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A PRELUDE  
IN VERSE

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A PRELUDE IN VERSE



A PRELUDE  
IN VERSE

BY  
MARION DURST

LONDON  
ELKIN MATHEWS, CORK STREET  
M CM XIV





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My thanks are due to the Editor of the *Saturday Review* for permission to reprint two of these poems.

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## The Poet of a Dream

A WORLD of heavenly beauty says me nay,  
Sweet wandering moments of it come and go,  
I may not keep them, or pretend to know  
The wished-for guests who will not with me stay;  
The Life is there, the Truth is there, the Way,—  
Christ's very Beauty, yet in broken show,  
For as Aurora lights that faintly glow  
And fade, are my poor visions of His Day.

One night there came to me a wandering dream—  
A poet to my Lord, all love and fire,  
With eyes to see—with heart for love's own theme :—

A prophecy of one with glorious voice,  
Coming to make all Christendom rejoice,  
Transfiguring each prelude of desire.

## Dawn

A STILL grey sea,  
Beneath a still grey sky,  
A soft wind whispering by,  
A distant sea-bird's cry,  
A sense that God is nigh  
Ere the day begins to be.

## Walking through the World

I WALK beneath mysterious autumn trees,  
An autumn twilight hour,—  
But when I walked in summer field or bower  
These too were mysteries ;  
Always there is a promise and a breath,  
Beyond my spirit's call,  
Almost the living trees confess the Faith,  
And yet I know not what Creation saith,—  
But He who walks here with me knows it all.

There was an hour, O friend of mine, when we  
To each drew very near,  
When, hand in hand, we both grew silent, dear,  
Because love could not see ;  
Always there is a secret yet untold,  
The barriers do not fall,  
Almost I touch your life whose hands I hold,  
And yet I know not what my hands enfold,—  
But Love Himself is with us, knowing all.

## Consecration

THOU Lord our God, through æons past our thought,  
A body hast prepared for man,—for Thee,  
When Thou would'st crown and save humanity,—  
Our Science for it in the dust hath sought ;  
And, feeling something of the Love that brought  
Beauty of hope to earth and sky and sea,—  
That gave each human form the power to be  
Thy Temple,—Art instinctively hath wrought.

Oh not alone through Time's poor changeful hours,  
We needs must yearn towards the work divine,  
Which is Love's outward sacrament and shrine ;

But, as it is Thy very Touch that dowers,  
We crave that in the End that Touch of Thine  
Might consecrate eternally our powers.



## Good Friday Sunshine

THERE is a day of all the year, when Spring  
Puts on most wealth of beauty ; and I tell  
No fancy-truth, my heart has loved so well  
Year after year earth's fair apparelling  
Upon that Day. Yes, and my mind can bring  
From childhood, memories like the distant swell  
Of half-heard music, linking with a spell  
The Grief, and every innocent laughing thing  
That haunts our garden. Easter seems begun,  
The hour of darkness is our victory,  
And as the Gloria in the Litany,  
Out of the very deep, earth's hope mounts high ;  
I know not how, but that Dear Grief hath won  
Such look of deepening hope for earth and sky.

## A Summer Afternoon

THERE is a little movement in the bushes,  
A little laughing cry,  
The lightest breath of wind across me brushes,—  
I think that Puck ran by.

The fern-fronds in the sleepy sunlight glisten  
About yon twisted thorn,  
They seem to dance,—and surely if I listen  
I hear a pixie horn.

A thousand sportive lights are gaily flinging  
Life o'er the forest glade,  
And merry shadowy birds their flight are winging  
From shade to elfin shade.

They lure me to the threshold of receiving  
Secrets beyond my sight ;  
That may not be,—yet ah ! no make-believing  
This dear God-given Delight.

## A Song among the Hills

OH ! what was that gay scrap of song  
That made a music in the hills?—  
More fleeting than the tender mist  
That all the sunlit valley fills.

Oh ! what was that fair dancing form  
That came before my spirit-eyes?—  
Lighter than sun-gleams after storm  
That touch the hills unearthly-wise.

The song said " I am gay in Christ,  
For He shall wipe away all tears,"—  
And the light form that danced along  
Bore all the burden of earth's years.

Oh ! who art thou so strangely gay,  
So free through mist and gleam to rove ?  
Thou flittest far and far away,—  
But now the hillside breathes of love.

## Oncoming Tide

A CONQUERING host whose onset must appal,  
A pitiless Fate devouring great and small,  
A Force untameable o'ermastering all,  
Surge on the waves.

Yet daily is that army held in check,  
Daily that Fate is foiled in making wreck,  
Daily that Force is made to bend the neck,  
By God who saves.

And harebells grow hard by the stormy shore,  
And sea-birds rear their young, where ocean's roar  
Doth ceaseless rise and fall for evermore,  
Among the caves.

## Advent

O WORLD, grown old and passing dull,  
Sated with evolution change,  
I know that thou art wondrous wise,  
And nothing new is wonderful  
Beside thy half-lost memories :—  
But, dost not envy us the strange  
Young Hope that lightens yet our eyes,  
This foolishness beyond the range  
Of any power of thine to lull,  
The looking for a great Surprise ?

O World, thy weary patient kings  
Are wearier now that thou art old,  
Their crowns are dusty grown and grey,—  
Thy seers with chill mechanic things  
Fashion Utopias every day :—  
But, unto us a blackbird sings  
His note on yonder hawthorn spray  
'Mid possibilities untold ;

## Advent

What if this songful moment brings  
The lightning Presence,—and behold  
Earth fades, for Heaven-gates unfold?

O World, thou knowest the Thing in store  
Gives thy drear history, immense  
Wild meanings, awful and sublime,  
That all our souls are craving for,  
Wherein love's least shall vanquish Time :—  
The Cross looms in pre-eminence  
Begirt with living love and crime,  
Thou canst not cheat our penitence,  
Who only hear Love's call the more  
For all thy iterated chime.

## A Moment in a Mist

A FIR-TREE stretched gaunt arms into the mist,  
    Shadowy,—alone,—  
Moorland, by a faint breath of sea-wind kissed,  
    Lay vast,—unknown :—  
Save that a tribal watchman's cry forlorn  
    Just reached the place,  
While on the mist was very thinly borne  
    A wood fire's trace.  
Man had not been ; so greyly Life sat still  
    Without a name,  
Awaiting there the moment of her thrill  
As through the mist the Roman Legion came.

## Recognition

I DREAMT that, waiting for the Dread Appeal,  
I was made conscious that I stood beside  
An uncouth wearer of the Spirit-seal ;  
I might not understand his thought, so wide  
The ages were between us, yet could feel  
That in the days when tide on Northern tide  
Surged over Rome, someone with rugged zeal  
Swore faith to his new Lord, loved Him, and died.



## A Vision in a Street

SORDID the street,  
Hopeless the multitude's tread ;—  
But the face of one woman was meet  
For the sunset that flamed overhead.

More than meet, for the truthful grey eyes  
Had a tenderer light than the heaven,  
A peace beyond that in the skies,  
To my soul from her bearing was given.

Dreary the throng,  
Mammon with Pleasure and Care,—  
Yet almost I break into song,  
For the beauty of holiness there  
Revealed,—but I pass on in prayer,  
And am strong.

## My Lady's Reverence

HER little common acts of every day,  
Half-conscious and serene,  
Made up a homage to poor human clay  
By all but love unseen.

She thought her gentle actions all unread,—  
Nothing but time and dress,—  
But I who knew her spirit learnt to dread  
My own unholiness.

## Earthly Sacraments

KISSES, and hand clasps, meeting eyes,  
Rare smiles and holy tears,  
Love's means of grace that spirit-wise  
Bear love through days and years.

The tender lights of sunset-glow,  
The chanting of the wind,—  
Channels whereby we dimly know  
An Ever-living Mind.

## Pictures

ONE dark November morning, as I went  
Churchward in our grim town,  
My heart was full of sudden strange content,—  
Beauty had claimed her own.

A Gardener stooped beneath bare churchyard trees,  
Under that murky sky,  
The touch of simple old activities  
Thrilled me as I passed by.

Within our modern Church's opening door,  
Darkness a mystery made,  
A working woman scoured the trodden floor,  
Half seen, half lost in shade.

I passed to where a light far distant shone,—  
I passed one kneeling there,—  
A lowly Sister, veiled and alone,  
Dignified in her prayer.

## Pictures

I passed into the Beauty all unseen,  
Of That I may not tell,  
'Twas but a glimmer of the King's pure sheen,  
Yet Light unspeakable.

And in that Presence with the mighty past  
Was fellowship most sweet,  
Beauty to cheer us, though our lot be cast  
Where all seems counterfeit.

Yea, through that Presence our inhuman days  
Hold power for time to come,  
When loving hands once more shall render praise  
And beauty find a home.

## To the Writer of Psalm CII

WHO wast thou, Sire, that from a far-off time  
Dost mould for us our very thoughts in prayer  
Clothing in words of faith and hope sublime  
Our inarticulate cry that God would spare?

How didst thou learn such depth of penitence  
As could foreshow the Love that should redeem,—  
Such grief for Sion's long-lost innocence  
As made earth's vanities in truth a dream?

Surely in bitterness of spirit thou,  
A Prophet criedst, deeming thy voice unheard,—  
A mist enshrouds thy sorrowing form, but now,  
Out of the mist that voice our souls hath stirred.

In days of strange and utter loneliness  
Thou sat'st apart, O Exile from thy home,  
And looking over ages of distress,  
Hadst glimpses of the Glory that should come.

## To the Writer of Psalm CII

Here do we, parted by all ages, meet,  
Thou Christ's forerunner, we that follow Him,  
While in a Psalm mysteriously sweet  
Thou teachest us to see through shadows dim.

Thine is a voice whereby lost Sion's call  
Reaches His ear, who shall her times fulfil,  
The broken shame that at Christ's Feet must fall,  
Was thine of old ; is hers in mercy still.

So word by word with thee our Psalm is said,  
Only, since One in flesh our earth hath trod,  
With fuller faith we, closing, bow the head  
With words of Threefold Glory unto God.

## The Fir-Tree Hymn

GLORY to God, the God of strength and straightness,  
Who reared us limb by limb,  
Who fashioned us in all our stern sedateness  
To lift up praise to Him.

No blasts of winter through the forest sweeping  
Find leafless branches here,  
For, decked with green, we Christmastide are keeping,  
The crown of all our year.

Not graciousness is ours, not summer beauty,  
Not autumn's radiant glow,  
Emblems we stand of faithfulness to duty,  
In midst of winter snow.

The mighty storms are on us, crashing, swinging,  
We lift a joyful cry,  
We clap our hands and break forth into singing,  
"Glory to God on high."



## The Fir-Tree Hymn

Glory to God, our anthem faileth never,  
Come seasons as they will,  
Though summer raptures die away,—for ever  
His praise abideth still.

## In the Shadow of Judgment

IN this strange moment of this life of ours,  
The note of sparrows twittering in our eaves,  
The call of garden thrushes, tender showers,  
The greyly quiet light the sunset leaves,  
Mingle with little wonted sounds of home,  
The clicking gate has suddenly grown dear,—  
Giving a sense that whatsoe'er may come,  
Love leads us yet, that Love Himself draws near.

## To Dear Jane Austen

It would be strange beyond the thoughts of men,  
If, in that Day when all our work is tried,  
Some glorious intellect superbly wide  
Should bow before your limitations then ;  
For, if your genius longed with freer pen  
To do the things that truth in you denied,  
Your faithful fear o'ermastered all beside,  
Nor dreamed of praise in worlds beyond our ken.

Yet is your life a beacon, calmly clear,  
Of pure unselfishness and honour true,  
Too true to clutch at satisfaction here ;

And gratefully I bring a tribute due  
Even more for this than for your witty cheer,  
And hours of happy laughter spent with you.

## Beyond Romance

Is it not strange that in some very hour  
When all the old world seems to be undone,  
When a New Age begins its course to run,  
And ancient sins fall with the Bastille Tower,—  
'That in some quiet spot, with wonted dower  
Of high symbolic splendour in the sun,  
Window and carven work, howe'er alone,  
Live, in a peace more beautiful than power ?

Old musty books with which men used to pray,  
A figure fitting by a whist-wood tree,  
These are no relics doomed to mere decay ;

Seeing that old prayers, old memory and ghost,  
Wait but the Day when the redeemed host  
Shall rise, to put on immortality.

## Christ upon the Moors

WE walked together, you and I,  
Under a cloudy moorland sky,  
Where long grey lines wheeled onward yet were  
still,—  
Even our grassway track, my friend,  
Was mystery without an end,  
A secret of God's purpose and man's will,  
Written upon the hill.

There came a moment when we stood,  
And in an unexpected mood  
You traced the lines of influence in my hand,—  
Until a thought, a sudden word,  
Revealed an Influence of our Lord,—  
Did HE write what we could not understand,  
Within the palms we scanned?

## Christ upon the Moors

One word and that was all,  
One gentle Touch most Personal,—  
The long grey lines of moor and cloudy sky  
Were writ by Him, but ah! He drew  
Nearer to us,—I turned to you,—  
And love's Redeemer bade me recognise  
Sweet wonder in your eyes.

## Christina Rossetti

HER poetry was woven into prayers,  
Aching with love to Christ,—aching with grief ;  
Hers was the valiant love that greatly dares  
To pray back others from their unbelief.

A Christ-like burden to her soul was given,  
Knowing her poet-world,—knowing its thrall ;  
Grieving for loveliness estranged from Heaven,  
The sorrow and the heart-break of it all.

Part of her holy grief I may surmise  
Love's undespairing woe,—love to last breath ;  
Till reverent wonder bids me turn my eyes,  
And leave to Christ the joy beyond her death.

## In an Arena Cell

“ O THOU Whose Hands and Feet were bound for me,  
My wondering joy, if so Thou let it be,  
Will be to know throughout Eternity  
That these two hands were bound with cords for  
Thee.

“ Saviour, Whose Spirit by my sin was bowed,  
The memories of years upon me crowd,  
Until I wonder that I am allowed  
Such blissful pain ; humbled, Thou mak'st me proud.

“ Thou said'st : ‘ Forgive, they know not what they  
do,’  
Enlarge my love, Redeemer, that I too,  
Loving their very hands who pierce me through,  
With unknown death, be to my Pattern true.”



## Stern Love

O THOU, Creator of Thy human race,  
Behold, our inmost soul and spirit yearn,  
Ever unsatisfied till we discern  
Our deepest instinct's final meeting-place ;  
Seeking not only Love's all-beauteous face,  
Not only Justice—sternest of the stern,  
For Thou Who madest us hast made us burn  
For fulness that transcends all thought and space.

Child, thou art such a little child of Mine,  
Thou can'st but kneel beneath My awful Cross,  
Within the outskirts of the Mystery ;

Dimly to recognise sin's utter loss,  
Dimly to feel the depths of Love Divine,  
And know that This begins eternity.

## In a Futile Generation

### I

O CHRIST, Thou didst create us for Thy Praise,  
Thy secret purpose we may yet fulfil,  
Beauties undreamt of, wonders hidden still,  
Are stored up in the counsel of Thy ways ;  
We only need Thy quickening Touch to raise  
Achievement from the dust of love grown chill.  
Ah ! touch us soon ;—this earthen weight will kill ;  
Even longing in our futile wistful days.

Our powers, our hearts, our hopes before Thee lie,  
We are but waiting for the breath of Spring,  
We do but need Thy Touch, O Love most High ;

And rapturous wealth of colour love shall bring,  
Love's new-found voice triumphantly shall sing,  
Love's new Cathedral soar toward the sky.

## In a Futile Generation

### II

If Thou wilt come into our lives indeed,  
Thou very God, Who yet wast crucified,  
Thou very Love, though utterly denied,  
Maker of souls, content with souls to plead ;  
Teach us, as Peter did, to feel our need,  
Even though we have to cry as Peter cried,  
Though it mean wreck of all our thoughts beside,  
Grant us Thy saving Look with Love's own speed.

For our hearts fail us following afar,  
As in pale service of some human Lord,  
Some phantom Hero 'mid stern things that are ;

Nay, where Apostles, Saints and Martyrs prove,  
Their endless ecstasy of living love,  
We too would worship Thee, Beloved, Adored.

## The Heart of All

LORD, let me speak to Thee this once of love,  
Ah! not in any paltry thought of mine,  
But once in that tremendous Thought of Thine  
Which goes so far beyond what we can prove ;  
Suffer me once o'er that great Theme to rove,  
The wonder of the Touch which is Divine,  
The Deeds which are of it the wondrous sign,  
Telling us how the Heart of God can move.

If I may dare to speak of Passion now,  
Let it be with one prayer of utter need ;—  
Lord, when before the Deeds of Love we bow,  
Make us to know by Hands that once did bleed,  
Make us to know by Thy once thorn-crowned Brow,—  
Thou mad'st us for Thyself, indeed, indeed.

## A Moonlight Hymn

JESUS our Peace,  
Jesus our perfect Light, our perfect Rest,  
Jesus all blest.

While shadows loom,  
Changing the aspect of all things that are,  
Lead by a star.

Lift Thou mine eyes,  
And flood the darkling heavens throughout the night  
With calm moonlight.

Even while I pray,  
Let me behold Thy witness, and then rest,  
Hope in my breast.

## Golden Street

A STORMY sunset lights the under-sky,  
The roadway glistens after rain,  
A more than fairy brightness suddenly  
Fills each dull window-pane.

Just for one moment does the long slate roof  
Shine as a level way to Heaven,  
The dingy rows of house-front are not proof  
Against such glory given.

One moment does the smell of rain-washed earth  
Our tired senses freshly greet,  
Some noisy pavement children make their mirth  
Just for a moment sweet.

The noble beauty of my friend's dear face,  
The grandeur of a patriarch's head  
Are always there,—but now I turn to trace  
Unwonted things instead.

## Golden Street

Say you : " It is a momentary gleam,  
Tragic with bitter mockery ?"—  
Nay, but That lies beyond earth's broken dream,  
Which makes it Prophecy.

## Harebell Music

Out of the realm of airy fitting shadows,  
Faceless or formless do ye come to me,  
As when the thin mist wreathes about the meadows,  
You dreamy things I see.

Elusive notes ye sing of far-off sorrow,  
Or is it laughter, will ye tell me true?  
And of the song, I know not if to-morrow,  
Or memory holds the clue.



## After Many Years

### I

SWIFT, unforeseen, a first young friendship came,  
And while our souls were with its ardour filled,  
Our life was changed in ways unguessed, unwilled,  
Just when it seemed for evermore the same ;  
And afterwards, by Beauty the untame,  
Some of us were to dreams undreamt of thrilled,—  
Then Love-at-first-sight met us, Love the skilled  
In setting dull monotonies aflame.

Time after time God made our lives anew,—  
The very gardens where we wandered seem  
Full of their sweet surprising moments given ;

One glad Spring-running, one tall tree that grew  
With one thrush singing, like a fairy dream,  
An evening symbol of the Touch of Heaven.

## After Many Years

### II

And if I am romantic in my love,  
As well as very reverential,  
So that a shyness on my thought must fall,  
Where some dear presences my spirit move ;  
Let these things be the signs which go to prove  
My love to be a fragment, howe'er small,  
Of that transcendent Love on which I call  
Emboldened by sweet Kinship's treasure-trove.

For if to me some in a garden-scene  
Wear glorious promise even in mortal dress,  
I never see it as God's Love hath seen ;

And for romance,—while memories round me press,  
I can but feel, through happenings which have been,  
Something of His dear unexpectedness.

## The Master Poet

LORD, where Thou art there must be Poetry,  
Do what we will to mar what Thou hast made,  
Thy Love can touch our mean vulgarity  
    In miracles of aid.

I marvel when in some poor sordid street,  
Some house where beauty is of nothing worth,  
To find a rare heroic beauty, meet  
    For Heaven more than Earth.

I marvel, in some Church of latter days,  
Reared with no craftsmanship, no love-design,  
To feel an atmosphere of solemn praise,  
    That does bespeak Thy Shrine.

I marvel when the thoughts of my sad heart  
Form for the Presence that is come within  
A holy house of wonder, set apart  
    From ugliness and sin.

## The Master Poet

It can be only that Thyself art there,  
Tenderly forcing us to know Thee nigh,  
Bringing Thy changeless love of beauty, where  
Beauty is like to die.

## Midnight

A SIGH from the patient earth,  
From tall black trees beneath a changing moon,  
Creation waits the meaning of its birth  
To be revealed,—ah ! might the Day come soon.

From the heathen world a sigh,  
Breathed shudderingly from age-long dumb distress,  
And lamp-lit cities answer with a cry  
Of mocking laughter worse than emptiness.

From watching Saints a prayer,  
Made without ceasing, “ Lord, how long, how long ! ”  
Then over all these half-sounds in the air  
A quiet Voice that saith, “ I come, be strong.”

## Earth's Meeting-Place

A HALF-FORGOTTEN mound,  
Set where the nations meet,  
Where East and West of old have found  
Their furthest beat.

There through the Roman power,  
That doom on sin was sealed,  
To Easterns in prophetic hour,  
By faith revealed.

There on a Day in Time,  
Central since Time began,  
The Slain of Jewish, Gentile, crime,  
For men was Man.

There in the face of Heaven,  
And of all history,  
We dare to speak of sin forgiven  
And unity.

## Earth's Meeting-Place

For all the dreaming East,  
For all the toiling West,  
For manhood sunk into the beast,  
One Hope, one Rest.

With distant alien mind,  
We dwell apart, alone,  
Only beneath that Cross we find  
That we are one.

One in our sorest need,  
One soul of man, one sin,  
And here a Love with room indeed  
For all therein.

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