

DOUBT

and Other Things

ELIHU VEDDER



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DOUBT
AND OTHER THINGS



THE SOUL BETWEEN FAITH AND DOUBT

DOUBTS AND OTHER THINGS

VERSE AND ILLUSTRATIONS
BY

Elihu Vedder



CAPRI-ROMA

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PORTER SARGENT

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THIS BOOK
I DEDICATE TO MY DAUGHTER
ANITA HERRIMAN VEDDER
WHO HAS SAVED IT FROM DESTRUCTION
AND TO THOSE WHO MAY BE GLAD
SHE HAS DONE SO
ELIHU VEDDER

Foreword

ELIHU VEDDER, at the age of eighty-six, now, after ten years of continuous thought and revision, consents to have these verses printed. Eight years ago, some of his friends will remember, their publication was first announced. At that time, he wrote, "Of course all things are crude and must ripen before fit for the public stomach. Yet I will send them along." Since then they have not been hermetically sealed, but have been ageing in the wood.

"The 'Doubt'," he writes "is doubtful—a fragmentary thing at best." And again, "I am sorry there is so little hope in 'Doubt'. It is as if written by a poet on Mars in prospect of its inevitable end. According to the astronomers, we have little reason for crowing. Perhaps other worlds are being fitted up for us."

"Doubt and Other Things," his friends will agree, however, is the ripest product of the genius of this gorgeous reincarnation of Leonardo.

Vedder, in his genius, is of all time, perennial and without age. His robust vigor, time-defying, impresses alike his friends and his portrait painters.

Of the latter, he says, "I send Paxton's portrait,—good as a Franz Hals. If you use it, have Paxton's name come out clearly. He was too modest by half in signing." Of another portrait he writes, "It's good, but as it gives not only the front face but the two sides, it is too broad—a sort of Mercator's projection, as it were—too many cocktails in evidence."

His active mind spirals about one's own, but always comes back and squarely hits the mark. He signs his name with a vigorous hand, and then looks up, eyes apop, and exclaims, "Behold the trembling hand of age!"

But this vigorous old oak that his friends have so long known now begins to show signs of physical decay. We can only pray

that he may yet have time, as he has the will, to complete some of the many projects that still remain in hand. For his spirit rebels at the weakness of the flesh.

Still "fondly round his heart are curled the clinging tendrils of this dear old world," and defiant of the processes of time, he writes, "A man once told me he began near St. Peter's, then moved to the Repetta, then to the Tritone—always getting nearer the cemetery of San Lorenzo. I, on the contrary, began my Roman life in this very house, circled about Rome, and now find myself just where I started so many years ago."

Since Vedder first saw Rome in 1857, his visits to these United States have been few and infrequent. For more than three score years he has dwelt apart, in Rome and Capri. Living in retirement, shunning publicity, Vedder has been really known only to those friends who, by persistence or propinquity, have penetrated the first bulwarks of reserve with which he has isolated himself. Once the first barrier was broken, he has given of himself and of his personality without stint.

Detached from the trivialities of modern life, he is, from his aerie, keenly observant of them. Unaffected by the petty eddies that swirl contemporary literary and artistic life, he boldly breasts the strong main currents. He has consorted with Michael Angelo, Leonardo, Durer, and the great of earth, and interprets life as would they today.

But his vision of the world is his own, and those who know him and his work catch wonderful glimpses, not only through his painting and his less known sculpture, but of late through his verse.

Whatever he does, in paint, or clay, or words, is always expressive of vision. To one who remarked that "an artist should be just an artist up to his eyes," Vedder retorted, "Yes, but look at Durer and Da Vinci. Didn't they cram ideas into their work? Have any of the big fellows ever been 'just artists up to their eyes'? By Jove, you can make up your mind that any chap who boasts of being 'an artist up to his eyes' is a fool the rest of the way!"

PORTER SARGENT

October 1, 1922

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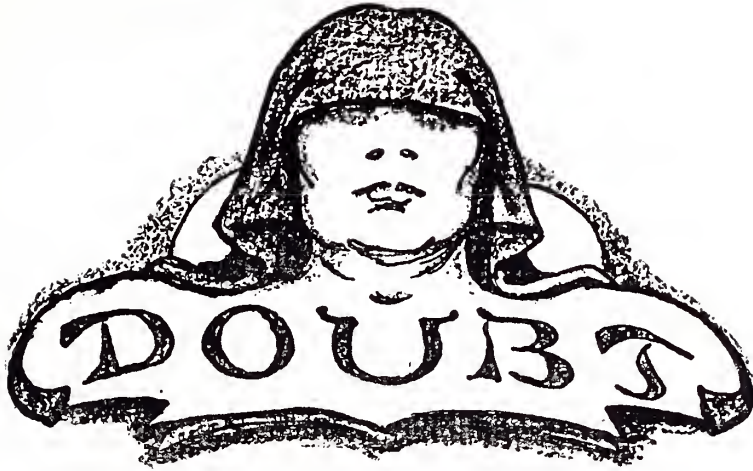
DOUBT

AND OTHER THINGS

'NOTA BENE'

I*T is not for me to pass judgment on Doubt or Doubters, that concerns Philosophers and Theologians; but as a painter I can at least give its portrait with some hope of success, after an intimacy of many years standing. Doubtless Erasmus Roterdamus could have done better, as shown in his "Praise of Folly" where he attends to Fools. But Doubters are not Fools; among them may be found many eminent persons, even a Saint—who by rights should be their patron—St. Thomas.*

As to the utility of this portrait of Doubt I must quote the magazines: "It will serve to identify me."



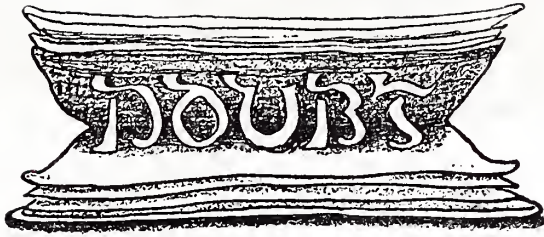
Those who can read the hearts of men
May know what motive moves this pen,
But he who holds the pen scarce knows
From what dim source that motive flows.
He sees in Nature's endless strife
By gleams, the mystic wheel of Life;
 Again a ray as from above
Shows him the flaming heart of Love,
 Then in the evergrowing gloom
 A single star above a tomb.

A Gleam, a Ray, a Star, a Tomb,
A Guess, a Faith, a Hope, a Doom.





CAN WE LIVING EVER SOLVE? AFTER—IS IT THEN TOO LATE?



Man makes himself a Labyrinth,
Which he then calls the life of man,
And in its mixed, meandering ways
He doubting and believing strays
Most of his days.

When he is right he fears he's wrong,
And when he's wrong—he thinks he's right;
He lights a candle—calls it day,
He blows it out and calls it night,
And thinks he's right.

Once Zion's altars streamed with blood
Of victims slain his soul to save,
He doubted—now the olive grows
Where he was once but Faith's blind slave
Or blind Faith's slave.

That is, the olive ought to grow
Where Turk to Christian still can show
The very birth-place and the grave
Of him who came mankind to save,
Lost Man to save.

Now in a Babel of wild creeds
The theologic maggot breeds
Where Man no more the offering slays
But curses his brother as he prays,
And even slays.

By doubting that the world was flat
He proved, it seems, the world is round,
By doubting that the world stood still
He proved that theory unsound—
It does go round.

And now perceiving all things move
He longs to know who gave the shove,
Came it in hatred or in love?
Had he a hand in this great shove?
Who gave the shove?

He sees all things forever move,
Conditions change, with changing days,
He hopes all things will end in Love,
Yet wonders at Love's cruel ways—
A Love that slays.

Time was when men the Doubter killed,
In this they proved themselves unwise,
Their aim should be to kill the Doubt,
This they can do when they find out
That Truth kills Doubt.

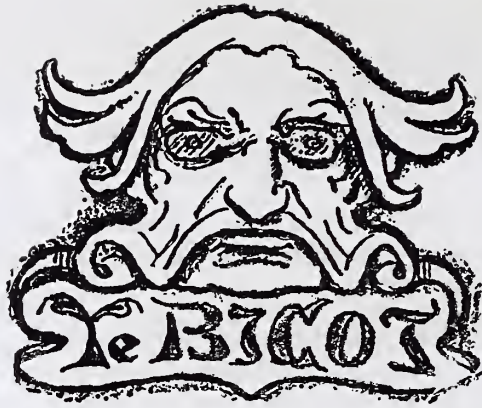
Abused Doubt—that Finder-out,
That Stripper-off of all disguise,
That Purger of Man's muddy eyes,
The thing that Bigots most despise,
How hard it dies.

But wait a bit—Doubt does not die;
It is essential as the eye,
For 'tis the prism of the mind
Making a spectrum where we find
The lines of Truth better defined,
To which we're blind.

One while, a taper's feeble ray
Lit the dark catacombs of Care,
Now, candles numberless display
A blinding light resembling day—
In which we pray;

To some all temples cast a gloom:
They seem a candle-lighted Tomb
Where Truth lies dead; they need a ray
Of purer light, to light the way—
Out into day.





Priests sometimes prate of Liberty.
Beware—'tis for themselves, not Thee.
Look at the lands where they most rule
Then meekly yield to them the school,
And you will very quickly see
What use they make of Liberty.

They'll give the youthful mind a twist
That in the adult will persist,
Making of man a pliant tool
To aid their plan—which is to rule.
They're simply wild to rule the roast
And when they can—again will toast,
See History.



The Mind's a stuff that doth retain
A form, an impress, or a stain
That nothing can obliterate;
A hall-mark on Youth's golden state
That must remain.

When Theologians fall out
And tuzle sheaves of Truth about,
They sometimes grains of Wisdom find
But ever leave one grain behind—
That grain is Doubt.

To offset which they possess Hope,
Or they think so, with which to cope
With Nature's great brutality,
A Hope which is a varying faith
In Immortality.

Pure Justice such as men conceive,
Or God permits them to believe,
In Nature they nowhere perceive;
This, Nature seems to be without,
And so they doubt.

But 'tis considered a great sin
To doubt the faith you're brought up in;
Yet all reformers must begin
By committing this great sin—
If 'tis a sin?

Savonarola saw expire
And in humiliation dire
Beheld his faith melt quite away
Before another Bigot's fire
On one dread day.

Yet many thousands Death have sought
Beneath the car of Juggernaut.
And so we see a varying Faith
Which makes us pause to estimate
The worth of Faith.

That Faith's the strongest thing on earth
It would be foolishness to doubt.
The only thing is to find out
Which Faith no other Faith can doubt—
Just find that out.

And what are we to say of Hope?
Cannot that Mighty Spirit cope
With Doubt and Fear and deep Despair?
And clear this labyrinthine air
Of dark Despair.

The world outside Man's little maze
As wide as all creation is,
Yet he pursues his narrow ways
And separates God's ways from his—
God's plan from his.

God's plan and his may be the same,
They may be doing all they can,
Man helping God—God helping Man,
This seems to be the latest plan,
The final plan.

So after this naught need be said.
Beyond this we no further go,
It may be, or may not be so,
As yet we do not surely know—
Some say they know!





I have a bone to pick with Saints,
Be they the fat or skinny kind,
Who first their way to Heaven find
And leave the most of us behind—
 'Tis most unkind.

They take the reason by surprise
With half-seen truths backed up by lies,
So mingled and so well entrenched
Are all these venerable lies
 That Doubt now tries.

Take then that scientific side
Where by degrees you gently glide
From facts to unproved theories,
Where one wanders more at ease
 The less one sees.

That things are as they are, we see;
The reason why is not so clear,
Nor is it comforting to know
That they are so because they are so—
That does not cheer.

What is the use of seeming odd?
Claiming your mind cannot grasp God?
When any preacher in the land
Will glibly make you understand
All about God.

I often think 'tis strange to see
How every man unwittingly,
No matter how opposed his plan,
Must do some good to every man;
'Tis a good plan.

So should the spirit of Tom Payne
Or Voltaire, visit earth again,
That visit some would call a good,
Or might, or could, or would, or should—
I know I should.

The same abuses are as rife
As when they lived this earthly life,
The need of caustic wit and pen
Is felt as keenly now as then—
Both wit and pen.

Of course I often mention Plan
Because it rhymes so well with Man,
I make them rhyme, but not agree,
And it's just that that bothers me—
 They won't agree.



The fact is no one knows the Truth;
Goodness is lovely, Sin uncouth—
Yet see them sitting cheek by jowl,
Sanctity and Sin most foul,
 Yes, cheek by jowl.

Contrasts are needed, the Wise say,
Night, to bring out the light of Day;
Even poor starving Poverty
Gives birth to generous Charity,
 So the Wise say.

All have a life—some more, some less;
Some live to curse, some live to bless,
Some lives are full of happiness
While some are but a sorry mess
 Of wretchedness.

Yet earth is fair with what has been,
With what now is, with what's to come,
With beauty every day renewed,
With pleasure yet to be pursued,
 With hopes new won.

Yes, beautiful beneath the sky,
Its verdant plains, its mountains high,
Ah! Yes, its beauty none deny,
But there's the shadow—all must die,
 Yes, all must die.



But set aside sad thoughts of Death,
See the myriad stars at night,
Is there not Hope, is there not Might
In all that most stupendous sight?
 And great delight?



THE BIRTH OF THE IDEA

There carping Doubt fades quite away,
Man feels that all things must be right,
That there at least his soul is free
To wander through Infinity
By its own might.

Wandering through Infinity,
What doth Man's ardent spirit find?
Naught but the limits of his mind—
The confines of his little mind
Doth he there find.

Yet beareth he a germ divine:
'This universe may yet be mine.'
Poor fool, he dreameth drunk with wine,
Yet his bold dream hath something fine—
Almost divine.

Such 'wine' old Omar dreamed about
As he went reeling in and out
Through taverns theological,
All ending in a Persian bout—
More logical.

Old Omar lived so long ago
He could not know what we now know.
Nor solve as we the scheme divine,
And so he solved his doubts in wine—
In real red wine.



Bugaboos

Men filled the world with Bugaboos
Until at last they now refuse
To fear or trust in Bugaboos.
Now millions of Atoms fill all space
Till waves of aether these replace,
Which some consider merely thought.
So matter is reduced to naught;
No matter, they'll begin again
Reducing thought to ease or pain
Or piously to Good and Evil,
Thus saving that Bugaboo
THE DEVIL.



All that we know of Deviltry
Was equally well known of yore;
So we but tread an ancient shore
Where all the pebbles we behold
Have been gone o'er.

Things we thought dead or stowed away—
The curtained corner, turned down light,
Now boldly flout the face of day,
Resuming in fair Science' name
Their ancient sway.

Science enamored is of Light,
For wandering in the darkest night
Tracing the ultra-violet ray
She only hopes to prove some day,
There is no night;

But, says the ruthless modern mind,
'What makes all things so devilish?
Tell us the Truth; no more, no less;
We're always put off with a guess,
Always a guess.'

The more we ponder on the question,
The more we need a good digestion;
Some swallow all and let it stay,
That was the good old-fashioned way,
That pious way!

'Let good digestion wait on all'
Remains, we fear, a pious wish
In view of this enormous dish.
What makes all things so devilish?
Yes, devilish.



Madness

Saints taking things so seriously
Bring on the very Hell they dread,
For every mad-house shows some one
Who saved his soul, but lost his head.

Nor is it safe to stop half way
For Dante shows as clear as day
That 'tis the hesitating Souls
That in the end, the dearest pay.

(March 2, 1915.)

We fear good folks must shut their eyes,
Or never read or realize,
How much the Saints all have to tell
And how on it they love to dwell—
We speak of Hell.

In these days it's kept out of sight,
For fear it might annoy or fright,
'Tis so depressing in the night,
In fact it's out of fashion quite—
But is this right?

It was prepared with so much care
In hopes of sending thousands there.
Truly, 'twould make old Dante stare
To find his Hell now almost bare—
So few go there.

But do not let us overween,
What has been may again be seen;
Names change, but things remain the same;
So we may see his Hell again—
With all its pain.

Saints many different stories tell,
But all agree upon a Hell,
There all their varied stories blend,
Their sinners all to Hell they send—
Admire the 'Blend.'



A Plan

Someone devised a simple plan
Imagining a God-like man,
Who without church or without creed,
Helps each according to his need.
Not in Man's plentitude of power,
In health, in wealth, in happiness,
But in his dark despairing hour
Of weakness and distress.



This the predicament we're in—
Without Sin there is no strife,
And without strife there is no life.

From this conclusion to escape we try in vain,
Nature a singularly even balance doth maintain,
For the same nerves that give us pleasure
Give us pain.

Mid all these schemes, some scheme must save,
So many are the various ways,
Some even think that problem plays
Some sorts of sinners yet may save—
 'Tis a close shave.

Doubtless I'll soon enough be told
My tales of Saints and Hell are old,
That things have undergone a change—
Much for the better—yet 'tis strange,
 Yes, very strange,

That I should find them all alive,
That Saints on differences thrive,
Questions not settled, not a bit,
And all the Saints for fight most fit—
 For fight yet fit.

Just let a Saint tread on the hem
Of some Saint in Jerusalem,
Then watch the brotherly embrace
And see the showers of Heavenly Grace
 Descend on them.



Doubt doubts itself into belief,
If only to get some relief
From all these strange bedevilments
Of scientific psychical developments.



Good men are born the wide world o'er,
And have been since the days of Noah,
'Tis not their creed that makes them good,
'Tis in the breed or in the blood,
Not neighborhood.

Creeds are but guesses Saints have made
At mysteries beyond their reach,
Which they, before they've fairly grasped,
Begin to teach.

They've fed men on fair fallacies,
Hope's rainbow hues and dazzling dyes,
But never show the naked Truth's
Crude nudities.

Perhaps 'twould like Medusa's head
Turn them to stone or strike them dead,
So must be overlaid with lies—
To spare their eyes.

Those strictly following the track
Of others, find when they get back
They have no progress really made,
It has been shadow following shade
Quite retrograde.

Better o'erleap the hedging walls
Unmindful of your many falls,
See for yourself what can be seen,
Allowing none to stand between,
Or the Truth screen.

'Truth—What is Truth?'—I hear the reader cry,
Truth changes from day to day—and so do I,
We're ever on the wing, could we but stay
I might find out what Truth is some fine day.





It is a fearful affair
When the doubter
Finds out, that he
Is beginning to
Doubt his own Doubt.

Doubt implies not Unbelief
But rather seeks for that relief
Which only certainty can give,
Otherwise we're like the brutes
Who only live.

Doubt often sees that Policy
Parades at times as Honesty,
But never will consent to be
Honest—through mere Policy,
That pious plea.

Doubt helps select, helps to appoint,
Even elect but not anoint,
Doubt ever lacks creative will:
The Doubter rests the Doubter still,
And ever will.

How cunningly the Doubter rails
And tears to bits the pious tales
Of Saints and Prophets, yet he fails
To give us better pious tales,
Or fairy tales.

Doubt, like the Earth-disintegrating worm,
Is not the working of a will infirm,
But is the slow preparatory toil
That makes Man's mind a more propitious soil.

Doubt doubts not for the sake of doubt,
It only seeks the Humbug out,
Unmasks pretentious dangerous fools,
Or the ambitious, or their tools—
As bad as fools.

Doubt finds no fault with efforts made
To remedy Life's many wrongs,
It only thinks with all earth's woes
There should be fewer Victor's songs,
Triumphant songs.

The triumph still is with the Strong,
Or cunning Greed still leads the way.
Doubt only asks of those who pray
Or preach, or teach, or talk so much,
Why this delay?

Brute Force gives but one knock-out blow,
And all your fine-spun theories go.
Think you by tying threads again
You may that Gulliver retain,
Bind or restrain?

Truly we need another life
To heal the Victims of this strife,
They ask no crowns for victories won
But compensation for wrongs done
Under the sun.





Where lies the Truth?—You must find out
Or blindly cast aside all Doubt;
But know that where there's mystery
Its shadow Doubt you'll surely see.
A better standpoint than that show
Of knowing what you do not know,
That shallow show.



The Doubter is not made but born,
So he doubts much if Gabriel's horn
Will wake him on that last great morn—
Doubting the morn.



THE RESURRECTION DAY

He thinks each morn may be his last,
And that without the rousing blast
Of Gabriel's awakening horn,
Doubting the horn.

He ought to fear that Gabriel
Might mean for him a call to Hell,
And would if he did not doubt Hell
And Gabriel.

Some think the Resurrection Day
Is one wild scene of dire dismay.
No—'tis as silent as the tomb.
Enough the looks all bent on Thee
To seal thy Doom.

When in Truth's mirror Thou shalt look
And see thine eyes gaze back at Thee,
Will that not be thy Judgement Day?
What need of other eyes to see?
What canst Thou say?



Man's heart first beats; he then takes breath;
His heart beats on until his death.
But he's not asked if he thinks meet
That he should breathe, or his heart beat—
Nor about Death.

Not being consulted in the least
How doth he differ from the beast?
Treading a path he cannot see
How can he say: 'My soul is free.'
How can that be?

Wills Man to live from the beginning
And finds that living is but sinning?
Or does he live in destined grooves
To find by sinning he improves?
What, Sin improve?

Evil is that which is opposed
To a great Law, or settled scheme,
The working out of which would seem
Constitutes Life.

To peaceful Souls this makes life Hell.
Weary of which they fain would dwell
Without this everlasting strife,
Unconscious both of Heaven and Hell—
Almost of Life.
This is Nirvana—at its best
Profound, almost unconscious, rest.

And yet, and yet, 'tis sad to doubt,
For when we see a growing light,
A harbinger of better days,
Cold Doubt absorbing all its rays,
Turns it to night.



Hope says, 'I seem to see a light.'
Faith says, 'That is the dawn of day.'
Doubt says, 'I'll wait, it is yet night.'
Death says, "'Tis left for me to say
Which one is right.'



VERSES ALLIED TO



Thus I diverge on either hand.
An I—divided, cannot stand,
Falling apart it forms a V—
Which I much fear resembles me.
By turns attracted or put out,
I sometimes marvel, sometimes flout.



A MYSTERY IN LINES AND SPACES

Proem

When past and present both conspire
To picture forth a future dire,
This may the doubting mind relieve—
Doubt long enough and you'll believe.
Believe all Good is from above,
Believe all is ordained by Love.

The voice of Doubt is never still
While we have breath,
Perhaps for this there was ordained
That Rest—called Death.

Why ?

Why in the name of common sense
When we perforce are hurried hence
Must we inevitably dwell
Either in Heaven or in Hell,
Is more than common sense can tell!

On Earth, we live in both, 'tis seen,
Not quite in Heaven, but between
Those others, who contented dwell
In what to us would seem a Hell!

But after—why a scale so just
That even one little speck of dust
Will send a soul to Heaven or Hell,
(Where it must permanently dwell)
Is more than common sense can tell.





In Extremis

Of all the fictions of the mind
Men take to with avidity
Is that salvation they can find,
With lightning-like rapidity.

Can oak with centuries of growth
Be changed to weeping-willow?
Can Man his years of sin revoke
At once upon Death's pillow?



Truth

No sooner doth Man make a guess
Than all the actors change their dress,
Till Truth remains the best guess made,
Pro tem, in Life's great masquerade.
And even this may be a guess,
Or shifty actors' change of dress.



All things men see, and ever saw,
Seem governed by unchanging law.
Then he is part of a machine?
If not, 'tis clear all things but seem
Governed by law.

The Old Question

The man who reconciles the two—
Free-will, Predestination—
By all odds will turn out, we think,
The smartest in creation.
Yet both are true and must be so;
Ingenious preachers make them go.

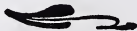
The universe is very wide,
In time and space well may abide
(No need that they be side by side)
Nirvana and frenzied energy;
And so these two be reconciled,
Man's vaunted Will and Destiny.

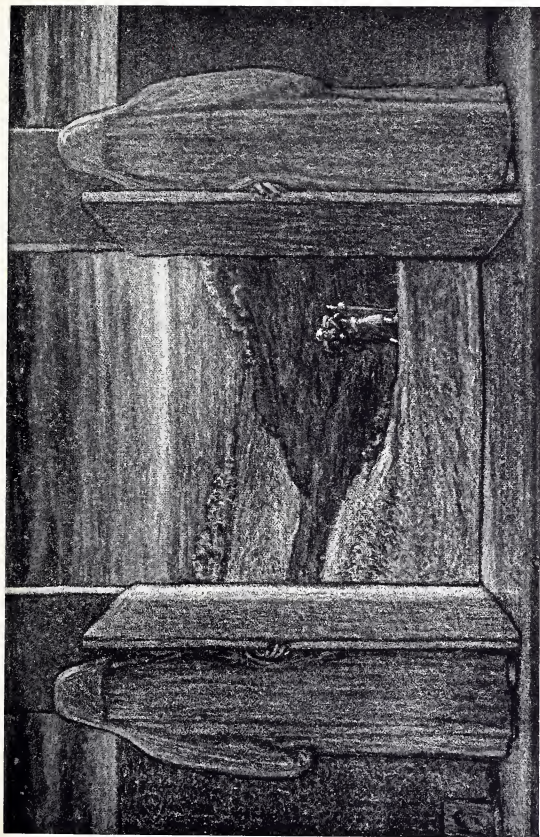
Yet spite this guess Doubt fails to see
How Free-will can be Destiny?





What means this wide and ever open door?
Through which mankind—the high, the low,
The rich, the poor, forever go, to weal or woe?
Means it Defeat—or means it Victory?
Means it Joy—or but more Misery?
We only know our bodies are but dust,
And go they must, back to infinity—
But where the Soul, and its fond hopes
Of Immortality?





THE EVER-OPEN DOOR

Logic

Logic affords this simple plan
To wind up the affairs of Man.

Let God and Satan cease to fight,
At once comes on eternal night,
Where Life itself yields up its breath
Lost in the great repose of Death.
For with the torch of Life burned out
Ended is both Faith and Doubt;
And movement ends and all is dumb
In silent equilibrium.
And Logic—Devil—God and Man—
In chaos end, where they began.

Here then behold a perfect plan
To wind up the affairs of Man.





Death

Death is a theme,
Belonging to the scheme
Of Life;
And bids fair to be
An unsolved mystery
To all Eternity.
Some moralists contend
That Death is not the end,
Only a change;
If this be so, 'tis strange
We do not crave the grave,
But doubting go.
Of one thing only sure:
We hope—but do not know.

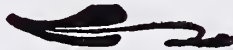
To Death we give the name of Change,
'Tis simply but a change of name,
The awful fact remains the same,
Which, sugar-coat it as you will,
Always remains a bitter pill.

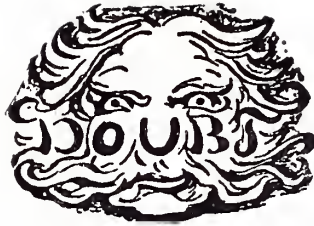
We see in Nature periods of rest,
And Death is one of them,—
Perhaps the best.



The Endless Fight

Facing, the Gladiators stand
On the arena's well-swept sand,
Blind Faith and a dogmatic Pope
'Gainst Reason free and man's best hope,
For though the Colosseum's gone
We see the endless fight still on.





This Doubt is an Opti-pessimist,
Who is quite willing to confess
His is a jolly gruesomeness,
Or a much chastened cheerfulness.

Seeing the folly of extremes,
Hopes of the absolute, but dreams—
Ever willing to take sides,
He in amused perplexity abides.

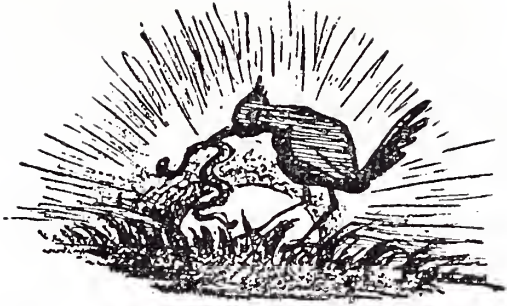


The Devious Track

When men found that their ancient Gods
Were heroes deified,
That God-like saints were merely men,
That prophets sometimes lied,
They wondered at the devious track
They long had wandered in,
Forever getting nearer God
Along the paths of Sin.



Note:—I fear this last line has a strangely familiar look.



The Early Bird

Where is the child who has not heard
The story of the Early Bird?
But where is taught, in school or chapel,
The story of the Worm and Apple?

Surely we may this truth affirm:
There always is an earlier Worm;
So let the child lay this to heart:
It all depends upon the start.

The Apple must have started fair
Without defect in any part,
Yet presently the Worm is there
Eating at its very heart.

Did Bird and Adam eat the fruit?
Leaving the worm a leafless brute?
For notice, as you see him squirm,
How naked seems the shameless Worm.

We then approve the early Bird,
But when his song of thanks is heard
Should it be counted as a sin
To ask what sings the worm within?

Is a child taught in any chapel
The story of the Worm and Apple?



Anno Domini 1914

Some busybodies stir up things when level,
Or pull down things they think have grown too high;
For every Angel, promptly find a Devil
And dig a Hell beneath the fairest sky—
They're very spry.

But Doubt begins by doubting of the Devil
And naturally of Angels in the sky
Fills up the Hells till they again are level
And proves it also can be very spry,
How hard both try.

Yet spite of all this preaching and this pounding
And centuries of hoarded wit and lore,
The Angels still the praise of Peace are harping
While from the Hells we hear the Devils roar
The praise of War.





Moralizing

Observe, and you will soon discern
More are inclined to teach than learn,
And hear the priceless gift of Speech
Monopolized by those who Preach.

How prone men are to moralize
On everything that meets their eyes.
I will not quote the sparks that fly
Upwards, but note this tendency,
That not a stone within their reach
But holds a sermon,—so they preach.
They see the cats' relentless claws
Are deftly hid in velvet paws;
The frugal ants' great industry,
Shiftless cicadas' minstrelsy,
They do compare, and make us stare
At doings in natural history.
Like Adam, the world before them lies
Wherein to prose and moralize.

But then so obvious grows this crop
I scorn to reap—Shame bids me stop.

The Eclipse

Lovers, they say, still vow and sigh
Neath thy bright rays,
O huntress of the sky!
Though Science ignores Mythology
Yet fancy sees Thee patiently
Counting thy month-long nights and days,
Keeping thine orbit's strict integrity.
What hopest Thou? Some cosmic crash
That shattering our old world to bits,
May end thy task's monotony
And from Earth's bondage set Thee free?





SUN BY THE
MOON

THE ECLIPSE
OF THE



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A Text

This text that long has seemed most fit,
We think needs brushing up a bit.

The Lord, they say, is good to all,
He even notes the sparrow's fall.
Does he prevent it?—not at all,
Save in a very general way.

What is this general way about
When sparrows from their nests fall out?
Providing cats from day to day
With fallen sparrows—we should say.

Were sparrows notified in time
They would not fall—but cats can climb,
And curtail genealogic lines
To which the sparrow much inclines.

Compared with sparrows cats are few
Yet for the sparrow seem to do,
Cats would be badly off indeed
If sparrows only took more heed.

But building nests unscientific
Well may the sparrow prove prolific,
Always in Nature something's to blame;
In Human Nature 'tis the same.

Now may we ask what they are at?
The Lord, the sparrow, and the cat?
Or ask in a more general way
The nature of this game they play?



The Missionary

'Touch not the Faith thou dost not know.'
So Shakespeare sings,—if this be so
How dare the Missionary mild
Wreck the faith of any child?

He can but teach what he was taught,
Perhaps a creed with error fraught,
Learned when a little child at home,
Geneva's creed, or that of Rome,





In Dogmatists we never find
Those tangled workings of the mind;
There all is crisp and well defined.
To such let us resign the skein.
They'll straighten out the string again,
Untie the knots and make all plain.

With them assertion—flat or round—
Has ever steadfast held its ground,
Until by sheer persistency
A heaven-sent message all men see.
But Doubt unconquered holding out
From time to time will have its flout.



Inconclusive

'I wend me forth,'—as poets say,
(That is, I take one of my strolls)
To where lean Saints in deserts stray
Losing their heads to save their souls.

But well I know before I go,
That Hermits have one single thought—
What will become of their poor souls,
To them all other cares are naught.

No middle course the Hermit sees,
With him it's either fry or freeze.
Useless are reason, useless suggestion;
You cannot spoil a saint's digestion.

So I wend back from whence I came,
They, not much wiser; I, the same.



Responsibility

All creeds in one thing end the same:
God gets the glory, man the blame.
Call this a bargain?—is it fair
To think the Lord should have no share
In his own work?—or at the best
Bear half the burden, we the rest?
Zealots say we bear it all
And well deserve to since the Fall,
And often bid us to admire
The mighty hand that lit the Fire.
Will zealots tell by whose desire
We make the Hell and he the Fire?
Is it, or is it not, his work?
If partly ours we should not shirk
To bear our share, but is it fair—
His, all the glory—we, the shame?

One God will save the Sinner, if he's good,
Another would not save him if he could,
For he must save himself; that is the favoured plan.
Yet being what he is, we doubt much if he can.



Inconclusive

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The Sunday Dram

As little birds at close of day
To various perches find their way,
So men repair to various churches
Seeking their theologic perches;
The perch that bears the slim canary
Will break beneath the cassowary.

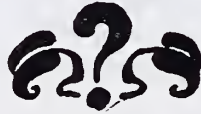
This has led to some deep thinking
On the vice of Sunday drinking,
For some must have their Sunday dram
A powerful blend of Bless and Damn,
Which persevered in of a Sunday
Leads to what workmen call Blue Monday.

The Unforeseen

We often see the unforeseen
Will wreck the cunningest machine.
Does Nature then her own work mar
In cooling sun or clashing star?
Or does she see the unforeseen?
That would be Fate—How about Man?
Is he excluded from the plan?
Does he not also make and mar,
Or shares he the fate of sun and star?

A Question

God certainly has his own way
His lessons to impart,
But would we treat a school-boy so
And see him to perdition go,
Or break his sorrowing heart,
Because he'd disobeyed some rule,
Perhaps on his first day at school?



The Antidote

We cannot think 'tis Nature's plan
To damn the greater part of man;
Yet eminent persons give it out
That we'll be damned if we but doubt.
And here we will the doctors quote
Who find in bane the antidote.

For Nature keeps a high-priced school
In which men often play the fool.
See with what skill her mighty hand
Fills the fatal poison-gland,
And paints the adder's gaudy coat
That the incautious fool may find—
The Antidote.



The Enemy Sowing Tares

To Satan then we come at last,
His brow with clouds of doubt o'er cast,
Wandering on his self-made way,
Who cannot rule nor yet obey.

See him sowing tares by night,
Tares of gold with great delight,
At the foot of that dread tree
Wet with blood on Calvary,
After—what harvest shall man see?





THE ENEMY SOWING TARES

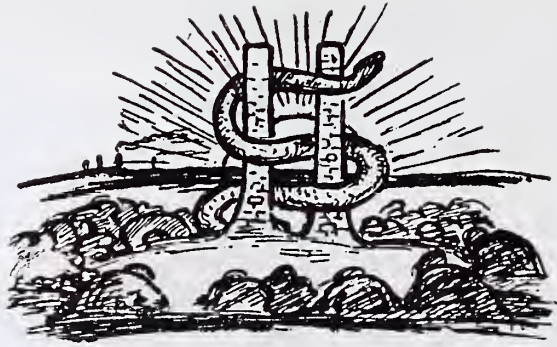
The Predicament

Science admits, or seems to see
That "I" persists—not so the "Me";
That "I" lives on eternally;
The fate of "Me"—Mortality.

For "I," the prospect is sublime.
While "Me" seems but the sport of Time
Or chance and shifting circumstance,
Forever hurrying it on
To its dark end—Oblivion.







Men worship trees and aeroliths,
Ancestral bones and Hero-myths,
Then shroud in symbols mysteries,
And worship them on bended knees—
Crescents, crosses, double-keys—
But worship most, if truth be told,
The Symbol of 'Almighty Gold.'



Fear

Fear is a Fiend that wanders in
The fairest fields of Arcady,
Shadow of Joy that longer grows
As the bright day sinks to its close,
Till mingling in the shades of night
Joy and Fear sink out of sight.



Atomic Responsibility

Men like dazzled moths revolve
About the light they cannot solve,
'Tis so about this theory,
'Atomic responsibility.'

Does each atom bear its part
And aid great Nature's beating heart?
Or by opposing bring about
The fruitless anarchy of Doubt?

Faith

Look at the humble dog's mute Faith.
His honest face no doubt doth show,
No warmer Faith than his can glow
In any human heart below;
And if his Faith is in the plan
How then can Doubt deny it Man?

Eyesight

Man, from his defective eyesight never free,
Is blamed for what he sees or cannot see,
For misfortunes he can never find a screen;
He's blamed for what he cannot have foreseen.

Say all ends well, and I must be content;
Say all looks well, and I must needs dissent.



Useless are denunciations,
They but lead to reformations,
Which in their turn must be reformed,
The defective giving birth to
The deformed.

Man's Need

As when a bold ship breasts the main,
The stronger rigging stands the strain
When weaker ropes break free,
So the strong trust that 'God knows best'
Sustains the Soul when all the rest
Is lost in Life's raging sea.

Then let Doubt do its very best,
Doubt long enough—you'll need a rest,
And finally agree
The guidance of this universe,
Thy birthplace and mysterious nurse,
Is not a task for Thee.

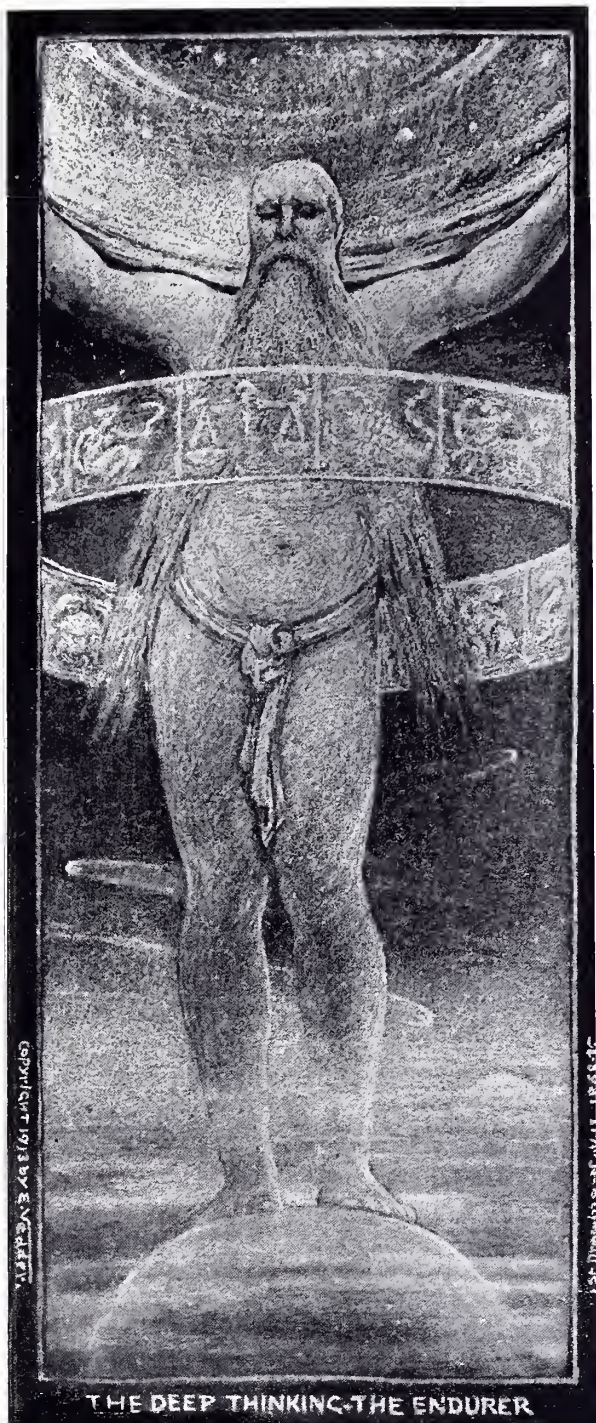
Fear not a preacher in disguise,
'Tis only one who only tries
To show himself and Thee,
That in this turmoil of the mind
A God man needs, and seeks to find
Through all Eternity.





Gazing as we now do on the skies
With ever keener, ever stronger eyes,
We see such signs of Wisdom and of Power,
That a belief seems growing hour by hour.

A Vision that doth the Soul entrance
'Tis of a Faith, not based of Ignorance:
A Faith, which yet in time may set aside
The dreams of Saints and philosophic pride.



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152 - THE DEEP THINKING - THE ENDURER

THE DEEP THINKING - THE ENDURER

This seeming endless Theme,
This book without a scope,
Let both end where all Doubt
Must end, in one word—



THE OTHER THINGS



Lift not the Eyebrow of Surprise
Nor deem that I too highly prize
These little outputs of my pen,
Wouldst have me differ from all
Men?



Foreword

In my Crusoe isolation
Many things I save in verse
Which I might in conversation
Wise, or otherwise, disperse.

I am absolutely ignorant of the Art of versification. I don't know the difference between an 'Anapæst' and a 'Spondee.' I cherish this ignorance (which a reference to an unabridged would dispell) for the purpose of trying what a man with some traces of literary, poetic, and critical faculties could do, were the expression of his thoughts confined to verse alone. Besides—

Bubbles often keep afloat
Things that otherwise would sink,
So words by one not very wise
May cause far wiser men to think.

In other words a house I build
That will require much greater wit,
In patching up, or pulling down,
Than was employed in building it.



Evidently Under Influence

Some aim to make the frightened reader's flesh creep
And some to make that gentle being's eyes weep,
But I—casting aside such worn out wiles,
Aim only to provoke that curious creature's smiles.

Quite true it is that I ought not to roam
In fields where others are much more at home;
But nothing daunted I keep on my fool-track
Where Angels (timid things) are seen to draw back.

Surely, strange influences must be at work
Urging me on to work I ought to shirk;
Truly miraculous must be that strange thing,
Which makes one born poetically dumb, sing.



Some Jokes

Some things I write not out of spite
But merely from a sense of fun,
And there I make a great mistake
And wish I never had begun;
For few there are, I've found thus far,
Who like a joke at their expense;
But this is wisdom that we learn
Solely through experience.

Jokes must be heard before they're seen.
Yet how absurd—they lurk between
Serious lines, and then are seen,
As one may say—before they're heard
And only after hailed with laughter.

Time sweeps away like chaff the laugh,
But it returns and gives again
Its joy or its spasmodic pain;
I mean the joke that's like a poke
The ribs between; although not seen
The pain is keen and leaves us sore,
To such we never cry 'Encore!'



Optics

Our eyes like wrinkled panes of glass
See all things crooked as they pass,
Reason, the Optician, tries
To straighten our defective eyes.

I think it can be proved with ease
That man all things through glasses sees,
Tinged by the rainbow's varied hues
From orange-red to purple-blues.

Old-fashioned spectacles, we find,
Best suit the philosophic mind;
While Sages, specks of pale sage-green
For introspective use are seen.

Astronomers through telescopes,
Microscopists through microscopes,
Observe the distant and the near,
The latter finding much that's queer.

Soldiers through red the carnage view,
Their leaders cool through Prussian-blue;
Yet these same leaders, when off duty,
Warmly review the passing beauty.

See how with purple glows the glass
As the long line of prelates pass,
Each hopes for a more crimson glow,
The line is long and Death seems slow.

All know how rosy is the morn
Seen through the hunter's early horn,
Of course I mean his early glass,—
That's a poor joke, but let it pass.

It is the lover and his lass
Who first see life through the same glass
But grey-beard Time to their surprise
Soon changes both the glass and eyes.

But chiefly the Kaleidoscope,
Fit emblem of fallacious Hope,
Remains the best of all man's toys,
The first he joys in,—last enjoys.

But why should we the list extend?
These aids to sight will never end
Till Death, the Glazier, comes along
Glazing our eyes and ends our song.



Adam

Some temptations are immense;
We cannot all say 'Get thee hence.'
But more especially just when
Resistance seems to common men
Almost like flying in the face
Of a kindly providence.
What! left alone with but one woman,
She so charming—he so human,
Both without experience
Wandering in fond dalliance
Where the sunlight softly dapples
The couch-like grass mid gleaming apples;
Add to which no fear of Hell—
Of course poor Adam promptly fell.



Equality

Men are born equal—at least they say so,
Then in God's name why don't they stay so?

Make men equal, if you please.
Set a Newton shelling pease,
Set Edison a-popping corn;
So botch a spoon and spoil a horn.

We now say: at all expense
Cultivate your common sense.
Common surely it should be,
Yet is the rarest thing we see.
For with the cart before the horse
Into the ditch we go, of course.





The Temple Door

Rising from my troubled sleep,
Weary of counting the passing hours,
I stand and gaze on sleeping Rome
And count her centuries of power;
Pondering on the solemn sight
So dim I scarcely can decide
If Janus' ancient temple door
Stands but ajar—or open wide;
Or if old Mars, dread God of War,
Beholds again with grim delight
Rising and spreading as of yore
The crimson desolating tide,
Alas! I fear the temple door
Stands not ajar—but open wide.

(February 15, 1915.)





Absurd

Pope, Kaiser, Czar, and Emperor,
Opposing powers—alike all pray
To one God for the Victory.
Each never doubting in the end
To him God will the Victory send.
How can they think without a shock
That God can be a weather-cock
And turn to each the Victory?
Nevertheless they go on praying,
Industriously each other slaying,
Never doubting in the end
God will to each the Victory send.



A Song

I seem forever hearing
A soul that sings alone,
Or is it only sighing,
It has so sad a tone?

Yet ever in the twilight,
When sounds are hushed and low,
It seems forever saying:
'My song Thou soon shalt know.'

Is it a traveller weary
Singing to cheer his way?
His journey nearly ended
As ended is the day?

Dear Soul, canst find no other song
To cheer me on my way?



Marsyas

Poor Marsyas, scorned by great Apollo
Because the landscape did not follow
The gentle pipings of his flute,
Remained not mute.
From shady dell or rocky waste
His humble little friends all haste
Drawn by his spell;
To them his music seemed more real
Than the Olympian's ideal—
Nearer the heart.
And so he ever pipes apart,
Nor will he Apollo's motto take—
'Art for Art's sake.'



Poetry

Of all the vainest things on earth,
The most deprived of wholesome mirth,
It strikes me 'Poetry' is the worst,
Yet some must write it lest they burst.

You do not say what you intend,
You do not go straight to your end,
But go about and spend your time
In seeking what words best will rhyme.
'Tis plain as on the face the nose
That you had better write in prose.



Rhyme

The power of Rhyme, like that of Time,
Must cause the loftiest Bards to bow,
And make them use time after time
The silly rhymes I'm using now.
So should the wind but bow a bough
That bough for sake of rhyme must sough,
Or should the wild wind prove unkind
Some solitary leaf 'twill find
And tear it from the soughing bough—
Thus making its brief life more brief
And like this ending a relief.



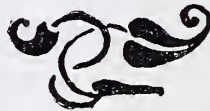
Nineteen Fifteen

Could Science make Faith scientific,
Thus a Religion 'a la mode,'
We'd find that such a creed eclectic
Would need the broadest kind of road.

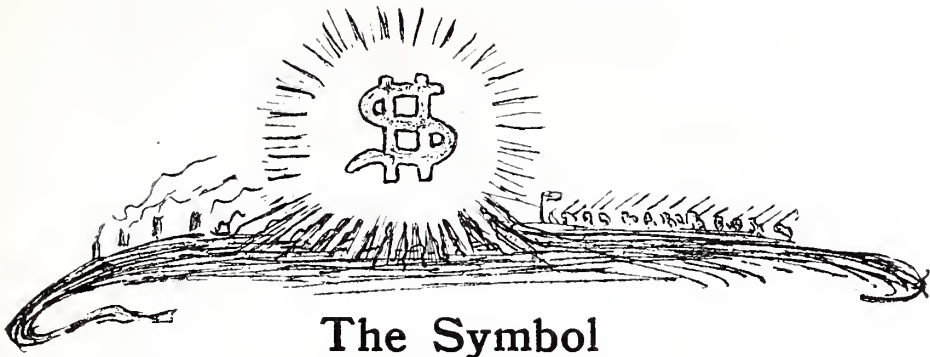
For now the ancient roads seem narrow,
The Star of Bethlehem grown dim,
Angelic greetings far too hopeful,
Unverified their lovely hymn.

Instead with glad hymn megaphonic
We greet a new electric Star,
And as we fondly gaze upon it
Hope we have seen the end of War.

Now 'Peace on Earth' men hear again,
Again the nations see delighted
That Peace, a dove—like Aeroplane—
But fully armed—has just alighted.

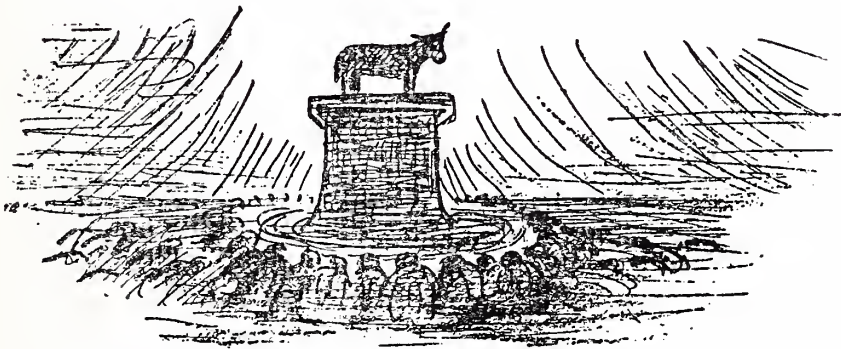


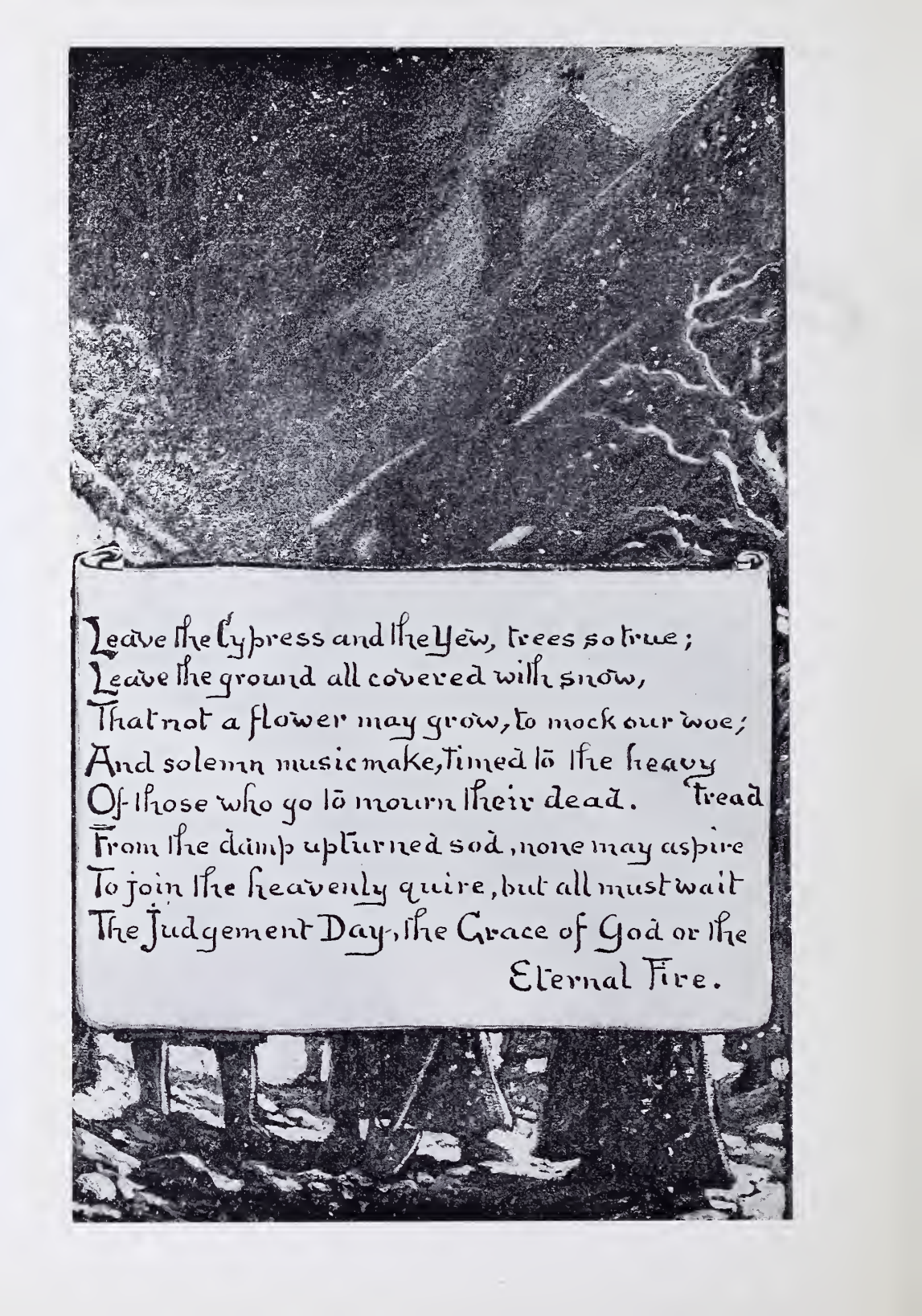
(Written at Capri, November 24, 1915, and, alas! still true in 1920.)



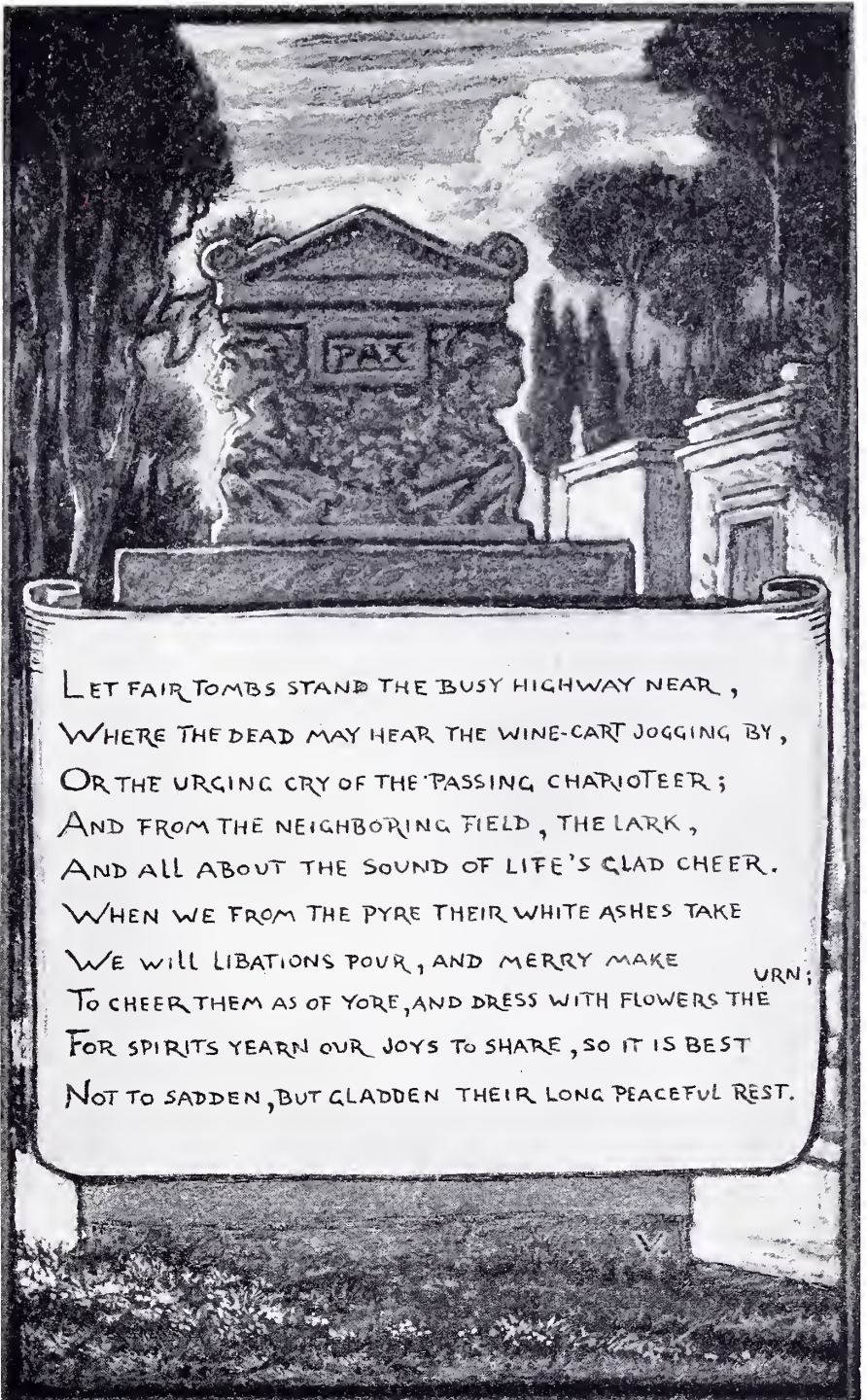
The Symbol

If the Old Testament is true,
This earth was made but for the Jew,
Or for Jews whose views are broader
Just Philistines enough to plunder.
The rest may take for all they care
Both Heaven and Hell,—the World's their share;
Nor do they care to spread their creed,
Well knowing the insatiate greed
Of men for gold makes one vast Creed
Where all join hands and gaily laugh
As they go round the Golden Calf.
For Jews and Gentiles now adore
The Golden Calf just as before.



The background is a dark, heavily textured surface, possibly a piece of aged parchment or a dark stone. It features intricate, vein-like patterns and a mottled appearance. In the center, a white scroll is unrolled, containing text in a black, calligraphic font. The scroll is held in place by small, dark, circular fasteners at the top corners. The text on the scroll is a poem or a passage of prose, written in a style reminiscent of 17th or 18th-century English literature. The overall composition is centered and balanced, with the white scroll providing a stark contrast to the dark, textured background.

Leave the Cypress and the Yew, trees so true;
Leave the ground all covered with snow,
That not a flower may grow, to mock our woe;
And solemn music make, timed to the heavy
Of those who go to mourn their dead. Tread
From the damp upturned sod, none may aspire
To join the heavenly quire, but all must wait
The Judgement Day, the Grace of God or the
Eternal Fire.



LET FAIR TOMBS STAND THE BUSY HIGHWAY NEAR ,
WHERE THE DEAD MAY HEAR THE WINE-CART JOGGING BY ,
OR THE URGING CRY OF THE PASSING CHARIOTEER ;
AND FROM THE NEIGHBORING FIELD , THE LARK ,
AND ALL ABOUT THE SOUND OF LIFE'S GLAD CHEER .
WHEN WE FROM THE PYRE THEIR WHITE ASHES TAKE
WE WILL LIBATIONS POUR , AND MERRY MAKE URN ;
TO CHEER THEM AS OF YORE , AND DRESS WITH FLOWERS THE
FOR SPIRITS YEARN OUR JOYS TO SHARE , SO IT IS BEST
NOT TO SADDEN , BUT GLADDEN THEIR LONG PEACEFUL REST .

The Letter I

A word that needs but little spelling
Stands for an imp in all minds dwelling,
Or rather that selfish, tiresome elf
Heard when a man talks of himself.

In print 'tis often turned to We,
A thin disguise through which we see,
As clearly as in milk the fly,
He longs to use the letter I.



The Sonnet

To one idea cling like death
Scarcely stopping to take breath;
Touch lightly on Mythology—
Avoid like H. Theology—
And plethoric Redundancy.
Then climb that peak in Darien,
And with Balboa and his men
Gaze, not silently, around.
Remember Sonnets are all sound
Save in that slight expectant hush
That follows your last fantastic rush,
When—if you've kept your mind upon it—
Your fourteenth line achieves—The Sonnet.





A Sigh

Now come the dreamy days of Age
When pleasures past as in a haze
 Seem magnified;
And present skies—however fair—
 Seem overcast;
Or if with sunset's hues made bright,
Serve as the prelude to the night—
 The dreamless Night.





The Weeping Willow

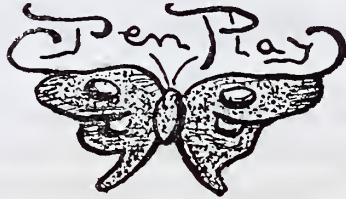
Look gently on this old-fashioned tree
Where dew has often been replaced by tears
For in the drooping of its pendant leaves
The tender color of undying Hope appears.



To a Youth

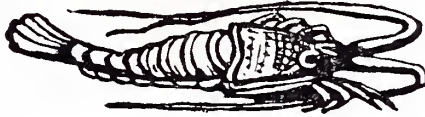
This Truth no poet yet hath told,
A Truth I now confide to Thee,—
That Time is ever Young, not Old,
As fresh as Venus from the sea;
Ever leading by the hand
Priceless Opportunity.

Make her your bride or you'll regret,
And yet, and yet, and yet, and yet,
It's only now that I regret.



A Dinner Declined

It is so neat—'All is illusion.'
Shall I turn this to confusion
By advocating things are real?
Such as my years that Time doth steal.
Do pangs nephritic—nothing seem
To those who suffer—or a dream?
Age may have Honor, not Immunity.
So while I worship the Ideal
I must regard my pangs as Real,
And give up many pleasant things;
Strange! how my heart with youth still sings.



Verdun

An utter disregard of reason
Filled the trenches of Verdun;
Science is both good and evil,
Neighbors the hospital and gun,
As sharper grows Minerva's lance
So greater grows the power of chance.

Of all the wasteful remedies
War is probably the worst,
And yet man turns to it the first;
Strange cure in which the doctor kills
His patient to remove his ills.

We see the mills of God grind slow,
Effect from cause of course should flow,
But from between the stones how know,
Why grind at all, or grind so slow?

If the foregoing be a lie
Pray cast about—what meets the eye?
Alas! But for its melancholy
A smile should greet such frightful folly.



Up to Date

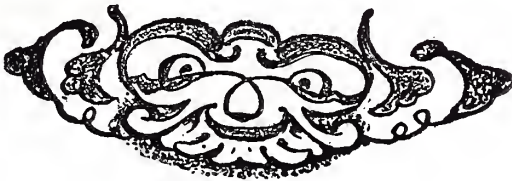
There is a power that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them as we may,
And roughly speaking that is what
We see takes place today.

For in mysterious ways it moves
And wonders it performs
In wars and famines, pestilence,
And devastating storms.
And that is why all people say
It moves in a mysterious way.

Napoleon was a providence—
So it is held today;
For Freedom's bird to George the Third
A debt we owe today.

Through Bismarcks, Kaisers, Emperors,
Great Frederick led the way,
Up to the glorious Victories
That are taking place today.

So have no fear—all must be right
Where Kings and Providence unite,
No matter on which side you fight
Though the Devil is to pay.



Packed Down

I make a poem I think fine,
Each stanza like long hoarded wine
Flowing smooth, mellifluous,
Which then I fittingly enshrine
In border quaint of twisted wine—
A task perhaps superfluous.

But never felt I so 'packed down'
As when a youth from London Town,
A writer famed and witty,
Passed on my decorated verse
A judgement I think rather terse—
'The border's very pretty.'



Quotations

Do what you will, three fingers still
You must employ in writing,
These fingers are—With Grace and Power
In various ways uniting;
Also the Head leave not apart,
But if from the Heart you wander
Right from the start, with all your Art,
Your pen and ink you squander.

Dear me, today how rhyme will stray!
How far on its tide I've floated!
For what I really meant to say
Was—write what will be quoted.



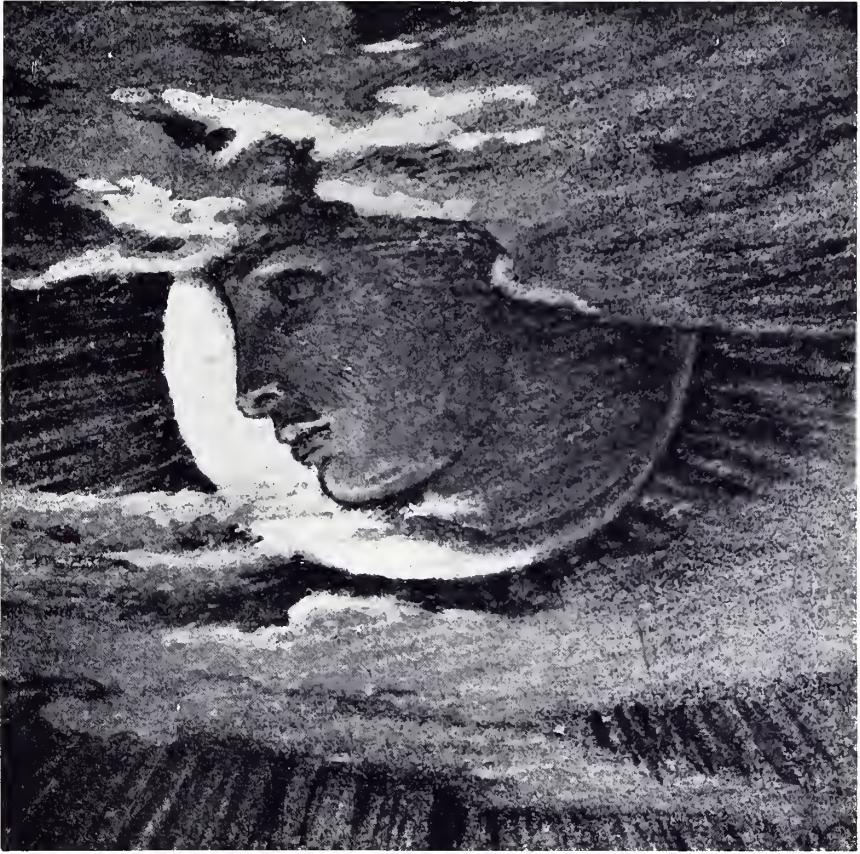
(December 17, 1915. Capri.)

The Hermit

'Gentle Hermit, dost thou dwell
Contented in thy little cell?'
'Aye, Pilgrim, once I followed long
A Siren, listening to her song,
Yet never could I reach her side,
And now contented I abide.'
'But tell me, Pilgrim, why dost roam
So far from kindred, far from home?'
'Hermit, I see beyond yon sky
That cloudless lands forever lie;
The road is long and short the day
So I must hasten on my way.'
'Stay, Pilgrim, stay, 'tis almost night.'
'Nay, Hermit, nay—beyond 'tis bright.'

Do Sirens' songs but lead astray?
The Hermit's cell prove but his tomb?
Did the Pilgrim find the light
Or was he lost in the night's gloom?
Are those bright lands beyond the sky
But dreams and not reality?
Can Pilgrim tell—can Hermit say,
That only Sirens lead astray?





Luna

Lone gazer on Earth's dreaming night,
Not always with unmixed delight
We gaze on Thee, for thy pale rays
Too often bring sad memories
Of things forever gone and happier days.

M.D.'s and D.D.'s

Doctors, in hunting a disease,
Think they have killed or maimed it
When truth to tell they've merely found
An old one and renamed it.

So doctors of Divinity
Will go on to infinity
Trying to cure our moral ills
Not with real bread, but with bread-pills.

They may be right but I feel sure
That Life for us is a long cure
Of an inherited disease,
And doubt if Dr. Death gives ease.



To William Graham

Now V. is very well informed
And not averse to show it.
Seek not to tell him something new—
He's sure to say 'I know it.'

V. met one day his old friend G.
And gave that opportunity
For which G. long had waited,
By saying—'Well, that's new to me.'
'Thank God,' was the simple repartee,
And G. went off elated.

This friend whose name's unknown to Fame,
(Who seems disposed to hide it)
Will have, if we but wait, his day.
Then V. will say 'I knew it.'



Parody

Vile Parody's a parasite,
A fungus growth, a dreaded blight
That oft the noblest poem spoils.
For Parody picks out the best
And in it makes an 'ill bird's nest.'

This harpy of the clever mind
Receives much praise but leaves behind
An odor faint as of a tomb,
Where lie fair flowers robbed of their bloom,
Or sense of something lovely slain
That never more will live again.



The Victors

In Life's triumphant chariot ride
The strong, and proudly wave aside
All sorrow, pain, and grief;
Who breathing in the joy of life
Cannot conceive that for the strife
One life is far too brief.

But clad like glorious kings of old
In royal purple and in gold,
Heed not that pallid slave,
That somber slave who mocks their pride,
Forever whispering at their side,
'Thou goest to thy grave.'



Revery

Old! Yes, but not in revery;
Young, poor, and gloriously free—
Today again I sketching go
In thy fair land, Boccaccio.

See where my model waits for me
Under that ancient olive tree;
No classic nymph or dryad she,
But a real girl in Tuscany.

Yet something classic lingers there,
For Zephyrus toys with her hair,
And in her softly shaded eyes
Amor slyly lurking lies.

'Cara, the sun is getting low,
One kiss more and I must go;
But where is that bright-eyed little fellow
Who carries my box and my "ombrello"?
"Peccato" that reveries must close.'
'Quando torni?'—'God only knows.'

A sketch, and low! a revery;
A sweet girl waits beneath a tree
Forever in sunny Tuscany;
At least in an old man's memory.



The Land of Song

Italy is 'The Land of Song.'
The question is, good Lord, how long
Can one this lasting rumpus stand
Before he quits this lovely land?

Donkeys begin it in the spring,
And urged by Love uproarious sing;
The natives then take up the tale,
And working or idle never fail
To fill the air both day and night
With sounds that harrow and afright.
The loud piano's pounding note—
Organic tunes ground out by rote—
The beggar's passionate appeal—
Midnight roisterers as they reel—
The lover's agonizing yell—
Suggest the usefulness of Hell.
Add to which they never scorn
To ply the tiresome auto's horn.

Such sounds kept up the live-long year
So tire the much abused ear,
That one begins at length to long
To quit this lovely 'Land of Song.'



Why Explain?

This picture I need not explain,
In Art the last cry makes this plain—
'Ideas are useless, Subjects vain.'
If good design and vital line
But strike the eye and satisfy
In modern stuff—it is enough.
Then why on earth should I explain?

Take out the 'if' and good design,
Also omit the vital line,
But shock, amaze, and strike the eye:
You'll satisfy the 'Modern Cry.'



A Fearful Thought

How silent Time steals on apace
And with his blurring finger doth efface
Our little footsteps, leaving not a trace,—
Even when stamped on monumental brass
Teaching the old lesson 'All must pass.'
And yet 'tis said our careless words
Live on when we are gone; mere breath
Defying that dread change called Death.

Oh! fearful thought, shall we again
Hear our own words? Perchance condemned
By our own breath, and learn our doom
In hollow whispers from the Tomb?



Alfaru

Named by his parents Elihu,
One Vedder built in Zanadu
Or thereabouts, or did decree
A spelling-dome (not spelling-bee)
Or home for his new Alphabet
Which with its cryptic letters set
In-Com-pre-hen-si-ble to Man,
Its fated course too quickly ran
Down to dark Omega's Sea.

This scheme called Alfaru looked fine
And indeed 'twas grand to see,
How each Sound had its proper Sign,
How each Sign did with Sound agree.
Now what occurred this scheme to balk?
It made you spell just as you talk,
Or made you talk just as you spell,
In either case not very well,
And so 'twas promptly sent—to Hell.



Spelling

When by spelling sore beset
 (My usual quandary)
I seek at once without delay
My Webster's Dictionary.

High would my Muse delighted soar
On pinions light and airy,
But what it knows its safety lies
In Webster's Dictionary.

Saddled with which my Pegasus
Plods on with footsteps wary.
How can the poor thing sing and soar
Under a Dictionary?





To an Old Man

For thee thy race is run;
All has been said or done,
Thou hast the Victor's crown,
Or—thou hast none.

Or stand forgotten,
Thy wreath no longer green;
Or crowned, thy crown
As yet—unseen.

Better so, than seen by flashes
Clothed in sackcloth and in ashes.





Bitter-Sweet

Nature for her sweetest dish
Prepares a bitter sauce,
For what appears a present gain
Turns out a future loss,
As when the toiler once set free
Turns out to be a Boss.

Here an old maxim comes in neat—
'Accept the Bitter with the Sweet.'
Did not Doubt ask 'Is this a Law?
Or is it but an ancient Saw?'
No ancient Saw—man's daily meat
By a stern Law is—Bitter-Sweet.



Hermits

Hermits we know as mild old men
Sitting by caves or purling brooks,
Engaged in prayer or telling beads,
Observing skulls or reading books.
Their food, they say, is brought each day
To them by ravens or pious rooks.

We're never told of all those others
Who fled the world their souls to save,
Those poor wandering half-crazed brothers
Who found in the desert but a grave.
'Tis always the blessed ones who saw
The Heavens opening to their eyes
And Angels bright, with crowns and songs
Welcoming them to paradise.





“WHO FLED THE WORLD THEIR SOULS TO SAVE”

Classification

Now Critics all things classify
And put a stamp on goods and brains,
And going o'er a man's remains
Either approve or crucify;
And are much vexed in finding some
They cannot put their stamp upon.

This one they find a mighty thinker,
This a mere literary tinker,
This seeming saint a fearful sinner,
This volume thick ought to be thinner,
This one was born before his time,
This one too late to start the climb.

In fact their 'forte' is finding fault
Chiefly in men we most exalt.



Technique

A KICK

Technique teaches Words should flow
In ancient channels, cold as snow,
Where frozen lines are born along
Deprived of all that made them song;
Then laid in Technique's narrow grave
To moulder in oblivion.

If these thy lessons, fair Technique,
Some other mistress must I seek.





The Three Knights

Three glorious Knights came riding by,
The very pink of chivalry.

'Had,' the regretful, slow of pace,
'Have,' ever questioning 'Will-Have's' face,
And 'Will-Have,' of the hopeful eye,
All valiant Knights and famed.

'Had' once possessed the fair domains
Where 'Have' precariously reigns;
While 'Will-Have' gazes at the sky,
Where his possessions mostly lie.
Yes—they are aptly named.





Wistful Shade, was Thou just saying
We were lovers long ago?
Dost Thou think I can remember?
It may possibly be so.
Didst Thou say 'twas long ago?

True—I mind me of eyes gleaming
As we see them when we're dreaming;
Yes, and hair dark as night
And hasty footsteps light
And whispered greetings low,
And fond arms about me clinging
While a moon was somewhere shining
And a nightingale was singing,
In a garden long ago,
Ah yes! I now remember,
In Florence long ago.



A Birthday Gift

Gentle Maid, be not afraid
Your secret I'll disclose,
From friends a waggon-load of flowers;
From you, a single rose.
A single rose as white as snow,
Yet in this breast why such a glow?

Aged Seventy-Four

A happy change
Kind friends have wrought
And made that extra four seem naught.
Let them respect the seven;
To take that off should they succeed
I'd be reduced to naught indeed
Unfit for earth or heaven.
Better by far that they should see
A frisky youth of seventy
Signing himself sincerely



A Precept

'Eat, drink, and be merry'
Seems a jolly good rule
When used with discretion
But not like a fool.

As a sound moral precept
It makes a poor show,
Yet most of us use it
(But we do not say so).

If you're going to glory
Why be sad on the way?
If you doubt getting there—
Then brace up and get gay.

So with modifications
I think we should try
To use it a little,
'For tomorrow we die.'

In other words,
We either live forever
Or through space our soul we scatter.
In one case there's no hurry,
In the other case—no matter.



Heredity

A curious twist our mind oft takes
Which may account for our mistakes,
Our sluggishness or too great haste,
Our lack of judgment or of taste.

Faults of our forefathers innate,
Defects of very ancient date,
Harking to days before our birth,
And now the cause of blame and mirth.



The Prodigal

'After a youth of dissipation
Attend in age to your salvation.
What matters a bit of youthful sin?
Return, you may be taken in.'
'Tis well the Prodigal should roam
And well that sons should stay at home;
They learn to care for fatted calves
And with the Prodigal go halves,
While he, just when he should return
To eat the food he did not earn.

Now in this story we should see
Not the gross partiality
But, from strict Justice quite apart,
The higher Justice of the Heart.



Fame

Fame is the fleeting breath of men,
Themselves as fleeting as their breath—
Motes on the edge of Life's great wheel
Ever revolving down to Death.

How hard they strive, each little mote,
To leave some word that men may quote.
If they succeed 'tis heard a day;
Then quoted and quoter pass away.

But not so fast—for it is plain
Eternal Striving doth remain
And may be found when all is done,
The very essence of the fun.

(May, 1920.)

Superstition

How Superstition still holds sway
Is shown in Stratford every day
Where certain doggerel-guarded stones
Hold undisturbed the poet's bones.

Indeed we think 'twill be the worse
For that sacrilegious wight
Who dares face that rustic curse
And bring great Shakespeare's skull to light,
And show what once was packed with wit
Lying dull and void of it.

All long to see—but stop at that.
Bold must he be, who bells that cat.

(June, 1920.)



In Old Books

Thoughts sincere lie buried here covered with dust,
And must like dust all disappear;
Could they in tenuous threads span the abyss of Time
And call up an answering echo in some heart
As yet unborn—'twould be sublime.

Some page you'll find so thumb-marked, dirty, soiled,
You'd think the book containing it quite spoiled,
Until you come across some verse thereon
When suddenly behold! the squalor's gone.
As firefly grovelling on the dingy ground
That bright thought shining in the dirt is found.



The Bookworm

One is appalled—
At volumes stalled in libraries,
Where the bookworm works at ease
On Lover's vows, and sighs and tears,
Turning all to dust in a few years.

One is amazed—
At things well phrased, lying unacted
In volumes of forgotten plays;
And astonished—
That people so well admonished
By endless sermons, should still sin;
Sermons—dusty without and dry within.

One must be mad—
To think that writings sad
Can please—yet I don't know,
Remembering Poe.

One must be chary—
In judging things unliterary,
Nor think works too gay or at their ease
Cannot become 'the go' and please.

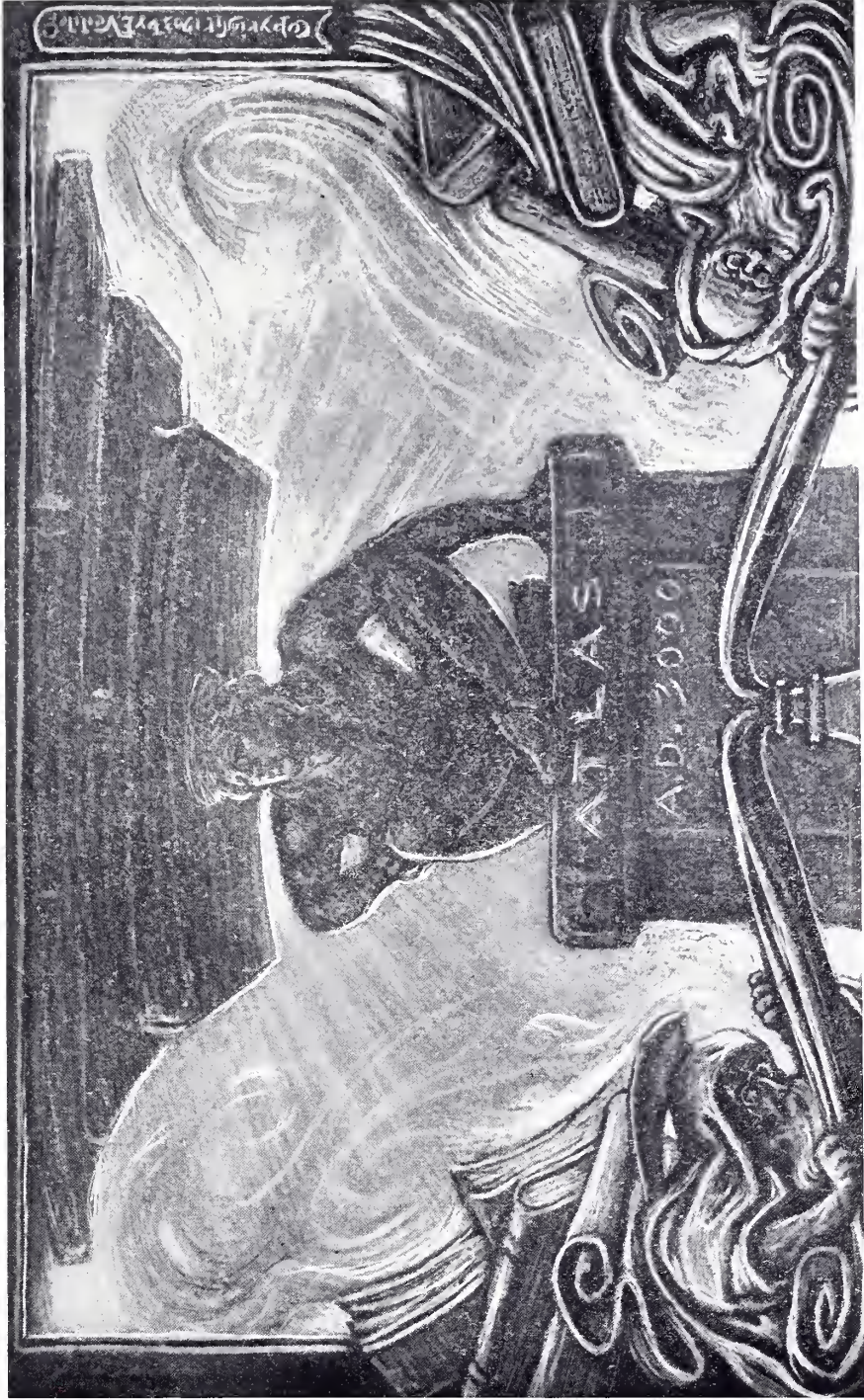
Meanwhile the moving finger writes,
Then disappears,
Together with the writing, the writer,
And all his hopes and fears.



Books

'Gainst Books, Time tries his tooth in vain,
The pen exploits the busy brain,
And Books in spite of Time and Chance
Like Cadmus' famous teeth enhance,
Or fabled Phoenix rise again
Till fearful in the eyes of men
Becomes the peril of the 'Pen.'





BOOKS



Dreams

In dreams we never dream we're old,
The dreams of age again unfold
Visions of youth—we're never old.
With dainty Ariel we'll go
When set free by Prospero
'After summer merrily.'

In a new world, under a sky
Seen only by the poet's eye,
For strange things and stranger still
Did we but know it wait on will;
Nothing's impossible to man,
Therefore quit speckled Caliban
And no longer moaning dwell
Under Prospero's stern spell.





The Beard

Many a man has grown a beard
Snow white as pure unprinted pages
On which the printing-press of Time
Makes no impression as he ages.

The monkish hood makes not the Monk
Nor can advancing age make Sages,
Snow covers the volcanic peaks
While just below the fire still rages.

At this Saint Peter nods his head.
'Among the called the cool are chosen,
The make up of a Saint,' he said,
'Is but a Sinner nearly frozen.'



The Eagle

The eagle seeks the highest peaks,
Would he from thence the world survey?
Not in the least—he's but a beast
That hunger-driven seeks his prey.

But do we know if this be so?
For something more he surely feels
As circling high against the sky
Slowly the earth beneath him reels.

It hath been said that Nature seems
Quite blind to her own majesty,
That human eyes alone enjoy
Her beauty and sublimity.

May not the eagle's keener eye
Share with man this ecstasy?



His Vocation

A Hermit stood at Heaven's gate,
He entered not but hesitated:
'This slothful scene of constant praise
Is what I never contemplated!'

Fight has been my food and drink,
Fighting Devils, and my delight
Is hounding them to Hell's hot brink
Where howling they plunge out of sight.

Lost in this press of Saints I'd be
Sadly missing my vocation,
How, or with whom, put up a fight
Without a scrap of provocation?

Soft has become my flinty bed,
Sweet, my austere solitude;
Unregretted pleasures fled,
Unshared, my great beatitude.

Back to my Devils and their din,
One prayer I will sincerely raise—
O Lord! forgive my only sin:
I cannot sing eternal praise.



(Rome, May 23, 1920.)

Smithereens

As I review life page by page,
I've found in age—not in my teens—
Things have been smashed to smithereens.
My thirst for rest and restful ease,
It seems I never can appease.

The domes I've reared with that intent
Have all to smithereens been sent,
Till now in age I seem to lean
On fragments of smashed smithereens.

Thank God! one dome remains intact,
That of Friendship, which in fact
In spite of age yet brightly gleams
Mid fragments of smashed smithereens.



Two Fair Philosophies



There are two fair Philosophies,
The one, too cheerful is and jolly;
The other bears with her a skull
And is inclined to melancholy;
The first frequents the flowery meads
And there continuously romps,
The second, the sad church-yard needs
For she enjoys funereal pomps.
In fact she mourns enough for two—
Her own, and someone else's sin,
While number one, so full of fun,
Wears one long optimistic grin.

Could I but find the two combined,
The first with optimistic grin off,
The second somewhat more inclined
To leave her pessimistic air off,
The fair result I'd gladly wed
And take her to my board and bed.



The Bended Bow

We hear the ring of the bended bow,
When the arrow sharp hath fled,
Only after do we know,
How some stricken creature bled.

Often rings the careless laughter
When some cruel word hath sped,
And we only know long after
How some tender heart hath bled.



Words

Our words indeed may greatly vary
 With a rich vocabulary,
But some essential are as breath,
Such Life, and Birth, and Love, and Death.
With these four strings on which we play
Begins and ends our short-lived lay.



The Absent Cure

'I leave the harbor far astern,
And face the open sea,
And yet I can but sadly turn
And fondly think of Thee.'

Thus did the Lover sob and sigh
And think his life was blasted;
Lord knows that life was sweet enough
While that flirtation lasted.

He calls his Love a distant star,
And cold—but much I fear
That others find her warm enough,
I mean those others near.

Now let him go to gay 'Paree'
And cease on her to think,
And if he's wise economise
His paper, pen, and ink.



Intensity

I'm lacking in Intensity,
Death—to obtain a single kiss
May be excruciating bliss
And doubtless is in poetry,
But were it left for me to say,
Rather than Death—Satiety.

For when the kissing's once begun
Do we see lovers stop at one?
Real lovers have more common sense,
And, considering the price,
Although one kiss is very nice
They leave that one to the 'Intense.'



Songs of Indigestion

If this life is made up of complications,
The next one must be passed in explanations;
Perhaps Death cuts for us the Gordian Knot
And turns 'what might be' into 'what is not.'

This life is but a kind of troubled bliss,
Mixed with a somewhat mitigated pain;
Our happiest times are naught but pleasant dreams,
And even these we cannot dream again.

A pretty scheme indeed—a pretty business
Not filled with ought-to-be-ness,
But downright is-ness.
Nothing obtained without a strenuous fight,
Where many may be wrong to make one right.



The Nude

Art, to puritanic minds
Is, as it were, the entering wedge,
Or the first glass, or the first step
Leading to the broken pledge.
They somewhat doubt this tendency
(In a clothed age) towards Nudity.

All would be well were we but sure
That Art could keep the Nude quite pure;
But there's the rub, for who can say
So much depends upon the way?
'To the pure all things are pure.'
Again the rub, we're not quite sure.



Two Pictures of Snow

We felt it in the air, and lo! 'twas there;
And childish faces turn from the ruddy glow
And gaze into the speckled darkness of the night
At the white multitude hurrying softly down,
Covering all below with soft silent snow.
And then their rest they take and dream of morn,
When they shall wake to the marvel of that sight—
A fair new world, clad in spotless white.

How sick I get of snow each year,
But it costs dear. When I am home again
And snow turns to rain and by frost is set,
Or begins to melt—how sick I get
Of snow, and the constant mackintosh
And the lost galosh—forever lost—
In slushy, influenza-breeding snow.





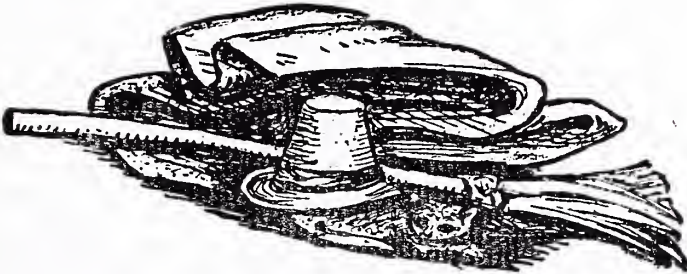
Mother Shipton's still alive
And by her guesses seems to thrive,
By her guesses right or wrong
Mother Shipton gets along.

Men guesses right hail with delight,
But guesses wrong forget outright;
Truth is the guess, the best guess guessed
But fails to guess which guess is best.

Her prophecy—

'God and Satan, Man between
Was and is and will be seen,
And of this truth we may be sure
While Man's alive and worlds endure.
And wars will see, and misery,
And famine, pest, and poverty.'

Here Mother Shipton ends her song.
If she be right she can't be wrong.



Folly Enthroned

Once in superb Byzantium
There wandered a demented maid,
On rude pandian pipes she played—
Her only speech—for she was dumb.

Such in the east they hold inspired,
So when she mounts the Sultan's throne
And wildly plays or makes her moan,
Into the omen they inquired.

They found no greater prophecy
Or better emblem can be shown
Of a nation's quick decay
Than Folly seated on a throne.





FOLLY ENTHRONED

A Protest

I know that good things can be turned from their uses
Into fearful abuses, as well as the rest,
But between prohibitions and people with missions
I hope Moderation will turn out the best.

I know that our ancestors fought for their freedom,
But I cannot believe that our backbone is such
That it bends to the sway of a pack of reformers
Who themselves cannot tell 'just enough' from 'too
much.'



Beer and Belly

No doubt that good beer was designed for the belly,
No doubt that the belly enjoys the good beer,
As it does the welsh-rabbit when found hot and handy
Add to these the good friend with his smile and his
tear.

No doubt that some saints while disliking this picture
Will promise instead lovely robes white as snow,
And places on pinnacles lofty ascending,
But I prefer standing by these good things below.

'Dear me,' cries the saint, 'how you cling to your
body!

But what will you do when from hence you must go?'
Why, I'll hunt up old friends and grow a new belly,
But I doubt if much better than the one left below.



John Beats Thomas

One thing in Nature another eats,
And by another thing is eaten:
In Grammer—it is John who beats
And Thomas who is always beaten.

In this see that 'Mysterious way'
About which we must nothing say
Or reason, lest we be accused
Of what is called—Impiety.

But we may say that Grammer's way
Shows a strange partiality
Unknown to Nature—who we see
Beats John and Thomas equally.

So when we learn that fire will burn
From fire we try to keep away,
Also from that 'Mysterious way'
Which shows no such partiality.

Can such discordant notes unite
And form an unheard harmony?
Which only gifted ears can hear—
Vibrations of the 'Mystery.'



Quaint Questions

Philosophers of lofty brow
Seem very anxious for to know
From whence we come and where we go—
Before they know what we are now.

If they find Men are now but Fools
According to great Nature's rules
Most surely fools they must become,
At least this can be said of some.

Do wild-cats ever change their habits
And become as mild as rabbits?
Lengthen their ears and drop their claws
Following Nature's unknown laws?

Curates are mild, are Bishops so?
Yet Bishops out of Curates grow.
Doth Nature show us here two rules,
One for the Wise and one for Fools?

We oft see Fools of lofty brow,
We ask not how they come and go,
We only know we have them now,
Some things we guess at—Fools we know.



The Praying Mantis

Does the Mantis really pray?
Her hands uplifted to the sky,
Or is it her little comedy,
We know she really means to slay.

Believing in this pious show
Her lovers fond around her crowd,
But she omitting heads and legs,
Becomes for them a bright green shroud.

Where, in her body fair, they lie
Forming a happy family
Which self-supporting as you see
Seems the reward of piety.

So trust not Nature when she's bland,
Not always under gloomy skies,
Oft where bright sunshine floods the land
The earthquake's densest danger lies.



Note:—The Mantis, it is said, after a short period of dalliance, devours all her lovers, wisely omitting heads and legs as indigestible, —see Natural History.

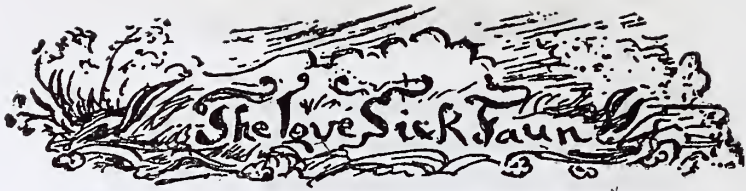
We know she eats them one by one.
Is it from hunger or in fun?

Naughty Spirits

While waiting on the gloomy shore
For old Charon and his skiff,
I noticed many spirits swore
With a But, or with an If—
'Damn it, but I didn't think;
Damn it, if I'd only thought;
I wish his damned old boat would sink'
Or, 'If an obolus I'd brought.'

So these light wights in debt get in
The heavier for this added sin.
While Charon toting them across
Muttered sadly—'Profit and loss.'





The flowery bells of breezy Spring
Set Lover's hearts and voices ringing,
'Tis but the lusty voice of May,
Singing while she is sowing,
That sets these pretty things agoing.

Lovesickness mostly soon is cured,
At least its pains can be endured,
They are the growing pains of Spring
And not at all a serious thing.
'Twas ever thus in spring.

Among the good there's someone bad,
Among the jolly—someone sad,
So in the spring while all things sing
One sadly goes a-sorrowing.
And so it was with this poor Faun,
Sitting grumpy all alone
His merry pipes abandoning.

He'd sought the forest's deepest shade
To mourn a wayward fickle Maid,
Till he no longer silent stayed,
But doleful lamentations made,
Remembering his philandering.

I said—'Why mourn that fickle Maid
And lamentations sing?
Thou knowest well, as well I know,
'Tis ever thus in spring. Another spring,
Another Maid, as sweet as May will bring.

'In sunny glades with such-like Maids
You'll while away the spring;
Until she leaves you like the rest
And then again you'll sing,
As you have often sung before,
" 'Twas ever thus in Spring."

'Out of the darkness of the night
Perchance some owl may mock your plight,
And echoing your sighs may sing,
"With you—'twas ever thus in spring,"
Till Echo's voice diminishing
Says faintly—"Ever thus in in spring,"
Reiterating—"Thus in spring,"
And finishing—"In spring."



Note:—This was the original as written by E. V., not the version printed in "Moods."

The Dreaming Mountain

Great Nature, dreaming, thinks in her deep way,
For through her massive portals we catch gleams
Of her mysterious thoughts and mighty dreams;
Yet seems she strangely blind to her own majesty.
Is it for us to see, or hath she seen
That Man up through these portals will some day
His own creative, emulous imagery display?

Pride

With body insignificant
In mind Man ranges near and far,
From blade of grass to distant star
In Will all but omnipotent.





THE DREAMING MOUNTAIN

11/15
01/15

Mirth's Music

Man in life's labyrinth strange music hears
Of labor, in the drone of Egypt's groaning wheels,
Of pleasure, in those soft voluptuous reels
Danced near the Danube's ever flowing tide.

Sometimes it flutters down from out the sky,
Then 'tis the happy Lark's mad minstrelsy,
Or rising nearer earth with silvery notes
The unseen Tree-toad's trilling symphony.

But come, fair Goddess Mirth! and bring today
Thy music—and with me let it abide;
Murmur of loved voices gone, or far away,
Mayhap faint laughter from dark Lethe's side.

Enough the sermons and the sorrows are!
Enough the noise of Life and its stern jar!
So come, Thou dimpled Goddess, stay with me,
Or if Thou needs must go—then let me go with Thee.



To Holland

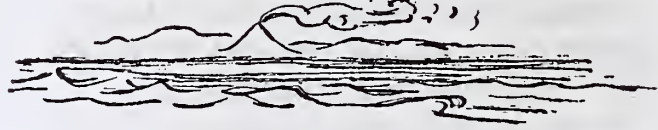
Holland, thou wast not born of Doubt,
Doubt never checked the wild North Sea,
Nor did it drive away that blight,
The blight of Spanish bigotry.

A dogged Faith in Man himself,
And not in mouldering bones of Saints,
Is why the blessed Sun now paints
With Hope's bright green thy meadows free.

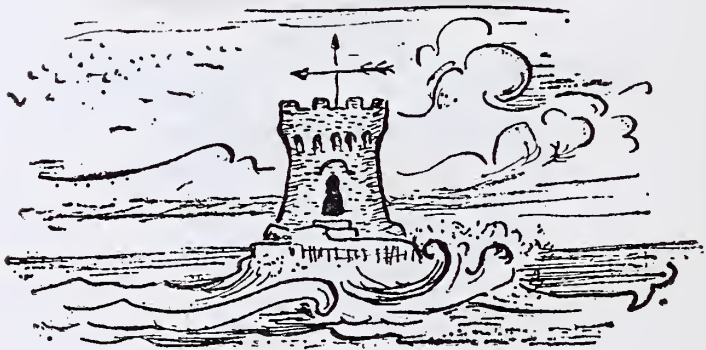
Faith in thy strength, Faith in thy right,
Drove back the sea, drove back the blight;
And now, o'er fields restored to light,
Blows the sane breath of Liberty.



In Capri



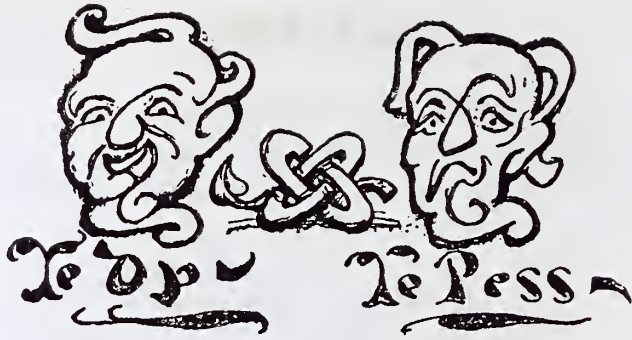
I build my house upon a rock,
A rock that rests on sand;
The sand rests on another rock
And so throughout the land.
The land an island in the sea,
In both too much uncertainty.
So now I build my house on air,
Mere Fancy rears a golden dome,
Will it hereafter be my home?
I look on clouds and see it there.
Some wandering wind may find a key
And show what I alone can see
Ere with the clouds it drifts away,
Yet how I long to have it stay.



Good Advice

To all ye men advanced in years
Who having ears, yet hear,
I'll tell you of a little plan
To free your minds from fear.
Buy quickly a small Annuity
And live without anxiety.
Thus while you live
You still can give
But dying naught can leave;
So all will wish you long may stay
And when you really go away
Over your grave will grieve.





The Optimist asserts that Life
Is like a Persian rug unrolled,
Where all the rainbow hues he sees
Are lovely flowers picked out in gold.

The Pessimist in Life beholds
A poor rag-carpet Fate unfolds
Worn and soiled by the constant tread
Of those who sadly earn their bread.

Truth finds the vaunted Persian rug
Is a mere modern imitation,
And the rag-carpet not so bad,
Needing a little reparation.



(April 21, 1915.)

Venus

Venus! get Thee gone!
With all thy loves and doves.
Why come gliding over the purple sea
On thy dainty shell
Letting thy warm glances dwell
Again on me?
I who have been so well
With only memory.

Would'st light again the fires
Of my desires?
On the altar where they as ashes lie?
Go—saucy hussy, get Thee gone!
Over the shining water
To thy native sky.





Smaller by Degrees and Beautifully Less

With the first blast from out Life's stormy sky,
Youth's fairy fabric shattered at his feet doth lie,
But Youth and Hope together mend the damage done,
And soon another lordly palace greets the sun.

That too and others just as fast go down
Before adversity and the world's frown.
Grown wiser, he builds smaller by degrees
Until he's happy in a hut to take his ease,

Resigned to reap the harvest he has sown,
Contented with a roof that he can call his own.





Bubbles and Baubles

Verse-making is a bad disease,
A little printing gives it ease,
Success indeed might work a cure
But of success no one is sure.

Make, if you can, but one good rhyme
That will resist the tooth of Time,
Or like a bubble lightly ride
Sparkling on Time's restless tide.

Baubles and bubbles—crowned, uncrowned,
Count as one in lives renowned;
Where oft a monarch's silly jest
Of all his deeds remains the best.



(N.B.—See Charles the First.)

The Outline

Show me the man to vice inclined
Who yet resists with steadfast mind,
And I'll show you a Saint designed
By Nature, or at least outlined.

Perhaps this may be Nature's way
She gives the outline or outlay
Which we fill up as best we may.
How then on Exhibition-day?
When we our masterpiece display,
Sign we the work our own creation
Or meekly state 'Collaboration.'



Miracles

At Miracles be not dismayed,
Of Jonah's whale be not afraid,
The miracles of flower and fly
Are greater—and that they should die
Made and remade, unceasingly.

Strange it may seem, but we find out
That Miracle is born of Doubt.
For given Mind and Mystery
At once the birth of Doubt we see.
Or if playfully inclined
Imagine Mystery minus Mind—
Or turn it the other way about,
And fancy Miracle less Doubt.



The Advent of Man

At first the Elements beheld with glee
That upright cub we now call Man,
But when they saw within his grasp the glint
Of a rude axe, fashioned of splintered flint,
Throughout their ranks a mighty shudder ran.
And now they see him strike the bird in flight,
Drag out the scaly monsters of the sea,
Warm himself and brood by self-made fire
And light his gloomy cave's obscurity;
From whence born on the air
Strange sounds they hear
Of throbbing, diabolic revelry;
Thus seeing Man rise from the sod, they fear
The advent of a Devil or a God is near.





THE ADVENT OF MAN

The Pessimistic Maze

Fancy its circlings—canyons great
Where light can scarcely penetrate,
Its lofty walls o'erwrit with lies
Or Nature's mysterious verities.

The center vast, dense silence fills
Or at the best vague whisperings;
No certainty has yet been found
But Death to end the weary round.

What scheme imagine? What devise
To find your way amid these lies?
You wander by a dubious light
While all about reigns hopeless night.

How came you there, you do not know;
Nor whence, nor where, nor why, you go.



The Slot

Death's like the penny in the slot,
Something we get—we know not what,
Nor do we care so much to know
That into that slot we care to go.

Now you may think this fun misplaced,
Yet surely funny it would be
Finding a game we held as chance
Was betting against certainty.

What if the bitter tear we mop
Or spend life in frivolity?
Great Nature comes not to a stop
Nor stops her old fecundity.

She says—'Increase and multiply,
What if I give the weeping eye?
I give the cure, the remedy,
In careless gay hilarity.'

One of her lies. Can this be told
To those who barely taste of life,
Or early perish in the strife
Before Life's glory they behold?

For you this moral is enough:
Cast not Life's penny in the slot
In hopes of getting God knows what—
Yet don't put up too big a bluff.

The Boomerang

Many on the woolsack sit
As Judges who are most unfit.
'Judge not lest you be judged,' a rule
Among the best that we have found,
A boomerang that circling round
Finds out the spot where we're unsound,
Or, quoting Johnson, we should say:
'Unsound fundamentally.'



Culture

Culture may make the cabbage grow
Till fit for horticultural show,
But it remains a cabbage still.
That is culture's bitter pill,
That cabbage still.

But no. But no. Science now cries:
Take with the cabbage proper pains,
You yet may make a head with brains.
Of course no brain will live to see it,
But we'll try it.



Too True

Mid all the longings of the heart
The Future forms the brightest part.
How will it be with us at last
With all our Future in the Past?
Ah! Youth, this is not so with you;
In Age alas! 'tis but too true.



Hell

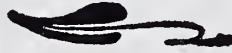
We've changed the name, the thing's the same,
In hopes it may take off the curse;
We suffer now a Mental flame—
Not Physical—which is the worst?



The How and Why

Things ask no questions in this wondrous world,
Silently the golden sunsets are unfurled
And tinged the drops in Hope's prismatic bow,
And so, Man only of all things below,
(Unlike the honest plants and flowers)
Passes his hours, scanning earth and sky,
Eternally asking the How and Why?

(1919.)



(A quotation from Maurice Hewlett.)

"There are at least two persons in each of us, one at least of which can course the starry spaces, and inhabit where the other could scarcely breathe for ten minutes."

(Montaigne—see Florio's translation and spelling—not mine!)

"If as some say, to philosophate is to doubt, with much more reason to rave and to fantastiquise, as I do must necessarily be to doubt: for to inquire and to debate belongeth to a scholler, and to resolve appertaineth to a cathedrall master."

Philosophers

We picture them as wise old men
Far past youth and its temptations,
A wand in hand, a little sand
Whereon to trace their demonstrations,
Seated on well-carved marble benches
Too cool for thin-clad classic wenchens.

There under academic trees
They pour forth wisdom at their ease
In various forms of eloquence
But always to an audience.

This wisdom's only for the wise,
One sage another verifies,
That is approves, quotes, or denies.

Of course we read them once or twice
But do not follow their advice
Nor really profit by their lore.
We simply sit and read some more.

Are we then given to understand
That wisdom must be second-hand?
When Science teaches us each day
That Truth lies just the other way?



Don't Call Me Mister, Call Me George

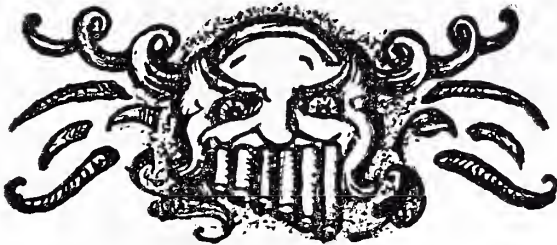
Sweet mistress mine, 'tis May, let's go a-maying,
Thy glorious hair like Eve unbind
As through the garden we go straying,
And bring with Thee a merry breeze
To set the trees and rushes singing.
But as we rove in silent grove
And I with pleading sigh begin a-wooing,
Mention not age, nor call me thy dear sage,
For that of all my fun would be the undoing.



Illusions

Ah! the wild music and the dizzy whirl,
And the timed footsteps on the level floor,
And two hearts beating, and glances meeting,
And tresses entangling ever more;
Could such things last forever?
Alas! they passed forever
Like those light footsteps
On that dusty floor.

If such things but illusions be,
Haste and make an end of me,
For they're more precious in my eyes
Than 'skinny Saints in paradise.'
So sang a singer long ago,
But we have changed all that, you know.
Now, we shall have just what we please
According to modern theories.



A Chinese Picture

Rising from a sapphire sea
An emerald island I espy,
Where dreaming in a turquoise sky
Pearly clouds stretch lazily,
While beneath a golden tree,
A little deer for company,
An old Sage sits in revery.

No changes mar this peaceful scene
Unvarying from year to year,
Its emerald grass is always green
And on it lies the dappled deer.
The pearly clouds dream o'er the sea
While deep in thought beneath the tree
The Sage remains in revery.

Where lies the charm? In changeless sky?
Or breathes it from the sapphire sea?
Or is it the little dappled deer
That keeps the old man company?
Whate'er it is, its tranquil peace
Pervades my heart and troubles cease.





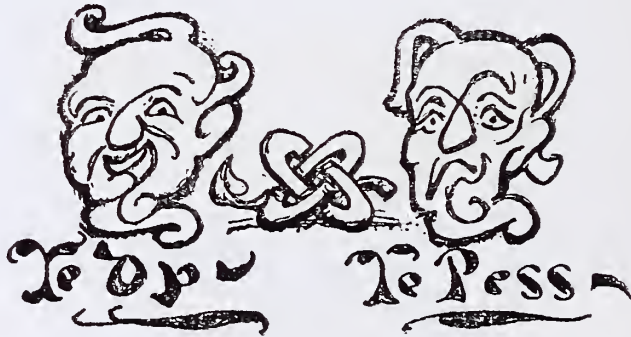
A CHINESE PICTURE

Compensations

No need to cheer up the rosy-gilled Optimist
Who swears he is happy as happy can be,
But rather encourage the grumpy old Pessimist
And lavish on him all your spare sympathy.

But we must confess twixt ourselves and the lamp-
post
That Rosy-gill's not so infernally gay,
And that grumpy old P., while wrapped up in his
sorrow,
Gets a great deal of comfort in his pensive way.

Whence we conclude that there are compensations
Which make of the Sad and the Gay but a pair,
And that in the course of the earth's revolutions
Things, after all, pan out pretty fair.

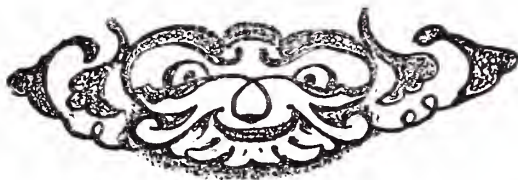


(June, 1920)

Humbug

How often have I tried to lug
Into my verse the word Humbug,
And also hoped the thing to kill
But as in verse, I lack the skill.
Unlike Hydra, one vital head
In Humbug lives among the dead,
And sprouts and breeds, we always find,
In various forms after its kind.

Saint George the dragon is ever killing,
And in some pictures the beast seems willing
To meekly come and take its gruel.
This on the artists' part looks cruel,
But Humbug's real—give it real pain
And make it squirm again and again.



Camera Lucida and Camera Obscura

Did angels singing as Creation dawned,
Know of the thousand monsters that were spawned?
Do two great laws preside in Nature's scheme:
One for the things that are—one for the things that
seem?

When angels sing, how is composed the song?
Is it composed of two parts, Right and Wrong?
Can laws of harmony unite these two?
Do discords count as nothing, are they few?

You may not say these questions are but seeming,
They form the very tissue of Life's dreaming.
Primitive monsters of the labouring mind,
They wander in huge freedom unconfined
Through the hushed watches of the lonesome night,
With gloomy questionings our sad soul affright.

Come, gentle Dawn—bring the fresh breath of Day,
Open the window—let in the cheerful light,
And drive these fearful monsters all away.



Autumn

Old Men say—

That happy days they still find in the autumn,
When squirrels rustle among the leaves,
That golden grain they still find in the furrows
Left long ago from the over-full sheaves,
So they say.

Old Men say—

How sweet 'twas to linger when young
Under the peaceful harvest moon,
That now the winters are longer and colder,
And that they come oftener and much too soon,
So they say.

Yet Old Men say—

That some of the sweetest though saddest colors
Are found in the west, at close of day,
But night coming on, and friends all departing,
They go themselves with the twilight away,
Alas! so they say.



Note:—This was the original as written by E. V., not the version printed in "Moods."

A Cure for Insomnia

(THE ARTIST'S)

Insomnia—child of incessant thought,
Nursed in darkness by thy mother Care,
Sad sister of the dread Nightmare,
And her infernal gang led by Remorse
 Followed by pale Despair—
How oft Thou sittest by my sleepless couch
Pointing to that oriental drug,
That lethal thug who promises
With Aladdin-dreams to free the mind
From strife—yet tangles
With ever tightening coils the Soul
To a dull semblance of Death in Life—
 I'll draw Thee—
And seeing what Thou art clearly portrayed
Henceforth regard thy horrors undismayed.



The Classic

This is a subject Doubt would prove,
What Classic helps afflicted Job
When with such grandeur he deploras
His many maladies and sores?
Yet once his indignation past
To his integrity holds fast.

And Homer of the bay-crowned brow,
Of course he is a Classic now,
But Doubt would know how class him when
Crownless and blind he sang to men,
As bowing his venerable head
From door to door he begged his bread?

Call it but Classic, 'tis enough
To purify the vilest stuff.
So the worst filth of Greece and Rome
In our best schools is quite at home.



Fourth of July 1914

The sun rose on our glorious Fourth,
Bringing a cool wind from the north
Crisping the tepid southern sea
With a fresh sense of Liberty.
Alas! 'twas burdened with the knell
Of a young monarch's funeral.
Now thousands must in mourning go
To prison, exile, or to death,
In compensation for the blow
That robbed one mortal of his breath.



Fame

What is this Fame? 'tis but a name
Banded about the world a bit,
It must be sweet when men deem meet
To risk their lives obtaining it.

But as for me, I'll let it be
To come or go as it sees fit,
Contented with my little share
If it with me will bide a bit.

And yet—I want a little more,
I hardly know what it should be,
Perhaps a smile, perhaps a sigh,
Or something to catch the passing eye
Writ on my tomb, that this will say
'On earth he lived—he did not merely stay.'



(Revised September, 1914.)

Rhyme and Reason

I find those verses are the worst
Where all the rhymes are thought out first,
And limping Reason hobbles in
To save it from poetic sin.
Some even say that what is meant
Is but the fruit of accident,
And they are right, for half the time
We often see the tyrant Rhyme
Puts poets in this paltry plight,
That, starting out to say one thing,
The very opposite they sing.



An Excuse

These lines treat not of bread and butter,
No fool is sent home on a shutter,
 No 'Pippa passes.'
Readers are never made to feel
 They are but asses;
And painful mental vivisection
May be avoided by selection.
Yet they're defective, that I own,
For which defects I make atone
By having ready this retort—
I've made them very, very short.



Those Days

With all the Dancers duly set,
We danced some pleading minuet
Which figured well the goings on
Of those days and our merry set,
That once so merry set.
But now with pretty ghosts alone
I dance that pleading minuet.

Could I But Know!

Careless youth scattered, as if it little mattered
How, or where, or when the golden grain was sown;
Had it but known!

Closing the weary eyes gives the brain no reposing,
It sadly goes on reaping what it has sown,
Had it but known!

Old Age again sowing but this well knowing,
It never will gather the harvest it now sows,
Can only murmur to itself, meekly and low,
'Could I but know!'



THOSE DAYS

An Old Man's Song

Time—for a moment hold thy glass
So that Life's sands no longer pass,
'Twill be great sport to look them o'er
And then make up the motley score,
A mass inchoate as this verse,
And like it, might have been much worse.

The common sand of Sweet Content I somehow miss,
And the rare pearls of Perfect Bliss;
The golden grain of Wealth is somewhat rare
But dull green grains of Discontent and Care
Are there.

And of sparkling diamond grains of pleasure
A good measure.

But ruby gems of Love and coral beads of Passion
I must count in,

Mixed with jet black specks of Sin.

Yet, to be fair, some pure white grains

Of Truth and Honesty abide, and purple Pride;

Nor must I leave out of the calculation

Some small, much broken particles of Reformation.

Dark are the grains that mark the death of friends,
But why trouble borrow? we go ourselves tomorrow.

Then comes a lot of dull disgusting stuff

Which taken in the mass must stand for Pain,

Repentance, carking Care, and Melancholy,

And taken in the rough, are far from jolly.

But is it best to calculate the rest?
The remaining grains that have as yet to run?
For there is one that soon or late stops all the rest,
Stops even breath—and that is—Death.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Set up the glass, Old Time,
And while we may we'll sing.
We now are old and past our prime
And all have had our fling;
We all have had our fling, old friend,
We all have had our fun,
So set up the glass again, old Time,
And let the mixed sands run,
And let the last sands run.



A Questioning Sage

A questioning Sage was seen scratching his head;
The answer 'tis plain was not there,
When after a silence he suddenly said,
'I always think better when lying in bed,
I never could think in a chair.'

So he hies him to bed and has a good nap,
But on waking as clear as a bell
The answer (which does not amount to a rap,
So I think) he refuses to tell.



The Seven Sages

The Seven Sages all agreed
They very little knew,
That wise men were not many,
The very wise but few,
And that the very wisest said,
'I know no more than you.'

This being so, a modern Sage
May stand among the rest,
Who says that what he does not know
Is what he knows the best.

Now this is not mock modesty
For that would never do,
And what he thinks about himself
He also thinks of you.



Aunt Eveline

How dear to my heart
Are the dreams of my childhood,
But one cherished dearly
Is of—Aunt Eveline,
Who from the ripe currant
Was want to make yearly
(By a miracle surely)
What she pleased to call wine.

This wine she oft proffered
With cakes of her baking,
For which it is whispered
She had taken 'the bun'
And the cakes were not wasted
But by me never tasted
Was what one painful lesson
Had taught me to shun!



Father William

What makes Father William
So eternally clever
Has never been settled,
And I doubt if it ever
Will be by will-power
No matter how willing,
Yet the secret he offers
To sell for a shilling.

My palm cross with silver,
The gipsy premises,
And then you can safely
Stand by for surprises,
And prophecies also
Which although not true
And you laugh at so slyly
Yet believe in them too.

Between knaves and fools
This rule's good enough,
The smaller the price
The poorer the stuff,
The greater the price
The bigger the bluff.



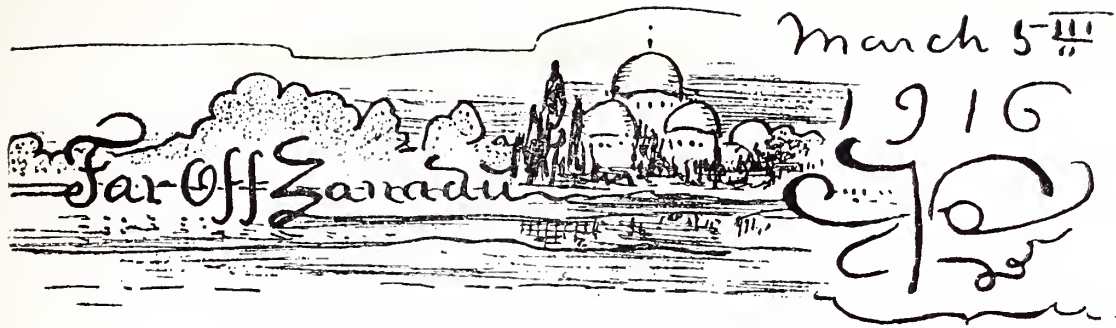
A New Year's Greeting

[A.D. 1909]

Old Sol is out today, or rather say
Apollo—and I would gaily sing,
For never have I felt, even in spring,
More springlike than I do today.
Sign of approaching age? So let it be—
With me life's sun is stooping low
And what remains of youth is but the glow.
Old friends seem dearer and years no drearer;
Of new friends I can count a score—and by and by,
Under another sky, I may find more.

This song I sing for all on New Year's morn,
Hoping this New Year's sun a glorious course may
run,
Ending as he began with sunny locks unshorn.





We loved, it may be madly,
In far-off Zanadu,
And then we parted sadly
And bade a last adieu.

Had we then solved the mystery—
Read to the end Love's history,
In far-off Zanadu?

It seems a perfect irony
Fond love should be but vanity
And passion end in satiety,
Leaving but ruined pleasure domes
In far-off Zanadu,
Even in Zanadu!



Herford's Fly

I merely kill a tiresome fly,
Thine activity I transfer
To another sphere—mayhap nearby,
For here Thou art too near my nose,
So thine account I close, hoping
For repose and sweet tranquility,
And no more talk of Thee and Me.

Vain hope! for when I see Thee dead,
A miracle of life wiped out,
Enters creeping Doubt, and questions old
Of chance and destiny and—may not
The next earthquake do the like to Thee?

But here at once I'm told this is
Impiety, and wonder at the temerity
Of Herford, who dares ask the reason
'Why and wherefore of the Household Fly?'



Microbes

No longer can we eat, or drink, or sleep, or think,
Or even breathe or sneeze, quite at our ease,
But what we find we're on the brink of some disease.
 Open the papers and at once our eyes
 Are greeted by some new surprise,
 For there we see them advertise galore
 Cures for diseases we never knew before,
 Arising from smells and dust and dirt
From millions of Microbes in one continuous flirt,
Who thus enhance to such a huge degree the dangers
We cannot avert, find out, or touch, or see,
That in despair we resign ourselves to Destiny.



Note:—This was the original as written by E. V., not the version printed in "Moods."



A Timely Saint

'Twas summer at midnight when all through the
house

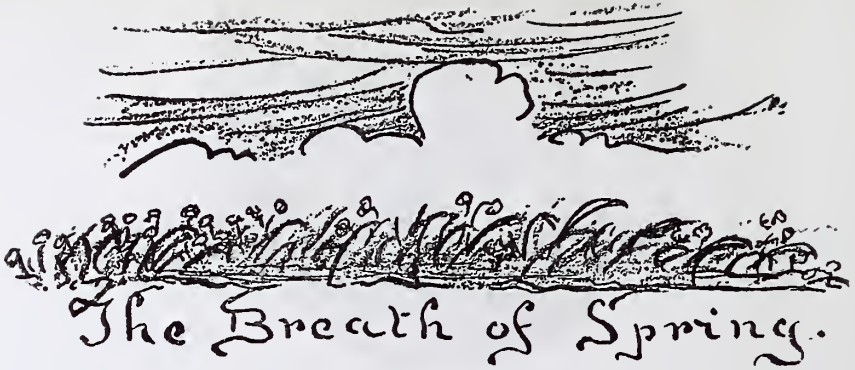
I went prowling for something to make a carouse.
The drinkables all had been locked up with care
For fear that some tramp might be wanting his share.
When what to my wondering sight should appear
But a waiter in white with a bottle of beer,
Which he deftly uncorked with a motion so quick
That I knew in a moment 'twas a summer St. Nick.
With no stocking to fill and no Christmas near
I yet felt it my duty to fill up with beer,
Which I did without fail, but as people are slow
To believe in this tale—I've the bottles to show.





Let the serious have their say,
As we've lived we'll pass away,
So bring the song and bring the wine—
Fitting things for life's decline;
Bring the wine and bring the bowl,
Think not you will lose your soul,
For many men as wise as they
Have lived and died in this same way.
A life unsuited to the present day?
Let them cheer up—we soon will pass away.





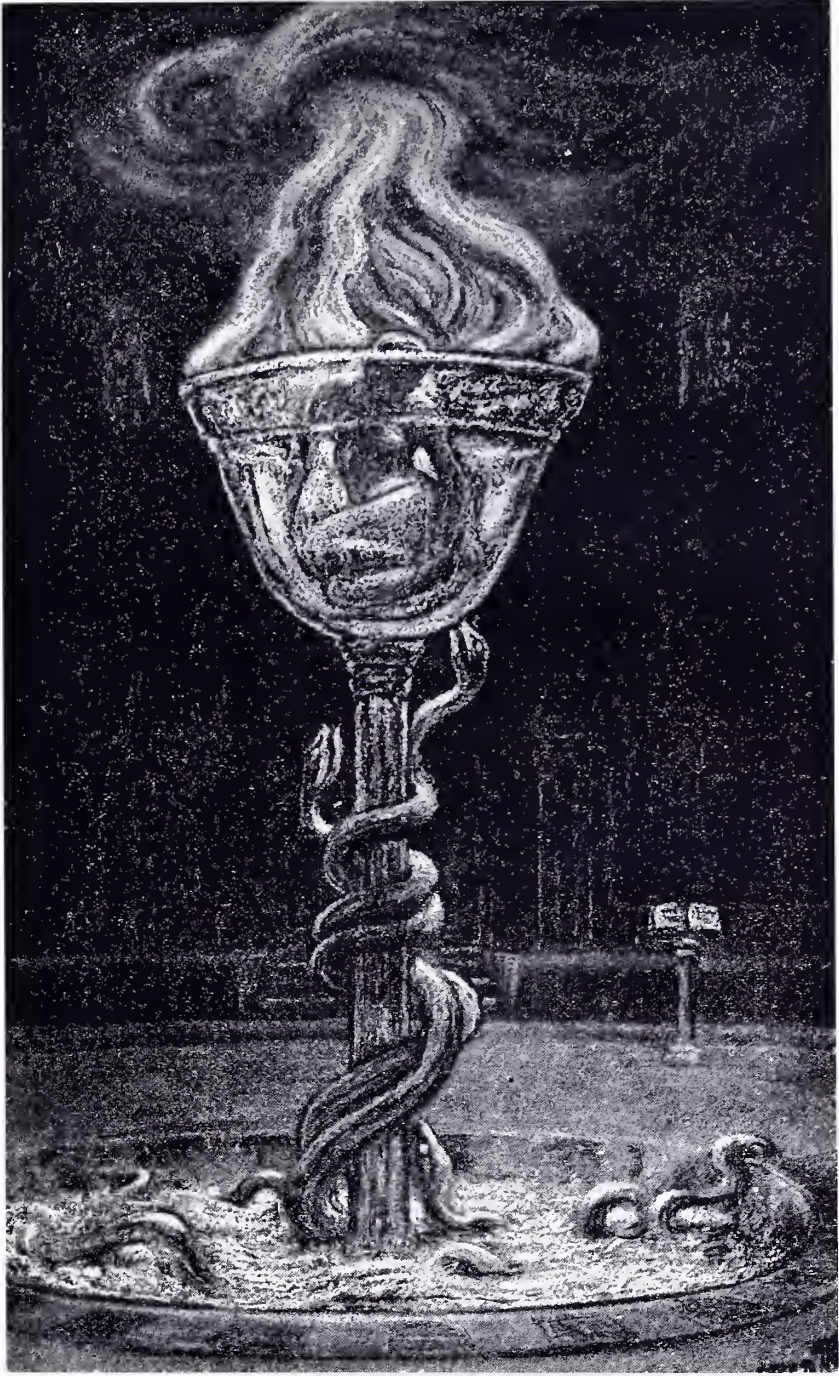
The Breath of Spring.

A wandering breath of fragrant May,
A soft caressing breath of spring,
Awakens in my heart today
The child that long since there did sing,
And in its welcome springlike glow
I feel it melts the lingering snow.



Enchantment

Enchanted between Heaven and Hell
In cold flames the Maid must dwell
Until a Hero breaks the spell.



ENCHANTMENT



Three Old Men sat thinking
All on a summer day,
The first said naught,
The second less,
The third, he went away.

The first one was a Saint,
The second was a Sage,
The third was but the common Fool
We meet in every age.

'I fear them all,' the Author said,
'Their looks are very cool,
I fear the Saint, I fear the Sage,
But most of all the Fool.'

Yet he to them did show his book,
'It treats of Doubt,' he said.
The Saint at once began to frown,
The Sage, he shook his head.

'Yes, 'tis of Doubt, as I have said,
So fitting 'tis that I
Should sometimes be in doubt myself.'
'We thought so,' all did cry.

The Saint resumed his settled frown,
The Sage his lofty look,
The Fool first laughed and then he yawned
And then his way betook.

The Writer tried to argue,
Then also went away,
And so it was while two Fools left,
Two other Fools did stay.



Vanity

A King who long had reigned
Reviewing deeds too often stained
By treachery and blood,
By lust of power and lust of gold
And by ambitions manifold
All wandering from good,
Said: 'Now alas! too late I see
My life has been but Vanity.
For all my gain has been my loss.
My hoarded gold has turned to dross,
Ambition to satiety,
And my long search for happiness
Ends but in pain and deep distress,
Suspicion and anxiety,
Until with Solomon I cry
This world is naught but Vanity.'

“Highfalutin”

Cease fife and drum and trumpets' rousing blast
And cannons' loud prolonged reverberations,
Things needless now as in the buried past
Since we have made our final reformations,
Renouncing War and all its infernal machinations!

Some Saints declare, in fact they swear,
This war-craze must be curbed—
'Far better go to war ourselves
Than have the Peace disturbed.'



As to the whiffle-tree its whiffle
So to the pen its play or piffle.

Things of the morning
Repented of ere night,
Thought better of next day,
Here see the light.

Sweet are thy uses, O Variety!
Within the limits of propriety,
Thou art the spice of life,
Or say the lively fife,
To the humdrum of life's monotony.

Had things been but sweet and good
And all mankind been meek and mild
I fear me much we never should
Have had a Whistler or a Wilde.

By a stroke of pen the Czar did away
With drinking in Russia, and that in one day,
But think you this dryness is destined to stay
While Adam is made of such bibulous clay?

What a pity sayings new
Quoted only by a few,
Made common in the course of time,
At last are quoted as a crime.
The brightest sayings, such our pace,
Become in one year commonplace.

When Painters take the Pen in hand
And Poets wield the Brush,
Many come forth the sight to see,
But few die in the crush!

Logic affords us this surprise;
'Tis full of loop-holes of escape,
And the surveyings of the wise
Are measured by elastic tape,
So using wisdom Baconian
Avoid all rigid forms Draconian.

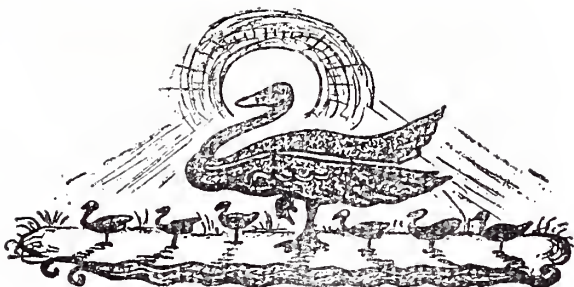
Doctors are but busybodies
Interfering with our toddies,
Examining our eyes and ears,
Keeping tab upon our years,
Overhauling our hydraulics
And ending all our fun and frolics.

If in the making of my rhymes
I use the same words many times
And their recurrence bothers Thee,
Think how they must have bothered me!
Ideas plenty, rhymes but few,
Try verse yourself—'twill bother you!

While walking in this vale of woe
One finds full many a tender toe;
But luckily all now aspire
To roll through life on rubber tire;
But tiresome and indeed a sin,
To tread on toes—then rub it in!
So autos guide as best you can,
Avoiding toes of beast and man.

There is a point of hard detection
Which stops just short of sheer perfection,
Beyond which if we try to go
'Tis painting lilies—bleaching snow;
Running perfection in the ground;
So stop when you this point have found.

The business man—
He fights for honesty in trade
As far as laws of trade permit,
Yet finds to Conscience in the end
A heavy debt he must remit.



Mid verses dear to memory
 The brood of Mother Goose we see
 So full of sound, some say of sense,
 Retain their proud pre-eminence.
 So here we give, stitched somewhat loosely,
 Leaves retaining all that's goosely.

Let Dante take his Beatrice cold
 And freeze with her in highest Heaven,
 She's scarcely human.
 I'll take my Beatrice here on earth
 And warm—more in the form
 Of a real woman.

Said Canova to Pauline
 'You're not too fat nor yet too lean,
 You're not too young nor yet too old,'
 And here she added 'not too cold.'

Often prompted by our wit
 We proffer caps we think will fit,
 Failing to note what others see;
 Such caps would fit us to a T.

I have now reached that time of life
When all friends seem to see
That any kind of shaky health
Is good enough for me,
While if they're ill a single day
There's the very Deuce to pay.

Oft in the street some man I meet
To whom I nod a pleasant greeting,
Then find that I'd made up my mind
To cut him dead on our first meeting.

Hear Bacon beautifully tell
How the most ancient music fell
Into the flutes of Greece and Rome,
There making for itself a home
Where it remains—for not a tone
Has reached the modern Gramophone.

This rhyming you may call it play,
And so it is looked at that way,
Yet also it may hold some Truth.
Let Chronus with his iron tooth
Put all to proof.



GLEAMS

Foreword to Gleams

Gleams are not Criticisms, but more like the rays or lines seen in a spectroscope. X-rays we might call them, discovered in the effulgence which surrounds celebrated characters and seen from the standpoint of an ordinary person; a person possessed, so he thinks, of that questionable gift—a sense of humor. Had this ordinary person been gifted also with an ounce of Discretion, Silence—as far as he is concerned—would have reigned supreme and no one have been the wiser. Question:—are they now? No, these are not criticisms, for I feel that—

The Cobbler may without disgrace
Point out defects in the statue's sandal,
Whereas the praise of form or face
Would in his case be called a scandal.

The Archæologists

Future research mid our remains
Will show what care we take and pains
To guard the output of our brains.
To check and lawless thieves appall
We blazon 'Copyright' on all—
On Venuses and telephones,
All copyrighted but our bones.

Note: "Our bones are turned to no such aureate earth
As buried once, men want dug up again."

TO COMMEMORATE THE DESTRUCTION OF ALL LIBRARIES
AND THE BEGINNING OF AN ERA OF HAPPY IGNORANCE 3000 A.D.



POST-FUTURIST ARCHAEOLOGY A.D. 3000

Why Compare?

Let great poets stand single and apart:
One to the mind, one to the heart
His wisdom or his music doth impart,
Nor merge the noble Milton with the throng,
Nor Dante stern, the scourge of every wrong.
How compare Shakespeare with the rest
When he seems best, until we read the rest?
No—let them stand apart, nor make compare
Between the perfect, wonderful, or rare.

Contrarywise—

Who so noble are or rare
But what with others we may make compare?
This a comfort is to some, to some despair.
Yet, to be just, however high or low
Or dark or fair, or generous or mean,
Some little touch is seen whereby is shown
We each have something we may call our own.



D. G. Rossetti

Rossetti simply seals our doom,
Nor can we ever hope to join
Of British Bards that noble throng
Or even emulate their song.

A band of Plagiarists we stand
In an extensive barren land,
From a poetic point of view
Seeing our Poets are so few.

In truth, Rossetti sees but one,
Yet hopes that in the course of time
We may give birth to things sublime
Huge—rugged—raw—and ‘Underdone.’



Note: Last words in Rossetti's "Lives of Famous Poets": "The real American poet, Walt Whitman—a man enormously greater than Longfellow or any other of his poetic competitors." This makes us feel like quoting the Bab Ballads: "Time, time, my Christian friend."



There's something wrong, dear Whitman, with thy song:
Words are not wanting, nor is sound
Oft signifying nothing. But a bound
To thy vast love, surpassing that of saints
Embracing all mankind, cannot be found.

When Thou didst first appear, a shameful fear
Ran through the land lest we should fail
To understand thy occult meaning
Of thy impropriety, which at once
Gave Thee fame allied to notoriety.

In Thee we seem to hear that story told
Of those who grasping all but little hold,
In Thee we seem to see that fearful slip
Between the longed for cup and thirsty lip;
But when we're borne along 'on pinions strong'
Unmindful of thy faults—we hail thy song.

Whitman reaped his "Leaves of Grass"
And while the sun shone made his hay,
We know not how 'twill look when sere,
We only know it served his day;
But say, why did he tear away,
In ruthless rage it would appear,
That leaf to modesty most dear?

Emerson

'I am the Doubter and the Doubt.'
Thus Emerson—turn this about,
'I am the Kicker and the Kick.'
Add bear's cubs into shape we lick.
Blake says 'Damn strengthens.'
That's the kick,
And that 'Bless weakens.'
That's the lick.
So kick in kindness those you lick,
And lick in meekness boots that kick.

Something is wrong in my quotations
Or in my ratiocinations,
My trend of thought seems off the track.
It scarcely pays to put it back.



Aristotle

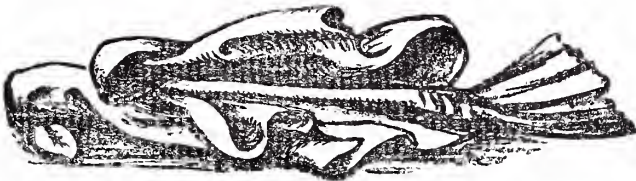
Once all-persuading Aristotle
The tree of knowledge sought to bottle,
Or put each branch into a socket,
And if it would not fit—would dock it.
For thought, reduced to handy lumps,
The head provides convenient bumps,
In this the origin we see
Of world renowned Phrenology,
Which in its day made such a show,
And may again, for aught we know.





When snugly seated by the fire
With Thee and friends and flowing bowl
Who cares how loud the wild winds howl,
 Let others chide,
 With Thee I'll bide
And risk a Tam O'Shanter's ride.

With Thee I breathe the new-mown hay
And with Thee through the gloaming wander,
In shady lanes where lovers stray,
Where eyes replace the light of day,
And kisses sweet forever linger,
And arms bid stay, cost what it may,
 With Thee I'll bide
 And risk a ride,
Another Tam O'Shanter's ride.



(April 2, 1916. Capri.)

Pluto & Plutarch



When Plutarch before Pluto stood
That monarch in a peevish mood
Said: 'Was it essential we should meet
To make thy set of Lives complete?
Or did'st Thou think to intertwine,
In thy old style, thy name with mine?'

Said Plutarch: 'Prithee ask no more,
I had a pair of "Lives" in store
When I gave out for want of breath
But neither hinted at my death;
And as for twining, would I dare
To make of our two lives a pair?'

'Well, someone's done it and I'm vexed.'
Here Pluto, turning, called out: 'Next.'



(May 2, 1916.)



IN PLUTO'S REALM



'Tis told of Ericson the great
That from his earliest years till late,
He used a little set of tools
Dating from his infancy;
They defective and but few,
Yet ample, for with them he drew
His great designs and measured lines
With absolute dexterity.
Let his example be your rule—
Idea first and then the tool,
But show not like the fatuous fool
Nothing but—Dexterity.

Ruskin



Lovely as are "The Stones of Venice"
In Ruskin's hands they are a menace,
It seems to him that he alone
Can know the value of a stone;
Yet I begin to think I know it
As by him through Venice led
I've had them all thrown at my head.



Hudibras

Alas! Alas! how all things pass,
Even Butler's 'Hudibras'
Where jokes that once the rafters shook
Would now hang dead, in mid-air stuck;
Yet they were good in their own day
But now have an odor of decay,
A taste for which we can't acquire,
But read, like Samuel Pepys Esquire,
In order we may a verdict pass
On Samuel Butler's 'Hudibras.'



Lacon and Festus

It's long years since I looked at Lacon,
Not classing it, or him, with Bacon;
Yet Festus might repay perusal,
Remembering how he did bamboozle
Or with his tale of Hell afright us,
For now we enter without asbestos
The once famed Hell of once famed Festus.
But why like Plutarch make a pair
Of Festus and Lacon? Or compare
Bacon with the great Shakespeare,
Is more than I can make quite clear;
I only know when this is done
Someone may call it flippant fun,
And think I should straightway repent,
And so I will—to some extent—
Under that good old plea 'well meant.'





Coleridge, we all know, thanks to thee,
How Kubla built in Zanadu—
Or did a pleasure dome decree
Whose priceless treasures we would see,
Had we the key.

But he who sees that dome arise
And drinks the milk of Paradise,
And hears that Abyssinian Maid
And her wild strains so sweetly blending
Must dread that noble river's ending
And be afraid.

But not afraid of thy Marineer,
Another tale we fain would hear
Told by that bright-eyed Marineer:
Or wander with pale Christobel
Adown a moonlit haunted dell,
Thrilled by that creeping pleasing fear
We love so well.

Yes, therein lies thy matchless spell,
Thou see'st more than tongue can tell
In thy wizard's crucible;
But soon in its magic fumes we fear
All thy marvelous visions end
And disappear.

In letters gloriously at ease,
A spendthrift of thy great estate,
In judging Thee, why hesitate
To call Thee great?





How one bubble breeds another
Like as twins are to each other,
'Linked sweetness long drawn out'
I merely quote, I do not flout;

For I was thinking of soap-bubbles,
And our little joys and troubles,
Each shining with its little sun,
All bursting and the game is done.

And how it all resembles Life
Where bubble-blowing is the strife,
Their bright gleaming our reward
While their bursting our sad record.

This peroration leads to Poe,
From whom we differ, for we know
This life is not an endless woe
On a dark Plutonian shore.

When bubbles burst, we blow some more!
Thus stopping that gloating Raven's quoting
Himself monotonously o'er
On memories' ever-echoing shore.

Poor Poe! How sad thou should'st not know it,
Europe, at least, did hail thee Poet.
Strange! How thy fire was quenched and lost on
That Plymouth-rocky soil of Boston—
That impenetrable 'Side' of Boston.

The Bacon Theory

Of all the things that vex the mind,
Of all the things that are not clear,
I think I need but mention one—
Who was Shakespeare?

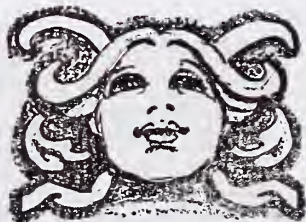
The greater we make out the man,
The greater grows the mystery:
Why should he wish to live and die
In absolute obscurity?

But make that man a King incog.
Hidden worse than in a fog,
The atmosphere begins to clear
About Shakespeare.



Pepys

Pepys' unconscious fun is fine,
No need to read between his lines
How that most lovable old sinner
'Mighty merry at some dinner,'
Tracing that dinner to its end
In haste must for the doctor send,
Who to relieve his passing ill
Administers the timely pill.
How touching his simplicity
For when his pretty wife awakes
She finds him weeping silently,
Of course they make it up straightway.
Then—'Mighty merry all next day'—
And she—a new gown doth display.



Dante

Stern master of vindictive verse,
Skilled weaver of a dreadful curse,
Thy powerful spell endureth long,
For in thy unforgiving song
Thine enemies yet dwell—in Hell.

Meanwhile thy name in Time's despite
Revolves in spheres of heavenly light.
Dost joy to cast thy glance below
Where, merged in thy Hell's murky glow,
Still wanders thine unforgiven foe?

Hateful thy creed, hateful thine age,
Surely thy guide, thy Mantuan sage,
Bore kindlier thoughts to Fields Elysian
Than thou to thy dogmatic Heaven?

Once only dost thou touch our hearts.
'Tis when Francesca's trembling lip
Its piteous tale of love imparts.



Spencer's Supine Comedy

In Spencer's paradise when all is done
Clouds cast no gloomy shadow, there's no sun;
For warmth's not needed where no one feels cold,
Nor can age be where nobody grows old.

Where wrong is banished, there remains no right,
So courage counts for nothing, there's no fight.
There is no pity, where no one's bereft,
So charity and poverty have left.

Even resignation, no display,
For every atom is content to stay
Where it is put, nor feels the least desire
To tempt again motion's creative fire,
But rests in balanced immobility
As such things should in 'Supine Comedy.'



Diogenes

What wast thou, O Diogenes?
Till Macedonia's great Son
Gave thee thy chance, the only one
To so impertinently ask:
'Wilt step aside and let me bask?'

Perhaps the surly Sage was right;
He loved not intercepted light,
So lying o'ershadowed in his cask
What better favor could be ask
Than 'Step aside and let me bask.'

For wonderful and up to date
Was this Diogenes the Great;
Plenty of sunlight and fresh air
Were seemingly his only care,
Surely no Englishman can snub
A man who takes his daily tub?





By Allah! but my garden's Fair!
While with Thee and Love I share
My Book my Bread and Jug of Wine
Where the red-red Roses twine —
What Sultan's throne can equal mine?
By Allah! but my garden's Fair!



By Allah! but my garden's Bare!
Sitting alone in the chilly air
Watched by the wolves of want and Care
While ever nearer and more near
Croaks the Raven of Despair;
By Allah! but my garden's Bare!



Feb. 15th
1916.

Tupper

When passion like a raging flood
Surges through our distempered blood
Then we should practise self-control,
Strengthen our will and save our soul.

This about as Tupperish
As any Tupperite could wish,
To such it may be safely told
Silence has been compared to gold.

But not with Tupper, when he sang
The golden guineas round him rang,
Yet many bards who better sing
Lack this satis-'factory' ring.



Crichton

We must touch up the youthful Crichton
By all allowed to be a bright 'un—
Do not omit the 'Admirable'—
Who it would seem was barely able
With this addition to his name
To get it on the roll of Fame.

Indeed his life reads like a fable,
For have you ever seen or lit on
A single word by this great Crichton?
What's in a name? we well may say
When of a man great in his day
All but the name, has passed away!

Horace Walpole

Walpole needeth not my pen,
His own pen doth him best display,
The man and manners of his day
He clearly shows in this one ray;
So to his hand I leave the job
Of picturing the perfect Snob.

"Men of the proudest blood shall not blush to distinguish themselves in letters, as well as arms, when they learn what excellence Lord Herbert has attained."



Chatterton

How could Fate blindly use its power
To crush so fair and frail a flower?
In thy short life no gleam appears
Of comfort, only bitter tears;
Others die young and young remain
Their memory a saddened joy,
But thine, poor boy, a lasting pain.
Keats' name 'in water writ' doth stay,
Thine, on a sigh was born away.





Browning

'Tis dangerous to touch on Browning
And set the Brownies all a-frowning,
But he's a preacher like the rest,
And only a poet at his best.

Hear Paracelsus where he tells us,
Or rather Browning's about to tell,
All we would know of Heaven and Hell,
How he peters out and fails us
Leaving the hard question dubious
By giving the Medium's old excuse,
Now worn bare through constant use—
'Even Spirits are not permitted.'
How much better had he admitted
He did not know—and just said so.

But he's preacher like the rest,
And only a poet at his best.





Carlyle

Could Carlyle be alive today
And have a bomb drop Chelsea way
It would not altogether charm him,
In fact I think it would alarm him,
And might his worship much abate
Of certain Heroes he calls great.

I think in reading history
Distance aids philosophy,
A bomb-shell dropped in our back-yard
Creates not brotherly regard
Towards those regarded formerly
As almost of the family.

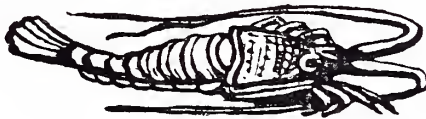
Is this the meaning of Christ's word?
'In Heaven peace, on Earth the Sword?'

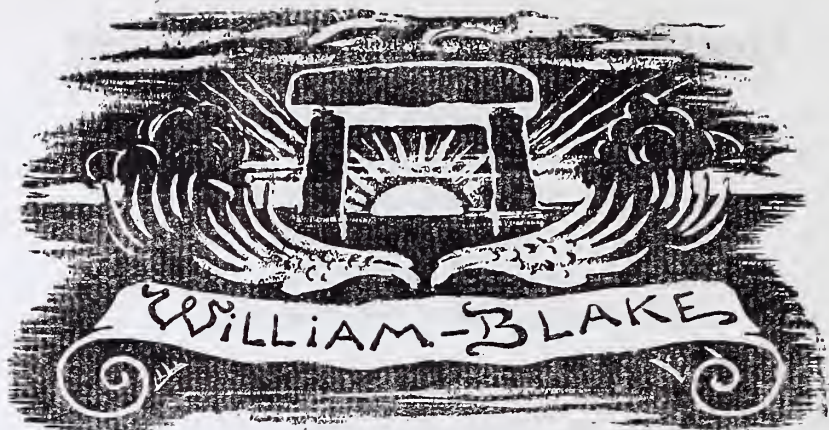


Goethe or Psychic Conchology

There lies a priceless Pearl within
Theology's calcareous shell,
A word—by Science scarcely seen—
Which humbler eyes oft spell.
But call that shell Conchology
Science might solve the mystery.

'Tis there as in a bag of tricks
Exists the Theologic mix—
Sin, Satan, Fate, Free-will and Grace,
Where Man and Nature, face to face,
Forever fight; but is this so?
For when we to great Goethe go
He cries, 'My friends, look on the whole.'
Solves this the saving of the Soul?
Or does the Devil still take toll?





A madman must that poet be
Who vainly thinks to rival thee.
Where find the colors and the hues
That can o'er a dingy street diffuse
The clear light of thy paradise?

Who by mere strength of will can see
An angel singing in each tree?
Or—making bold—stroke the lion's
Mane of gold? or piping down a valley wild
See on a cloud a little child
Laughing at thee merrily?
As thou didst—till theology's cold breath
Condemned thy fairest flowers to death.

Blake did in noble poverty
Achieve a signal victory,
And his great scheme's consistency
But proves his perfect sanity.

Boswell and Johnson

Had Boswell added Goldsmith's name
He would have made a trinity
Of that great epiphytal tree
He reared to Johnson's memory,
Only let the sequence be—
Genius, Learning, Industry.

Johnson, not so great as good,
Did in melancholy mood
Save his soul—but did it pay?
(Dare we say so without scandal?)
Was it worth Life's cheerful candle
To save a soul in that sad way?

Goldsmith—vain and ill at ease—
Offending where he aimed to please,
Full of foibles—ever dear—
All this we owe to Boswell's ear.
Boswell himself was not Inventive
But Mr. Boswell most Attentive.



Defoe

Thy great book holds my boyhood's hero,
In which I trace a dear old friend
Through a sailor's bad beginning
To a good man's peaceful end.

How breathlessly I fetch with thee
That long run up the sloping beach,
Until, beyond the last wave's reach,
I turn and gaze on the raging sea.

Then, living in security,
Yearning for man's company,
Fearful, in wild amazement stand
Before that footprint in the sand.

Book, dear like to youth and age,
Showing on every living page
The value and the rarity
Of absolute simplicity.



Gustave Doré

Many good things that had their day
If really good pass not away;
Of such the 'Thrill' is a good test,
If it remains, perhaps the best;
For when the novelty is passed
But little thrill remains at last.

So apropos of G. Doré
Often we are forced to say
How he amazed us in his day,
When with Gargantuan appetite
He illustrated all in sight,
Books, ancient and modern, up to date,
Till naught remained to illustrate.

And I confess I thought him great,
With due allowance think so still,
Nor can my loyalty abate
While I remember the first thrill.





Tolstoy

Saints have known from the beginning
All about Man and Sin and Sinning,
And have concluded for his good
There's nothing left but the monk's rough hood.

In Man, from family ties set free,
The perfect type of Man we see,
The only being in their eyes
Worthy the joy of Paradise.

So, better that all men should die
Than give up Tolstoy's theory.
And truly when I look around
Most of the good are under ground.

Which makes me think I may agree—
In time—with Tolstoy's theory.
Strange that this quest—
Man's greatest good—
Should end beneath the monk's rough hood.



Reader, hast thou yet decided
Which was the truthful Spaniard's plan?
To depict a half-crazed Dreamer
Or a simple Gentleman?
Wandering, poor, (except for visions)
O'er La Mancha's dusty plain,
The Gentleman by boors derided,
The Dreamer counted as insane.

Or was it the genial author's scheme
To destroy, or to restore,
The little Romance yet remaining
Which in his heart he did adore?
Was he himself a Hero dreaming
A former Hero's dream once more?





Cornaro was an old Venetian
Who lived about the time of Titian.
(Pray note the neatness of this verse,
A neatness we may well call dapper;
To take away would make it worse
Nor can you add to it a capper.)

Did Time with him prevaricate
Or slip up in his calculation?
Or was his but a glaring case
Of well devised procrastination?

But sure it is through half-starvation
He long outlived his generation,
Till one small egg a day supplied,
For him, a riotous collation.

This gave him quite a century
Wherein he passed his latter days
Composing madrigals or lays
Or essays on longevity,
Even whistling while at work,
Such his senile levity!



Beethoven

Music, freest of things in nature,
Yet the slave of law,
Mistress of mirth and melancholy,
And of inspiring awe,
Filling the dark chambers of the brain
With heavenly light,
Thy gifted children suffer most
When giving most delight.



Moore

A love-song in a foreign tongue
I mind me how a maid did sing,
And how on me a glance was flung
That needed no interpreting.

My bark was waiting—we must part,
Too soon, alas! I must away,
But how that glance went to my heart
And eloquently bade me stay.

It matters not how Lovers sing;
There is a language of the Heart,
That only loving eyes impart,
That needeth no interpreting.



Herford

Could I but rival Herford's vein
In all things of a lighter strain
I would not of my Muse complain;
For Herford in his brilliant flights
But pecks at every thing he sights,
Just pecks—for Herford never bites.



Austin Dobson

This gentle poet is all right,
Dainty porcelain clean and bright,
Shepherds and their shepherdesses,
Flower-besprinkled brocade dresses,
Smiling, pouting, billing, cooing,
Always something graceful doing.

Withal he makes them live and breathe.
They love and sigh and sometimes grieve,
And many kisses give and take,
But keep them in a cabinet
Where they are so nicely set—
And handle gently lest they break.



Botticelli

How Botticelli's Graces fair
Lightly leaning on the air,
Regardless quite of gravitation,
Excite our boundless admiration.

Alas! Fond hopes to us so dear
As lightly lean on air, we fear,
But lacking his imagination
Follow the laws of gravitation.



Carlo Dolce

C. D. was that Master
Of whom we oft hear
Who finished too highly
A Magdalen's tear.

On his picture thought good
Was passed this harsh sentence,
'While admiring the brush-work
We miss the Repentance.'



Bangs

Cosy House-Boat, my delight,
Would I could drop in every night.
Perhaps some future century
A refuge may provide for me
Far from the present war-like mix;
The quiet waters of the Styx
May be the cure and give me rest.
I'll ask Sir Walter—he knows best.



(June, 1920.)

A Comment

As a small fire provokes much smoke,
These things may have been all a joke,
And prove that they are not the thing,
But only a poetic fling.

The smoke (if joke) I much regret,
The joy I've had I can't forget,
And, strange as it may seem, I feel
The fire, however small, was real.

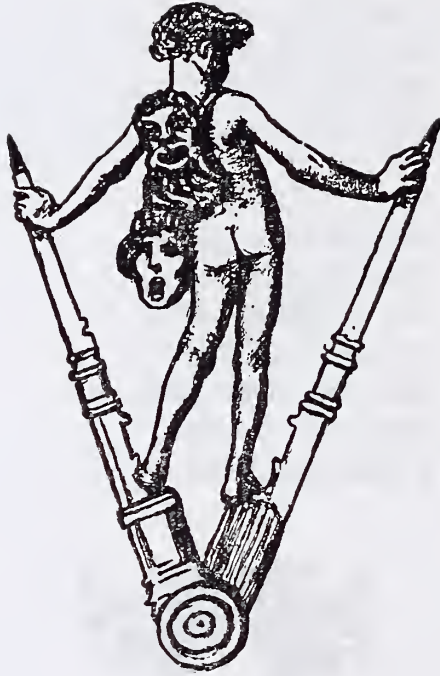


Books and Looks

Should good friends find
Trends in my mind
Resembling Thought
Leading to naught,
I can show books
Whose solemn looks
Wisdom proclaim
That end the same.

Doth Folly's mask
Hide Wisdom deep?
Pray do not ask
But simply keep
All you may find
And with thine bind,
Nay—call it thine,
I shall not mind.









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