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SELECTED POEMS

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BY

LADY MARGARET SACKVILLE

LONDON

CONSTABLE & COMPANY, LTD.

1919

PR

6037

S118A17

1919

PREFACE

LADY MARGARET SACKVILLE is the best in my opinion of our English poetesses, at least of the younger generation. Certainly she is among the most interesting. She has written verse since she was six years old, and it has always been good verse. Though misled for a while into the blind alley of blank verse, the common snare of young and ambitious writers of a dozen years ago, she has always emerged into the daylight of sound rhyme, metre and melody, the three essentials in our English tradition, for blank verse, though it may be poetry, is not really verse at all, even in master hands, say, rather a dignified kind of prose pompous in recitation and for common reading, dull.

It is difficult to forecast what the future of English poetry will be. At the present moment it is going through a period of delirium, in harmony with the war-fever which has overspread the western world, and we must wait for really good

original work until white mankind shall have regained its normal sanity. This will return to us with the other good things we are doing without under administrative order. But the fever will not last for ever, and we shall probably see repeated what happened at the end of the Napoleonic wars in France and Germany and among ourselves, an era of intellectual new birth caused by its long suppression under military rule, and which reminded contemporaries of the wealth of spring herbage which is seen where fire has devastated a mountain side, clothing it in astonishing new green and illustrated by such splendored flowers of originality, especially in vanquished France, as Europe had not witnessed since the days of the Pleiad, a sudden adornment which overgrew the military disasters and invaded every region of art and established a supreme ideality compensating a sad world for the happinesses lost. We may look for something analogous to this among ourselves when the war shall have cast its crude barbarities on the scrap heap of vain glory and shall have settled down to its ancient bourgeois way of peace, prosperity and the romance of beauty. Let us in the meanwhile be thankful for what remains to us of the classic tradition in form and dignity which Lady Margaret, more than any other of our young writers adheres to, even where she yields to the war-like emotion

of the hour, in her choice of subject. Her war poems are not mere experiments in realism, but genuine laments for the pity of such things, the ugliness of rage and the waste of what is noblest. Her volume, two years ago, *A Pageant of War* gave voice to these finer influences and this present collection renews it. The glories of war as Lady Margaret Sackville sees them are the glories not of victory but of its final disappearance from the possibilities of human folly, and so, I doubt not, we shall all regard them before many years, perhaps months are over, which may God grant with much else of urgently needed wisdom in an unwise world.

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT.



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SELECTED POEMS



άλίστονος

“We will gather branches of myrtle and pluck
dreams from the fast-fading aromatic leaves.”

WHAT dreams are these which from the myrtle
stem

And the crushed leaves arise?

What shining host of fragrant memories?

Let us bend our heads and take our fill of them,
Here where the pale verge of enchanted seas
Meets the faint luminous skies.

Oh! scent which stabs sharp as the sea's salt breath
Yet with the sweetness of all earth in it;

Is it not even as the curling smoke
Which wrought a trance of ecstasy like death,
When once in Delphi the white flame was lit
And the god stirred and spoke?

That flame has turned to perfume; all that was
In those lost years divine,
The tragic splendour and unslumbering woe,

The passion and delight and triumph has
 Crushed itself in the myrtle and the vine
 That the new days may know.

Though all forget, though all the earth forget,
 Still the wise myrtle doth remember : grief
 For the past day like ever falling dew
 Has kept its branches and frail blossoms wet,
 Has stored with life unfading every leaf
 Which Daphne changed into.

.
 Thou hearest too. Hast thou not seen each face
 Which the grave myrtle's haunted scents
 surround?
 Thy feet pursue the vision and afar
 Beyond our hesitating days can pace
 Lonely upon that solemn, holy ground
 Where the immortals are.

PRELUDE.

PAUSE for a little, Summer, and forget
How few the hours 'twixt sunrise and sunset ;
How fugitive thy kingdom, and how soon
Thy crescent swells to the gold harvest moon ;
And how with faded flowers are strewn thy ways—
Grant us one perfect day of all thy days!
Golden, as only thou canst well devise,
Coloured and sumptuous as peacocks' eyes :
A day of unstained lustre, without fleck,
Like a pearl hung round Aphrodite's neck,
That we may, peradventure, crush therefrom
The essence of thy beauty : sun and storm
And shadow and wild scents—all palpitating
For the hour only. Lo! thou art a thing
Pagan and unremembering. For a while
Charge us with the full magic of thy smile,
And in some haunted place, where the full stream
Murmurs and laughs like music in a dream,
Through ferns, and noiseless over the green earth
slips,
Sit mocking us, thy pipes pressed to thy lips,

Those perverse pipes which lure men's feet to stray
From the ancient safety of the straight highway,
To worship on some perilous hillside
That loveliness which perished when Pan died.

—O Summer! grant to us our full desire!

A flame of inextinguishable fire,
Which shall not wane though all life's fervours wane ;
A joy in each new joy reborn again ;
Foam of far seas ; a flower snatched from the wreath
Of a nymph dancing ; song which lurks beneath
The thickest woods' most secret canopies :
These things would we have, Summer, and more
 than these,
And a full draught of wine from thy wine-press
To comfort us, pilgrims of the wilderness.

We who entreat thee are the children of
Fire and delight and ecstasy and love,
Whose feet most fatally the roads have drawn
Ever outwards and away and ever on.
And we have laughter on our lips and pride
And song and passion—yet the world is wide!
And we have wisdom—yet we may not rest!
Our hearts are leaves the wind drives East and
 West ;
Exiles from some lost Paradise, we claim

As bearers and inheritors of the flame
Which in the heart of the garden burns, to break
Our souls up as we will for our dream's sake.
Gipsies of the wide earth, lonely and glad,
Whom one brief, soaring hour of life gone mad
With its own loveliness, suffices still :
Kings are we or beggars, as you will—
We ask nor praise nor pity.

Yet, behold!

We tireless seekers after fairy gold,
Grown weary for a little, pray to thee,
Summer, thou gossamer divinity,
That thou, one gracious gift for which we long,
Wilt grant to us, poor suppliants of song!
Grant us one day of roses—all the scent
Of roses—fragrant as Love's sacrament.
Something equal to our dream of love,
Who have not loved, save only in dreams.

Enough!

Let us be still a little, though the road,
The road of our desire is still untrod.—
Ah! let us rest to-day, to-morrow is
Much less than the wind's whisper in the trees ;
Soon our mad hearts will urge us forth again
Shelterless, beneath the sun and rain,
And faces, which the wind stings mockingly,
Turned, full of mirth and longing towards the sea!

A PROPHECY.

FIRE shall absolve thee. Thy immense delays,
Thy silent, bleak, unmemorable days,
All thy waste words, thy passions come to naught,
The pauses and limitations of thy thought,
Shall in one blast of windy rapture, glow
Such a flame, as only those altars know
Which the very god's secret, still, silent breath
Touches and the dark ashes leap from death.
So thy feet faltering, and thy hands which long
Have vainly sought and thy heart athirst for
 song,
Shall meet at last in some sequestered place
Thy dream, thy dream living and face to face!
Yea, and beside thy dream no memory
Nor mark of all thy life left upon thee,
Nor proof that thou hast been save sprung from
 this
Dream, a new song wherein thy whole soul is ;
Wherefrom, re-born, thou shalt again arise
Swift on the track of finer ecstasies.

These are thy deaths and births—this is thy life ;
All else to thee is little more than strife .
Of winds, or phantoms urging their dim flight
Through the forlorn, lost solitudes of night.

“QUANDO VENIRET VER MEUM?”

Now over the brown hill
 Spring rises like a star,
And scatters with glad will
Her treasure near and far,
And Earth, Spring's pensioner,
 Joins lightly in a maze of dances,
Since the cold, long-sleeping blood of her
 Has turned to wine beneath the Sun's kind
 glances,
O! festal, royal Sun
 Of Spring's nativity,
Hast thou of all thy robes of joy not one
 For me, for me?

I have waited over long
 In many a shadowed place,
For (ah!) once heard—a song,
 And (ah!) once seen—a face ;
Once in a dream, but swift
 Night's river chill and gray

Carried both in a drift
Of drowning dreams away :—
Outward, onward borne
On that chill, hurrying stream
Until far off in the leaping sea of morn
I lost my dream.

My Spring, my Dream, most rare!
When shall I find thee, when?
This spring is not so fair
She is for all men.—
This spring goes with the wind,
She is young, she is glad,
Sweet but of common-kind,
Mine moves like a Queen clad ;
Not in any secret way
Shall ye find her or know
In what soft paths of fallen flowers to-day
Her white feet go.

I am so sick for her
Who wait till she shall pass,
In shining robes like lily-leaves astir,
Or twilight on the grass.
Her hands are cool like deep
Water on a summer's eve ;
In her eyes, innocent as sleep,
No memories awake or grieve.—

I have searched the house of Day, the house of
Night,

And found no place at all where she might be :—
When shall my Spring come, when shall my
Delight

Come, come to me?

THE RUNAWAY.

I'VE lost my favourite dream, good lack!

She was so swift, I might not hold her!

I run hot-footed on her track,

But she has wings on either shoulder,

She fled from me last Spring,

And now the Summer's done :

Out upon the crafty thing!—

She has wings and I have none.

BALLADE OF THE JOURNEY'S END.

THOSE far fair lands our feet have trod,
The journey that was never done,
The dreams that followed us golden shod,
All mad adventure 'neath the sun ;—
Ships in the trough of a waste sea spun,
The treasures of outlawed kings,
And the white walls of Babylon ;—
Ah! woe is me for all these things!

Your staff and scrip are laid aside
And all my golden minstrelsy ;
We sail no more at the turn of the tide
In a captured vessel out to sea.
Oh! fallen and sick and tired are we!
Sleek sloth about us twines and clings,
And where is the sword that should set us free?
Ah! woe is me for all these things!

The street lamps in a dreary line
Gaze through the dusk with venomous eyes ;

We stir the fire and pour the wine,
For we have done with enterprise.
The anxious town about us lies ;
Another song the shrill wind sings
Than that which startled the morning skies.—
Ah! woe is me for all these things!

ENVOI.

A sudden gust and a rattle of rain,
And a thought which leaps in the heart and
stings ;
Draw the curtains close round the window pane!—
Ah! woe is me for all these things!

LINES.

ASSOUAN, 1913.

TREAD softly oh! my dancing feet,
Lest your untimely gladness stir
Dust of forgotten men who find death sweet
At rest within their sepulchre!

WEARY-WELL.

THERE is no mirror where I dwell,
And I was fain to see
From the smooth depths of Weary-well
My face smile back at me.

But now if I should stoop to gaze
Where the still water lies,
I could not even see my face
For the tears within my eyes!

INVITATION AU REPOS.

No longer heed the restless seas
Calling at the fall of night :
Nor let the perfume-laden breeze,
Soft, treacherous and sweet, invite
You forth : there is no worth in these.
All deceptive cadences
Of sea and wind and day and night
Shut from your ears. For who may know
Any lasting certitude
Who follows where the sea-winds go
East and West, in fickle mood?
But rather when the fire is lit
And the warm curtains closely drawn,
Cheerfully remain by it!
The wild night and wilder dawn,
And clamour of the outcast sea,
And lights of the slow-passing ships,
These shall form your reverie ;
Or when the sea-fog with cold lips
Presses upon the window pane,

Brooding closely on cold wings,
This and the sharp sound of rain
Shall teach you unfamiliar things.
Ah! better thus in dreams to range!
All far cities are less strange,
Less wondrous than your dream. Abide
Therefore with your dream content!
For it can spread pinions as wide
As any earthly continent.—
Friend, stir no more from the fireside!

FÊTE GALANTE : ADIEU.

LET all be put away—all garments fringed and
fine,

Rouge, rapiers, powder, frills, the mouche of
Columbine,

All gallant, shining things ; the day grows chill ;
depart

Before the last gay love has withered in your heart ;
Before the wind-swept skies have hurled their
torrents down.

Is there any shelter anywhere outside the town ?

There is no shelter—see, the woods are wringing
wet,

And you have lost the buckle from your shoe,
Pierrette!

Time to go home at last, put all your gauds away.
Songs fail, old age, ah! me, will it be like to-day,
A mockery of broken strings and tarnished gold?—
The woods are wringing wet. Adieu. We have
grown old.

VALE.

Go forth ; the snow
So fast upon thy track
Shall fall, no man may know
Whether thou goest on
Or turnest back.

The cold winds over thee
Snowing shall hide
Thy pathway ; not the sea
Shall so efface all footprints from the sand
With the incoming tide.

But when at last
Glad early morning like an anthem thrills
The skies, how wilt thou lie? In sleep locked fast
In a warm bed, or where the snow drifts deep
Out there among the hills?

THE GHOST.

“OH! who is this that calls through the grey rain
to me?”—

“Oh! it's I you loved, and loved too well, and I've
been drowned at sea.”

“But if it's you I loved so well, and if it's you I lost,
You who came not as a living man, why come you
now as a ghost?”

“Oh! proud and foolish was my heart, but now my
pride is done,
I'm but a weary waif, driven through the lone seas,
alone.”—

“Oh! many's the time, day out, day in, I called in
vain to you,
Now you may knock at my closed door: I shall not
let you through.”

“Is there no shelter then for me?” “Fast bolted
is the door.”

“And is your heart all dead to me?” “Dead as
was yours before.”

Comfort you as best you may, drift seaward with
the rain—

The heart which died for a living man, wakes not
for the dead again! ”

THE WIND IN THE GARDEN.

WIND of the sea-way,
Wet Wind, drenched with spray!
 Thou hast surely swept and lingered
 Through the paths of an old garden,
 Loitered, spied there, beyond pardon!
Where my thoughts, my thoughts too, stray,
 When the twilight, chilly-fingered,
Turns the red to grey.

These are tears,
Not spray upon thy pinions.
Tears, tears—
Thou pilgrim from the sea's august dominions,
Why didst thou leave
Those vexèd ways to creep
Into a garden given over to sleep,
Freed from the long obsession
And tyranny of the unavailing years?
Intruder! thus to take possession
Of the secrets therein hidden

And a guest unbidden,
To sally forth with wings whereon
Gleam my tears, each one a gem—
Thou art drenched with them.
Begone, begone!
This garden made for my sad thoughts alone
I will not share with thee.
—Not for thy pleasure are these wild ways sown,—
Sea-thief, gaunt Wind, return unto thy sea!

THE APPLE.

EVE, smiling, plucked the apple, then
Laughed, sighed—and tasted it again:
“Strange such a pleasant, juicy thing
On a forbidden tree should spring!”

But had she seen with clearer eyes,
Or had the serpent been less wise,
She'd scarce have shown such little wit
As to let Adam taste of it!

OH! MY DEAR!

THE wind has scattered the leaves down
And made a path so bright and clean,
For some high lord to tread thereon,
Or for Lightfoot, the fairy Queen.
Or—for you!
No, my dear, no.—
And yet it might be so,
If dreams came true!

My eyes have grown so bitter-bright
I could see you a mile away,
Any time by day or night,
Oh! will you never come this way?
You I'm wearying for,
Day out, day in;
Oh, why can't I just rise and open wide the door,
And drag you in!

I know you'll never come, and yet
Like a puzzled ghost am I

Who must have wrought some crime, for it
Safe and sleeping cannot lie.

Oh! my dear,
Here's Autumn and the fall,
And the ending of the year.—
Is it then the end of all?

If the roads are light to you,
They are very heavy for my feet.
I think that I will die and forget and forget you,
And not care though we never meet.

Oh! my dear—
I wish that you were dead,
I wish that you were dead and loving me and
here,
With the broken earth for your bed!

My own dear—
And never a word to be said ;
I wish that you were dead and lying very near
My heart a pillow for your head!

A DIRGE.

LET not around her brows be set
Earth's golden blossoms for a coronet.
For she was of the sea and not of earth :
Grey waters gave her birth.
And she who sleeps thus soundly shall become
Grey mist and elemental foam.
Pluck not for her rich blooms whose passionate
 scent
Might stab her soul with waking discontent.
Rather those petals by light winds blown down
From the waves' crest should be her crown.
—Ah! me, what salt, faint, savourless perfume
 stirs
Round these fast-fading flowers of hers!

ROMANCE.

COME, come to me!
I am the Sea,
I am all that can never be ;
The whirling wave, the steady light
Of ships slow sailing out into the night ;
Wind, wave and leaping spray,
And the lands which are very far away ;
Every rainbow-circled shore,
Where you may stay
A night and a day,
No more!
I kiss your eyes and leave them blind ;
I am around you and above ;
I am the road that lies before,
And behind ;
I am Morning—I am Love!
I shake my gleaming
My sun-splashed wings,
Whilst you lie dreaming
Of other things.

The sun shakes your grating,
The wind's at the door ;
Oh! ride forth for all the world is waiting
And come back no more!

Am I not fair
With my wishing cap on my gold hair?
Am I not fleet
Who have feathered shoulders and winged feet?
Listen! listen! have you heard
Such a song ever,
As now beneath the wandering moon I sing?
Each wild-winged bird
Whose throat is mad with Spring,
Has sought to learn it and might never!
Listen! wheresoe'er I pass
Laughter stirs among the grass,
And the withered tree,
Breaks into leaf,
And Grief,
Smiles through heavy eyes, tear-laden,
And becomes my waiting-maiden,
Serving me!

I am the sheath, I am the sword,
And I am flame: I set alight
Cities that men may make
Songs of that burning for my sake,

And yield their souls up at a word.
It may be I shall turn my head
And with my eyes' flash strike you dead,
What matters it?
You will have lived as only they
Who do my bidding may.
Of what avail to sit
In comfort ease and slow decay,
Watching the grey ash, bit by bit,
Crumble away?
What care though I destroy
Who have re-christened Death and called him Joy,
And have taught Laughter
To the sharp-visaged, horny-fingered Fates.—
Oh! if I lead you dancing through Hell's gates
What matter what comes after?

Come, come to me!
I am the moon, I am the sea ;
I am every ship that sails
Trackless waters, knowing not
Where she steers.
I am the light which never fails ;
I am a golden knot
Binding together the loose years.
I sparkle and run
Like ice in the moonlight, like frost in the sun,
And when you have found me, then life has begun.

Therefore be bold,
Of my hand take hold,
And swing in the track of my garment's fold!
Cling to me, follow me, set your heart free ;
I am all that can never be,
A song, a spell, a key of gold,
Which can unlock the earth and the sea :—
Come, come, oh! come with me!

DRAMATIC POEMS.

THE FLIGHT.

FOLLOWING! Following!
I heard the horse-hoofs rise and ring
And rise and fall again and beat,
And strike the sand; they had winged feet
Those horses! I could almost hear
—As it seemed—a rush of wings draw near,
Demons with great pinions spread
To fall on me. On, on I sped;
On I sped, swift as air,
The wind tangled in my hair
Dragged me forwards. I kept pace
With the wind. So fierce a race
'Twixt death and life was never run.
I cried: “Now surely Death has won!”
And yet I did not die.—

Red sand,
Burning hot on either hand,
And the sun angry and red
Fixed just above my head,
Motionless in the still sky;

There was no man in all the world save I,
Nor sound, save the following
Horse-hoofs' sharp rise and swing,
And a whirr as of great wings behind
Me dragged in the wake of the wind,
With the whole world to ride in—grown
Empty save for us alone,
They who followed, I who fled!

The steady sun above my head
Pressed me down, down, down. The sun
And my enemies were one,
Leagued together for my defeat ;
Earth seemed sodden through with heat,
Through and through ; yet I rode on.

Whilst red, like madness, the sun shone.

Or like a flame up-blown from Hell.
My horse stumbled, almost fell,
I was riding with so slack a rein,
Since life seemed hardly worth the strain,
Of this interminable flight.
“At least I shall be dead by night”
I thought—and renewed the flight again.

When suddenly how did it chance?
I must have fallen into a trance,

Time had slipped from me like a sheath,
Leaving the spirit, crushed beneath
Long dominion, at last free
In a moment from all memory,
Since nothing I remember more
Till leapt up bright as flame before
My eyes, there at my feet, my own
Whitewalled, battlemented town!
Ah! me how coldly, strangely gleamed
The shining spires, the walls which seemed
A mirage, impossible as heaven,
To a soul beyond all hope forgiven!
So I pressed on—whilst life began
To fade from me and the tears ran
Down my cheeks like fire, as I
Heard the following horse-hoofs die
Slowly, slowly away and cease,
And I stood in the shadow of my trees,
And through the high-arched doorway passed
And swooning over the threshold cast
My body down—safe, safe at last!

SYRINX.

I AM Syrinx : I am she who when the gold,
Sun over the grey mountain burns awake,
Rises and drives the flock from the safe fold ;

And all day long hidden in the green brake
Watches ; or where the wood's heart grows so
still
That the least tremor of small leaves ashake,

Seems somehow a foreboding of strange ill.—
And I am she who gleans the scattered wheat,
And prunes the vine on the steep side of the hill.

I follow the white morning on swift feet,
I slumber in the thicket at mid-noon,
The racing wind bears me along with it.

And, for the gods' delight, under the moon
I dance, dance and laugh to feel my hot
Heart leaping frenzied to the wild pipes' tune.

But as for Love, truly I know him not,
I have passionately turned my lips therefrom,
And from that fate the careless gods allot

To woman. Love who has taken the world by
storm,
For all his fury of blind wind and flood,
Has had no power to change me or deform.

For the chill mountain-streams are in my blood,
And pale, phantasmal fires of dawn, twilight,
Shadow and dew are all my maidenhood.

And as the setting sun on the cold, white,
Snow-braided, frozen peak rests his fierce head,
Then goes out in a thin trail of light ;

So Love, leaning upon my heart, instead
Of flame finds only snow and falls asleep
Quietly like a child on a soft bed ;

And lies there forgetting the broad sweep
At noon-tide of his sudden, blazing wings,
Which thought my narrow life to over-leap ;

Not knowing me tameless as the breeze which
clings
Round Summer's golden limbs when she moves clad
In music, wonderfully, where the pine-branch
swings.

Therefore what thing 'is this which makes me
mad,

So that no laughter of the rose-crowned year
Shall evermore rejoice me or leave glad

My heart which now has a sick core of fear?

I am Syrinx : a strange doom is over me

Like a cloud, hanging about me everywhere :

Yea, listen and marvel how such things may be!

I am bewildered and all overcast

As a spent swimmer struck sideways by the sea.

For once, as through the deep, cool wood I passed

Singing, for it was June, and ah, June goes!

And only song may capture and bind her fast ;

I paused : there was no stir among the close

Boughs ; for the heat nothing alive might breathe,

And the least wind swooned backward as it rose.

Outside the sick earth seemed to burn and seethe

Like molten metal in a pot. I saw

The sun, a wild beast with sharp shining teeth,

Eagerly search the barren land and draw

What of green might still be left therein,

To cool the rage of his insatiate maw.

Yet, through the leaves, his rays on my white skin
Played harmless and I sang, sang till a sound
Fell on my ears and made me reel and spin.

Low laughter welling lightly from the ground
Like water, mocking, sweet, and crystalline
As though up-bubbling from earth's heart profound.

And in it something bestial and divine,
So that my senses hearing it were stirred,
Quickened and overcome, as though with wine ;

And motionless I stood even as a bird
Beneath a snake's eye ; then when life began
To fail within me, once again I heard

That laughter and saw, crouched there before me,—
Pan!

The very shepherd and godhead of our hills
Whom I have feared more than the Cyprian.

Since his is the sharp secret breath which kills
At nightfall, and he is lord of death and birth,
And the year wanes and waxes as he wills.

Yea, very spirit is he and heart of earth,
And cruel as untempered rain and sun,
In those sick seasons when all falls to dearth.

And there shall none resist him, nay not one
On whom rest the eyes of his desire :
Wherefore am I too ruined and undone ;

For though a little I may escape his fire,
Since he subtle and wise let me depart
That morning, helpless am I though I fly higher

Than the eagle, yea or press the waves apart,
—The cold, dark, clean, indifferent sea-waves—
Nay, though I shelter in the whirlwind's heart,

Pan, Pan shall have at last the thing he craves,
Me : and my shadowy days must sink to naught,
Falling earthward like shed leaves when the wind
 raves.

Yet might these weary toils wherein I am caught
Break, break! Would that I might become
A shadow or fast fading flower wrought

From day and night, or sunshine or blown foam
Ere this thing chanced, or a clear drop of rain
New scattered, or music suddenly fallen dumb ;

A note of music by its own breath slain,
Blown tenderly from the frail heart of a reed
Whereof the singing shepherd lads are fain,

Who with strong, careless hands from all toil freed,
Pluck joy, pure joy, green-growing from the soil,
And turn and twist and shape it to their need.

If this might be! If some kind god would foil
The inexorable purpose of Pan's lust,
Having pity on my swift youth's recoil ;

My frugal, kindly, passionless days which must
Perish, perish like wild wood-berries,
By sharp-hoofed goat-feet trampled all to dust.

If they would sigh towards me, bidding me cease,
Changing into white sap my willing blood,
And granting me the calm of growing trees,

And of the reeds springing in the full flood ;
Being myself portion and part of these,
Surely, beyond all longing, it were good!

I am Syrinx : I am afraid : I would have peace.

THE LION-GODDESS.

My feet were scorched ; the white-hot stones forth
shone

In the white, beating sunlight, like the scales
Of a great dragon, and on every stone
Seemed lingering still unquenched the fiery trails
Of recent sacrifice ; death everywhere

Lurked, yet neither death nor life in all the place
Stirred, nor living nor dead thing showed there
Save the wind leaping suddenly in my face.

Stone, stone was all about me, columns hurled
Up towards the sky as though in anger cast
Forth from the furnace at the heart of the world
By some mad god of chaos. On I passed,
Straight through the outer gateways. All this
white

Stone pressed upon my forehead, savagely,
Like a curse ; stretching out from left to right,
The columns lay, then through them like a sea
Breaking their silence with a roar came sound,
Not very far away. I stumbled on

More eagerly, knowing at last the goal was found,
And my dread pilgrimage of long years done.
This was the shrine of the goddess ; I knew well
The roaring of her lions. Ah! but now
Must my heart fail me? Terribly there fell
The sun's unblinking eye full on my brow,
So that I grasped at shadows for support,
Reeling through the fierce light, whilst still more
near

The lions' roaring from the inner Court,
Came, and I knew not whether 'twas hope or fear
That made my limbs so tremble, yet I knew
Somehow an end had come, and now between
An avenue of carven lions, drew
To that last shrine where in the shadow unseen,
She lurks, the tawny goddess, I must seek
Or die.—I saw the doorway gleam and heard
The voices of the lions behind it, weak
At first, then mighty as the wind which stirred
Echoes through all the temple, then again
Silence. I hastened blindly onwards through
Those shining courtyards of white light ; in vain
To turn now or escape because she knew
My coming and awaited me there. Blood
Leapt before my eyes ; the scent of wine
Made me mad ; I neither paused nor stood,
But passed into the shadow, into the shrine.

THE QUEEN'S CABINET.

IN the Queen's Cabinet
Wayward shadows lurk and lie.
Restless, uneasy the hours fret
Their moments out then droop and die,
As though such weight of heaviness
On passion-laden wings they bore
Such fragrant weight of faint distress
They may not rise, nor any more
Higher than the painted ceiling soar,
Or the deep window's arched recess.

Perfumes hover everywhere ;
The sunbeams, piercing the low pane,
Pour a fierce flood of crimson stain
On floor and wall, but pausing there
Flicker with suddenly startled light ;
(Is it bewilderment or fear?)
Some hidden thing surely, laid bare,
Has dimmed the strength of the sun's
sight ;

Some cloudy memory of night,
Phantom of a fevered brain.
(Is it passion, is it pain?)
Lingers here in day's despite,
Wherewith the morning strives in vain,
Strives with, but may not put to flight.

The panelled walls are overwrought
With curious work of cunning art ;
The swift, illuminating thought
Flashed from the workman's brain and heart,
Has twined a net of twisted gold,
Made rich with infinite device,
Over the walls,—a brave design ;
What subtle hand, wary and bold,
Might thus translate and realize,
Bidding so wonderfully rise
In webs of implicated line,
Those secret forms the mind doth hold,
A visible joy to all men's eyes?
The level floor is fashioned well
With tiles of every shape and hue,
Wherein the fancy may pursue
Colour of flower and of sea-shell ;
So, too, the ceiling nobly planned,
Is wrought by some compelling hand,
Where every glowing shade that is
Mingles in perfect trceries.

The very shadows seem to stir
Frightened and then like ghosts dismayed,
Seek before their hour to fade.
There is no freshness in the air ;
The hot, soft touch and sense of death
Taints with contaminated breath
Each careless wind that enters here,
Nor does night even bring relief
Whose veiled eyes, furtive like a thief
Through the dark curtains peep and peer.

What does the Queen? Her long, white hands,
Her beautiful and subtle face,
Her gold hair braided in soft strands,
Each movement's magical caress,
Her measured speech, where one can trace
An echo from some far off place,
A memory of other lands,
Are laden with a rhythmic grace
Languid and sweet. What does the Queen?
See how the heavy velvet sweeps
Its splendid weight of crimson sheen
Around the body's loveliness,
Deliberate and imperial.
The heavy robe a girdle keeps
Under the bosom, then lets fall
A sudden flood of drapery down ;
The jewels flashing in her crown

Are like bubbles leaping up
To the edge in a wrought cup,
Which flash a moment and then drown.

Who shall say whether on hate or love
Her great eyes brood 'twixt lid and lid,
Or what within their depths lie hid ;
Passion or joy or grief or fear ?
Fathom them not—fear, fear !
Lift not the shadowy veil that lies
Over the secrets of those eyes,
Lest some ambiguous gulf shall be
Stretching beneath,—some dread abyss,
A place of perilous mysteries.
How quietly the lashes move,
Like shadows threatening storm above
The stillness of a tired sea.

This is a palace built for kings,
Compounded of all loveliness.
Watch how the outer walls express
A varied opulence that flings
Careless its beauty to all eyes,
Yet still in meet obedience lies
To incommunicable laws.
The patient stone dissolves and thaws,
Expressing what the thoughts devise.
From balustrade to balustrade

The leaping of the perfect line,
Each light and soaring pinnacle,
The sinuous arches' rise and swell,
And every separate balcony,
Each moulded with some new surprise,
The columns, insolent and free,
Like clear, melodious notes combine
Into one perfect harmony.
So, too, the flowing staircase caught
By sudden inspiration—yea,
As though the mastery of thought
Plied without hands the willing stone,
And the swift spirit wrought alone
Nor knew the body's slow delay :
Each step a soaring miracle
Scales the high places of man's mood
To where in gracious solitude
His best beloved creations dwell.

Like some exotic, perfumed flower,
The palace spreads—each separate room
A petal laden with perfume,
Sheltered from fear of the wind's power ;
And even as moths and butterflies
Live and are glad from hour to hour,
With pinions dipped in splendid dyes,
A never failing pageantry
Of golden ladies and great lords,

Sweep by and pass and pass again ;
And here is pleasure without stain,
Gorgeous garments, jewelled swords,
Laughter and soft instruments,
Love and intoxicating scents,
Delicious music and low words.
Here delight sojourns and drinks up
Each moment from the proffered cup ;
Life is here which knows no bound,
Quick passions and swift gusts of flame,
Dreams that are fair, deeds that are shame.
A sweet bewilderment of sound ;
A fiery day, full of strange light ;
A fierce and shining interval
Between the passing centuries,
Strong to delight, strong to appal ;
A torch tossed up through a dark night ;
All life's delectable vintages,
Sweet to men's mouths, poured forth and lost,
Among the scattered foam flakes tossed
On Time's grey shores by the grey seas.

This is a palace built for kings
Only a king may know how fares
He who by certain secret stairs
Descends, nor whence the stairway springs.
If one should know let him speak not
Lest he too shall lie forgot

Low and lost where such men lie
Far from the kind earth and sky
In a dark, deep, dismal bed.
Does any man envy these dead?
Let him keep peace then and not die.

Ah! think upon such things no more,
Life's gifts are fairer than those of death,
Fruit that is rotten at the core
Is past, and none remembereth.
Better forget, better to be
Wrapped round with mirth and minstrelsy
And that adventurous life re-risen,
Like dawn from out its antique prison.
Ah! the swift flush of changing hues
Through hall and garden sweeping by,
As though the suddenly smitten sky
Let all its rainbow torrents loose
Upon the earth—better to choose
Song, and the ministering of love,
The shining labyrinths thereof,
Is there not here store and enough?
Drink the bright, perishable pain,
Drink for ye die; from fervent springs
Drink till the sweet grow wearisome;
Pause not nor fail; all else is vain.
Be sure the ultimate rest will come.—
This is a palace built for kings.

Here also is a cabinet,
Where even as a jewel set
In curious work of woven gold,
A Queen sits, pale and beautiful.
The sudden rush of fold on fold
Of her robe's crimson fall, the dull,
Gold clasps of a wrought girdle hold.
The glory of her hair's long strands
Burns flame-like where the jewels press.
As though from very weariness
Her eyelids droop and her white hands.
What does the Queen? Sometimes her feet
Move with a quiet, languid tread
Towards a certain panel led,
Which, even as her fingers beat
And grope upon the gold-traced wall,
Gapes with a silent opening.
Surely the swift spring's noiseless fall
Has given to light some precious thing?
Small phials are there wherein flame glows
Each like a delirious gem,
The hidden virtue hid in them
Their marvellous might, this the Queen knows.

Do they, too, know, who wend their way
Radiantly clad 'twixt night and day,
The lady, full of life and fire,
Suddenly faint and fallen wan ;

The heat of infinite desire
Extinguished in a little span ;
The lord and all his fame in love?
Oh, ask no more, it is enough ;
Fear thou the heavy shade that clings,
Like a pall about the room.
What ails thee with thy questionings?
Seek not to probe 'twixt gloom and gloom.
This is a palace built for kings.

BLOIS, 1905.

ORPHEUS AMONG THE SHADES.

ORPHEUS.

AIDONEUS.

PERSEPHONE.

EURYDICE.

THREE SHADES.

SCENE: *Hades.* ORPHEUS stands before the thrones of AIDONEUS and PERSEPHONE. He lays aside his instrument.

ORPHEUS.

So is the song finished.

AIDONEUS.

A grievous thing,
And foolish is this prayer of thine! What profit
Findest thou in all the ways of earth,
Since woefully men live there and lament,
Continually, and fill with tears their days?
Nay, though the seasons quicken and fresh winds
Stir, and though flowers fill the waving fields

With scent, and blue seas turn to fire at dawn,
 All this shall not check one least pang of grief.
 If a man grieve how shall he gather flowers?
 But here is neither sorrow nor desire,
 Only silence folding the spent souls in mist.
 They feel no more, the mist so shuts them in.—
 Wilt thou teach Eurydice again to weep?

PERSEPHONE.

She is the fairest of my hand-maidens.

ORPHEUS.

Give me Eurydice!

AIDONEUS.

Did I not pity
 Her brow and hands, too fragile and too white
 To bear the burdens of the outer world——

PERSEPHONE.

She is the fairest of my hand-maidens:
 I will not part from her. There clings about her
 A faint scent as of Autumn roses. Pale
 And perfumed is she like faint hawthorn blossom;
 Seeing her eyes I think upon the sea,
 The sea which splashes the bright shores of Enna;
 I would she too might taste that pomegranate
 I tasted—taking 'twixt her lips the seed

Which made mine crimson. So might she no
more

Escape nor ever rise to earth again.

I shall not, wherefore then should *she* escape?

My feet will never linger in long grass

Any more, nor tread the sea's brink any more ;

Why should hers therefore? Am I not more than
she?

AIDONEUS.

Thou hearest the will of Persephone? Abstain
From thine audacious prayers and get thee hence,
Where thou must wait till thine appointed hour
Brings thee back hither—thou thyself a shade—
Till then thou shalt not clasp Eurydice.

A SHADE (pressing forward).

I have a lover in the outer world,

I too—I too! I pray thee bid him sorrow

No more for me, since these gray, gradual mists

Have wholly quenched my love. I sorrow not.

ANOTHER SHADE.

O kindly Stranger!—

ANOTHER (pressing in front of the Second).

Nay, but hear my word!

Nay I *will* speak before the spark dies out

Thy music has kindled in my heart—

SECOND SHADE.

And mine.

Oh! search my lover out and say I seek
 Often entrance to his dreams, bid him not shut me
 out,
 Bid him to think of me and I will come.

THIRD SHADE.

My lover has shut me out from all his dreams!

ORPHEUS.

I will die now, so shall our mutual shades
 Intermingle for ever. Thou, Aidoneus,
 Breathe on me and slay me. Make me one
 With her and spare not. Let us henceforth be
 Two streams in Hell, grey, sunless, and austere,
 Or weakly blowing winds, or foamless waves.
 Only compel me not to bear to earth
 My grievous loss again: I conjure thee,
 Drive me not out where the sun shines to die!

AIDONEUS.

This is the resting place of Death: not here
 Shall Death slay men. Arise, and get thee hence!
 Trouble us not with singing any more;
 Thy singing has brought life into her eyes
 And soon she will remember.

PERSEPHONE (to herself, brooding).

Ah! the lift
Of the great pine-boughs seen against the sky!

ORPHEUS (aside).

How may one reach them? Nay, but I will sing
Again till the waste veins of Aidoneus
Shall feel the song like blood flow quick in them.
I will sing him into dreaming that his sweet
White-browed Persephone, crowned with white
flowers,
Has left untasted the red pomegranate,
And he shall dream himself alone in Hell.

[He turns to AIDONEUS.

Yet since thou wilt not grant my prayer, once more
Let me sing—emptying thus my heart a little
Of some of its consuming grief. Let me
Leave something of my woe even in this place!

PERSEPHONE.

Yea, thou shalt sing again. It is my will.

(ORPHEUS *plays*. THE SHADES *gather and press round him as though for a moment they were again alive*. Dark tears roll at last from the eyes of AIDONEUS. PERSEPHONE *has risen and stands with arms outstretched*. The music ceases.)

AIDONEUS.

No more!

I will not feel such pain. I will not suffer
 Even in thought these pangs. Oh! misery
 Of intolerable desire, never appeased!
 Its fury is upon me. Orpheus
 Save me from the brink of such despair,
 Save me, for I am torn by wild beasts' fangs.

ORPHEUS.

I stand upon the brink of such despair.

PERSEPHONE (suddenly coming to herself).
 Give me thy lute that I may break it. Give
 Me thy lute and cease thy singing. I
 Will hear no more. Wilt thou not pause at last
 From torturing me? What need was there to sing
 —Since I had half forgotten—how I, even I,
 Might have escaped back to the earth and back
 To the sun sparkling on the sea, and back
 To my mother, to my mother and human love!
 Ah! make me forget again and thou shalt take
 Eurydice to thy living breast and arms.
 Make me instantly forget. I would forget
 All sights, and sounds of the beloved earth!

THE FIRST SHADE.

The sheltering mists have fallen away from me.

SECOND SHADE.

Woe, woe! to see his face only in dreams!

THIRD SHADE.

My lover sleeps in a strange woman's arms.

AIDONEUS.

If separate love be such as this, I cannot
Sever thee from Eurydice, lest I
Suffer the same torment even in thought.

ORPHEUS.

Give me Eurydice, and I will heal
Instantly the wounds that I have made.

AIDONEUS.

Summon Eurydice!

(THE SHADES *depart. They return surrounding EURYDICE. She sees ORPHEUS and holds out her hands.*)

EURYDICE.

A little longer,
I must have melted into mist. The pain
Could not be borne, even though I live no more.

(ORPHEUS *takes her in his arms. She lies there silent.*)

ORPHEUS.

I will heal up those wounds which I have made ;
I will play Persephone to forgetfulness.

(He plays ; gradually THE SHADES fall back listlessly ; the longing fades from PERSEPHONE'S face and that of AIDONEUS grows once more stern and menacing. In silence, with bowed head ORPHEUS and EURYDICE move away, ORPHEUS still playing.)

LE VOYAGE EN CYTHÈRE.

THE RETURN.

An old garden with high yew-hedges. Beneath a group of elms is the marble bust of a laughing faun, garlanded with roses—but the roses are dead.

(PHILOMÈLE is seated on a marble bench—she has a disconsolate, woebegone air and one of the ivory sticks of her fan is broken. Suddenly ARLEQUIN enters: he appears worn and travel-stained. PHILOMÈLE starts, turns round, but looks at him angrily without smiling.)

PHILOMÈLE.

Ah! you—returned!

ARLEQUIN.

Your most unhappy slave
Comes, full of deep humility, to crave
Forgiveness.

PHILOMÈLE.

Good! I see that past all doubt
You have been punished.

ARLEQUIN.

Like a flame put out
I come, to be rekindled by your lips.
Ah! but the motion of those hateful ships,
The comfortless cold waters! Never more
Shall I, preserve me heaven, leave the shore!—
I am punished truly.

PHILOMÈLE.

Yet how eagerly
You turned away that morning and left me
Upon the shore alone, unkind! How then
You have the courage to return again,
I cannot guess.

ARLEQUIN.

A shameful fugitive
I come.

PHILOMÈLE.

Nay, shameless rather.

ARLEQUIN.

Princess, forgive!

PHILOMÈLE.

Forgive! I did not even miss you!

ARLEQUIN.

Low

Before your feet, behold all grey with woe,
A wise man and a changed! Alas! those days
Spent on the wet, deplorable sea-ways,
A nightmare, horrible indeed—

PHILOMÈLE.

You seem

Not to have found Cythera then?

ARLEQUIN.

A dream,

A dream distraught, it is and nothing more,
A treacherous dream!

PHILOMÈLE.

What, all that rosy shore

Where very love dwells and all happiness,
—The poet's land?

ARLEQUIN.

'Tis but a dream—and less!

PHILOMÈLE.

But all those wondrous tales then?

ARLEQUIN.

All are lies.

PHILOMÈLE.

You found small favour in Queen Venus' eyes
I understand—poor dupe!

ARLEQUIN.

I was but led
By a false rumour and the others sped
Sadly, even as I!

PHILOMÈLE.

The others? Yes—
Where are they?

ARLEQUIN.

Truly I know not, Princess.
Wrecked on some savage rock perchance or cast
On a desert island. I can but hope at last
They will return as I.

PHILOMÈLE.

But did you not
Then reach Cythera?

ARLEQUIN.

Ah! the accursed spot!
And thrice accursed the poets who sing thereof!

—Dedicated to disastrous love—
Love the destroyer, Amor infelix—

PHILOMÈLE.

Thus

I warned you!

ARLEQUIN.

Hear the ills that fell on us!
When we embarked and I, alas! gone mad,
Left you whose eyes alone can make me glad,
Whose lips the sweetest in the world recall—

PHILOMÈLE (severely).

Continue.

ARLEQUIN.

Full of laughter were we all ;
Our barque most gaily decked as well-beseemed
Those who set sail towards happiness long dreamed,
Long thought of, and our sails were all of silk,
Creamy and white like softly curdled milk ;
Our oars were gold to meet the angry seas,
And even as gold we glittered ; the Marquise
Was wittier than I have ever known—

PHILOMÈLE (interrupting).

Enough!

How long it takes to reach the isle of love!

ARLEQUIN.

Pardon, Princess, a brief unhappy tale
It is when all is done. Thus we set sail,
And shortly ere the close of the third night
Saw very near the isle of our delight.
Then gleefully we rose and hand in hand
Stood on the decks to greet that fortunate land ;
But then, alas! a sudden wind up-leapt
And tore our sails in shreds: the Marquise wept ;
I seized the helm, yet little could I do.
We drove ashore, the ship was broken in two
Upon the blackest rock in all the world,
A gaunt wave seized upon me and up-hurled
Me on the highest, where all drenched with spray
I lay and shivered for a night and day,
Until a fishing-boat—but I will tell
The rest when you command me.—Philomèle,
Have you no pity?

PHILOMÈLE.

None,—and yet to speak
Truth, this has been the very dreariest week
That ever living mortal maid has known!
I could not live in Paradise alone.
What, with no man to praise or call me fair?
For three whole days I have not done my hair ;
I cannot fan myself although the heat

Is insupportable, I cannot eat.
How often did I wish I had faced death
On the high seas! Why, even the faun's wreath
Is faded; see what untold misery,
Perverse and fickle, you have brought on me!

ARLEQUIN.

But you forgive?

PHILOMÈLE.

Only because I must—
Another day and I should fall to dust,
And so I pardon.

ARLEQUIN.

This is holy ground!
Princess, I swoon, for surely I have found
Cythera! 'Twas love's self that made me fail.

PHILOMÈLE (anxiously).

And am I fair still?

ARLEQUIN (looking at her critically).

Perhaps a little pale,
Otherwise like Queen Venus' self.

PHILOMÈLE.

Alas!

'Tis three days since I dared consult my glass.

I tremble now—but yet, a touch of red
You think? The melancholy life I've led
Has surely left its mark! I'll not be long;
Get your guitar and make me a new song,
And hold yourself forgiven—more or less!—
Arlequin, *wait*, I go to change my dress.

“HARK TO THE RAIN!”

FOR my great weariness pity me!
I am as weary as may be.
There was no time to pause or rest ;
 (Hark to the rain!)
Of all the days this is the heaviest!
(How many hours before night comes again?)

Like wind, like smoke, like flame, I ran,
At mid o' night that cry began!
I heard him cry at my bedside,
 (Hark to the rain!)
And I answered when he cried.

Bitter cold the years had passed
Since I heard his voice: the last
Time he cursed me. And the years
 (Hark to the rain!)
Have not dulled his voice in my ears.

Then his face was like the white
Snow frozen hard in the moonlight.

I lied—my lips were hard and hot.

(Hark to the rain!)

My lips slew, yet he died not.

Like quenched flame his love went out
And then he cursed me ; round about
My head his words flew on dark wings

(Hark to the rain!)

And hissed and hurt like living things!

Silently I saw him go ;

I would not have him stay ; I know

Hate of him made my eyes dim

(Hark to the rain!)

For the treachery I had wrought on him!

Afterwards I wept ; each day

Sped slowly on in the old way,

Only since he came no more

(Hark to the rain!)

I was all dead at the heart's core,

Until last night ; when suddenly

Through my sleep I heard him cry,

I heard his voice pierce through my sleep,

(Hark to the rain!)

His voice which called, though I slept deep,

Crying to me, crying to me.
 Up I sprang, I might not see,
 So dark the night was—yet his cry
 (Hark to the rain!)
 Seemed a lamp I must see him by!

I was like a spirit freed
 From sin, because in his great need
 He called me. Almost I believe,
 (Hark to the rain!)
 O Jesu!—that his love still lived!

And so I might not pause. Without,
 The wind whirled the leaves about ;
 Like a dead leaf from the path
 (Hark to the rain!)
 It seized and whirled me in its wrath.

I cared not, for no wind I cared!
 The long grass caught me and ensnared
 My feet ; I slipped and stumbled on.
 (Hark to the rain!)
 Dawn broke—my toil was scarce begun.

Of one thing was I sore afraid
 Lest the voice I heard should cease. I prayed
 My heart out, that it might not cease ;
 (Hark to the rain!)
 And then I heard it moan in the trees.

At last all stark in the sunlight
I saw his dwelling-place in sight ;
The shining window panes, the tall
 (Hark to the rain!)
Door set deep in the grey wall ;

And then I entered. God in Heaven!
Thou knowest that he had forgiven,
Thou knowest—yet with no word said,
 (Hark to the rain!)
I live on and he is dead ;
He who loved—I who betrayed.
(How many hours before night comes again?)

A POET AT THE COURT OF PAN.

*(A green field. Pan in the centre surrounded
by NYMPHS. He speaks.)*

PAN.

EARTH and I are tired of Spring
Too late and too long loitering!—
Her pale face and maiden wiles,
Ready tears and fickle smiles,
Weary us: the time has come:
Chilly Spring must hasten home!
Delay not, Spring, thy reign is over,
Summer's a more wanton lover.
Have ye found her, have ye seen
Sweet foreshowings of our Queen?
All ye nymphs I bade go greet
With welcome her returning feet,
If ye find—

A NYMPH.

We have—we have!

PAN.

Found?

A NYMPH.

A rosebud red and brave
Ready to burst in flower almost.

ANOTHER NYMPH.

And I not one bud but a host!

PAN.

For every bud that opened is
Ye shall have—

A NYMPH.

Ah! Pan—?

PAN.

A kiss.

THIRD NYMPH.

Deep within the woods I found,
Where the wind moves without sound,
All the thickets one pink flush
Of wild roses, and a thrush
Singing, singing, singing his song,
And the nightingale all night long!

PAN.

Such signs unto our Queen belong!

FOURTH NYMPH.

I have seen tall hollyhocks,
Meadow-sweet, and ladies' smocks,
And where the wood all green and chill is
A pool, knee-deep in water-lilies.

THIRD NYMPH.

And I have seen—

FIFTH NYMPH.

Tall lilies spun—

THIRD NYMPH.

From moonbeams flickered o'er with sun!

PAN.

Ye have done well, but who comes here?
Can *this* be Summer's messenger?
Whose shaking head and haggard eyes,
Blanched cheek and mouth wide with surprise,
Proclaims him one whom stern priests lead
Upon the altar stone to bleed,
Bound hand and foot—

*(A crowd of NYMPHS advance, the POET in
their midst. He is bound with ivy, vine
and honeysuckles, and can hardly breathe
for terror.)*

A NYMPH.

O! glorious Pan!

ANOTHER.

We have done best—

ANOTHER.

We bring—

ANOTHER.

A man.

ANOTHER.

Who sang of Summer—

ANOTHER.

And of thee

So daintily we deemed that he
Summer's herald well might be!

PAN.

How came it?

A NYMPH.

In the wood he lay
Close and sheltered at noonday,
And we heard him sing so sweet
No nightingale might equal it;
For delight we might not stir.

(The POET makes wild efforts to free himself.)

—Strive not, pretty prisoner!—
 And we heard him cry upon
 Pan, whose reign (he vowed) was done.
 Making lamentation.
 “Ah Pan, Pan, great Pan,” he said,
 “Woe worth the world, now thou art dead!
 Woe worth the world, and woe worth me
 Who should have lived in Arcady!
 And ye nymphs and oreads,
 Dancing girls, and laughing lads,
 Where are ye?” And we answered, “Here.”

ANOTHER NYMPH.

Leaping forth,—

ANOTHER.

He shrieked with fear!

ANOTHER.

And would have fled—

ANOTHER.

But we pursued,
 Captured and with many-hued
 Garlands bound, and swift did bring,
 To the Court of Pan, the King,
 Him who so desired this thing!

THE POET.

Mercy, mercy, let me go!

A NYMPH.

Why trembles he?

ANOTHER.

I do not know,
Unless from very ecstasy
That he, at last, God Pan does see!

THE POET.

Mercy, mercy, maidens all ;
On you and on your god I call
That you unbind me. Heaven send
Among you all I find some friend!

PAN (*musings*).

'Tis a strange wight—has he a crook?

A NYMPH.

Nay, a long goose-quill—

ANOTHER.

And a book.

PAN.

And he can sing?

A NYMPH.

And sweetly raise

Such a pæan in your praise

The like I never heard.

PAN.

Why, then

Let him warble!

THE POET.

Never again!

Let me escape and silent I

For evermore shall live and die.

Out upon it!—who'd have thought

A poor poet could be thus caught?

*(He has succeeded in freeing himself from
the garlands and runs off. The NYMPHS
would pursue him, but are prevented by
PAN.)*

PAN.

Nay, my girls, for he is worth

Nothing, save to make you mirth!

Know that poets often rue

Greatly when their dreams come true:—

Well for them dreams rarely do!

A NYMPH (*sulkily*)

'Twas a lad to make us sport,
Love and laughter in Pan's Court.

PAN.

Go seek further—you shall find
Other loves more to your mind,
Where the fauns play seek-and-hide
In green woods on the hill-side!

A NYMPH.

Poets mean not what they say ;
Give me a shepherd any day!

A NYMPH (*suddenly*).

Hark! what is that?

ANOTHER.

All the trees stir
With laughter floating here and there.

ANOTHER.

'Tis Summer!

ANOTHER.

Run to welcome her!

THE WOOING OF DIONYSUS.

PRELUDE.

THE light of heaven now renewed,
The flicker of Spring's inconstant fires,
Have wrought all nature to their mood.
Spring's mantle caught among the briars
I saw, and how the web was torn,
And hung upon a fortunate tree ;
Full soon shall many a withered thorn
Shine with a like embroidery.
Nay, but we will hold her fast,
When Spring, the loiterer, comes at last!

I, full of hope and roaming far,
Marked how this sudden flood of light
Had washed away each pitiful scar
Left on earth's face by Winter's might ;
All the joy which slept too long,
In detested fetters bound,
Now awakes and visible song
Bursts in blossom from the ground :

Let us hurry forth to view
Sleep's most daring dreams come true!

Where is the maiden fair enough,
Spring, to fitly honour thee?
She must have the eyes of love
And the soul of chastity ;
She must supple be and fleet,
High of heart and light of tread,
With the West wind in her feet
And the stars about her head ;
She must be thy counterpart
With thine own rebellious heart.

Have the sleeping woodlands heard
In the snows thy feet astir?
Did each mute expectant bird
Feel thee, ere we felt thee, near?
We, less keen of sense than these,
Slumbered still and still delayed,
Whilst the fields and hills and trees
Delicately themselves arrayed ;
Thus are we so much the less
Worthy of thy loveliness!

Fling thy proclamation forth
By the wind's triumphant mouth.
Lo! thy word has bidden the North
Dance a measure with the South.

Where reluctantly still linger
The least trace of yesterday's
Bitter touch, with thy swift finger
That last shade of death efface ;
On the waste and starving lands
Pour thy bounty with both hands!

Oh! what rapture shall be ours
When we share an equal bliss
With Spring's best beloved flowers,
Snowdrops and anemones.
How each moment shall combine
With delight that went before,
Like wine added unto wine,
Growing in sweetness ever more.
Let us drink the whole earth up,
Spring, from thy enchanted cup!

SCENE I.

Spring. A Sea-shore. Many Maidens assembled.

ERINNA and AGLAE.

FIRST MAIDEN.

Or ever the white dawn kissed the sea, I heard
 In the orchard, under an apple-tree,
 Oh! it was not voice of man or song of bird,
 But my very dream which sang to me.

CHORUS OF MAIDENS.

Tell us your dream.

FIRST MAIDEN.

Why, no ;
 For a dream that's told will quickly spread
 Restless, gleaming, moon-splashed wings,
 And vanish, even as it sings,
 Far away, beyond the far
 Chilly light of the last star ;
 Wherefore, lest our dreams prove vain,
 Let us be wary, for most grievous
 Are those hours when fair dreams leave us.
 I know—I know—

MAIDENS.

What do you know?

FIRST MAIDEN.

That dreamless life is pain.

MAIDENS.

Yea, heaviness and mortal woe.

SECOND MAIDEN.

Speak not of woe to me!

THIRD MAIDEN.

Nay, of joy only, joy, unbounded joy!

Oh! sharp sweet savour of the glittering sea,

Oh! delicate scented earth and clear light of the
sun,

And goddess Spring, goddess without alloy,

Exquisite queen whose reign is scarce begun—

MAIDENS.

Behold us dedicate to thee!

SECOND MAIDEN.

Not with fair offerings of scattered flowers,

Not with roses listless and sweet,

Kneel we before thee laden ;

Nor with ripe fruit of the sun's kisses born

When earth lies swooning in the summer heat :

With maiden gifts we come before thee, maiden ;

Thine are low winds and lightly scattered showers,

And chiefly thine—

FOURTH MAIDEN.

Are the cool-footed morning hours.

SEVENTH MAIDEN.

Scarcely yet on briar and thorn
 Even the first faint mist appears,
 Of green, tremulous and young,
 Caressing with shy touch the branches bare.
 With ashen fog the earth is still o'erhung.
 The birds, grown weary of their wintry fare,
 Cry eagerly on Spring to hasten hither ;
 Yet the pale sun a doubtful livery wears,
 And vanished Winter his bleak head up-rears
 Suddenly—none may guess whence he has come,
 Then goes—none knoweth whither.
 Yet in the low nook of a sheltering hill
 I found, with melting hoar-frost wet,
 Like a bright gem in a green casket set,
 This half-blown daffodil.

SECOND MAIDEN.

And by Athena's grace, the violet-crowned,
 I this pale violet.

OTHER MAIDENS.

Here are grasses—

OTHERS.

And myrtles fresh with dew—

SIXTH MAIDEN.

But I bring trails
Of frail, translucent, many-branched seaweed ;
For greatly on the sea the Spring prevails,
Changing it to her mirror as she passes,
Bidding it show each hour a countenance new,
Glad as some creature from long bondage freed.

SEVENTH MAIDEN.

How still the impatient water lies,
The fretful, torn, inconstant sea,
Since on its tortured bosom fell
The glance of Spring's bewildering eyes ;
And still reflected in its breast
Shines that accomplished miracle.
Oh? lovely moods of sweet unrest
The sea shares with us who beside it dwell.—
O Spring, dream laden, grant to us thy dream!

FOURTH MAIDEN.

She who is goddess now and reigns supreme,
Will she not surely send some gift of worth
To us who love her?

SECOND MAIDEN.

May the gods be kind
Now in the hour of the new season's birth!

FIRST MAIDEN.

I will make my prayer to Spring :
 May I be fair for ever !
 Let old age, which men abhor,
 Breathe on me never !

FIFTH MAIDEN.

Would you choose death then ?

FIRST MAIDEN.

That would I !

If I can be beloved no more,
 An evil in the eyes of men,
 Then let me die.

SECOND MAIDEN.

I would be Queen !
 Spring grant that some day at high noon
 Suddenly a marauding throng,
 Gold-crowned, with weapons bright and keen,
 Rich cloaks and leather shoon,
 Shall hither sail and leap to land,
 And in their arms so fierce and strong
 Seize me and bear me far and far,
 And make me Queen of some ancient race
 In a country under the northern star,
 And give me a sceptre for my hand
 And perfume—

THIRD MAIDEN.

Folly!

AGLAE.

Grant me, Spring, to live
 Such days as thou unto the flowers dost give
 And to the fruit trees, wise deliberate days,
 When each, rejoicing, thy least law obeys ;
 The brown boughs breaking into bud again,
 The shadowy blossom frail and fugitive
 Turning to gold and ruddy fruit at last,
 So may the present still repeat the past,
 And when my unperturbèd life shall wane,
 Let death be a soft cloak around me cast.

SIXTH MAIDEN.

How calm she sits, and has no care
 Save for spun flax and carded wool!
 She is like a lily in a sleeping pool,
 Sheltered from all loud winds and violent air :
 Were I as fair as she—were I as fair—

SEVENTH MAIDEN.

Erinna has not spoken.

FIFTH MAIDEN.

Vex her not ;
 Her thoughts are far from us.

THIRD MAIDEN.

O whither flying,
Where we and all our songs are quite forgot?

SECOND MAIDEN.

She would have a god for lover!

FIRST MAIDEN.

'Tis for this her heart is sighing.

FOURTH MAIDEN.

Oh! impious!

ERINNA.

What say'st thou?

AGLAE.

Fear

Lest the thick-set myrtle cover
Some god, who, if he chance to hear
Thy words, then shall our days of joy be over.

ERINNA.

But evermore thou tremblest; wherefore?

THIRD MAIDEN.

Nay,

Since the offended gods pause not to slay
Kings, and strike cities headlong from the earth,
We who are little and weak and slight of birth,
Is it so strange we tremble?

ERINNA.

True it is,—

I had forgotten—ye are made for this
 Moment and nought beyond, fashioned for sweet
 Hours without service, delicate and complete ;
 Yet daily in the temples still ye make
 Your loveless offerings for some god's sake.
 Wherefore? None knows ; nor wherefore ye
 return

Thanks for ye know not what. O lights that burn
 And flicker and go out, foam on the shore,
 Feathers which change with the wind's every turn!
 Are ye but dust then even to the heart's core?

THIRD MAIDEN.

Is it not true that you have seen,
 When early morning touched the myrtle bushes,
 The curling horns, the brown eyes sharp and keen,
 And the split hoofs of a satyr among the bushes?
 And you feared not—is it not true?
 And you have watched, couched 'neath the green
 Mountain pines, an Oread
 Fast asleep in the heat of noon?
 O it may be a god shall stoop to you!
 Yet think of Syrinx and the woe she had,
 To whom was granted even such a boon.

ERINNA.

O women, feeble and unconsecrate—
 Daphne and Syrinx! Am I then as ye,
 Who, if a god called, should, as ye fled, flee
 From the divine insistence of a god?
 Oh! well for you that kind, contemptuous fate
 Thrust each deep-rooted down in the dull sod,
 Safe even from any pang of memory,
 Drowsy and safe and blind.

AGLAE.

We pass our days

Honouring the gods with fitting words ;
 And they behold us with averted face,
 Yet give us increase to our flocks and herds.
 What further shall they ask of us—what gain
 Shall we desire they have not granted? Rain
 In season, plentiful harvest and sunshine ;
 These are their gifts, and in return
 Lo! the slain heifer on the altar burn,
 And dance, and song, and sacrificial wine.
 Such is our service, is it not enough?
 How have we sinned against the will divine
 That they should scourge us with their pitiless love ?

ERINNA.

Pale is thy cheek, AGLAE, pale,
 Mine is ruddy with wind and sun ;

Thy weary feet on the high hills fail,
 Mine, swift o'er moor and mountain run.
 What wilt thou know, what wilt thou have?
 Some few webs thy hands have spun,
 Days secure in certain good,
 The heaviness of plenitude ;
 And soon thy portion in the unseeing grave.
 Whilst I, a ship, wave-tossed, wind-harried,
 On tides of wrath for ever carried
 Towards, ah! what harbour in the end ;
 Have neither life nor death for friend,
 Nor any refuge from the engulfing wave ;
 Yet thou shalt lose and I shall have.

AGLAE.

I care not for disaster, therefore go
 Thy way, I mine ; and let the days bestow
 On each the thing she wills. Seek thou those
 heights
 I love not, and the wind which walks o' nights ;
 I in my turn will wander 'mongst the sweet
 Green blossoming fields, and feel the noon-tide
 heat
 Less for the sound of honey-laden bees,
 The scythes' slow swish amongst the sighing
 wheat :
 So shall we twain fulfil our destinies.

ERINNA.

But is she not, hearken to her, a fly?
 A fly that basks on the wall in summer!
 Content to live whilst the warmth shall last,
 And when Autumn comes content to die.
 Ah! the new-comer—

*(From out the myrtle grove a stranger draws
 near. He is tall, fair-skinned and beauti-
 ful. Over one shoulder is thrown a fawn-
 skin. He approaches laughing.)*

FIRST MAIDEN.

Who is this, whence did he spring?

FOURTH MAIDEN.

He is of some alien race.

SECOND MAIDEN.

Lordlier than he ne'er saw I man—

THIRD MAIDEN.

He is perchance some outlawed king—

SEVENTH MAIDEN.

Or a god even, the great Pan!

FIFTH MAIDEN.

Never had Pan such comeliness of face.

DIONYSUS

(the stranger, descending amongst them).

Maidens, I greet you!

ERINNA

*(who has been gazing at him steadfastly
and in silence).*

Humbly as we may,
We in turn greet thee, Lord.

DIONYSUS.

A weary way
Over seas I come, a vagrant ; here and there
Indifferently my course I steer,
And where my keel grounds there I stay ;
Lured by the promise of some isle,
Some blessed spot for roving feet,
Where for many a day and night
I may linger a long while,
Even as I pause to-day.—
Ah! for the Spring is languorous and sweet,
And like the flickering breeze her smile
And short as a swift gleam of glistening spray.

ERINNA.

We welcome thee, and hunger to obey
Thy will in all things, Lord.

DIONYSUS.

O ye are fair,
 Ye maidens! wrought of gossamer and air;
 And the sun stooping to kiss you at high noon
 Has left his tangled gold amongst your hair,
 For truly the sun has kissed you, and the moon.
 Elusive are ye fragile as a dream,
 Thin flames of wonder, frail and exquisite,
 Which shall go out if breathed upon, I deem.—
 Oh! though Spring fade, must ye, too, fade with
 it!

AGLAE (*whispering*).

I fear him.

DIONYSUS (*gazing at her*).

Do you fear me?

Before such brows, eyes so serene and clear,
 Surely the very gods might tremble afraid.—
 Are you not beautiful as the summer, maid,
 Alluring as the sea?

AGLAE (*aside*).

How might he hear?

I will depart.

SIXTH MAIDEN.

You have surely come
 From a land of roses, for the scent
 Lingers about you in the air!

DIONYSUS.

Oh! wild

And sultry is my country.

SECOND MAIDEN.

Such a kingdom

Whereof one might be queen, and well content!

DIONYSUS.

Arduous are the mountains there,
 And the earth with subdued fire
 Blazes like an anvil, heat
 Does from every pore expire,
 And the blanched face of the year
 Shrinks appalled from the fierce eye
 Of the sun perpetually
 Red and molten fixed on her.
 The sick breezes faint and fail,
 Withered 'neath the noon-day's wings ;
 Yet still within the sunless spaces
 Of the wood's most secret places,
 Where cool shadows breathe and shiver,
 Roses blossom heavy and pale,
 Turning up astonished faces
 Towards the breathless nightingale—
 The shadowy nightingale who sings
 Lost and passionate for ever.

And lo! a god's triumphant thought,
 With one sudden blinding word,
 Called forth the tangle of the vine's torn tresses
 And bade it roam at will over the plain,
 A mystic veil divinely wrought,
 Shielding that land from the sun's mad caresses ;
 And the god's blood in each grape's heart lay
 stored

Till it should foam anew in the wine-presses.
 Then, like a quickly swelling flood,
 Over the earth the vine exulting ran,
 A riotous growth of tendril, leaf, and bud,
 And glad, glad was the heart of man!
 And earth was shaken with a mighty laughter
 Because the days were good, and in their turn
 Good days still followed after.

O women! have ye heard
 Cymbals clash in the dark night?
 Has the heart in you leapt like a fountain stirred
 By sudden sweeping breezes of delight?
 Have ye sped with the wind's speed
 Wheresoe'er the god may lead,
 Close as his shadow over the dim
 Haunted slope of the hillside,
 When white moonbeams overbrim
 The crystal moon's celestial cup,
 Which earth with thirsty lips drinks up,
 Cries Dionysus's name, and prays to him!

FIFTH MAIDEN.

Ah! the grape and the mad scent of it,
 It is in my nostrils. Over the hill's brow
 The wild scent of the grape is wafted now.—
 Would I were treading up to the knees in wine!

SECOND MAIDEN.

Some strange new dance is in my feet ;
 I would away and away to the hills,
 To the hills for which I pine!

SIXTH MAIDEN.

Ah the blood that leaps and thrills
 In this wild heart of mine!

AGLAE.

I fear as I never feared before to-day.

FOURTH MAIDEN.

And my limbs tremble, yet half with gladness.

ERINNA (*aside*).

Yea,

I fear too ; my breath fails me ; I am spent
 As though with age, yet am I well content,
 More than content, that never any peace
 Shall visit me again nor bring release

From this white torment which has clasped me
round

Since suddenly the earth grew holy ground.
I who am but a flame by god's breath fanned,
Who shall deliver me from the god's right hand?
Nay, not the god's self even! I am free
To suffer as I will, my pain sufficing me.

DIONYSUS.

Oh violent country of my birth!
Delirious land, where the sun risen
Is full of ardour and gigantic mirth,
Like a wild beast escaped from out its prison;
Did I not hunger after thee and strain
Towards the shores of thine unrest,
Land of fever—land of desire—
When in detested Erebus,
Where many pray and are answered not again,
I wandered among shades, the heaviest,
Since I could still remember the sun's fire?

SEVENTH MAIDEN.

Thou who hast been in Hell, have mercy upon us!

DIONYSUS.

I have been in Aphrodite's isle,
Among the myrtle and the orange groves;
I have heard the sirens languidly beguile

Mariners to their treacherous loves.
 I was among that impious crew
 Who mocked at Dionysus; when
 Suddenly clambered over the ship's side
 A strangling vine and over-grew
 The ship, and each man thrust out roots and died,
 Transformed to tortured trees, no longer men:
 For the god will not be denied.
 Ye maidens are all wrapped in silence.

ERINNA.

Lord!

Wilt thou stay a little among us?

DIONYSUS.

It may be

For a long while.

AGLAE (*in sudden panic*).

Here is nought, nought for thee;
 Simple are we; what pleasure can we afford
 To one who is King by manner and face?
 For ah! what shall a king do in this place?
 Here the slow days fade out, the days begin,
 There is no change, with nought to lose or win,
 There is no change, no varying delight,
 Only monotonous day, monotonous night:
 What wilt thou do here?

DIONYSUS.

Why, as shepherds do
Who are happy.

ERINNA (*aside*).

She is chosen.

AGLAE.

The kine call, I must away!
My Lord, these other maidens shall wait on thee,
Let me depart speedily as I may.

(*She goes out swiftly.*)

DIONYSUS.

She should wear roses round her brow,
And the roses should be each as white
As the white roses Aphrodite gleans,
Each petal fashioned from the silvery light
Of the white moon when from the sky she leans
Rapturously, on a Summer's night. (*A pause.*)

ERINNA.

Wilt thou have bread and wine, lord!

DIONYSUS.

I have fasted long.
Thou art kind :

ERINNA.

We are thy servants, ready to fulfil
Thy bidding utterly.

(She brings fruit, and wine and bread.)

DIONYSUS.

I shall not find
Anywhere food sweeter.

(ERINNA pours a little wine on the ground.)

Why dost thou spill
The wine?

ERINNA.

It is my custom to honour thus
The gods who may unseen be dwelling among us.

DIONYSUS *(laughing)*.

I can see thy heart, maiden, it is fire!

ERINNA.

Shall the heart then accomplish its desire,
Or die of its own flame?

DIONYSUS.

Why, who may tell!
For prayers are sometimes granted—and that is
well;

And if they are not granted that is well too ;
 'Tis all one in the end for thou shalt do
 The bidding first of life and then of death—
 Oh! maiden of wild heart and eager breath
 Whom life and death shall leave unsatisfied!

ERINNA.

That thou wilt here close in our midst abide
 Is my desire.

DIONYSUS.

An easy prayer, and meek!
 Yet in the midst of this slight thing ye seek,
 Ruin may lurk and fate's unheeding hands
 Shall wrap thee round in cruel, iron bands.
 So be it, thou shalt suffer as all must,
 The eternal gods, and mortals which are dust.—
 Ah! the hot sun; lead me, ye maidens, now
 Where I may slumber, I weary and my brow
 Aches for the chilly woods.

THE MAIDENS.

We follow, Lord,
 We follow dancing—

CHORUS.

The light Spring lingers, and earth half-waking
Smiles and relents, from her long sleep breaking,
Stirs and sighs 'neath her veil of snow.

Through the woods which the storms have harried
Laughter light as a flame is carried,
'Mongst cloven boughs where the young winds
. blow.

Lover of mine, the white Spring calls me,
In a voice that holds and binds and enthrals me,
Which stabs with joy till the heart brims over,
Love me enough,—for I fain would prove her—

Love me enough to let me go!

My feet would join in the new surprising,
Sweet strange dance of the year's uprising;
For the shining birth of the gracious May-time
Is the golden festival of the sun's play-time,

When all things quiver and burn and glow.

Would you prevail with me, O my lover?

Then follow me where the hills uncover

Their glad grey heads in the light of the sun;
And farther yet and beyond the last bound
Of the mountain-sides where earth still lies fast
bound,

Waiting the sign that her sleep is done.

Oh! we will fly than the Spring's self faster,
And breathe in her ear that the days fly past her,

And that she must wake, for the frost is banished,
The skies are kindled, and youth begun.

Now that the might of the sun-shafts reaches
Through the hollow straight to the heart of the
beeches,

Where light is faint and the wind breathes low ;
Beyond the plains and the sheltered valleys,
Where all that's left of the last snowfall is,
To the high grey crag where the eagle screeches—

Love me enough to let me go.

Ah! but honey and wine and passion
Are good, but I love in a freer fashion ;
As the warm wind loves when the rain-cloud
scatters,

And tears the veil of the day to tatters

As the last falling mad wave of the sea ;
As all things happy and wild and fleeting,
Hark, oh hark, to my heart's loud beating,

'Tis the heart of earth that beats in me :

Let me go ere the day grows older,
When the bright hour fades, would you seek to
hold her?

Nay, but she fades if you will or no.

Lo! the woods and the hills receive me,
Lover of mine, oh! love me and leave me,
Leave me or follow, but hear me imploring,

Love me enough to let me go!

Now that a warm wind lightens and passes
With trailing pinions through the green grasses,
And the ice is snapped and the glad streams flow,
What should I do then with love, I pray ye,
With love that hinders and would delay me,
Whose voice is solemn, whose feet are slow?
Oh! love, if you will, come with me a-dancing,
Where shadow and sun through the new leaves
glancing,
Mock at joy which is kin to woe.
Ah! but ruinous love's endeavour
To blind and bind and hold me for ever,
Who am I to be cheated so?
Nay, my lover, pardon and speed me,
Let me run wherever the wind shall lead me,
Speed at my side, though your heart reprove me,
Follow and blame, but I pray you love me,
Love me enough, in the year's new dawning,
Love me enough to let me go!

SCENE II.

Next day. Another part of the Island. AGLAE enters, DIONYSUS following.

AGLAE.

Wilt thou not leave me?

DIONYSUS.

Yet upon what plea
Still wilt thou turn aghast and shrink from me?
Maiden, how do I fright from out thine eyes
The light, as a gaunt wind from Summer skies
May insolently sweep the blue away,
And with black clouds blot out the face of day?

AGLAE.

Lord, I am most humble, Lord, I have not raised
My heart from these known fields, where kine have
grazed
Always, and never change has come,
And I love safety and the sense of home ;
And for that fruit which grows beyond my reach
I crave not : as the tide on the low beach
Washes with lazy murmur, so would I
Through long reposeful moments live and die ;
Thus am I fashioned. Nor do I hold as blest
Those who travel East and travel West,
Seeking ever some new thing for delight
And finding in the end less than some slight

Joy of ripe grain and blossoming fruit-tree brings
To me who am lowly and glad, and have no wings.

DIONYSUS.

Wilt thou hear nought of love, then? Wilt thou
wend

Solicitous and frugal to the end
Of thy obscure and indeterminate days?
Is this the way thou hast chosen of all ways?
Secure and even measure, thy life's span
To thee what Summer is to a blind man,
To whom the year is but a grey tale, told
In unrecorded moments of waste gold.
Wilt thou lay upon thyself this curse—to cease
From life too lapped in peace to have known peace?
Wilt thou rejoice over ripe grain and say:
'The harvest quickens, I am content to-day,'
And rejoice never to know thou hast called down
Love which shall be to thee what the sun's crown
In the wild moment of the new day's birth,
Is to the forehead of expectant earth?

AGLAE.

Why! it is good to love, but a sore thing
To yield one's self a willing offering
For hungry Love to make thereof his prey
And in one moment leap upon and slay.
Yet surely love is good—the tender, wise,

Habitual glance of clear untroubled eyes ;
 And pleasant, when the day's slow toil is done,
 The home-coming of some much longed-for one :
 The answering voice—the hours that still renew
 Pleasure and mutual toil the whole year through.
 Such joys indeed are well worth thinking of !

DIONYSUS.

Most delicately dost thou blaspheme Love,
 Who knowest him not, who canst not even spell
 Of all his language one least syllable ;
 Who, though thy stubborn heart refuse to be
 Aught save his slanderer and arch-enemy,
 Yet all thy empty beauty about me flows
 Like the colour and warm perfume of a rose.
 Thou, flame-coloured and glowing, in Love's name,
 Art thou who glowest thus but frozen flame ?
 Wilt thou rest content with the mere semblance of
 fire,
 Who canst to all improbable heights aspire ?
 Yea, if thou wilt refashion earth and heaven,
 And destroy both maybe, yet rise forgiven,
 At war with life and never reconciled.
 Make haste to learn thy beauty's worth, O child
 Of some god's secret and most radiant dream.

AGLAE.

What are the gods to me ? They reign supreme.
 And heed me little more than the blue skies

Reflected in a pool's clear depths, which seem
 Near but care nothing for what beneath them lies :
 I am too slight to trouble a god's eyes.

DIONYSUS.

Thou art omnipotent. Thou canst compel
 A god to stoop to thee, and deem it well
 That like a moth he perish in thy small light.
 Knowest thou not what thy hands hold of might,
 Passion and majesty—those fragile hands
 Which can absorb men's lives as thirsty sands
 Drink in with manifold lips torrential rain—
 Yet taking all, yield nothing forth again.
 Anointed art thou, chosen and consecrate
 To some unmeasured and unparalleled fate.
 Wilt thou not exult then, shudder and be glad
 That, shod with terror, crowned with light and clad
 In a wild garb of elemental flame,
 A god has trembled to pronounce thy name?
 Stretch forth thy hand—Lo! wilt thou have the sea
 Like a sleek hound to crouch and fawn on thee
 And at thy word the heavens know storm or peace,
 And the winds rise, or if thou willest, cease?
 Have Summer for thy bond-woman, and divide
 As the moon, the falling from the rising tide?
 Will a shepherd serve thee better than a god,
 Obey thee and fulfil at thy least nod

All thy desire, and thy heart's wish entire,
Nor cloy thy spirit with fulfilled desire?

AGLAE.

Terrible art thou who thus importunest me,
Lord, what art thou to me, or I to thee?
What thou art I know not. Hast thou sped
From heaven to curb one lowly maiden's head?
A great deed truly, and worthy of a god!
Or art thou man? Thy footstep on the sod
Leaves the grass broken—thou art man then! So
Thou wilt perchance prove merciful and know
How much upon my soul thy presence weighs.
Oh! who art thou to darken my good days?
Who art thou thus to torture and make blind?
If man, then be, as often men are, kind;
If thou art god, I have no hope.

DIONYSUS.

Wherefore?
Are the gods so harsh, then? Wilt thou shrink
before
Their faces turned towards thee?

AGLAE.

Why, let them take
Care for me if they will, and for my sake
Send joys like birds to sing about my path,
And such soft splendour as the new day hath,

Temperate and warm and blessed, and refrain
 The sudden shafts of extreme joy or pain.
 So I in turn will pray to them and spend
 My days in fitting service till the end,
 Honouring their temples as is meet ;
 But let no passion venomously sweet
 Draw near my life for ever.

DIONYSUS.

Stone art thou, stone
 Beautifully fashioned, loveless and alone,
 Set in some solitary shrine where men
 Shall come to worship and depart again.
 Stone art thou, which, if to thy lifeless lips
 A god should press a cup which might bestow
 Colour and shape and dream, and light and speech
 To a white image of fresh frozen snow,
 Lo! useless to the ground the wild draught slips
 Wasted and vain—for thee it cannot reach.

AGLAE.

What meanest thou by these dread words of thine?

DIONYSUS.

Why, that I love thee, maiden ; I, divine,
 Love thee who art less than mortal—yea, I grieve,
 Yea, I yearn for thee, yea, without reprieve
 Do utterly desire thee. I whose hand

Maketh a fruitful or a barren land,
 Who have fire attendant on me, and the skies
 Obey me, and the winds make sacrifice ;
 For I am god, and where I choose my home
 There will desires awake and strange dreams come.
 Lord am I of madness and of fear
 And mystery ; the hillside quakes to hear
 My footsteps ; forests tremble. Lord of mirth
 Am I, and the quick pulsing heart of earth.
 Delight is all about me. I can compel
 Laughter to enter the low gate of Hell.
 I scatter joys as one may scatter seed ;
 I am a mighty shepherd who does feed
 His flocks on music, and love and song and dance,
 And darkness flees before my countenance,
 And the white hosts of grief. Who art thou then,
 Who hast presumed to make me suffer ?

AGLAE (falling on her knees).

When

Has any feared as I feared ! Oh depart
 If thou art god ! With thee I have no part
 For ever. Raise me not above the dust ;
 Destroy me, into utter darkness thrust
 My willing body, but lay not love on me,
 O thou most dread, O mightiest deity !

DIONYSUS.

If I pursue thee wilt thou flee? In vain
Wilt thou flee from me.

AGLAE.

Harrow me with pain,
Destroy me at thy pleasure, bring me death
Rather than life, which tears and ravisheth
All wonted boundaries down. Oh, let me cease
From the torment of this god! Is there no peace
For ever for me now, nor yet again
Familiar days, unnumbed by terror—

DIONYSUS.

Or

Shall I then grant that which thou cravest for,
And turn my face away, and from me fling
Thee, a despised, unprofitable thing;
Seeing for all thy beauty nought thou art
But empty and dull and vacant to the core?

AGLAE.

Then leave to me my emptiness of heart!
I am so worthy of oblivion,
Canst thou not, lord, such nothingness forget;
Yea, utterly, before to-morrow's sun
Fades into gold and purple of sunset?

DIONYSUS.

Or else compel thy love, and bid thee cast
 Thyself far from thee, as a mountain blast
 May sweep some mountain valley and leave it bare
 To the new glory of the quivering air?
 To thee I love shall I not bring for gift
 Release from doubtful days which deathward drift,
 Laden with trembling joys and fugitive grief?
 Not thine shall be the lot of a dead leaf,
 Which sinks to earth at last and all is told,
 Though for a season it was green and gold.

AGLAE.

Ah! whither shall I go, and where abide,
 In what dark cave of desolate darkness hide?
 Will my terror give me wings, will my fear prevail
 To save me from these forces which assail,
 Thus without mercy, my unsheltered head?

DIONYSUS.

Yet, thou whom I might slay; art thou not dead
 Already? Dost thou then refuse to be
 Resurrected and brought to life through me?
 Wilt thou reject god?

AGLAE (*sobbing*).

I am lost—lost—lost;
 There is no help for me.

DIONYSUS.

At a small cost

Thy prayer be granted.

AGLAE.

How!

DIONYSUS.

I leave thee!

AGLAE (*looks up startled and silent*).

DIONYSUS.

Yea,

Hold high thy head—god yields to thee to-day!
 Poor, meaningless, slight soul, which dare not
 move

Save in broad meadows and smooth ways of love!

Lo! did I taste thy beauty I should prove
 Nought but the hollow and savourless taste thereof.

Therefore fear nought—I go; here is enough!

And let those shades which waited on thy birth,

Those thin, impassive shadows, weave thy fate;

And in the compass of thy life's small girth

Hold thee still passionless and inviolate.

I will depart; but thou, hadst thou been wise,

Thy swift advancing, fearless feet had trod,

Scaling the flaming stairway of the skies

In mystical equality with god.

But now an end ; untroubled and unblessed,
 Live on, and let the slow heart in thy breast
 Beat timely measure as the grey hours pass,
 And wipe thy beauty from thee, as from a glass
 Are wiped the delicate markings of hoar-frost.
 And little shalt thou heed thy beauty lost,
 And little shall any heed thee—so farewell.
 Thou art a shining fruit, desirable
 Until one tastes thee. Duly thou shalt weave
 Thy days in a dull web, nor pause to grieve
 For any memory, nor yet complain,
 Although thy life be but a long drawn chain
 Whose links are rusty, rounded and complete.
 Thy soul shall rest secure from cold or heat,
 And the wine thou drinkest, that shalt thou find
 sweet,
 And a small measure leave thee satisfied.

AGLAE.

Ah! may the gods be blessed who have replied
 To me, who craved their succour ; yea, and thou,
 Surely, oh, surely, thou wilt leave me now
 That thou art angry, and upon my knees
 I thank thee for thine anger, and for these
 Good words of scorn—

(She breaks off astonished.)

*(ERINNA has entered and thrown herself at
 the feet of DIONYSUS.)*

ERINNA.

Have mercy, Lord,
Heed me, have mercy on me!

DIONYSUS.

What strange word
Falls on my ears: what, maiden, is thy will?
Who art thou?

AGLAE (*who is now quite calm, a little
scornfully*).

One who surely would fulfil
Thine utmost bidding.

ERINNA.

I indeed, most weak,
Most impotent, beseech thee, Lord! What then
If the dust suddenly find tongue to speak,
Shall god not listen and answer not again?
Wherefore, forgive and bend
Towards me pitying, in my extreme need;
For always thou canst slay me in the end.
And even as the myriad-throated dust
With feeble voices parched and desolate
Shall call on god till even god must heed—
So do I put my trust
In thee and cry on thee.
O Lord, have mercy, have mercy upon me,
And on my humble heart insatiate!

DIONYSUS.

Am I then god to help thee?

ERINNA.

Thee I knew

For god, when first thy shadow touched us and
threw
Confusion on our spirits. I adore
Thee as earth does when red from every pore
She bleeds her grapes. I will that thou break up
Me, body and spirit crushed into thy cup
That my essential life may in some measure be
For nourishment and gladness unto thee.
Canst thou not spill me, Lord, as wine is spilt?
I am thine to be used or wasted as thou wilt—
Ah! but turn not, turn not thine eyes away.

DIONYSUS.

What ails thee, maiden? Neither to save nor
slay,
Will I turn towards thee.

ERINNA.

Have I earned thy hate,

Lord, by my worship? I will pause and wait
Silent before thee, vexing thee not until
Thou stoop to me and bend me to thy will.
Till then let me keep silence, nor despise
My entire life, brought thee in sacrifice.

DIONYSUS.

Mine art thou truly : had I turned to thee
 Thou hadst surely died of so much ecstasy.
 Verily, mine thou art : thy soul was wrought
 In close communion with the secret thought
 Of wise, glad-hearted, opulent-bosomed Earth ;
 Thou art responsive in each nerve to her.
 My priestess art thou, and my minister,
 Dedicated to me from thine hour of birth :
 Yet have I nought to do with thee.

ERINNA.

I die

Then, Lord, and willingly.

DIONYSUS.

As thou wilt. I
 Forsake this land for ever. A short space
 I loved a little a maiden's perfect face,
 Who, trembling, turned away from me, as now
 I turn from one with cold, indifferent brow,
 Who does infinitely adore me. Such is god's will.
 For one shall pray for the mere chance to spill
 His life in homage forth—and none take heed ;
 And one whom lavishly god loves shall feed
 By his own choice on husks his whole life long :
 And each shall say the god has worked him wrong,
 For to each the god has brought some bitterness.
 Yet am I not a god of the wine-press,
 Who treads men's souls like grapes ?

ERINNA.

I will take flight ;
 Pursue thee, and pursue by day and night !
 Rage with thy Bacchantes—be at least
 Present, if all-forgotten, at thy feast.
 This thou shalt not, though hating me, forbid,
 That, lost and lonely, by vine tendrils hid,
 I may drink the scattered madness thou dost fling
 In mystic showers amongst thy following.
 So shall I find some peace at last, and grow,
 A drop of the live streams which round thee flow ;
 Losing heart, soul, sense, thought and body—all
 Which binds me and constrains and holds me thrall
 To the ruinous subjection of my days.
 Oh of thy pity, grant me so much grace
 That secretly I may follow where thou shalt move !

DIONYSUS.

Here is enough speech, I am weary thereof !
 Come, if thou wilt, bind, if thou wilt, thy brows
 With vine, when the glad Bacchanals carouse
 All the long summer night. I hold thee not
 From coming—already art thou as one forgot !
 I have lit a fire in thee which shall consume
 Thee, wheresoe'er thou goest ; that is thy doom.
 So be it : and thou in whom no fire is lit
 Live out thy threadbare moments bit by bit.
 I neither seek to harm thee, nor befriend.
 And now, farewell—my sojourn here finds end :

Ye who have found no grace with god—farewell!
*(He goes out. ERINNA follows as though in
 a trance. AGLAE gazes after them as though
 stupefied.)*

AGLAE.

O may no strong god trouble us again!
(She remains reflecting for a few moments.)
 Yet—'twas *my* face he found desirable,
 And I have conquered god by miracle
 And by my will, and by my high disdain!
(She goes out with an air of solemn exultation.)



POEMS.

1914-1917.

QUO VADITIS?

“WHERE do ye go
Pale line of broken men?”—
How should we know?—

To die. Could we die twice, we'd die again.

“Wherefore?”—The call
Of a strange voice—was it of death or birth?—
Came to us all,
To all of us, the men of all the earth.

“And to what end?”—
We ask not, but we see
The self-same light which kindles in our friend
Shine from the faces of our enemy.

“Same light, same doom!
And to what purpose?”—Deep
We lie in the same womb,
The slain, the slain together in one sleep.

RECONCILIATION.

WHEN all the stress and all the toil is over,
And my lover lies sleeping by your lover,
With alien earth on hands and brows and feet,
Then we may meet.

Moving sorrowfully with uneven paces,
The bright sun shining on our ravaged faces,
There, very quietly, without sound or speech,
Each shall greet each.

We who are bound by the same grief for ever,
When all our sons are dead may talk together,
Each asking pardon from the other one
For her dead son.

With such low, tender words the heart may fashion,
Broken and few, of kindness and compassion,
Knowing that we disturb at every tread
Our mutual dead.

FLANDERS—1915.

THE men go out to Flanders
As to a promised land ;
The men come back from Flanders
With eyes that understand.

They've drunk their fill of blood and wrath,
Of sleeplessness and pain,
Yet silently to Flanders
They hasten back again.

In the Low-lands of Flanders
A patient watch they keep ;
The living and the dead watch on :—
Whilst we are sound asleep.

TO ONE WHO DENIES THE POSSIBILITY
OF A PERMANENT PEACE.

OLD friend, I greet you! you are still the same :
You poisoned Socrates, you crucified
Christ, you have persecuted, mocked, denied,
Rejected God and cursed Him—in God's name.
You gave monotonously to the flame
All those (whom now you honour) when the
new
Truth stung their lips—for fear it might be
true ;
Then reaped where they had sown and felt no
shame.

Familiar voice, old adversary—hail!
Yesterday's fools are now your gods. Behold!
The generations pass and we can wait.
You slandered Shelley, Florence Nightingale ;
Now a new splendour quivers in the cold
Grey shadows overhead ; *still* you are late.

THE PEACEMAKERS.

WE do not fight with swords,
Red iron, explosive fire,
And on no battle-field
Urge we our soul's desire.—
Nay, but our bitter might,
Silent and shod like Peace,
Shall set your homes alight
In the fullness of your ease.
Strike us, we strike not back,
But o'er the bloodless sod
Come thundering on our track
The batteries of God.

We slay you with a thought ;
We wound you with a word ;
We stab you to the heart
Who have abjured the sword.
Your strength has trampled down
Our weakness underfoot ;
The king has saved his crown,
The scaffold bears its fruit ;

Our lips are silenced—yet
The word we spoke lives on ;
The thing ye would forget
Is the thing already done.

Oh! victors have ye bound
Our bodies? This is good.
But ye seek to bind in vain
The thought not understood.
Not this year or the next
Shall we be justified ;
Enough that we perplexed
Your minds before we died.
This shall suffice our need,
That one swift word once said
Shall later be your creed :
And other men lie dead.

THE FIGHTERS.

WE die who had forgotten how to live ;
The flashing of a sword-blade bright and bare
Consoled us for all life promised and might not
give,
Saved us from lust, from memory and despair.

And that loud crying breaking up our sleep,
That dread, disastrous summons heard at morn,
Heard and obeyed, gave us our souls to keep
Who had forgotten the reason we were born.

More dangerous our dreams, our sick delight
More sorrowful, than in the thousand-fold
Ambiguous coils of the unending fight
That death whose bitterest pang is still untold.

Ah! not from passion did we seek release
But from our comforts—satisfied desires,
From that long masquerade which was not peace,
From little triumphs, fatigue, and sleeping fires.

So from our exultation may take shape
Peace which is neither merchandise nor lust,
Nor that false ease men hunger to escape,
Which is but war without the bayonet thrust.

Flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, we die
To give peace birth—peace once born among
men,
Deformed and stained and twisted into a lie:
We die to bring that peace to earth again.

“BEHOLD THE DREAMER COMETH.”

BEHOLD the dreamer cometh! For his sake
Strew the long road with stones. Doth he not
bring
Strange tidings of great joy? Oh, he would
fling
These chains far from us. Slay him lest they break.
Watch closely! Is not all we love at stake—
Our old familiar servitude and sin?
The stranger's at the gate, let him not in,
Let him not in, lest all we dead should wake!

This grievous torment surging up anew
Each generation!—Scarcely may we keep
Our beds, so near the dreamer comes, alas!—

Beware, lest all unnoticed he slip through!
For with no trumpet blare he stirs our sleep,
But very meekly, seated on an ass.

FOAM AND EARTH.

“OH! when will ye come home?”

“Never, never, never, never, never,
We have become brown earth—earth and blown
foam.”

“But we who sit at home
Through all the days, the long blind days, without
ye
All day, each day, knowing ye cannot come,
That ye are now nothing but earth and foam,
How shall we live, and what shall we become?”

“White, drifting foam, brown earth,
Is all your sons (brave dust made dear for ever!)
Earth and foam, ye gave us birth,
Foam and earth which come not home—
Nor would ye know us should we come.”
“Come ye not home?”—“Your sons shall come
home never.”

VALE.

THIS song is yours :

Take it ;—a home-returning bird,

Whose wings 'mongst storm-tossed plumage
hold

The pearly glint of silver hours,

The murmur of many worshippers which stirred
Some drowsy shrine of old.

These gifts it brings

From journeys made flying far south,

What are they but memory?—

Such songs the silence sings

In desert places—the wind's mouth

Has breathed them to the sea.

Faint notes, no more

Than wind or flying spray repeat

An exiled music, wild, divine :—

Now to this homeward shore

And to thy friend who watches there, beat, beat

On longing pinions, bird of mine!

To such a land

So wrapt in quiet, each day falls

Tender as slumber ; listen ! Deep

Sighing over white sand

And through green olive-groves how the sea calls

In a low voice like sleep.

But lest thou break

The silence, let thy pinions move

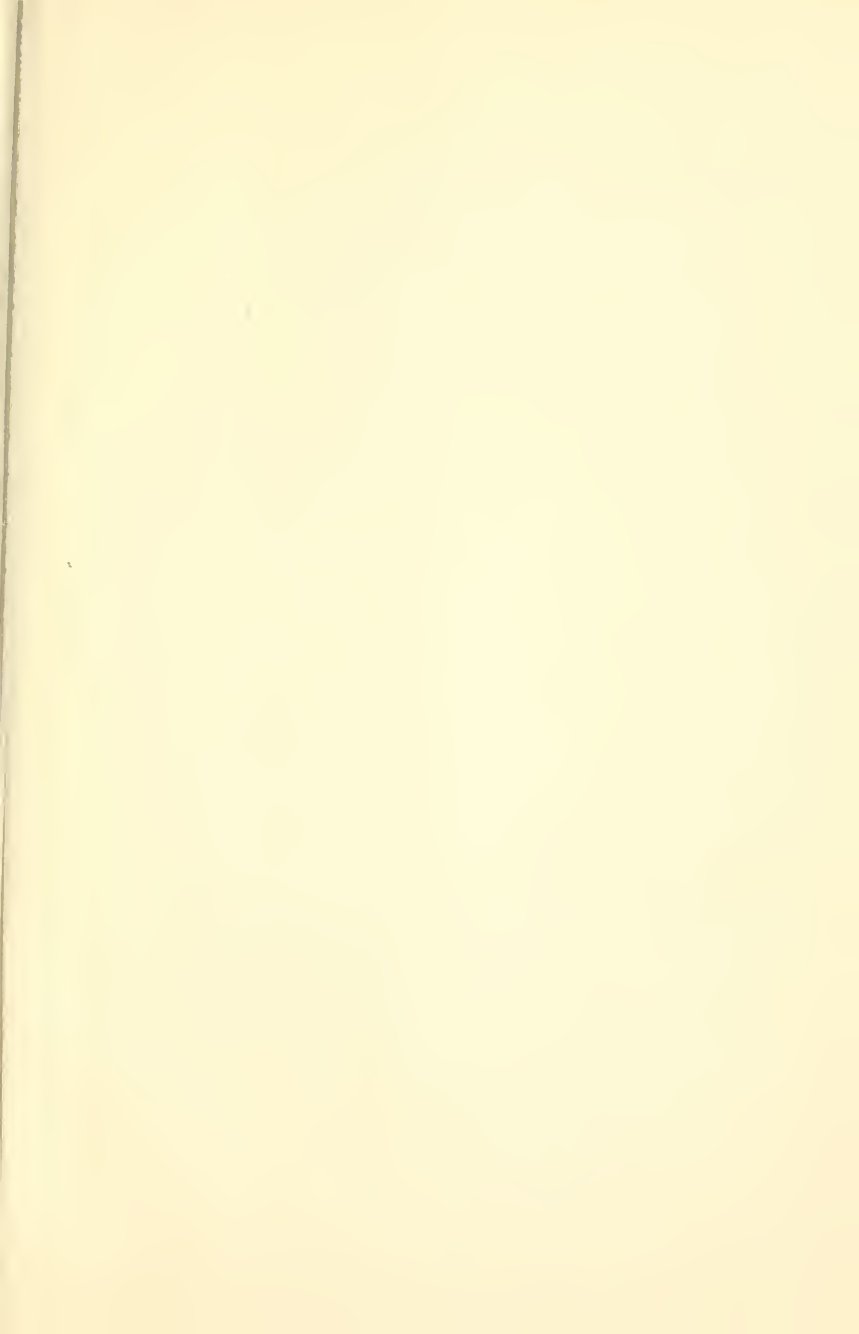
So delicately, thou shalt come

As in half-sleep to one not yet awake,

The footsteps of returning love,

One early morning to thy home.







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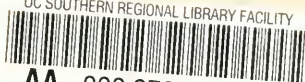
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