
were watching the vessels passing,

On the canal, one sunny fast-day.

But the swans were ailing, in the shadow of  
the rotting bridge.

They were lopping the trees about the  
prison,

They were bringing remedies, on an after-  
noon of June,

And in every quarter there were sick folk  
feasting!

Alas, my soul,

And alas, the sadness of all these things!







## LASSITUDE

These lips have long forgotten to bestow  
Their kiss on blind eyes chiller than the  
    snow,  
Henceforth absorbed in their magnificent  
    dream.  
Drowsy as hounds deep in the grass they  
    seem;  
They watch the grey flocks on the sky-line  
    pass,  
Browsing on moonlight scattered o'er the  
    grass,  
By skies as vague as their own life caressed.  
They see, unvexed by envy or unrest,  
The roses of joy that open on every hand,  
The long green peace they cannot under-  
    stand.







## THE WEARY HUNTING

My soul is sick, in evil mood;  
Stricken with many a lack it lies,  
Stricken with silence, and mine eyes  
Illume it with their lassitude.

Arrested visions of the chase  
Obsess me; memory whips them on;  
The sleuth-hounds of Desire are gone  
On fading scents—a weary race.

In misty woods the hunt is met;  
The questing packs of dreams depart;  
Toward the white stags of falsehood  
dart  
The jaundiced arrows of regret.

Ah, my desires! For breath they swoon!  
The weary longings of mine eyes  
Have clouded with their azure sighs,  
Within my soul, the flooding moon!







## THE PASSIONS

Narrow paths my passions tread:  
    Laughter rings there, sorrow cries;  
    Sick and sad, with half-shut eyes,  
Thro' the leaves the woods have shed,

My sins like yellow mongrels slink;  
    Uncouth hyænas, my hates complain,  
    And on the pale and listless plain  
Couching low, love's lions blink.

Powerless, deep in a dream of peace,  
    Sunk in a languid spell they lie,  
    Under a colourless, desolate sky,  
There they gaze and never cease,

Where like sheep temptations graze,  
    One by one departing slow:  
    In the moon's unchanging glow  
My unchanging passions gaze.







## PRAYER

A woman's fears my heart control:

What have I done with these, my part,  
My hands, the lilies of my soul,  
Mine eyes, the heavens of my heart?

O Lord, have pity on my grief:

I have lost the palm and ring, alas!  
Pity my prayers, my poor relief,  
Cut flowers and fragile in a glass.

Pity the trespass of my mouth,

And things undone, and words unsaid,  
Shed lilies on my fever's drouth,  
And roses on the marshes shed!

O God! The doves whose flights are gold

On heavens remembered! Pity too  
These garments that my loins enfold,  
That rustle round me, dimly blue!







## STAGNANT HOURS

Here are the old desires that pass,  
The dreams of weary men, that die,  
The dreams that faint and fail, alas!  
And there the days of hope gone by!

Where to fly shall we find a place?  
Never a star shines late or soon:  
Weariness only with frozen face,  
And sheets of blue in the icy moon.

Behold the fireless sick, and lo!  
The sobbing victims of the snare!  
Lambs whose pasture is only snow!  
Pity them all, O Lord, my prayer!

For me, I wait the awakening call:  
I pray that slumber leave me soon.  
I wait until the sunlight fall  
On hands yet frozen by the moon.







## THE WHITE BIRDS

Proud, indifferent, slow, they have fled,  
they have flown away,

The peacocks white as snow, lest weariness  
awake;

I see the birds of snow, the white birds of  
To-day,

The birds that fly away before my slumber  
break;

Proud, indifferent, slow, the white birds of  
To-day,

Winning with indolent flight the shores  
of the sunless lake;

The birds of listless thought, I hear them  
on their way,

Indolently waiting for the sunless day to  
break.







## THE HOSPITAL

The hospital!  
The hospital on the banks of the canal,  
The hospital, and the month July!  
They are lighting a fire in the ward,  
While the Atlantic steamers are whistling  
on the canal!

(Do not go near the windows!)  
Here are emigrants loitering through a  
palace,  
And I see a yacht in a tempest!  
And herds of cattle on all the ships!

(It is better to keep the windows fastened,  
Then we are all but safe from the outside  
world!)

One thinks of a forcing-frame placed upon  
a snow-drift,



## The Hospital

Or a woman being churched on a day of  
thunder;

One catches a glimpse of plants scattered  
upon a blanket,

And a conflagration on a sunny day,

And I pass through a forest full of  
wounded men. . . .

O, here at last is the moonlight!

A fountain is playing in the middle of the  
ward!

And a troop of little girls has opened the  
door!

And lo, a glimpse of lambs in an isle of  
meadows!

And beautiful plants on a glacier!

And lilies in a hall of marble!

There is a banquet in a virgin forest,

And the vegetation of the tropics in a cav-  
ern of ice!



## The Hospital

Listen! They are opening the locks,  
And the ocean steamers are churning the  
waters of the canal!

But see, the Sister of Charity is making up  
the fire!

All the lovely green rushes of the banks are  
in flames

And a boat full of wounded men is tossing  
in the moonlight!

All the king's daughters are out in a boat in  
the storm!

And the princesses are dying in a field of  
hemlock!

Oh, do not unfasten the windows!

Listen—the ocean steamers are still hoot-  
ing on the horizon!



## The Hospital

They are poisoning some one in a garden!  
They are holding a splendid festival in the  
houses of the enemy!  
There are deer in a beleaguered city!  
And a menagerie in a garden of lilies!  
And the jungle of the tropics in the depths  
of a coal-mine!  
A flock of sheep is crossing an iron bridge!  
And the lambs have come from the mead-  
ows and are mournfully entering the  
ward!

Now the Sister of Charity is lighting the  
lamps;  
Now she is bringing the patients their  
supper,  
She has closed the windows upon the canal,  
And all the doors to the light of the moon!



## NIGHT PRAYER

Below the somnolence of prayer,  
Under languid visions I  
Hear the passions surge and cry:  
Lust with lust is warring there.

Thro' the lassitude of dreams  
Shines the moon as thro' a mesh;  
And the wandering joy of flesh  
Still on pestilent beaches gleams.

Under ever-shrouded skies,  
Thirsting for their starry fires,  
Thro' my veins I hear desires  
Toward the green horizon rise.

Evil fondnesses I hear  
Blackly surging through my mind.  
Phantom marshes vanish blind  
Sudden on the sky-line drear.



## Night Prayer

O Lord, thy wrath will slay me soon:  
Have pity on me, Lord, I pray!  
Sweating and sick, O let me stray  
Thro' pastures glimmering in the moon.

For now, O Lord, the time is nigh  
To rase the hemlock with the steel,  
Whose moon my secret hopes reveal  
Green as a serpent in the sky;

And the plague of dreams mine eyes  
Smites, and all its sins subdue,  
And the rustling fountains blue  
Toward the sovereign moon arise.



## WINTRY DESIRES

I mourn the lips of yesterday,  
Lips whose kisses are yet unborn,  
And the old desires outworn,  
Under sorrows hid away.

Always rain on the far sky-line;  
Always snow on the beaches gleams,  
While by the bolted gate of dreams  
Crouching wolves in the grasses whine;

Into my listless soul I gaze:  
With clouded eyes I search the past,  
At all the long-spilt blood aghast  
Of lambs that died in wintry ways.

Only the moon her mournful fires  
Enkindles, and a desolate light  
Falls where the autumn frosts are white  
Over my famishing desires.







## LISTLESSNESS

I sing the pale ballades of eld,  
Of kisses lost without reward,  
And lo, on love's luxurious sward,  
The nuptials of the sick are held.

Voices thro' my slumber sound:  
Listlessly they gather near.  
Lilies bloom in closes where  
Star nor sun hath blessed the ground.

And lo, these ghosts of old desire,  
These lagging throbs of impulse crost,  
Are paupers in a palace lost,  
Sick tapers in the auroral fire.

When shall the moon my vision bathe,  
That seeks to plumb the eternal streams  
Of darkness, and about my dreams  
Her slow cerulean raiment swathe?







## AMEN

At length the consecrating hour is here  
That sains the slave's extenuated sleep.  
And I who wait shall see its hands appear,  
Full of white roses in these caverns deep.

I wait—at length to feel its cooling wind  
Strike on my heart, impregnable to lies,  
A paschal lamb lost amid marshes blind,  
A wound o'er which the surging waters  
rise.

I wait—for nights no morrow shall defy,  
I wait—for weakness nothing shall  
avail;  
To feel upon my hands its shadow lie,  
To see in peaceful tides its image pale.



## Amen

I wait until those nights of thine shall show  
All my desires with cleansed eyes go by;  
For then my dreams shall bathe in evening's  
glow,  
And then within their crystal castle die.



## THE DIVING-BELL

Lo, the diver, forever within his bell!  
And a whole sea of glass, a sea eternally  
warm!

A whole motionless world, a world of slow  
green rhythms!

So many curious creatures beyond those  
walls of glass,

And any contact eternally prohibited!

And yet there is so much life in those bright  
waters yonder!

Look! The shadows of great sailing-ships  
—they glide over the flowers, the dah-  
lias of the submarine forest!

And I stand for a moment in the shadow of  
whales that are voyaging to the Pole!



## The Diving-bell

And at this very moment, I doubt not, my  
fellow-men in the harbour  
Are discharging the vessels that sail  
hither laden with ice:

A glacier was there, in the midst of the July  
meadows!

And men are swimming and floating in the  
green waters of the creek,

And at noon they enter shadowy cav-  
erns . . .

And the breezes of ocean are fanning the  
roofs and balconies.

Lo, the flaming tongues of the Gulf-  
Stream!

Take heed lest their kisses touch the walls  
of lassitude!

They have ceased to lay ice on the brows  
of the fevered

And the patients have lit a bonfire

And are casting great handfuls of green  
lilies into the flames!



## The Diving-bell

Lean your brows upon the cooler panes,  
While waiting for the moonlight to enter  
the bell from above.

And close your eyes tightly, to the forest  
of colour,

The pendulous blues and albuminous violets.

And close your ears to the suggestions of  
the tepid water.

Dry the brows of your desires; they are  
weak with sweat.

Go firstly to those on the point of swooning.

They have the air of people celebrating a  
wedding in a dungeon,

Or of people entering, at mid-day, a long  
lamp-lit avenue underground,

In festival procession they are passing

Thro' a landscape like an orphaned child-  
hood.



## The Diving-bell

Go now to those about to die:  
They move like virgins who have wandered  
    far  
In the sun, on a day of fast,  
They are pale as patients who placidly listen  
    to the rain in the gardens of the  
    hospital;  
They have the look of survivors, breaking  
    their fast on a battle-field;  
They are like prisoners who know that all  
    their gaolers are bathing in the river,  
And who hear men mowing the grass in the  
    garden of the prison.



## AQUARIUM

Now my desires no more, alas,  
    Summon my soul to my eyelids' brink,  
For with its prayers that ebb and pass  
    It too must sink,

To lie in the depth of my closéd eyes;  
    Only the flowers of its weary breath  
Like icy blooms to the surface rise,  
    Lilies of death.

Its lips are sealed, in the depths of woe,  
    And a world away, in the far-off gloom,  
They sing of azure stems that grow  
    A mystic bloom.

But, lo, its fingers—I have grown  
    Pallid beholding them, I who perceive  
Them trace the marks its poor unblown  
    Lost lilies leave.



## Aquarium

And I know it must die, for its hour is o'er;  
Folding its impotent hands at last,  
Hands too weary to pluck any more  
The flowers of the past!



## THE BURNING-GLASS

I watch the hours of long ago :  
    Their blue and secret depths I set  
    Under the burning-glass, Regret,  
And watch a happier flora blow.

Hold up the glass o'er my desires !  
    Behold them through my soul, a glass !  
    At memory's touch the withered grass  
Breaks forth into devouring fires.

Now above my thoughts I hold  
    The azure crystal, in whose heart  
    Suddenly unfolding start  
The leaves of agonies borne of old,

Until those nights remote I see  
    Even to memory dead so long  
    That their sullen tears do wrong  
To the green soul of hopes to be.







## REFLECTIONS

Under the brimming tide of dreams,  
O, my soul is full of fear!  
In my heart the moon is clear;  
Deep it lies in the tide of dreams.

Under the listless reeds asleep,  
Only the deep reflection shows  
Of palm, of lily and of rose,  
Weeping yet in the waters deep.

And the flowers, late and soon,  
Fall upon the mirrored sky,  
To sink and sink eternally  
Thro' dreamy waters and the moon.







## VISIONS

All the tears that I have shed,  
All my kisses, lo, they pass  
Thro' my mind as in a glass:  
All my kisses whose joy is dead.

There are flowers without a hue,  
Lilies that under the moonlight fade,  
Moonlight over the meadows laid,  
Fountains far on the sky-line blue.

Weary and heavy with slumber I  
See thro' the lids that slumber closes  
Crows that gather amid the roses,  
Sick folk under a sunbright sky.

Of these vague loves the weary smart  
Shines unchanging, late and soon,  
Like a pale slow-moving moon  
Sadly into my indolent heart. •







## PRAYER

Thou know'st, O Lord, my spirit's dearth:  
Thou see'st the worth of what I bring:  
The evil blossoms of the earth,  
The light upon a perished thing.

Thou see'st my sick and weary mood:  
The moon is dark, the dawn is slain.  
Thy glory on my solitude  
Shed Thou like fructifying rain.

Light Thou, O Lord, beneath my feet  
The way my weary soul should pass,  
For now the pain of all things sweet  
Is piteous as the ice-bound grass.







## GLANCES

O, all these poor weary glances!  
And yours, and mine!  
And those that are no more, and those  
to be!  
And those that will never be, and yet exist!  
There are those that seem to visit the poor  
on a Sabbath;  
There are some like sick folk who are  
houseless,  
There are some like lambs in a meadow full  
of bleaching linen,  
And O, these strange unwonted glances!  
Under the vaults of some we behold  
A maiden being put to death in a chamber  
with closed doors.  
And some make us dream of unknown  
sorrows,  
Of peasants at the windows of a factory,



## Glances

Of a gardener turned weaver,  
Of a summer afternoon in a wax-work  
show,  
Of the thoughts of a queen on beholding  
a sick man in a garden,  
Of an odour of camphor in the forest,  
Of a princess locked in a tower on a day  
of rejoicing,  
Of men sailing all the week on the stagnant  
waters of a canal.

Have pity on those that come creeping  
forth like convalescents at harvest-  
tide!

Have pity on those that have the air of  
children who have lost their way at  
supper-time!

Have pity on the glances of the wounded  
man at the surgeon,

Like tents stricken by a hurricane!



## Glances

Have pity on the glances of the virgin  
tempted!

(Rivers of milk are flowing away in the  
darkness,

And the swans have died in the midst of  
serpents!)

And the gaze of the virgin who surrenders!  
Princesses deserted in swamps that have no  
issue,

And those eyes in which you may see ships  
in full sail, lit up by flashes of the  
storm!

And how pitiful are all those glances which  
suffer because they are not elsewhere!

And so much suffering, so indistinguishable  
and yet so various!

And those glances that no one will ever un-  
derstand!

And those poor glances which are all but  
dumb!

And those poor whispering glances!

And those poor stifled glances!



## Glances

Amid some of these you might think your-  
self in a mansion serving as hospital,  
And many others have the air of tents, lilies  
of war, on the little lawn of the con-  
vent!

And many others have the air of wounded  
men tended in a hot-house!

Or Sisters of Charity on an ocean devoid  
of patients.

Oh, to have encountered all these glances,  
To have admitted them all,  
And to have exhausted mine thereby!  
And henceforth to be unable to close mine  
eyes!



## VIGIL

My soul her unused hands to pray  
Folds, that hide the world away:  
Lord, my broken dreams complete,  
That Thine angels' lips repeat.

While beneath my wearied eyes  
She breathes the prayers that in her rise—  
Prayers that find my lids a tomb,  
And whose lilies may not bloom:

While in dreams her barren breast  
Hushes 'neath my gaze to rest—  
Still her eyes from perils cower,  
Such as wake by falsehood's power.







## AFTERNOON

Mine eyes have snared my soul. But O,  
Grant me, O Lord, my one desire:  
Let fall Thy leaves upon the snow,  
Let fall Thy rain upon the fire.

The sun upon my pillow plays,  
The self-same hours they sound again,  
And always falls my questing gaze  
On dying men that harvest grain.

My hands they pluck the withered grass,  
Mine eyes with sleep are all undone,  
Are sick folk in a springless pass,  
Or flowers of darkness in the sun.

When will my dreams unchanging know  
The rain, and when the meadows brown?  
—Along the far horizon, lo,  
The lambs are herded toward the town.







## THE SOUL

Dreams within mine eyes remain,  
And beneath its crystal dome  
Lights my soul its sometime home,  
Taps upon the azure pane.

Houses of the listless soul!  
Up the panes the lilies creep;  
Reeds unfold in waters deep,  
Longings nought shall e'er make whole!

Closing eyes it all but seems  
Past oblivion I could hold  
All the rosy flowers of old  
Of my half-remembered dreams:

Their leaves are dead and scattered far;  
Shall I not see them verdant soon  
When with her azure hands the moon  
In silence sets the gates ajar?







## INTENTIONS

Have pity on the eyes morose  
Wherein the soul its hope reveals;  
On fated things that ne'er uncloze,  
And all who wait what night conceals.

Ripples that rock the spirit's lake!  
Lilies that sway beneath the tide  
To threads the eternal rhythms shake!  
O powers that close to vision hide!

Behold, O Lord, unwonted flowers  
Among the water-lilies white!  
Dim hands of Thine angelic powers  
Trouble the waters of my sight:

At mystic signs the buds unroll,  
Shed on the waters from the skies,  
And as the swans take flight my soul  
Spreads the white pinions of its eyes.







## CONTACTS

The sense of contact!

Darkness lies between your fingers!

The cries of brazen instruments in a tem-  
pest!

The music of organs in the sunlight!

All the flocks of the soul in the depths of a  
night of eclipse!

All the salt of the sea on the grass of the  
meadows!

And the blaze of blue lightning on every  
horizon!

(Have pity on this human sense!)

But O these sadder, wearier contacts!

O the touch of your poor moist hands!

I hear your pure fingers as they glide be-  
tween mine,



## Contacts

And flocks of lambs are departing by moon-  
light  
Along the banks of a misty river.

I can remember all the hands that have  
touched my hands,  
And again I see all that was protected by  
those hands,  
And I see to-day what I was, protected by  
those cool hands.  
I was often the beggar who gnaws his crust  
on the steps of a throne.

I was sometimes the diver, who no longer  
can evade the surging waters!  
I was often a whole people no longer able  
to escape from the town!  
And some hands were like a convent with-  
out a garden!  
And some confined me like a group of in-  
valids in a glass-house on a rainy day!



## Contacts

Until other cooler hands should come to set  
the doors ajar,  
And sprinkle a little water upon the  
threshold!

O, I have known strange contacts,  
And here they surround me forever!  
Some were wont to give alms on a day of  
sunshine,

Some gathered a harvest in the depths of a  
cavern,  
And the music of mountebanks was heard  
outside the prison.  
There were wax-work figures in the summer  
woods,  
And elsewhere the moon had swept the  
whole oasis,  
And at times I found a virgin, flushed and  
sweating, in a grotto of ice!



## Contacts

Pity these strange hands!

These hands contain the secrets of all the  
kings!

Pity these hands too pale!

They seem to have emerged from the caverns  
of the moon!

They are worn with spinning threads from  
the distaffs of fountains!

Pity these hands, too white, too moist!

They are like princesses that slumber at  
noon all the summer through.

Avoid these hard, harsh hands!

They seem to have issued from the rocks!

But pity these cold hands!

I see a heart bleeding under ribs of ice!

And O, have pity on these evil hands,

For these have poisoned the springs!

They have set young cygnets in a nest of  
hemlock!



## Contacts

I have seen the angels of evil open the gates  
at noon!

Here are only madmen on a pestilent river!  
Here are black sheep only in starless pas-  
tures!

And lambs hasting away to graze in dark-  
ness!

But O these cool faithful hands!

They come to offer ripe fruits to the dying!

They bring clear cold water in their palms!

They water the battlefields with milk!

They have surely come from wonderful and  
eternally virgin forests!







M

## NIGHT

My soul is sick at the end of all,  
Sick and sad, being weary too,  
Weary of being so vain, so vain,  
Weary and sad at the end of all,  
And O I long for the touch of you!

I long for your hands upon my face;  
Snow-cold as spirits they will be;  
I wait until they bring the ring.  
I wait for their coolness over my face  
Like a treasure deep in the sea.

I wait to know their healing spell,  
Lest in the desolate sun I die,  
So that I die not out in the sun;  
O bathe mine eyes and make them well,  
Where things unhappy slumbering lie.



## Night

Where many swans upon the sea,  
Swans that wander over the sea,  
Stretch forth their mournful throats in  
vain;  
In wintry gardens by the sea  
Sick men pluck roses in their pain.

I long for your hands upon my face;  
Snow-cold as spirits they will be,  
And soothe my aching sight, alas!  
My vision like the withered grass  
Where listless lambs irresolute pass!



FIFTEEN SONGS







## Fifteen Songs

### I

She chained her in a cavern frore;  
She set a sign upon the door.  
The key into the ocean fell:  
The maid forgot the lamp as well.

She waited for the days of spring;  
Year by year did seven die,  
And every year one passed her by.

She waited thro' the winter's cold,  
And her tresses, waiting too,  
Recalled the light that once they knew.

They sought the light, they found it out,  
Crept thro' the rocks and round about,  
And lit the rocks with all their gold.

He comes at eve that passed of old;  
Amazéd at the wondrous sight,  
He does not dare approach the light.



## Fifteen Songs

He deems it is a mystic sign,  
Or else a spring that gushes gold,  
Or angels at their sport divine:  
He turns, and passes as of old.



## Fifteen Songs

### II

If he one day come again,  
What shall then be said?  
—Say that one awaited him,  
Always, that is dead.

Ay, but if he ask me more,  
Yet know me not again?  
—Speak as any sister might,  
Lest he be in pain.

If he ask where you are gone,  
What shall I reply?  
—Give him then my golden ring,  
Make him no reply.

If he ask me why the hall  
Shows a silent floor?  
—Show him then the smouldered lamp  
And the open door.



## Fifteen Songs

If he ask me of the hour  
When you fell asleep?  
—Tell him, tell him that I smiled  
Lest my love should weep.



## Fifteen Songs

### III

Three little maids they have done to death,  
To see what hid within their hearts.

The first little heart was full of bliss,  
And lo, wherever its blood might run,  
Three serpents hissed till three years were  
done.

The second was full of gentlehood,  
And lo, wherever its blood might run  
Three lambs that fed till three years were  
done.

The third was full of pain and woe,  
And lo, wherever the red blood crept  
Archangels three their vigil kept.







## Fifteen Songs

### IV

Maidens with bounden eyes

(O loose the scarves of gold!)—

Maidens with bounden eyes,

They sought their destinies.

At noon they opened wide

(O keep the scarves of gold!)—

At noon they opened wide

The palace of the plain:

There they greeted life

(Bind close the scarves of gold!)—

There they greeted life,

And turned them back again.







## Fifteen Songs

### V

The three blind sisters,  
(Hope is not cold)  
The three blind sisters  
Light their lamps of gold.

Up the tower go they,  
(They and you and we)  
Up the tower go they  
To wait the seventh day.

Ah, saith one, turning,  
(Still let us hope)  
Ah, saith one, turning,  
I hear our lamps burning. . . .

Ah, the second saith,  
(They and you and we)  
Ah, the second saith,  
'Tis the king's tread. . . .



## Fifteen Songs

Nay, the holiest saith,  
(Still let us hope)  
Nay, the holiest saith,  
But our light is dead.



## Fifteen Songs

### VI

There came one here to say,  
(O child, I am afraid!)  
There came one here to say  
'Twas time to haste away. . . .

A burning lamp I bore,  
(O child, I am afraid!)  
A burning lamp I bore,  
And went upon my way!

At the first door,  
(O child, I am afraid!)  
At the first door  
The flame shook sore. . . .

Then, at the second,  
(O child, I am afraid!)  
Then, at the second,  
The flame spoke and beckoned. . . .



## Fifteen Songs

The third door is wide,  
(O child, but this is fear!)  
The third door is wide,  
And the flame has died!



## Fifteen Songs

### VII

Orlamonde had seven daughters:

When the fairy died  
The seven maids, the seven daughters,  
Sought to win outside.

Then they lit their seven lamps;  
Through all the towers they sought;  
They opened full four hundred chambers;  
The day, they found it not.

They came to the echoing caverns deep;  
Down, tho' the air was cold,  
They went, and in a stubborn door  
Found a key of gold.

They see the ocean through the chinks;  
They fear to die outside;  
They beat on the unmoving door  
They dare not open wide.







## Fifteen Songs

### VIII

She had three crowns of gold:  
To whom did she give the three?

One she gave to her parents dear,  
And they have bought three reeds of gold,  
And kept her till the spring was near.

And one to those that loved her well:  
And they have bought three nets of gold,  
And kept her till the autumn fell.

And one she gave to those she bore,  
And they have bought three gyves of iron,  
To chain her till the winter's o'er.







## Fifteen Songs

### IX

Toward the castle she made her way,  
(Hardly yet was the sun on the sea)  
Toward the castle she made her way;  
Knight looked at knight and looked away;  
The women had never a word to say.

She came to rest before the door,  
(Hardly yet was the sun on the sea)  
She came to rest before the door;  
They heard the queen as she paced the  
    floor,  
And the king that asked her what would  
    she.

“What do you seek, O where do you go?  
(Have a care, it is hard to see)  
What do you seek, O where do you go?  
Doth one await you there below?”  
But never a word, a word spake she.



## Fifteen Songs

Down she went to the one unknown,  
(Have a care, it is hard to see)  
Down she went to the one unknown,  
And round the queen her arms were  
    thrown;  
Never a word did either say;  
Without a word they went their way.

The king wept by the open door,  
(Have a care, it is hard to see)  
The king wept by the open door;  
They heard the footsteps of the queen,  
And the fall of the leaves where she had  
    been.



## Fifteen Songs

### X

Her lover went his way,  
(I heard the gate)  
Her lover went his way,  
Yet she was gay.

When he came again,  
(I heard the lamp)  
When he came again,  
Another made the twain.

And the dead I met,  
(I heard her spirit cry)  
And the dead I met,  
She who waits him yet.







## Fifteen Songs

### XI

Mother, mother, do you not hear?  
Mother, they come; there is news to tell!  
—Give me your hands, my daughter dear:  
'Tis but a ship that saileth well.

Mother dear, have a care, give heed!  
—They go, my daughter, away they speed.  
Mother, the danger is sore, alas!  
—Child, my child, it will quickly pass.

Mother, mother, She draweth near!  
—It is down in the harbour, daughter dear.  
Mother, mother, She opens the door!  
—Child, they go, to return no more.

Mother, She enters! I am afraid!  
—Child, they now have the anchor  
weighed.

Mother, I hear Her speaking low.  
—Child, my child, it is they that go.



## Fifteen Songs

Mother, She makes the stars go dark!  
—Child, 'tis the sails of a shadowy bark.  
Mother, She knocks at the casement still!  
—Child, maybe it is fastened ill. . . .

Mother, mother, my sight grows dim. . . .  
—Child, they sail for the open sea.  
On every hand I can hear but Him. . . .  
—O child, what is it, and who is He?



## Fifteen Songs

### XII

Now your lamps are all alight,  
The sun's in the garden on every side—  
Now your lamps are all alight;  
The sun through every chink is bright:  
Open the doors on the garden wide!

The keys of the doors are lost one and all,  
We must be patient whate'er befall;  
The keys they fell from the tower on high.  
We must be patient whate'er befall,  
Wait and wait as the days go by.

The days to be will open the doors.  
The keys are safe in the forest wide.  
The forest blazes on every side;  
The light of the dying leafage pours  
Blazing bright beneath the doors.



## Fifteen Songs

The days to be already ail,  
The days to be they fear and fail,  
The days to be will never come;  
For day by day will die as we,  
Even as we, in this our tomb.



## Fifteen Songs

### XIII

Sisters, sisters, thirty years  
I sought where he might be;  
Thirty years I sought for him:  
Never did I see.

Thirty years the way I trod;  
Long the road and hot;  
Sisters, he was everywhere,  
He who yet is not.

Sisters, sad the hour and late.  
My sandal's thongs unpick.  
Even as I the evening dies,  
And my soul is sick.

You whose years are seventeen,  
Forth and seek him too;  
Sisters, sisters, take my staff,  
Seek the whole world through.







## Fifteen Songs

### XIV

There were three sisters fain to die!  
Her crown of gold each putteth on,  
And forth to seek their death they're gone.

They wandered to the forest forth:  
"Give us our death, O forest old,  
For here are our three crowns of gold."

The forest broke into a smile,  
And kisses gave to each twice twain,  
That showed them all the future plain.

There were three sisters fain to die:  
They wandered forth to seek the sea:  
They found it after summers three.

"Give us our death, thou ocean old,  
For here are our three crowns of gold."

Then the ocean began to weep:  
Three hundred kisses it gave the three,  
And all the past was plain to see.



## Fifteen Songs

There were three sisters fain to die:  
To find the city they sought awhile;  
They found it midmost of an isle.

“Give us our death, thou city old,  
For here are our three crowns of gold.”

The city opened then and there,  
And covered them with kisses dear  
That showed them all the present clear.



## Fifteen Songs

### XV

#### CANTICLE OF THE VIRGIN IN "SISTER BEATRICE"<sup>1</sup>

I hold, to every sin,  
    To every soul that weeps,  
My hands with pardon filled  
    Out of the starry deeps.

No sin is there that lives  
    When love hath vigil kept;  
No soul is there that mourns  
    When love but once hath wept.

And tho' on many paths  
    Of earth love lose its way,  
Its tears will find me out  
    And shall not go astray.

<sup>1</sup>First published in "Sister Beatrice," the English version of which, by the present translator, was published, with "Ardiane and Barbe Bleue," by the present publishers, in 1902.











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