AN EPITHALAMIAM
ROY ELLIOTT BATES
To Parkin,

from Mary Becton.

Oct. 11, 1911.
AN EPITHALAMIIUM
AND OTHER POEMS
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AN EPITHALAMIAM
AND OTHER POEMS

BY
ROY ELLIOTT BATES

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DEDICATION

These songs upborne above the loom of laughter,
These voices heard below the tide of tears—
Whose name were meet that they should follow after—
These first-fruits of unripe and idle years?
So there were aught not all unworthy in them
'To do my lady honour, proud were I
To seal them hers, and bid her favour win them
From thought of other praise—or let them die.

But they are frail to bring my lady honour—
A simple music for a summer's day—
How should their poverty confer upon her
The perfect gift that shall not pass away?
They cannot bear the homage I would do her,
But ere their life ephemeral be past,
Haply some word of theirs far-wafted to her
Shall sing the secret I would send at last.

She knoweth not, my lady, that I love her,
And I—I know not where she waits alone,
But oh, whatever skies may bend above her,
My heart hath whispered where she hath her throne!
As to an unknown goddess and immortal,
Whose shrine some votive offering beseems,
I lay these verses by her temple portal
Beyond the lowly barrier of dreams.

Once from a surging city's street-oasis
I heard her voice and felt her face was fair:
Once on the wide lagoons' star-silent spaces
Methought she passed with moonlight in her hair.
I know her beauty like the lingering cadence
Of far-heard flute or fading dulcimer;
I have gone near to love with many maidens
For eyes, or hands, or heart that told of her:

Yet ever hath there come the fairy-haunting—
The eyes that frowned beyond the eyes that smiled;
I have been true, and now, though nothing vaunting,
These songs I offer to that Presence mild.
Like as a gift of red, brief-blowing roses
Plucked out of Boyhood's garden, they shall be
One charmed hour, while day's deep twilight closes,
Near to her heart, though far, though far from me.

And if my steps grow weary ere they meet her
Wandering down the way of life alone,
I shall but have the worthier gifts to greet her—
Yea, in the darkness if we pass unknown,
Lost in the press, unheard the sweet forewarning
Till down the Stream at Night my spirit slips,
I know that I shall meet her in the Morning,
And I shall hear my song upon her lips.
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EPITHALAMIUM


WHERE dreaming fields lie fragrant to the morn,
Strewn with fresh flowers let fall from Summer's hand,
Cometh a sweet-voiced laughter; now a band
Of rose-wreathed maidens, in whose arms are borne
   Burdens of blossom, burst into view,
   The distant wildwood arches through, 
   Over the meadow, two and two.
With sylvan grace their spoils are worn
   Like nymphs beneath their native trees
Listening for Dian's hunting-horn
   Of old; nor fairer were than these
They who once bore like trophies to adorn
   Some floral shrine in ancient Arcady, 
   Where, to pipes' and timbrels' sound
   And choric revel ranged round,
Full against the rising dawn some sacrifice should be.

Whence come ye, maidens, dight
   In virgin robes of white,
Now Flora and her shrine no more are sought?
   Wherefore this wild delight?
   And whitherward your flight?
What place shall wear the garlands ye have wrought?
Hast thou not heard?—our wreaths are worn—
These woodland wildflower blooms are borne,
Tokens of love for one we love,
Her beauty to adorn:
For her we sing and garlands bring—
What maid could be forlorn?
The wreaths we bear are bridal wreaths for this her marriage-morn.

Through the meadows by the shore,
Tripping now, ye maidens gay—
Open wide the cottage door,
Driving doubts and dreams away.
Merrily, merrily, move ye now,
Trim the bower and bind the bough—
Tricksy Cupid whispers how.

Then deck the marriage-bed
With roses white and red,
And scatter wide your buttercups of gold;
Hawthorn and wild rose too,
Still gleaming with the dew,
Shall form each fairy curtain’s fragrant fold.

When this task ye shall have done,
Seek the Well-belovèd One;
Whisper to her willing ear
Tenderly, ah, tenderly—
That which she shall blush to hear
For maiden modesty.
Bring ye then the bright array
Which shall grace, this blissful day,
The beauty of the bride.
Drape each white and shining fold
Lovingly, ah, lovingly—
Till as one from days of old
Whose charms in legend still abide,
She standeth peerless to behold,
Crowned with her bright hair's ruddy gold—
A Princess out of Chivalrie—
A royal Arthur's pride.

What blossom bright
Shall lend its light
To that crown, like a gleaming gem?
Oh, valley lilies like clustered pearls shall star the diadem!
What honoured flower
At the bridal hour
In the hand of the bride shall be?
Oh, the maiden rose, the white, white rose of virgin majesty!
Thus when ye have made an end
Of attiring her—
Comrade dear and chosen friend
Still admiring her—
Out of her chamber your loved one bring,
Before her sweetly carolling,
And this be the song that your hearts shall sing:

Like to a flower at the flush of dawn—
Fairest and dear!
Like to a stream when the snows are gone,
Or skies when the promise of June is here—
Come from thy maiden chamber white,
Swift to thy love and a new delight
Near, so near!

Never again shalt thou lay thee down
To maiden dreams:
Nor when night is deep shall thy fancy crown
King after king, as the hour beseems,
In thy heart's great castle of High Romance,
When full i' thy casement the fairies dance
   In pale moonbeams.

For thou hast chose one only knight
   Courtier and king;
Strong in thy service, his love and might
Shall be for thy guard and thy heart's-girding:
Helmed with thy Favour, he e'er shall bear
The sovereign prize to thy couch so fair
   At evening.

Cometh he who shall claim thy hand
   Soon, full soon!
Sealing it his by a golden band:
Two bride-kisses shall be our boon—
One for the love between us, Sweet—
One to our true-loves' coming, fleet—
   Under the moon.

What shall be in the loom of years,
   Who can tell?—
Warp of laughter and woof of tears
Weave the web like a wondrous spell—
Thine of the brightest colours be!
Peace and all prosperity;
   Dear, farewell!

Turn now, my song, to herald his appearing
   Whose eyes shall claim, undoubting, barrier-free,
This long-sought bride—shall know each moment nearing
Love's promise and love's final victory.
Full seven toiling years hath he been waiting
   Like one of old, this damsel fair as she
Who sat in peace her shepherd tales relating
   Beneath the shade of Haran’s fountain’d tree.
Love hath been e’er unfalt’ring and unending,
   Yea, ever hath grown stronger and more fair,
Till eyes of love o’er eyes beloved bending
   Have looked and found Love’s perfect image there.
Now bridegroom, brother, when this hour is bringing
   Hope’s long fulfilment, I to thee would bear
This tribute of a song—tho’ crude the singing—
   To greet thee on the pleasant morning air:

Forth from out his eastern chamber by the ocean’s utmost bourne,
Glorious through the gates of heaven burst the Sun this summer morn,
Bringing Light, the High Gods’ blessing, o’er each stream and field forlorn.

Radiant as the day’s uprising, unto thee there cometh One
Who shall clothe thy life with brightness like the brightness of the sun—
Who shall crown thy life with blessing till thy days of life be done.

Now hath fled thy Night of darkness to its dungeon in the west:
Love, her great and growing kingdom hath established in thy breast—
Chained with flowers thine aimless freedom to her service: this is best.
King after king, as the hour beseems,
In thy heart's great castle of High Romance,
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Love, her great and growing kingdom hath established in thy breast—
Chained with flowers thine aimless freedom to her service:
   this is best.
Thou shalt labour wiser, bolder, that thy life hath found its light—
Frame each purpose clearer, nobler, and each plan more true and right,
And each far-flung, stately fancy shall sustain a surer flight.

O'er the lonely mountain-passes with the eagle for thy friend—
Through the northern forest regions where the former trails shall end—
By the unimagined rivers of a paradise unkenned—

Thou shalt blaze thine unknown pathway, drink an air unbreathed before,
View the gorgeous, blood-red sunset fading up the snow-peaks hoar,
From thine eerie camping-places high above some lake's blue floor.

Thou shalt build thy mighty bridges o'er the roaring cataract,
Thou shalt drive thine iron roadways through the dreary desert tract,
Thou shalt see fair paved cities in the paths thine hand hath hacked.

They who follow in thy footsteps shall be swift to claim the land,
They shall see thy work, and seize it, but they shall not understand,
Neither shall they know the Vision nor the joy of him who planned.
From the cruel, crowded places of this hunger-haunted earth,
Shall they seek thy silent spaces, make the barrens bloom to birth;
Forest-lands shall ring with labour, and the mountain slopes with mirth.

Men shall profit in thy peril, may, or may not, speak thy name—
Be thy works but firmly fashioned, strain-defiant—this thy fame;
Whether honouring thee or others, in the end it is the same.

We who rear but ghostly castles in the shadow-realm of Song—
We who sell our souls to others for the whisper of the throng—
How shall we escape thy laughter, thou who buildest and art strong?

Thou hast chosen well, O brother, for the labour of thy life,
Thou hast chosen fair and wisely in the maiden for thy wife;
All thy days be great with gladness, and thy years with honours rife!

Secret in the silent chamber of thine heart’s fond memory,
This of all life’s sovereign moments shall be dearest unto thee—
For this hour shall that be sealèd which shall shape eternity.
But hark! Adown the fitful noontide breeze
A sudden burst of pealing bells I hear,
Along the meadows and among the trees
And from the hillsides echoing far and near—
Swinging—singing—fading—swelling
Like a crystal fountain welling
Into silver sound—
All the lofty steeple rocking
With their merry, merry mocking
In the air and all around,
Like an unseen Ariel climbing
Airy spars, and softly chiming
Faint, from under ground.

And now in answer to that summons sweet,
Slow pacing in the pleasant paths along,
Cometh a jocund rout in brave array—
Maidens and youths whose merriment and song,
Alternate heralds, proclaim the onward way
Of two, before whose feet
Are strewn the flowers of the well-favouring year—
The woodside wildrose and the daisy white,
And every flower that springeth blue and bright
Along the river-margins and the meads
Fast falling where that fragrant pathway leads
The bridal altar near—
Where loud the organ sounds and portals wide appear.

And now through nave and chancel they are come
Even to where the sacred altar stands;
The pealing organ and the aisles are dumb,
A solemn voice is raised; with joinèd hands
They hear the holy rite of Book and Ring,
The vows are taken and the prayer is said,
And unseen guardian angels, listening,
Stretch forth their hands above each bowèd head.
Now all is done; he who hath won
Leads down the bride again
Like to a king first entering
The gates of his new demesne;
The path is free through a broken sea
Of friends on either hand,
Red as a rose beside him goes
His Queen of all the land.
Happy is she abundantly—
Happy but hazy-eyed—
The doors swing out—Hark! comes a shout—
'The Bridegroom and his Bride.'

Now all the daylight hours shall be
Given up to jollity.
Youths and maids with merry jest
Gather round the bridal-feast:
Many a health is raised on high
To the bride, and all shall vie
Oft'nest to congratulate
The happy groom, and high debate
Shall be raised on who may be
Next of all the company
Him to imitate.

Were it not fitting, ere we end
Our revels, that we bid attend,
To share and bless our marriage mirth,
Those spirits of the older earth
Who ever haunt about us still,
Saddened and invisible,
Since their shrines by wood and shore
Now are visited no more?
Let the guest we first invite
Hymen be, with taper bright
And stole of saffron—pray that he
Enter not unwillingly
Nor with such light
As on the night
When Orpheus wed Eurydice.
Then the presence we must crave
Of the Daughter of the Wave—
Mother of that roguish boy
Whose bright arrows, barbed with joy,
Smote these hearts, and wrote the fate—
Clearer, dearer grown of late—
Which to-day we celebrate.
Nor should Juno be forgot,
Whose blessing high each maiden sought
With prayer and shrine-incense of yore
When unto his fair-wreathed door
Her spouse should soon with nuptial song
Triumphant, lead her swift along.
And Vesta, moving through the mirth
Sedate, will come and bless the hearth,
Then passing Aphrodite by
With reddening cheek and downcast eye,
Will seek again the upper sky.
Look once more and ye shall see,
Here in our midst, Euphrosyne;
She entered soft and silently
All uninvited, for she knows
That welcome, wheresoe'er she goes,
Shall her presence be.
These, with many a goddess more
And sylvan god and grace, implore
To honour our festivity!
And when all shall ended be—
The gifts all viewed, the farewells said,
The blushing bride and bridegroom sped—
Then shall the Muse a loftier strain
Assay, and when they down have lain
At last within the bridal bower,  
Shall, after midnight’s magic hour,  
Next seek them, and low-hushed, ere long,  
Thus softly singing, end the song:

O Cynthia, Queen of the skies,  
Now the blue-vaulted heaven is bare,  
Come thou down from thy throne,  
Where thou rulest alone  
By right of the light from thine hair.

Thou art chaste and a maiden we know,  
And the far-flying hunt is thy care,  
But this maid of our song  
Served thee well in thy throng—  
Oh be loving and list to our prayer!

By the love that thou borest of old  
To the Latmian shepherd so fair—  
By the curls on his brow  
And thy kisses enow  
To beseech for thy favour we dare.

Ah, the chamber is filled with a light!  
Through the casement the white arrows stream  
Till they silver the floor  
Like Aladdin’s of yore,  
Or the uttermost courts of a dream.

See, the fair-girdled Huntress is here!  
She hath followed her shafts by their gleam;  
Now she stealthily creeps  
Where her weary one sleeps,  
And to whisper a blessing doth seem.
Then leaving her radiance still,
She mounts by a silvery beam
   Where, straining for flight,
Stand the Steeds of the Night—
Her swift-gliding, yoked dragon-team.

Hardly hath she the casement crossed,
Slow gliding upward, when a host
   Comes trooping in—a fairy band;
For sprightly dance their hands are met,
And lightly o'er the coverlet
   They steal, and listening, stand.
Yea, still she sleepeth; trip ye now
Round about her breast and brow,
And as ye weave each subtle ring,
Mazily meandering,
Softly in the moonlight sing:

Come, fairies, weave around her
Our spells, till they have bound her
   So flitting Fear,
   By marsh nor mere,
Ne'er frighten nor confound her.

O mortal maid, our blessing,
Soft as thy love's caressing,
   We bring thee now,
   That he and thou
May live with love unceasing.

With potent spells we charm thee,
That naught of earth shall harm thee,
   Nor witch nor wight
O' the black midnight
Portentous e'er alarm thee.
Good fairies shall attend thee,  
To guard thee and defend thee,  
And winsome sprites  
O' summer nights  
Shall oft and oft befriend thee.

Our nightly tapers, burning,  
With months' and years' returning,  
Shall bring to thee  
Fair children free  
To bless thine inmost yearning.

And this be thine endeavour  
That naught our loves shall sever ;  
Oh bear in mind  
The fairy-kind  
For ever and for ever.

A whisper—Lo ! the room is clear,  
And now four stately queens appear  
Whose sceptres rule the varied year  
Of fiery months and frore.  
They slowly pace the couch beside,  
And smile their blessing on the bride,  
Then vanish, lingering, backward-eyed—  
They are the Seasons four.

First cometh Spring.

Maid and Mother am I, and Queen ;  
My breasts are girt about with green—  
White stars and azure are between :  
My moods are many, fair my face,  
Tho' clouded oft ; no man shall trace
EPITHALAMIUM

Pale sorrow in mine eyes serene.
My life shall fill thee and empower,
My breath be fragrant for thy bower,
And ever shall my sweetest flower
Belovéd, in thine hand be seen.

SUMMER followeth.
Summer, Queen of the South, am I;
Before my feet the streams are dry,
The tall fields greet me royally:
My lusty paramour, the Sun,
Fast-cleaving by my side, hath won
Away my raiment utterly.
Beneath the waving wildwood boughs
My presence shall be hearth and house;
My kiss shall be upon thy brows,
And thou shalt know my love thereby.

AUTUMN next speaketh.
I am the Queen of Fruitfulness;
Fine yellow gold hath wrought my dress,
And purple flowers twine each tress.
Oft, seated on some granary floor,
I dream, and watch my winnowed store,
Or loiter by some cider-press.
My young men and my maidens sing
In going forth to harvesting;
King Plenty is my spouse and king,
And all our riches thine, to bless.

At the last, WINTER appeareth.
I am a haggard queen and old,
Hoary my hair and mine hands a-cold,
But warm to my heart the flowers I hold.
My mantle still is maiden-white,
My dark crown gleams with stars by night
When cramped flocks shiver in their fold.
My breath shall rock the branched oak-tree
And freeze the rivers, but not thee:
I bless thy wide hearth blazing free,
And bring thee homely joys untold.

The Voices cease, the vision is departed;
Away on wings of Dreamland they are borne—
Oh may this dear one wake the stronger-hearted,
Therefrom to greet the new life with the morn.

The Muse now mute, from her sweet toil reposes:
One only word remaineth—which shall boast
No sounding strain nor rhetoric of roses—
The heart speaks briefest where it feeleth most.

It saith, how strange and true, O thou my Brother,
Tho' many have been comrades more than we,
The giving of thine heart unto another
Hath brought thee near, and dearer unto me.

And Sister, through green Junes and grey Novembers,
My heart looks back with dreaming half-surprise
To find how clear the picture it remembers—
Thy girlish golden hair and laughing eyes—

Then swift the absent years and months remeasures
To call thee Sister now, and doubly mine:
May Fortune yield thee all her richest treasures,
And all life's sovereign happiness be thine.

And now my pleasant labours all are ended—
The night grows old, and all the stars are gone;
My blessings—list!—with birdland notes are blended,
And darkness, breaking, ushers in the Dawn.
I watched the coming of the queenly Night
Down from her royal mansions of the air;
Her sober garments glowed with hidden light,
A thousand jewels burned amid her hair:
One silver clasp, the crescent moon, she wore,
Which on her shoulder caught her mantle's hem,
And in her hand a torch of stars she bore,
Her wingèd feet gleamed fair with many a gem.
Self-poised above the shadowed Earth she hung,
And hushed the boisterous breezes of the day;
Her mantle dark across the skies she flung,
And drove the cares and toils of men away.
'Lo, weary ones, the wearying Day hath fled;
Sleep, softly sleep, dream, sweetly dream,' she said.
SONG

LOVE, and the fall of the Dusk,
And the rose low down i' the west—
When the breeze is heavy with evening's musk,
And above, from a high and hidden nest—
The last, sweet, sleepy bird-note—Hark!—
Warbles—' The Dark!'

Love till the grey o' the Dawn,
And the first light breaking through—
When the woods awake like a startled fawn,
Tremble, and scatter away the dew,
And a little wind from far away
Whispers—' The Day!'

B
THE BALLAD OF MAID YSOBEL

A KNIGHTLY realm there was of old
With many a castle tall and tower,
And many a midnight wood was there,
And many a northern flower.

Came once a maiden from the South
Alone in virgin majesty;
Men knelt down palely as she passed,
So shining-fair was she.

Stately along the King's highway
She moved, and no man spake of sin—
Even unto the King's own gate
She came, and entered in.

Then made the King a mighty feast,
With pomp and ancient pageantries,
And all his lords were bid thereto
From near and overseas.

And ever did the King's own son,
Flushed with the dance and wine and pride,
Lead down the stranger through the hall
As who should be his bride.

But ere the days of mirth were o'er,
There went a whisper through the land:
The stranger-maiden Ysobel
Would not bestow her hand.
'First would I see ere I shall wed
Who best will prove his love to me—
That I may know your Knighthood’s worth
In all the land,’ quoth she.

Long pleaded then the King’s own son:
‘Whose gift can match with mine?’ saith he;
‘Erelong thou shalt be crownèd Queen,
And rule the land with me.’

‘This proveth not thy heart’s true love,
For many love not, yet they wed—
I fain would see some knightly deed!’
The maiden answerèd.

Then spake a knight of fair renown:
‘Come, let us hold a tourney wide,
And prove therein who of us best
Is worthy of the bride.’

So made the King a tournament—
Three days they strove with lance and shield:
The maid saw many a warrior fall,
And many a bold knight yield.

And one prevailed among them all,
And vanquished e’en the King’s own son,
Then brought he to the maiden’s feet
The guerdon he had won.

‘Well hast thou fought,’ the maiden laughed—
‘Well wouldst thou fight and valiantly
For love of arms—for slighting word—
Ah, what is that to me?’
Came then a poet unto her,
    Saying, ' If valour move thee not—
Nor princely honours nor rich gold—
    Wilt hear what I have brought? '

Before the Knighthood of the land,
    And ladies fair assembled all,
Chanted he then a wondrous lay
    High in the sounding hall—

A tender ballad of lost love
    In honour of fair Ysobel ;
Ne'er had men heard before a song
    So nobly made and well.

Praise leapt like fire adown the hall :
    ' Thy song hath won the maid alone! '—
Quoth she : ' My glory hast thou sung
    Remembering more thine own! '

At evening from the gate she fled
    Toward the far South in changèd guise—
A night and day she wandered on,
    And tears were in her eyes.

Along a forest-side she stole ;
    Hushed were the woods, the waters whist—
When by a fountain she espied
    A minstrel lutanist.

' Who art thou? ' cried she, all unseen—
    ' What dost thou here at even-fall? 
What hidest thou so fast away
    Behind the oak-tree tall? ' 
'Ah, Lady, thou affrightedst me.
    I thought thee other than thou art—
'Tis but my lute—a minstrel I,
    Dowered with a roving heart.

' From court to court I wander by
    With nothing save my minstrelsy—
The sweetest lute in all the world
    This lute of mine,' saith he.

' Nothing is mine beside to love
    Under the starry-sprinkled sky:
If they should steal my lute away,
    I could do naught—but die.

' I speed to Court this morrow-day
    For Lady Ysobel to sing,
And kiss her hand—why gazest thou
    So deep in the deep old spring?'

' O Minstrel, I am sore athirst,
    My lips are parched, I scarce may speak—
The water of the well is low—
    Some hollow cup I seek.'

The minstrel looked to earth and sky,
    Nor cup nor any shift was there—
Long gazed he on the maiden's face—
    Ah, she was wondrous fair!

Quick seized he then his precious lute—
    The thin flat breast, each trembling string
He cut away—the hollow shell
    Dipped from the crystal spring!
The maiden drank with filling eye;
No drop distained her silken vest:
The minstrel bowed and turned away—
His hand clutched to his breast.

'O Minstrel, see thy ruined lute!—
And dost thou know what thou hast done?'
'I have refreshed Her burning lips—
The Well-belovèd One!'

'So thou hast found me who I am?
And thou canst tell why I have fled?
And thou dost know that which I sought?'
'O Lady, thou hast said!'

'Who best should prove in all the land
By knightly deed his love of me—
None other did mine heart desire:
O Minstrel, thou art he!

'Early upon the morrow-day
Unto my southern far countree
Together with the dawn we'll fare,
An thou wilt go with me?

'King of the South my father is,
And thou the royal Prince shalt be,
And I thy loving Princess, Dear—
For that thou lovedst me.'
I know a wood where the fairies meet
Safe from mortals' wandering feet.
Once I saw the Fairy Queen
On her throne of mossy green,
With her maidens gathered round
On the flower-sprinkled ground.
Some were dressed in rose and grey
Like the heralds of the day;
Some in gentian petals blue
Jewelled with the evening dew.
Through the watches of the night,
By the moon's pale silver light,
Kept they woodland revelry—
Dancing, singing merrily—
Feasted on the junkets sweet,
Clover-honey for their meat,
Sparkling dewdrops for their wine
Served in bowls of eglantine.
Then their fairy tales they told—
Of their tricks and ventures bold
In the realms of mortal men,
Yet beyond all mortals' ken.
So they passed the hours away
Till the East foretold the day,
Then, at the first steps of the Dawn,
Whisk! the fairies all were gone.
Broken was the magic spell;
I was in a lonely dell,
Naught in sight but flowers and trees
Stirring in the morning breeze.
Oft since then I've sought the spot,
But the fairies saw I not.
A COURTSHIP

Bare is the Shore—all red and bare and desolate,
Burning 'neath the fervour of the noonday sun's attack:
Through the pools of silver sheen,
And the shallows still, between,
Runs a murmur, 'Be not mournful—Lo! thy lover cometh back!'

Blue is the Sea—all blue and gold and emerald,
Sparkling, diamond-crested, many a furlong from the Shore:
Comes he now upon the tide
Till his loved one is espied,
Then he ripples, laughing, singing, to her outstretched arms once more.

Cool are his lips upon her red and thirsty ones,
Wondrous are his presents—purpled shell and pearly stone—
Treasures for a princess meet.
Now with words of wooing sweet,
See! his robe is wrapped around her—he hath claimed her for his own!
Now old Winter's reign is done—
    Now the stream more bravely flows—
Earth is wanton with the Sun;
    Where the first arbutus blows
Feet are early on the hill
    Seeking spoils within the glen,
Every Jack beside his Jill—
    Ah! 'tis May again!

May again, and I am far
    From your land of Acadie,
Where the great white orchards are—
    Where the meadows sang to me.
May in France? Yea, and 'tis good
    Sailing here adown the Seine
To Saint Cloud within the wood,
    Now 'tis May again.

But I somehow long to climb
    O'er a seaward-sloping hill—
Hear the ripple and the rhyme
    Of the river by the mill.
When the world awakes anew,
    Something—some one—calls me then,
And in dreams I come to you
    When 'tis May again.
High upon this lonely headland
   Based in foam and falling spray,
Where the silent gulls are wheeling
   Charm-bound through the summer day—
Here the breezes from the ocean
   Riot through my veins like wine,
And the singing heart of ocean
   Chordeth well with mine.

Broad the path of golden sunlight
   Eastward o’er the blue below;
Laden ships along the offing
   To their distant haven go.
Changeless waves for ever breaking
   White along the stubborn shore—
Hollow voices calling, calling,
   At each cavern door.

Giant clouds for ever climbing
   Up above the ocean’s brim
Where the mighty bowl of heaven
   Rests its azure rim—
Mine is all this realm of waters,
   None there is to say me nay—
Rocks and clouds and vaulted heaven—
   All the world is mine to-day!
O sing to me of Prester John—
Of Araby and Azaron—
Of Xanadu and Babylon
And errant captains bold—
Of Phœnix with his emerald wings—
Of Argosies and Eastern kings—
Their hundred wives and—other things—
Of elephants and gold:

Of deeds by gulf and charmèd bay
Where merrily the mermaids play
Round coral islands far away
Athwart the rising sun—
Sing those brave lies of Mandivel’s—
Of silver-tinkling temple bells—
Of caracks and of caravels—
And battles lost and won:

Of doubly-split-hair-breadth escape
From water-spout and towering Shape
And demons of the guarded Cape
Across the venturous way
Through seas where ships had never blown,
Nor sound nor shore had e’er been known—
Save caverns where lost rivers moan
For ever round the coasts of far Cathay.
I WATCHED a cloud come creeping up
   Out of the Eastern Sea:
The whole wide heaven I saw it fill,
Then pass below the western hill
   Into the Western Sea.
I thought, 'No other cloud can e'er
   So full of beauty be!'

I watched a maiden growing up
   From youth along with me:
My heart's whole heaven she came to fill—
Then passed adown Life's western hill
   Unto Life's Western Sea.
I know there lives no other maid
   So beautiful as she.
THE PEOPLE OF THE DARK

When the shadows dark are falling
On the moorlands and the leas,
And the mournful winds are calling
Hoarsely through the rowan-trees,
Have ye seen our faces, peering
Palely from the gathered glooms—
Heard, at midnight, names endearing
Uttered in your empty, echoing rooms?

When your world is locked in slumbers,
And the dread night-raven flies,
Know ye of our spirit numbers
Moving where the white mists rise—
Each to his familiar meadows
And the dwelling loved of old,
Where, among the dim moon-shadows
Entering, we may shun awhile the cold?

Have ye heard the nightly noises
At your shutters—the despair
Of thin, half-remembered voices,
And the footfalls on the stair?
Come we thus not to astound you
From our silent spirit-land:
Fain we 'd fold our arms around you,
Speak with you and make you understand.
We were once your wives and mothers,  
    And your little children dear—  
Once ye called us friends or brothers  
    Till—we slept—and wakened here  
On a strange and silent morrow:  
    Now for ever we are whirled—  
Knowing neither joy nor sorrow—  
Round about the windows of the world.

Still we dream and come unto you,  
    Walking as who walk in sleep—  
Softly in the moonlight woo you—  
    Strive to laugh with you, or weep:  
But your eyes turn never near us—  
    Tearful, blinded, still ye grieve:  
Will ye never see and hear us—  
Never smile upon us and believe?

Have ye striv'n to pierce the seeming  
    Veil of silence hung between—  
Sought to wake us from our dreaming  
    In the land of the Unseen?  
One day shall your fear be banished,  
    And with love we shall be known:  
Haste ye, ere the years are vanished—  
O Belovèd, we are long alone!
HALLOWE’EN

Uprose the Moon of the darkening fall
High over the twilight forest tall,
And silver-white in the starless sky
She watches the blood-stained sunset die
   Along Earth’s western wall.

The clouds fly over her frightened face
From the Sun’s low grave in a headlong race—
Driving the Spirits of the air
Over the mountains and meadows bare
    To their forest trysting-place.

Then fairy sprites in the wood are seen—
Imps, and witches, and goblins lean—
Holding their revels all the night,
By the little Moon’s pale ghostly light,
    In the woods, at Hallowe’en.
In the midst of the mirth of life's Maytime,
When the world seemed a garden of song,
Down the deep, golden heart of the daytime
The flower-bright meadows along—

We wandered, secure and unheeding,
Our voices attuned and athrill—
Knew not that a Shadow came speeding
Where the meadow-land meets with the hill.

Like a silent cloud-shadow it sought us,
Though the blue was unbroken above,
And the chill, darkened breath of it caught us
As I crowned with red roses my love.

Quick we turned at its touch, and saw stooping
A form like a woman's bowed low—
Hollow-eyed, with her flesh sere and drooping,
Her breasts—God! we hated her so!

So withered and wrinkled of feature,
Our hearts from the sight of her shrank—
From the hair and the hands of the creature—
From her limbs so unlovely and lank.

Our eyes, by her sharp finger guided
O'er our path the white meadows among,
Wandered back, and a voice that derided
Croaked, tuneless, the song we had sung.
Then broke into mocking and laughter:
    'Thy beautiful one—hold her fast!
Youth and love—for a day—ah, but after—
    When youth and when beauty are past!'

'Now ye sing, for ye know not of sorrow:
    Ye shall know, and your singing shall cease:
Perchance ere the morrow's to-morrow
    There shall sound the cold knell of your peace.'

Then I caught my love to me, and kissed her:
    Jeered the hag, 'Ere the bloom of her die,
And I yield her to Death, my dark sister,
    More dreaded of mortals than I.'

She vanished—our spirits breathed bolder,
    We laughed at our fears that had fled—
Vowed a love that should never grow colder
    Till the stars from their courses were sped;

And we sang the long echoes a-ringing
    Where the meadows gave into the glen,
But one note from the song we were singing
    Sounded never so gaily again.
THE LESSON

Oh to see, I prayed, as the Poet sees,
And to walk on the hills in the dawn,
Where the waking sun's first rosy beams
Speed over the upland lawn;
To watch from the fields of the drowsy noon
How the great cloud-ships go by,
Bearing their plundered cargoes home
To their castles in the sky:
And then, as the golden day goes down
With the sun when he sinketh low,
To ride on the wing of the homing wind
Through the gates of the west aglow.

Ah, to hear, I cried, as the Poet hears,
The voice in which Nature speaks,
And to listen low in the darkling wood
For the sound of the sprite who seeks
To whisper the runes of the world-old rocks,
And the tales of the hoary trees,
And the secret lore of the water-brooks
Singing their litanies;
Or when wintry winds are wailing drear
On the bleak and sounding shore,
To learn the saga of the seas
In the loud-mouthed breakers' roar.

Oh to live, I sighed, as the Poet lives,
In a world from the world apart—
Where the star-enamoured streams flow down
To the Garden of Asmolart;
Away from the moil of the market-place,  
   And the city's strain and strife,  
Could I rest like a world-forgotten child  
   Dreaming, afar, of life—  
Ah, then would I sing as the Poet sings,  
   And my words in the hearts of men,  
Like a magian song, should beget erelong  
   The Golden Age again.

Then I dreamed that the God of the Golden Bow  
   Gave heed to my prayers all three,  
And caused me to dwell in a dream-built land,  
   New-quickened to hear and see:  
And I strung me a lyre with a silver string,  
   And sang unto men below  
From my secret height—but I ceased full soon,  
   And my joy darkened out to woe;  
For naught could I sing as the Poet sings,  
   But my songs seemed an empty sound;  
Men passed them by with a laughing eye,  
   And they fell, unloved, to the ground.

Then I said: 'I was blest with mine eye and ear  
   And my life 'mid the world of men'—  
And I prayed to the God of the Golden Bow  
   To give them all back again!
ULTIMA NOX

A BLAZE of light—a brilliant, joyous throng—
A stroll beneath the dear old classic trees;
A low sweet laugh, a fragment of a song—
Then silence—save the whispering of the breeze.

High hopes, deep thoughts beyond their youthful ken—
A shadow cast by parting, and a sigh;
A whispered word—a stolen kiss—and then?
And then the last, sad, lingering 'Good-bye.'
Midway 'twixt Alph and Abora
The windless valley lies;
Some queen it is that bideth there,
Wondrous with dusky-woven hair—
A weary dream of Africa
In her wide, almond eyes.

With lotus-leaf her couch is spread,
And languid lilies smile
Immortal o'er her brow, and lo!
Like marble are those veins that flow
With blood of kings long buried
Beyond the mystic Nile.

Was that a murmured 'Antony!'
That moved those vermeil lips?
Sounds there a battle on her ear
Far-borne and fading—doth she hear
The wind along a purple sea—
The sails above the ships?

She dreameth of an Emperor
Slow-dying by a tower—
A frenzied last supreme embrace,
Her burning eyes above his face
Who lightly gave, to be with her,
An empire, for an hour.
So hath she dreamed a thousand years—
Or was it yesterday
The venom spread?—she cannot tell,
But oft i' the troubled poison-spell
Slowly her proud dark head she rears
And gazeth far away—

Gazeth as she would pierce the blue
That valley-mouth above,
And alway moaneth wearily,
'Why comes he not again to me?
What should my lord of Cydnus do
So long from his dear love?'

'Tell me, my faithful Charmian—
Am I no longer fair?
The asp discoloured not these breasts—
Are those where now my false love rests,
Are they more white or firmer than
Mine own—are they more bare?'

'My Queen, thou art more beautiful
Than Nilus in the dawn!
Than alabaster is thy brow
More fair—thy breast than mountain snow,
And from thy voice no syllable
Of olden time hath gone.

'Thy Roman loveth thee alone;
When his one soldier-stain
Is purged away by gloomy Dis
Swift will he come to claim thy kiss,
And bid thy perfect smile atone
The thousand years of pain.
'For thee this lotus-vale hath bloomed,
    And sleeps the poppied air
Only till Antony shall choose
The fields Elysian, or to lose
    With thee his soul—for thou art doomed
    Thou knowest—otherwhere.'

'Yea, but with Antony—a fate
    More queenly far than now. . . .
Hist! Charmian! Yonder by the stream—
The spell is shattered—sped the dream—
    Know'st not that more than mortal state—
    That ivy-mantled brow?

Charmian, he comes, he comes to me!
    My Roman chooseth well!
These breasts shall feel—these arms, these eyes
    Shall know their only Paradise;
I 'll reign once more with Antony—
    His Queen—tho' Queen of Hell!'
I know three trees on a barren hill,
And a favoured fourth by a fountain-side;
A rock-hard soil where they lived but ill
Had the three, but the other could drink its fill
Through the rich dark earth by the shady rill
Where the crisp leaf-galleys ride.

And I marvelled oft that the three could grow
Clustered there on the mountain-side;
But they thrive, till now wayfarers go
And lie in the grateful shade they throw;
But the fountain'd tree in the vale below
Shrivelled and withered and died.

I know three men whom their fellows say
Were starved as my trees on the mountain-side:
Father, nor friends, nor a home had they—
It had been their wealth what I cast away;
Yet they wrought till their names are blessed to-day,
And their fame hath travelled wide;

But I have been naught men hoped I 'd be,
Though the soil was rich by the fountain-side,
And when I am dead men shall say of me—
Even as I of the favoured tree—
'What hath he done that a man may see?—
He was born, and he lived, and he died.'

Yet I thank the God of vale and hill
For my youthful hours by the fountain-side—
For the goodly gifts I have used so ill,
For a name unearned and a stubborn will,
For the son whom I know will be thankful still
I was born, and I lived, and I died.
THE MAD FISHER-MAID

Here by the sea,
Children together,
No wind or weather
Wilder than we.
Treasure-trove blinding
Came to our finding,
Wrought by the Fairies
Under the sea.

Here by the sea
A youth and maiden,
Our hearts love-laden,
I promised to be
His, and for ever—
False to him never:
Life was a dreamland
Here by the sea.

Here by the sea
He left me weeping,
Lone vigil keeping—
Sailed he from me
With father, brother
(I knew no mother),
And they returned not
Back from the sea.
THE MAD FISHER-MAID

Here by the sea,
Heartsick and lonely,
Sad memories only
Come back to me.
My Love's departed—
Mad, broken-hearted,
I go to meet him
Down in the sea.

Under the sea
Mermaids will heed me,
Care for and lead me,
Show him to me.
Fisher-folk kindly,
Reasoning blindly,
Here will they find me—
Here by the sea.
ONE READING OF LIFE

Life's a Mistress void of heart—
    Jealous as a glorious jade;
You shall never love apart
    Rival—mother, wife, or maid—
But She dogs you, luring, near—
    Wanton wins you, breathing low
Perjuries you long to hear,
    Till you follow, fain or slow,
Murmuring, with a tear or so,
' Farewell, I must leave you, dear—
    Kiss me once and let me go.'

Mother mine, whose tender care
    Made thine arms my sure defence,
And whose love would hold me there
    Still in boyhood's innocence—
Life is beckoning—I obey—
    Heart aproud and cheeks aglow,
I must wander far away
    Where great cities rise and grow.
    (Falls a childish tear or so.)
Naught have I but this to say:
    'Kiss me once and let me go.'

Soon, O Sweetheart of my youth,
    Here, beside the summer sea,
Life is mocking love's sweet truth,
    Tempting madness—unto me
Whispering, 'Freedom, Art, and Fame.'
Promising to you, I know,
Riches and a noble name
Wherefrom tears of blood shall flow,
(Not this lonely tear or so).
Say not mine is all the blame,
Kiss me once and let me go.

Life grows over-wroth with thee,
Wife of my mid-manhood's power;
She hath lulled us cruelly,
Grudging us each happy hour:
From thy bosom and thy bed,
With a sudden, stealthy blow,
To the Mistress of the Dead
She betrays me as a foe.
(Farewell, whom I lovèd so!)
Naught availeth to be said—
Kiss me once and let me go.

Since I could not give belief
To thy God from Galilee—
Cannot ape the moaning thief
On the thunder-riven tree—
Now Life sells me unto Death,
Utter darkness I shall know,
Writhing (so the preacher saith)
In a pit—God-made—below.
(Death comes stalking: be it so!)
Raise me, dearest—one more breath—
Kiss me once, and let me go.
ANOTHER READING

Away with tears and sighing,
And leaden-eyed despair:
Life is a flight for flying
Serene through sunlit air:
'Tis a ball if you 'll but fling it,
A sceptre if you 'll swing it,
A song if you 'll but sing it,
And singing, find it fair.

What of the darkness pending?
The game may yet be won;
Life showeth not the ending,
But somewhere is the sun.
'Tis a garden if you 'll tend it,
'Tis a bow if you 'll but bend it—
A fool is he who 'd end it
Before the game is done.

The same bells, at your ringing,
Will cheerily chime, or toll—
Say not that Life goes swinging
To dirge notes and to dole.
'Tis a dragon ?—you can slay it;
'Tis a ghost ?—but you can lay it;
'Tis a pipe if you 'll but play it,
And playing, win your soul.
A MIND unmoved when troubles rise,
Nor overjoyed at Fortune's smile
Keep, Dellius mine—a little while
Remember, and my Dellius dies,

Whether he live for ever sad,
Or in some grassy nook recline,
With mellow old Falernian wine
To make each festal season glad.

Huge pine and silvery poplar bring
Their boughs to weave one friendly shade—
Why, think you? Why this brook's delayed
Wild flight through banks meandering?

Have wine and perfumes hither borne,
And sweet, brief-blowing roses, now
While fortunes and while age allow,
Ere yet the Fates' dark thread be shorn.

Your villa, with its woodlands vast,
Which Tiber's yellow waters lave—
Your high-piled wealth—an heir shall have—
Yes, you must yield it all at last.
Unpitying Orcus waiteth nigh,
Alike if Argive blood you claim,
Or, pauper of an unknown name,
You dwell beneath the open sky.

We all are gathered to one doom;
The shaken Urn sends forth our lot
Or soon or late, and we are caught
To Stygian exile’s endless gloom.
EPITAPH FOR A CERTAIN GREAT POET

Too late the praise ye would now bestow:
Give to the dust that lies below
A simpler tribute—the truth ye know—
   This be the verse ye carve:
'Countrymen'—let the lines be deep—
'Here lies'—praise not now nor weep—
'One that loved you. Leave him—to sleep—
   Him that ye left to starve.'
LOVE'S DWELLING

Where is the rose-pearl portal
Of Love's high dwelling-place?
Hath man or maiden mortal
Beheld Her wondrous face
Alone in fields Elysian,
Unmarred by earthly lust—
The substance of our vision—
The spirit of our dust?

Beyond the Sunless Mountains,
Across the Sailless Seas,
Where soft the plash of fountains
And low the hum of bees—
There, in a valley vernal,
On rose-blown banks She lies,
The light of life eternal
In her wide azure eyes—
The Queen of all the courts of Paradise!
RONDEAU

To Margaret—a little more than friend—
A little less than who should love, or lend
A dreaming ear to loving word of mine—
I promised late some verse of quaint design,
Hon'ring her last brief maiden year at end.

How should she know my homage as I bend
Above that matchless hand she will extend?
I shall but lift a glass and name the wine—
'To Margaret!'

For soon she weds with one more fit to fend
Her beauty from the world. Ere I have penned
My last, unheeded verse, will she divine?—
But now there lacketh but a single line
To make my rondeau—which I shall not send
To Margaret.
A PICTURE FROM AN ANCIENT SONG

How fair art thou, my Love! The sparkling wine is weak beside that veiled glance of thine; Sweeter thy lips than honey in the comb, And sweetest incense makes thy locks its home. Upon thy brow the valley-lily blows, And in thy cheek the rose of Sharon glows. Thy garments breathe of aloes and of myrrh— Of sweet frankincense and of mountain fir; They hold thy virgin beauties unrevealed Like gardens high-enclosed, or fountains sealed— Gardens where luscious fruits and spices grow, Or fountains pure where living waters flow From Lebanon, or Hermon's snowy crest— Itself no whiter than thy fair white breast. Awake, O North Wind, blow upon my Love, And thou, O South Wind, softly blow above, That I may enter this my garden fair And taste the ripened fruit which waits me there— May see the waters stirred and move apart For me, when thou hast warmed my Fountain’s heart.
The Sun sinks down behind the hills unto his nightly rest
Just where the narrowed ice-bound Charles goes winding
to the west:
Behind Mount Auburn's leafless trees the sky is rose and
gold—
Across the silence of the snow a solemn bell is tolled.
Down o'er the hills to right and left the wings of evening
lower;
The red still glows between the trees, behind the tall
black tower—
'Tis gone. Along the river's bank the lights, a twinkling
crowd,
Gleam forth. Above the tower there stands a gloomy
coffin-cloud.
A SONG OF SWEET ODOURS

THOU hast filled me a pillow of pine, O my sister Dolores—
A pillow to keep in my hammock where dreaming I lie,
And its fragrance calls up the old lodge where the soft woodland floor is,
'Neath the dark giant trees on a mountain that meets with the sky.
Unto me, as I rest in my green-latticed, toy city arbour,
With my cheek on thy sweet-scented cushion, and lazily dream,
Come the cold claret air and the cliffs where the grey eagles harbour—
The neighbourly clouds and the roar of the steep mountain stream.

But now I would set thee a task for thy conjurer's cunning:
Canst thou fill me a pillow whose odours will make me a child
Hand-in-hand with thyself down the lane to the far pasture running
To call home the cows from the bars where the roses grew wild?
I know all the sweets for thy spell, O belovèd Dolores—
Thou must mingle the fragrance of clover and newly mown hay,
Then add the salt breeze blowing fresh where the wide distant shore is,
For the little white sails all alean on the blue of the bay.
Then the scent of the old-fashioned box-hedge in grandmother's garden—
(Ah, the rare scent of box hath the spell wellnigh woven alone!)
Or the wonderful shelves stored with cates and strange jellies to harden,
And the odour of orchards where bees multitudinous drone.
Thou couldst bring back the days on the Hill by the level Atlantic,
Couldst thou capture and close in thy pillow the breath of the brine.
Oh call up the years of our youth by the tides of Niantic—
Come fill me a pillow with childhood, O sister of mine!
Upon a time Love came to me,
And made my home his resting-place;
My mistress—Oh how fair was she
And full of joy!—No lav'rock free
Above its new-made nesting-place
E'er sang so merrily.

A little while our hearth beside
Love tarried, fond and fairy-wise;
He led us where the stars abide,
And taught us, in this world so wide,
The path to enter Paradise—
But soon, so soon, he died.

What time he passed we heard no moan,
Nor knew what word had stricken him;
The altered glance proclaimed him flown,
And changèd smile—we sat alone—
Nor tears again might quicken him
By the cold hearth-stone.

Now is no song—the joy is fled,
The white moon waneth wearily;
The halo hath gone from a golden head—
Life seemeth bitter, and dark, and dead,
And the cold rain falleth dreearily
Where Love lies burièd.
II

But leaf out of leaf is the way of the Spring—
   (Ah, silently, so silently)—
And day out of darkness an hour shall bring,
And two, a song out of sorrowing;
   And an ebbing sea sends back to thee
The flood, ere evening.

Yea, life out of death is the Earth's refrain:
   (A mirthful mother, our mother Earth):
And the good south wind shall blow again
O'er the river swollen with northern rain,
   And the glad green grass shall spring into birth
On each sodden meadow and plain.

And who shall say if the heart of man
   Be not as the heart of the bending sky?
Which, after the winter's weary span,
Awakes, when the Universal Pan
   Leads Earth's fair daughter, young Springtime, by
In the world-old, pagan plan.

Then one shall mock at an angel's ken—
   (For the rose of June is a red, red rose)—
And life cries out for a new life then,
And the primal purpose is strong in men:
   And the lesson of June may be—who knows?
   That Love shall rise again!
EVENING STAR

Light . . . light . . .
Graceful our cedar and light;
   Bright . . . bright . . .
Brown my love's eyes are and bright;
   In the bow, cushioned high,
Looks she into the sky
To wish on the first star to-night.

Dip . . . dip . . .
Deep the broad paddle I dip;
   Slip . . . slip . . .
Still down the dark river we slip;
   Sparkling circles, just made
By the wet shining blade,
Now float far from our faerie ship.

Plash . . . plash . . .
Dim shapes pass us by with a plash;
   Flash . . . flash . . .
In the dark how the fireflies flash!
   Here a laugh, there a word
Rather dreamed of than heard
O'er the beat of the slow-bending ash.

Swing . . . swing . . .
Sway with a rhythm and swing;
   Sing . . . sing . . .
Far away o'er the stream hear them sing!
While in time, perfect time,
With the ripple and rhyme,
Comes the low night-wind’s weird whispering.

Low ... low ...
Love’s tale is so tender and low;
Slow ... slow ...
Unguided, our bark drifteth slow:
And the wish?—I can guess,
And a blush will confess—
Has come true before homeward we go.
THE ALCHEMIST

There's a dreaming mighty Magian in the deeps below the sea,
Sits he there for ever toiling at his endless alchemy—
Ever toiling, ever dreaming of a Golden Age to be:
All the iron mountain-bases in his cauldron turn to gold,
And each day he sendeth upward, for the dull Earth to behold,
Treasure that his craft hath fashioned in its black titanic mould.
Wouldst thou know the spell he weaveth?
Hither come who disbelieveth—
Hither where the towering galleons held their dark and star-led way—
And our loftier prows are breaking
Foamier through the mists awaking—
While the Night is fleeing westward from the warning of the Day,
See! the far horizon shivers
And a rosy flush now quivers
Faint beyond the silver sea-line, like a ruby held impearled—
Till, behold a sudden wonder!—
All the East is burst asunder,
And the flaming Sun leaps upward from the fiery underworld!
IN ACADIE

DEAREST, what days were ours
Here, in this land of flowers,
Ere we the world of men had need to know!
Careless we lived and dreamed,
Perfect the Vision seemed;
Love, bravely shining, cast o'er life a Promise Bow.

The splendour of those days,
When autumn's golden haze
Lay sleeping o'er the streams in Gaspereau!
And elfin trumpet-calls
From redd'ning woodland walls
Rang clear for us whose gipsy feet were fain to go.

Snow-laden boughs of pine
Above your head and mine—
Long winter walks that set your cheeks aglow:
The steel-winged races fleet—
The slow return and sweet—
When long moon-shadows lay mysterious in the snow.

Some early morn in spring,
With birds all on the wing,
We sought the dew-bright uplands, turned, and lo!—
Earth-fallen in the night
Lay heaven's long pathway white—
A thousand orchards stretched, one Milky Way below.
Rose-breathing nights in June,
What time the fairies tune
Their silvery harps to music soft and slow—
The poet moon above,
We wandered with our love
Silent upon the hills, and the river sang below.

Now others, year by year,
Still love and linger here—
E’en in our very steps may come and go—
May love as well as we,
More wisely, it may be—
But are they quite as happy?—Dearest, think you so?
I heard a Voice upon the hills
Say, 'Wherefore seek'st thou me?
Am I more blest with beauty
Than my brother of the Sea?'

I heard a whisper from the Deep:
'The peace thy spirit wills
Lies not within my bosom—
Seek my sister of the Hills.'

Low-couched beside a rippling brook,
I heard a murmur say,
'I bear a sister's message
To her brother far away.'

I saw a fair cloud rising up
Out of the ocean blue,
And as it sailed far inland
All its mission sweet I knew.

It bore an answer unto one
Who dwelleth there above—
Its windy decks were laden
With the freight of a brother's love.

So is the Secret guarded well,
While years of men decay—
But voices out of the starlight,
Like the voice of angels, say:
'Man, doomed to strife, thou ne'er shalt win
Until thy journey's end,
The Sister for thy loved one,
Nor the Brother for thy friend;

'But yet a little longer here,
And thou shalt find thy rest
In the great deep heart of the Brother,
Or at last in the Sister's breast.'
LINES WRITTEN BENEATH THE PHOTOGRAPH OF A BEAUTIFUL GIRL

One sings, 'It is not always May'—
For thirsty Summer followeth:
The frail, dead flowers are blown away,
And Winter comes with chilling breath.

Blue skies above the warm blue sea—
What wouldst thou give to keep them thine?—
The secret is revealed to me,
And May immortal now is mine.

The skies shall freeze—the roses fair
Shall fade, and forest leaves shall fall;
I know the charm beyond compare
Wherewith I may defy them all:

Whatever wintry winds may blow,
Whatever bard or book may say—
I look on this dear face, and lo!
Within my heart 'tis always May.
THE SPHINX'S RIDDLE

A PARCHMENT, written first in Arabic
By Abou Kel, the sage of old Seville,
Ere Ferdinand arose and drove the Moor
Southward till fair Granada was his own,
And Spain was all one realm, and he its king—
This parchment, found within a palace wall,
Clothed with the dust of seven centuries,
And superscribed with many a mystic sign,
At last fell to the hand of one who turned
Into his native tongue the Eastern words,
That all who would might read and think thereon.
That which was written in the scroll, in part
Is here set forth, but much hath been destroyed.

When Creon ruled in Seven-Gated Thebes,
A cruel monster ravaged all that land,
Descending from its lair on Phycium's Mount,
Or from Cithaeron's frowning fastnesses.
It was a creature passing strange of form—
A winged lion with a woman's face—
Which spoke aloud in weirdly human voice;
The Thebans called their enemy the Sphinx.
And ever in some dark and lonely spot,
To every ill-starred one who passed that way
A riddle it propounded, and the fate
Of him who could not answer it was death.
Though many passed upon the seven roads
That led unto the Seven Golden Gates
Of Thebê, set into her wondrous walls
Whose stones danced to their places at the sound
Of sweetest chords from young Amphion's lyre,
Yet none could read the riddle of the Sphinx,
And none escaped who left it still unread.
But men of Thebes who tell the ancient tale
Relate how once there came a stranger by
Who solved the riddle—whereupon the Sphinx
Plunged headlong from the steep acropolis,
And nevermore was seen in all the land;
Wherefore the people, in their gratitude,
Crowned Ædipus, the stranger, as their king.
Another legend of more ancient days
Would make the story of the Theban Sphinx
A Greek corruption of an older tale
Told by tradition of that world-old Sphinx
Who lies half buried on the banks of Nile,
And scorns the scars of all the centuries.
Ere Cheops built his mighty pyramid,
Or any Pharaoh ruled in Egypt’s land—
When all the world was young, and men appeared
For the first time upon this virgin Earth,
And learned the use of tools that carve and hew—
Then was the Sphinx cut from the solid rock—
A symbol of the mystery of God,
And worshipped by the dwellers in that land
As Harmakhu, God of the Setting Sun.
Huge, human-headed, lion-bodied thing,
At rest it gazed upon the lazy Nile
As if in thought, and in its thought, contempt,
And in its eyes a dull and stony stare,
And on its lips a cold and cruel smile.
Erelong among the dwellers by the Nile
A whisper started, strange and wonderful—
The Sphinx had spoken! Many came to hear,
And some heard nothing, and returned again,
And others, listening, thought they heard a sound,
But one, when he returned, praying, amazed,
Said that the Sphinx had spoken, riddling, thus:

'Breath in a house of dust—
Whither, and Whence, and Why?—
Life—Death—flies the breath
Bird in a boundless sky:
Read the Sphinx's riddle, Man—
Man so soon to die!'

And so the story spread through all the land,
And into other lands beyond the Sea,
And far beyond the deserts of the East,
And many came and stood before the Sphinx,
And many heard the riddle that it put,
But none could answer what the riddle was.

That graven monster by the Pyramids
Is but a symbol of Philosophy,
Which asks of man these very words of fate—
The Sphinx's riddle—Whither, Whence, and Why?
And since the Wheel of Ages first began
Its turning, started by the Master Hand,
Those who are called the wisest of mankind
Have pondered o'er that riddle, but in vain;
For all the Cycles of Philosophy
Follow the wheel, and end where they began.
Like wanderers in the Cretan Labyrinth,
They wind through many a secret passage-way,
Only to lose themselves within the maze,
Circling on their own steps, for that they lack
The little golden thread, which, following,
Perchance their wanderings might lead to light.
Since men began to think upon their fate,
Full many a man has made his little guess,
And though he missed the clue, has won a name;
And other men have followed from afar,
Choosing the Name whose guess seemed nearest truth—
Worshipping Storm-Clouds, mighty Thunderbolts,
Or counting as the Whither and the Whence
Water, or Air, or finest Atmosphere—
Warm Breath, cold Earth, or fiery Elements,
Or making gods of Discord and of Love,
The warring causes of the Universe.
To some, Man has no end nor origin,
No reason for existence, and no God:
The Universe a game, and men the pawns,
So others say, and there be some who hold
God is a potter, and all men his clay.
One asks, 'And will the potter spare at last
The perfect vessels, pleasing to his eye—
The pots he marred in making, hurl away?'
Many there be who, when the fatal words
Come for an answer, say, 'I do not know.'
And others boldly shout, 'I do not care!'
And some there be who answer with a laugh,
'Come, let us eat, and drink, and dance to-day,
For when to-morrow cometh we must die.
Think not upon the Whither and the Whence,
And thou shalt find an answer to the Why.
Here is the Present—which is all we know—
Crowded with pleasures, the mere joy of life,
The flush of beauty, and the lust of love,
The pride of power, and the gleam of gold.
Oh let us grasp and taste them ere they fade,
And hail sweet Pleasure as our sovereign good.'
But others, sighing, answer, 'Nay, not so!
For Pleasure is a vain and empty thing,
Which fadeth soon, to leave an aching heart.
Wherefore be brave, and cherish in thy soul
Visions of life beyond this prison-house
Which holds the unwilling spirit for a time:
Soon comes sweet Death, which opes the prison door—
Permission to return unto the light
And to the purer air where once we dwelt
With Him who sent us here, we know not why.'
So, many thousands since the world began,
Into the Sibyl Cave of Destiny
Have called, and there has come no answer back
Save their own echo. When all these have failed,
How shall I read the meaning of my life
To give account of Yesterday, or how
The tangle of To-morrow to untie?
Is life a forward and a backward look,
And then—a step into the deep Unknown?—
A quest for shadows while the light remains,
And with the dark to go where shadows go?
Has life no more than this to offer me?—
No great and plain solution to it all?
Why seek for reason where no reason dwells?
To shirk an answer, cast the burden by,
And jocund go my way—were’t not as well?
But no, the fatal riddle of the Sphinx
Rings in mine ears, and haunts me night and day.
I am a slave to every mystery—
I am not free until I understand.
As one who, dreaming, finds himself alone,
Standing upon the vast mid-ocean’s wave,
Nor land, nor log, nor any sail in sight,
And knows his puny steps toward any land
Would be as naught on those long leagues of sea
That touch the empty sky on every side—
So, many a time, I find myself alone
Upon the strange and all-mysterious sea
Of this existence—wondering whence I came,
And whither I shall go, in fear the while
Lest the waves whereon I stand should suck me down.
And then I think this too is but a dream,
And I shall wake at last and know the truth.
I seek in Happiness the Why of life,
To find my quest is all in vain, for what
Is Happiness but that beyond our reach?
I look to Nature for Man's destiny,
And there I learn that, like the little flower,
He fades and perishes, his season o'er,
Or passes like a drifting summer cloud
Which leaves no mark upon the heaven’s blue.
And yet again this answer comes to me:
As when beneath a woodland waterfall
Bubbles are formed, to float upon the pool,
Some sparkling in the sunshine down, and some
Drifting within the shadow of a bank—
So men are bubbles from God's waterfall:
We dance our little distance in the sun,
Or hurry through the shadows, then, behold,
We are no more, but still the stream flows on,
And other bubbles come, and follow us.

The parchment ended, and I raised my eyes—
I stood before the Sphinx on Ghizeh's plain,
And suddenly a voice within myself
Said, 'Thou canst solve the riddle; wherefore, speak.'
And I, obedient to the prompting, spoke:
Grim monster, I defy thee to thy face,
And thus thy dreaded riddle I will read:
Wast thou not graven by the hands of men?
But I was fashioned by the hand of God.
Yet a few years, and thou, the mighty Sphinx,
Shalt join the dust of those that carved thee forth—
Be blown about the desert on the wind,
And form a part of Earth, which other men
Will plough with iron, sow, and tread upon;
But I return to Him from whence I came—
My life to do His will a season here,
Then I shall live through ages, unto which
Thy lifetime is as but a single day.
For He who came and took the form of man,
And solved thy riddle—He hath promised this
To all who with the heart and soul believe.'
But, like an echo, from those lips of stone
In mocking tones a question seemed to come:
'And dost thou in thy very heart believe?'
I strove within myself to answer 'Yea'—
The word refused to come—those grim stone eyes
My soul's most cherished secret pierced and read.
I bowed my head before them to the sand,
And answered, whispering, 'I do not know.'
'Then thou hast failed,' they answered, and I fled.
When, far away, I turned me and beheld
That face upreared against the setting sun,
Methought a sound came floating down the wind,
The sound as of a hollow, scornful laugh,
And I bethought me of the mystic words:

'Breath in a house of dust—
Whither, and Whence, and Why?
Life—Death—flies the breath
Bird in a boundless sky:
Read the Sphinx's riddle, Man—
Man so soon to die!'
THE BOOK, TO THE READER

Thou dost not seek, thou wouldst not find,
In every flower that blows,
The fragrance of the violet—
The freshness of the rose;
But many a bright though humbler bloom
How welcome in thy winter room!

High o'er the vale 'twere sweet to hear,
Or out the woodland dark,
The melancholy nightingale—
The music-drunkèn lark;
Yet lives there many a grateful song
Less rare, each hedgerow-lane along.

The sad, deep song of tragic love
Some still there be who sing,
And some who madly to the throng
Their rhyming revels fling,
And some in whose sweet verse seem met
The musk-rose and the violet.

I do but sing in joyous lilt
Of field and sun and cloud,
And fabled loves of days long dead
In storied castles proud.
Who fain some poet's heart would pry
May turn, and lightly pass me by.
But thou who by the blazing hearth
    After a weary day
Dost love a lightsome rhyme or twain
    To while an hour away—
Where most thy friendly poets be
Canst find a little place for me?
Bates, Roy Elliott
An epithalamium and other poems