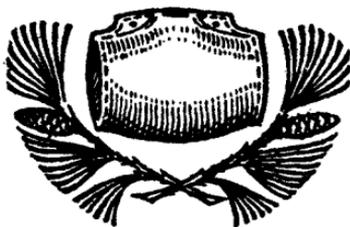


BERRY POMEROY CASTLE, DEVON

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THE
LEATHER BOTTLE
By Theodore Goodridge Roberts



EXPECTANS EQVITO

The AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This is what is left of a sadly shot collection of my verses. The shooting was necessitated by the limitations of 96 pages. My Publisher is against inflation. My title is significant I think; and my motto is very dear to me. I believe that the appeal of the idea of waiting and riding is common to thousands of romantic souls; and who shall say for what it is one waits and rides?: but I suspect that the best of horses goes lame, the most faithful of riders falls off, the strongest of leather bottles springs a-leak before the high quest is ended.

T. G. R.

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THE LEATHER BOTTLE

Vintages of My Own Country

A NOTE ON POETRY

I BELIEVE that poetry is the very essence of mankind's highest efforts to express and interpret life and our speculations concerning death, all beauty, the joyous and tragic adventures of the heart, the illuminating flashes and dark agonies of the mind, the mysteries of human behaviour and of divine acquiescence and intention, the glories of illusion and the truth of dreams.

Poets, as individuals, are as other men and women—brave and timid, false and fair, generous and mean, reckless and cautious, harsh and kind—but when their peculiar gifts of vision and expression are being applied honestly in the cause or quest of any truth that may disclose even so little of the Spirit of Beauty as the glimmer of her halo, theirs is the authority of a sacred office.

If God Almighty is all things save evil, then very surely is he all-truth and all-beauty: if all-truth, then every part and impulse of truth; and if all-beauty, every flash and whisper and broken dream of beauty. And poetry, as I believe in it, is the sincere and inspired effort of our better selves to express, interpret or discover anything or everything of truth, everything or anything of beauty—a truth

of the beauty of a plowed field in May or of an unselfish thought; a thrill of the truth of the purpose of strong wings passing over us, high and shadowy against the stars; a throb of the tragic truths of loveless lives, empty houses, fire-scarred hillsides and the bleached timbers of wrecked ships; a glimpse of a fragment of fleeting beauty, of a flash of steadfast beauty, of a true vision, an honest deed, a valiant aspiration or a lovely prayer.

A knowledge of what is poetry is (I believe) due to the functioning of an instinctive taste, a faculty of discernment, a quality of native genius, which is all a part of the fortunate one's spiritual and mental equipment at or before birth—or never! This fairy possession, which cannot be acquired by taking thought, is not peculiar to articulate poets. Thousands of persons other than writing poets are blessed with it, bless them!—but thousands only, after all! and what are thousands against millions? When genius of discernment and gift of expression are bestowed together, there is a poet, winged and flying.

O to be winged and flying!

ON CEDAR DRIFTWOOD

THREE-FACED cedar blocks came down from the up-river shingle mills every spring. Icy freshets tossed them high on wooded banks, and falling waters left them strewn over miles of intervale and island meadows. But the three-faced blocks were not the only form in which driftwood of cedar came down-stream to us in those days. The shingles themselves came, too; and sometimes old shingles, torn by swirling waters from roofs of lowland barns; and grey rails, snatched from fences of river-side orchards.

Was there ever better kindling for campfires than driftwood of cedar shingles, after the river had worked and played with it through a few golden summers? Water-smoothed, sand-rubbed, it was thin as paper, grey as smoke, light as feathers from a plover's breast. Frail as it was, its heart was of sunshine and resin—the resin sucked from forest loam in decades of slow, green years; the sunshine baked into it on hot sandbars. At the touch of a match, it bloomed in clear flame and clean perfume.

Do you know the scent of a river beach on a summer dawn? There is no wind, but there is a stir, as of faintest breathing, in the shadowy tangles of wood and foliage behind you, and on the glassy surface before you the air moves with the deep, slow glide of the river. The eastern edge of night has been washed up by a tide of silver fire. You smell the river—the stilly sliding water—faint, cool and alive like breath; and the wet sand at the

margins of the gravel bars; and the stranded clots of white foam whipt from little waves yesterday by a wind that went down with yesterday's sun; and pennyroyal, wet willows, black mud at the alder roots, waterlogged wood and the honey of wild cucumber blossoms. Of such is the smell of my river in a summer dawn.

Many a time have I been homesick for scent and sound and sight of this river, as others have been for other rivers; and in the throes of that longing I have made rhymes to her. I have written verses about driftwood and campfires, white waters and brown, herons and sandpipers, spring freshets and August shallows—but where they have all got to is more than I know. Here are a few of my river pieces—but not the best of them. The best of them are among the lost, naturally, like the biggest fish.

ON THAT FAR RIVER

A WIND came to me, crying
"On that far river which you love and know,
The sliding shallows redden in the sun;
The noiseless paddles dip, the red barks go
Silent as dream; and day is just begun
With lifting mist along the meadow's rim
And lifting fire around the valley's brim.
In scent of ripened grasses, dawn releases
Shadow and dew and many a night-old thing;
The shallows flash; the level light increases;
And high day gilds the heron's ashen wing."

A wind came to me, crying
"On that far river where the eddies turn,
Pause and swing wide and sink to amber sleep,
The snipe are running in the dewy fern;
The white poles bend, the slim barks, quiv'ring,
 creep
Up the loud rapids. . . . Day and toil are done,
And red as Gluskap's war shield hangs the sun.
With scent of dimming waters and wet grasses
Night soothes the river that you love and know:
Along the west the last flame flares and passes:
And now the crimson campfire is aglow."

OLD WHITE WATER BOY

THIS is of Archie Douglas, a hero of my childhood, and his enchanted surroundings. He worked for Mr. Sam Smith, of Crock's Point. The Smith house stood on a green knoll, flanked by an old willow on the right and ancient Lombardy poplars on the left—Acadian willow and poplars. The dark, deep and mysterious Perdu lay on its left-front, in a high, haunted wood of pine, rock maple, white and golden birch and ash. It looked across a mile of lush intervale to the sparkling "thoroughfare" and Shore's Island and the blue river.

Archie Douglas had been a "white water boy" of the old school in his limber and dashing youth; a wizard on running logs in roaring, snow-fed waters in the spring of the year. He was a giant even when I knew him, though the broad shoulders and angular knees were bowed by stiffened muscles and the weight of years. In the pride of his strength, straight as a pike-pole and limber as whalebone, he must have stood six-foot-six. But his joints had begun to stiffen and his hot blood to cool at the time of his first hiring with Sammy Smith for the year round, year in, year out; and that had been twenty-five years before I knew him.

We called him Archie. It sounded to us like an ancient Highland title. He suggested titles. He looked to our young eyes as we imagined the best of King Charles's cavaliers must have looked. He told us many adventures and marvels and answered our childish questions kindly and wisely.

I've heard great men talk and forgotten what they
said:
I've read wise men's books and forgotten what I
read;
But when the dark comes down and curtained
windows glow,
The words of Archie Douglas come back from long
ago.

He used to sit in the kitchen; and there we went to
him.
Bowed he was of shoulder and long and stiff of limb.
Long and still was his face; his eyes were grey and
mild;
His hair was glossy and curled like the ringlets of a
child.

That was a wonder-kitchen, wide and long and low,
With seed-corn hung to the rafters in dusty row
on row,
And an old loom, a settle-bed and a conch shell
dinner horn,
And a crock of buckwheat batter against to-morrow's
morn;

A sooty fireplace, boarded up, with a great stove set
before;
A dresser bright with dishes and a gun behind the
door;
A reek of black tobacco from Archie's glowing clay,
And fainter scents of cookies and spice and carraway.

'Twas there that first we guessed grim truths which
now we know:

*The mills of the gods grind small, no matter if fast or
slow:*

*Bitter winds of the world search the grain from the
chaff:*

*'Tis the man who keeps his own soul who smiles at
the gaff.*

'Twas there we sensed the magic of Gluskap's
painted wood,

And the devilish, hostile cunning of tortured rivers
in flood;

Glory of youth and strength; horror of greed and
hate;

A brave man's creed of courage and brave acceptance
of fate.

I've read wise men's books and forgotten word and
thought:

I've heard bishops preach and forgotten what they
taught:

I have elbowed the great and forgotten their very
looks:

I have laboured at writing and forgotten the names
of my books;

But when the last red leaves drop slow in the wind-
less wood,
And the white frost lays his fingers on the sumacs
purpling blood,
And the Hunter's Moon mounts red and round,
and curtained windows glow,
The tales of Archie Douglas come back from long
ago.

AN EXILE'S PRAYER

VOICES of foam-flanked rapids,
Stillness of hemlock gloom,
Bring your peace to my heart
Here in this room.

Glimmer of dusk and dawn;
Pride of sun-filled valleys;
Shadows of noons withdrawn;
Courage of flaring sunsets;
Hush of twilight gloom,
Bring your peace to my heart
Here in this room.

Mists of little rivers
In forest crests astir;
Volley of morning song
From pointed spires of fir;
Scent of slim cones' bloom;
Bring your peace to my heart
Here in this room.

RETURNING

PALE mushrooms in wet pastures grey with rain;
Grey mists adrift in pointed conifers;
And scent of ferns keen as remembered pain:
To you I turn once more, returning ever
To my dear land of high wood and deep river.

Warp of my heart the slanted field's plowed breast;
Web of my heart the goldenwing's quick flight,
The crows' harsh clamour in the black pine's crest,
The whip-poor-will's sad challenge from the night.
To you I turn, returning home again
To mushrooms in high pastures grey with rain.

DEATH IN JUNE

IN some green valley of the Hills of Har,
In such a twilight happy poets know
Of dawn and the soft shining of Eve's star
And moonrise and the spent day's afterglow,
He wakes; and lo! the quest we thought was done,
Starts bright before him as if just begun:

And he who made the rhyme of Hack and Hew,
(God's workmen, striking beauty from dull clay)
Feels the sweet urge of song as sharp and new
As April morn of mortal yesterday,
And knows the labour and the joy again
Of building words to beauty, not in vain.

His no eternal rest! His still the quest
Of word, of phrase, to catch the spirit's gleam;
To mark the meaning of the swift stream's zest;
To fix, in ink, the radiance of a dream,
And ring in rhymes the challenge of old seas
Rolling their fog among the windy trees.

His is no vast repose, no seat of gold
In some high heaven for the Saints of God:
He walks the ferny paths he knew of old,
And marks the dewdrop on the mossy sod:
He turns his head at rustle of a wing;
He knows the spruce-tops where the white-throats
sing.

No golden trumpet plays him to his place,
But glad friends greet him in the beechen shade;
And from a wayside window smiles a face
To which so many of his songs were made
In his old days of singing, with brief breath,
This mortal life along from birth to death.

And now, in that green valley of that land,
The tawny eyes are bright and quick again;
And heart and soul go bravely, hand in hand,
On the old quest of beauty, not in vain;
And Heaven for him is as he dreamed this Earth
Between his April and his Summer birth.

THE FORSAKEN CANOE

I SLEEP all day and count my dreams;
Live my adventures over again;
See vanished campfires and lost men
At nightfall by the willowed streams;
And grey geese homing from far south,
And jammed logs at the river's mouth,
And catkinned alders near and far
Starting the banks with fairy gleams,
And driftwood swinging at the bar.
I sleep all day and count my dreams.

My master's love has passed me by,
But I remember these brave things—
The splashing and the beat of wings;
The flashing kingfisher's harsh cry;
The heron at the water's rim,
With checkered shadows over him;
The songs the snarling rapids knew,
And wind across a hollow sky.
All these come back, alive and true,
Tho' his brown hands have passed me by.

The frosts of winter chill me through.
The heat of summer does not reach
This dusty loft. . . . To bar and beach
Dawn lifts a lid of magic blue,
And morn's breath stirs the misted trees
And wakes the vine-draped shrubberies,

While I lie here, where spiders twist
Their webs; and those glad things I knew—
Pull of black rapids, turn of wrist—
Are not; and silence chills me through.

Flood and low water; Spring and Fall;
Wet shores, ripe cherries, beaches bare
To sun and Summer; Autumn, rare
With fading fragrance and the call
Of flocking birds in tree-tops. Gone!
All gone from me save in my dream . . .
Here in the dust my young desire
Still feels the dripping thrust and gleam
Of paddles that can never tire.

RIVER MORNING

MIST along the river, creeping down
With spinning clots of drift and blinks of foam;
Terns screaming out along the sandbars;
A heron flapping from his reedy home.

Breath of pennyroyal on the gravel;
Breath of wet willows down the shore;
Start of life around the bushy islands,
And, at the East's gold gate, one blue day more.

THE BLUE HERON

IN a green place lanced through
With amber and gold and blue;
A place of water and weeds
And roses pinker than dawn,
And ranks of lush young reeds,
And grasses straightly withdrawn
From graven ripples of sands,
The still blue heron stands.

Smoke-blue he is, and grey
As embers of yesterday.
Still he is, as death;
Like stone, or shadow of stone,
Without a pulse or breath,
Motionless and alone
There in the lily stems:
But his eyes are alive like gems.

Still as a shadow; still
Grey feather and yellow bill:
Still as an image made
Of mist and smoke half hid
By windless sunshine and shade,
Save when a yellow lid
Slides and is gone like a breath:
Death-still—and sudden as death!

THE SANDBAR

HERE the black crows gather;
Here the herons wade
Along the amber shallows,
Far from their willow shade.
Here the patient clams
Trail out their senseless scrawls,
And here the glassy tide
Breaks white in sudden squalls.

Driftwood lodges here,
Polished and smooth and grey,
Washed down from above the Falls
Hundreds of miles away;
Shingles thin as paper,
Rafters and tide-worn planks
Ripped from bridges and ferries
When the river topped her banks.

Here the loud crows gather:
Here the slim terns fly
With curved wings flashed like silver
Against the cobalt sky:
Here the whitecaps ride
When the wind blows up at dawn;
And here the plovers cry
When wind and sun are gone.

THE DESOLATE CABIN

SWINGS the door at the wind's will:
Sun-dazed, the clearings swoon:
Over the stump-land washes
The voiceless afternoon.

Creaks the roof at the wind's whim:
Noiseless, the lean hares pass:
Snake-berries gleam in the shadows:
Shadows glide in the grass.

No one crosses the threshold.
The windows show no face.
The northern gable slouches
Like the loser of a race.

Here are sunshine and silence,
Shadow and empty air.
Did something gleam at the window,
Like a thin hand waving there?

No bird calls from the spruces,
No beast cries from the plain.
A spent wind runs on the roof,
With the sound of forgotten rain:

And something stirs on the threshold
Like the ghost of a drifting leaf,
And sobs in the yellow silence
Like a lost soul of grief.

A mist at the edge of the wood
The breath of the forest waits.
Westward, the naked rampikes
Stand at the crimson gates.

JULY MORNING

A WHITETHROAT sings in a pointed fir:
In orchard branches joy is astir:
A whip-poor-will by a hidden spring
Volleys his 'plaint where shadows cling.

From river-meadows white mists creep,
Shying and crowding like frightened sheep:
Lifting and swirling, they stream away—
Through fire and dew—to the gates of day.

To grey barn eaves, on tremulous wing,
Martins flutter and dart and cling:
A blue cock-pigeon struts to his mate;
Colts in the paddock trot to the gate.

From eastward windows blinds are drawn.
Night's last shade from the west is gone.
From chimneys rosey in golden air
Smoke ascends like azure prayer.

LOST

THE singing shallows wonder where
She went before the lift of day.
The tall pines glimpsed her flashing hair
Against the stars, they say.

The river meadows muse upon
The singing laughter of her lips.
The flocking brant believe her gone
Far questing with blown ships.

The willows ask the piping snipe
How soon they think she will return:
Perhaps to-morrow?—but the ripe
Wild island cherries burn,

And August spills his brimming cup,
And all the gravel-bars are bare.
The sun goes down, the stars come up
And cannot find her there.

The dark pines question everything
That, morn or night or noon, goes by—
The eagle in his sky-faring;
The darting dragon-fly;

Sandpipers flickering on the bars,
And small hawks cruising the deep grass;
The moon, the wayward winds, the stars:
Did no one see her pass?

The true pines dream she will return:
They count the days: They count the years:
Summers; and snows that drift and burn;
And Aprils spent with tears.

FLYING OVER

PACING an endless city street,
I heard a sound from the upper air—
Vibrant, mystic, quick with life
And sad with longing—of wings astir.

I raised my glance past the midnight lamps,
To catch a shadow of that high flight
Of birds in the starshine breasting north,
Homebound, cleaving the April night;

And my heart went, too, with my eyes' rapt gaze,
To join the geese in the starry ways.

SPRING FLIGHT

IS it the voice of the open waters
Calling the grey geese home from the South?
Do they hear the freshet under the willows,
And the grinding logs at the river's mouth?

How do they know the lakes are open?
Do they scent the maple buds bursting red?
Who has whispered them word of April?
Who has told them of Winter fled?

Strong wings athrill;
Brave hearts astir:
They come, and the stars
Are high and chill;
And the frosty air
Is alive, aware
Of the whisp'ring wings
In the star-mist there.

Sure, unafraid,
Swift, undismayed,
Where the North Light flings
His cloak, they fly
And *cronk* and pass
Under the sky.

My heart flies, too,
Fearlessly forth
With that feathery crew
To the North.
Up and away,
As their wings aspire,
I sail to the land
Of my heart's desire.

With scent of alders and swollen waters
And the flooded bar at the river's mouth,
Spring, awake in our Nashwaak valley,
Calls her exiles home from the South.

DISTANCE

THE red sun rides the blue hill's crest,
Bright as a lamp in the dimming west.
So red he glows, and so near he stands,
Beyond the valley and sloping lands,
I think I could run to the next blue rise
And touch him with my hands.

Nay, foolish feet! Nay, foolish eyes!
Between this hillside and those skies
Is she I long for, dream of, pray for.
So, by my yearning heart, I know
How far away is the red sun's glow.

BACK TO JUNE

TIME, old Time of the frosty beard!
Turn me the round world back a-pace!
Turn it back 'til my heart can hear
The leafy rustle of June surge near
And my weary eyes behold her face
White in the flash of the glad green year.

Time, old Time of the palsied hand!
Spin me the world the other way!
Spin it back, 'til the snows are crossed;
Twirl it back, through biting frost—
Back and back—to that golden day
Dreams came true and hearts were lost!

Back, old Time, 'til the waters fall!—
'Til the leafy rustle of June draws near;
'Til nighthawks twang in a lilac sky,
And bats and beetles and fairies fly,
And Pan on his reeds blows soft and clear
For only enchanted hearts to hear.

THIS DAY'S GRIEF

ENCHANTMENT glimmered here that day—
But now the white sun overhead
Strikes down and shows, through dimming leaves,
Footprints of fairies fled.

High summer lingered here that day—
But now the wind has a thinner note,
And down to the brooding underbrush
Two spent leaves float.

Ghost of enchantment turned and gone!
A grey-stemmed maple loses a leaf.
The pale, slim birches are aware
Of this day's grief.

SECRET RIVER

DREAMING, I go back again,
Down a logging-road I know,
Where the nesting partridge runs
And the tall brakes grow.

Wishing, I am there again
Where, the leafy walls between,
All the air is like a tide,
Quivering cool and green.

Dreaming, I go down again,
Through the shadow and the gleam,
To the quick trout lurking there
In the amber stream.

Waking—no, 'tis best to dream!
Dream and hold the peace for ever
Of my hidden logging-road
And my secret river.

GLUSKAP'S HOUND

THEY slew a god in a valley
That faces the wooded west:
They held him down in their anger,
With a mountain across his breast:
And all night through, and all night long,
His hound will take no rest.

From low woods black as sorrow,
That marshal along the lake,
A cry breaks out on the stillness
As if the dead would wake—
The cry of Gluskap's hound, who hunts
No more for the hunting's sake,

But follows the sides of the valley,
And the old, familiar trail,
With his nose to the ground, and his eyes
Red lights in the cedar swale,
All night long and all night through,
'Til the heavy east grows pale.

Some say he foreheralds tempest,
Outrunning the wind in the air . . .
When willows are flying yellow
And alders are wet and bare
He runs, with no joy in the running,
Giving tongue to his mad despair.

Another stick on the fire!
The shadows are creeping near!
Something runs in the thicket
The spruces droop to hear!
The black hound running in fierce despair,
With his grief of a thousand year.

OLD WOODS

OLD woods, what have you known,
Save birth and sap and decay?
Of the thousand high winds blown
To carry your leaves away
And set your crests a-sway,
What do you know to-day?

Old woods, what have you learned
In your cycles of death and birth?
From all the suns that have burned,
And rains that have watered your earth,
What have you gained?—save girth?

Seed and sap and death,
Frost and sleep and decay.
Of April's quick'ning breath,
And the silver pipes of May
Playing despair away,
What have you got to say?

Old woods, do you feel no stir
In your fibres, no melting glow
In your crests tossed high in air
And your strong roots sunk below,
Of this my joy and woe?—
This madness of hope and despair?
Of the greatest thing I know,
Are you unaware!

THE MOOSE

ALL day through woodland stillnesses
Of snow-bowed fir and spruce
We've followed, on our springing webs,
The blood-trail of the moose;
And now the moon shines white, and black
The shadows slant across his track.

All day above the depths of snow
Pierre and Dick and I,
In lust of blood, have slogged along
To see a bull moose die;
And now the night has come and dim
The spectral drifts writhe after him.

We shot him at the cabin door.
The whisky-jacks cried shrill;
And when the smoke moved up, we saw
The hemlocks waiting still
And ancient spruces brooding low
To that brave blood across the snow.

MAGIC

FRAGRANCE of burning driftwood gathered
where

Elms and stooped willows darken on the sky
When breath of star-dust chills the windless air
And herons on bent wings come oaring by.

Fragrance of driftwood burning on what sands?
Gathered along what surf? what sliding stream?
By what fond hearts and fearless, comrade hands,
In what glad day or what adventurous dream?

Burnt savour of wrecked timbers and tost spars
Plucked from the landwash of a tide-worn bay,
Rising like prayer to dim the clustered stars,
Sweeter than incense burned in old Cathay.

Magic of thin smoke from a driftwood blaze—
Of darkling skies and plover haunted sands;
Of strong wings beating through a seaward haze;
Of dreams come true and dear recovered hands.

Stuff of Neptune's Brewing

SEA MAGIC

WHO has not heard the call of the sea? Many of us can respond only with yearning hearts, in our dreams. It is heard in the markets and offices of inland cities; in vineyards and orchards; in sloping forests, upland farms, prairie kitchens and mountain fastnesses.

Those who go to her are the lucky ones—in the opinion of the rest of us. Yet of those who go to her, many curse her; and yet again many of the defamers return to her.

We know that salt is in our blood, for chemists have found it there—but that fact is a small part of the truth of the allure of salt water for the children of men. Salt is present in the flame of the human spirit and the tissues of our imaginations. Salt of the Seven Seas is the very stuff of our ancestral dreams. In our origins pulse the urge and zest of the turns and tumults of dark and flashing tides, sea winds, sea coasts, sea triumphs and sea-bred fears are native to our souls as to our blood. Of sea salt and sea magic are we fashioned and sprung.

One, two or many generations ago, your ancestors and mine were seafarers and dwellers beside salt water. Swing of flow and ebb of salty tides is the primal rhythm of life in us. Adam was not of an inland garden, but of a sea beach and a seaward facing cave; and not of fig leaves was Man's first dress, but of kelp and dulce and pearly shells.

Man's first tales were of sea adventure—if the truth were known! And Man's first pictures were of great fish and flippered sea beasts, drawn on sand and scratched on soft rock; and the sea rubbed them out and scrubbed them away. Do you think that the first pictures were of elk and bison? Those pictures are the work of the great-great-great-grandchildren of the first artists—if only the truth were known!

When mountain or plain or any inland place breeds a poet, does that poet sing only of inland life and scenes? Not in one case in ten. The chances are that he sings early and often of salt waters, beginning his spiritual seafaring and salty rhyming before even so little as the frothy edge of the least of weedy landwashes becomes known to his physical eye. Soon or later, his feet follow his dreams down to the sea, by sloping valleys and swift rivers, down and seaward to tidal marshes and ringing beaches; for to the sea his mind must go for its creative salt, even as his ancestors went to it to take their daily food from its gleaming shoals and mysterious depths. The business dearest to the poet's heart (after those of romantic love and heroic death) has to do with islands, reefs, glimmer of top-sails on heaving horizons, opal landfalls after weary voyages, pale sands edged with spent foam, wave-worn spars a-wash in green caves and seaward forests grey with blowing fog.

All of which is not so much to convince you of the magical qualities of the sea as to excuse the nautical

verses of our landlubberly poets—my own not excepted! And yet, though my salty rhymes may be poorer verse than those of others, I flatter myself—do I flatter myself?—that they are a thought less landlubberly. I am no shellback, but my voyaging has not been confined to trans-Atlantic liners. I have seen a mizzen-sail split from boom to gaff in a squall and corpse-lights man the yardarms. I have angled for dolphin from a pitching jib-boom, using a white rag, to represent a flying-fish, for bait. I sometimes wish that I had “followed the sea.” If I had done so I should now be without a ship—but is it a worse thing for a navigator to be without a ship than for a poet to be without a public?

Down the hatch!

THE LOST SHIPMATE

SOMEWHERE he left me; somewhere he slipt
away—

Youth, in his ignorant faith and his bright array.
The tides go out, the tides come flooding in,

And still the old years pass and the new begin—
But Youth—

Somewhere we lost each other, last year or yesterday.

Somewhere he failed me. . . . Down at the harbour-
side

I waited and watched for him where anchored
argosies ride.

I thought he came! 'Twas the dawn-wind blowing
free:

I saw his shadow—and 'twas the shadow of me.
Somewhere my shipmate left me, between a tide
and a tide.

It may be that I shall find him. It may be he
waits for me,

Sipping those wines we knew in the draught of a
breeze from the sea.

The tides still serve; and I am out and away

To search the spicy harbours of Yesterday,
Where the lamps of the town shine yellow beyond
the lamps of the quay.

Somewhere he failed me, somewhere he turned
away—

Youth, of the careless heart and the bright array.
Was it in Bados? God, I would pay to know!

Was it on Spanish Hill, where the roses blow?
Shall I hear his laughter to-morrow in painted
Olivio?

Somewhere I failed him; somewhere I let him
depart—

Youth, who would only sleep for the morn's
fresh start!

The tides still serve; the ships pass out and in;—

Anchors a-weigh to the capstans' clanking din!—
But Youth?—

Shall I find you south of the Gulf?—or are you
dead in my heart?

IN WITLESS BAY

IN Witless Bay the little fields
Are dark above the sea—
The little, sheep-cropt pastures
Where Bridget walked with me.

The evening glow is fading
Where the west is clear and wide,
And the boys are climbing homeward
From the *flakes* along the tide.

The geese are herded in the pen—
'Twas Bridget called them in.
The red cow's lowing at the door
For milking to begin.

The darling lights are gleaming
In windows high and low:
In Father Keegan's study
You can mark a saintly glow.

In Witless Bay the little fields
Are dark above the sea;
And Bridget's calling, in her prayers,
To tear the heart of me:

And still the wind holds steady
Across the darkling blue. . . .
Then may the dear Christ shield us safe
And guide me home to you!

For oh! my heart is longing,
From half the world away,
To foot again the climbing path
Above the little bay!

THE DEAD FISHERMAN

NOW let him rest,
Toil-worn hands on nerveless breast.
Fish come into the silver bays,
And red suns go to the west.

But never again with wind and tide
Will he pull out from the harbour-side:
Never again will he stoop and toil
On the flakes where the fish are dried.

He knew these wonders—fog and wind;
The lifting dark with fire behind;
The slosh of surf in weedy rocks;
The flurries white and blind.

In dread and hunger he sailed and steered.
Famine and cold were the things he feared:
But now he feels no want nor doubt
Since the farthest cape was cleared.

Gulls wing over the laughing bay
Where he and his cares toiled yesterday;
And down where his lobster traps are piled
The green tide has its way.

When winds draw south, and ice drives in,
And the landwash shakes with crashing din,
Right well he'll know, though his eyes be shut,
How the white spume hisses thin.

When sea smoke hides the crawling sea,
And black reefs crouch expectantly,
He'll know the drag of the twisting tide
And the doomed brig's agony.

Now let him sleep.
Nothing to win; nothing to keep;
Nothing to want; nothing to fear—
Buried so soft and deep!

THE LOWER-BRIDGE BATH

PALE green, paler than any green that grows,
The clear brine fills the white bath, cool and
deep:
And pale light, awning-filtered, still as dawn,
Floods the iron bulkheads, grey as dreamless sleep.

Here are release and sanctuary and ease.
High on the lower bridge, I taste the balm
Of crested waves and deep, unfretted tides
And white surf blossoming from vasts of calm.

All weedy grottoes loved of Neptune's daughters;
All jade-green roadsteads loved of weary ships;
All trade-winds and all spicy island breezes
Comfort me here with magic arms and lips.

THE SHARK

A SHADOW deep in the wave astern:
A quivering gleam: a gliding fin
Shifting, yet ever keeping the course—
Silent and keen as sin.

Sometimes close in our wake he swam;
And sometimes far, with a careless air—
But we knew that ever those evil eyes
Were wide awake and aware.

Through the doldrums, across the Line
We crawled; and on deck, at every turn,
The Skipper marked, with uneasy glance,
That voyaging fin astern.

All day, all night, day in, day out,
He held to our course on that lazy sea;
“He be waitin’ for more nor the galley slops,”
Said Boatswain Pat McGee.

The lads aloft looked aft and saw,
Where the sinister dorsal tacked and slid,
An eye that stared at our rolling hull
With never the blink of a lid.

At last we won to brisker seas,
With spray abeam and porpoise ahead;
And the black fin sank in our bubbling wake.
“That’s that!” the Skipper said.

THE BLIND SAILOR

"Strike me blind!" I swore.
God, and I was stricken!
I have seen the morning fade
And noonday thicken.

BE merciful, O God, that I have named in vain!
I am blind of the eyes, but spare the gleam in
my brain.

Though my footsteps falter, let my soul still sight
The things that were my life before You hid the light.

Little things they were, Lord—too small to be
denied;
Green of roadstead waters where the tired ships
ride—
Bark and brig and barkentine, blown from near and
far,
Safe inside the spouting reef and the sobbing bar.

Leave to me my pictures, Lord! Leave my
mem'ries bright!
The twisted palms are clashing and the sands are
white;
Shore boats crowd around us; the skipper's gig is
manned,
And nutmegs spice the little breeze that baffles off
the land.

Negro girls are singing in the fields of cane;
Lizards dart on those white paths I'll not walk again;
Opal blinds melt up at dawn, crimson blinds flare
down,
And white against the mountain gleam the street-
lamps of the town.

Leave to me my pictures, Lord; spare my mind to see
Shimmer of still water and shadow of still tree;
Cables roaring down and grey sails swiftly furled;
A riding-light ablink in some far corner of the world.

Leave to me my treasures, Lord! The islands and
the main;
The little things a sailorman must out to see again;
Fountains in the gardens and oxen in the streets;
Black men selling parrots and brown girls selling
sweets.

I have fed my vision, Lord. Now I pray to hold
The blue and grey and silver, the pink and green and
gold.

I have filled my heart, Lord. Now I pray to keep
The flashing and the laughter through this unlifting
sleep.

MERMAIDS

I am strong for mermaids, though I must admit that some of them are mischievously inclined. I believe in them: but there are dusty professors, with long noses stuck into books, who argue that the whole mermaid tradition is founded on nothing more or other than seals glimpsed suddenly and unexpectedly by drunken sailors and fishermen. Seals! I have seen seals—and maybe I've seen mermaids. Nobody but a fool, and certainly not a sailor with three sheets in the wind, would mistake a seal for a mermaid. Some people are always trying to take such joys as mermaids and fairies out of our difficult lives. But here are some verses which prove that mermaids are not seals.

THE bell is gone from the pitching buoy;
The warning voice is gone from the reef,
With its sudden clangour and shaking grief.
Stand wide! Stand clear!
'Ware rocks, Mariner.
Death lurks here!

Wakeful, it hung in its iron cage—
Clatter and clang when seas smashed wild,
Boom and bang when tides span mild.
Stand wide! Run clear!
'Ware reefs, Mariner.
Death lurks near.

Night and noon and dawn and eve,
It shook, from the tumult of green and white,
Its boom of warning and clatter of fright—
'Ware rocks! Stand clear!
Peril is near.

Silver mermaids found the bell.
Laughing sea-maids took it down
From the pitching buoy to their coral town,
And stilled its clangy voice to sleep,
Restful and deep.

The ship stands in; there is naught to hear—
No clang of bell, so nothing's to fear.
All's well. All's clear.
But death is here!

FIDDLER'S GREEN

“At a place called Fiddler's Green, there do all honest Mariners take their pleasure after death; and there are Admirals with their dear Ladies, and Captains of lost voyages with the Sweethearts of their youth, and tarry-handed Sailormen singing in cottage gardens.”

NEVER again shall we beat out to sea
In rain and mist and sleet like bitter tears,
And watch the harbour beacons fade a-lee,
And people all the sea-room with our fears.
Our toil is done. No more, no more do we
Square the slow yards and stagger on the sea.

No more for us the white and windless day
Undimmed, unshadowed, where the weed drifts by
And leaden fish pass, rolling, at their play,
And changeless suns glide up a changeless sky.
Our watch is done; and never more shall we
Whistle a wind across a fest'ring sea,

Cities we saw: white wall and glinting dome,
And palm-fringed islands gleaming on the blue.
To us more fair the kindly sights of home—
The climbing streets and windows shining true.
Our voyage is done, and never more shall we
Reef bucking topsails on a tossing sea.

Wonders we knew and beauty in far ports;
Laughter and peril round the swinging deep;
The wrath of God; the pomp of pagan courts . . .
The rocks sprang black! . . . *and we awoke from
sleep!*

Our task is done; and never more shall we
Square the slow yards and stagger on the sea.

Here are the hearts we love, the lips we know,
The hands of seafarers who came before.
The eyes that wept for us, a night ago,
Are laughing now that we shall part no more.
All care is past; and never more shall we
Make sail at daybreak for the grievous sea.

CHRISTMAS IN ALURIO

A pink-walled house between the cane-fields and the surf was a good place in which to write verses. The sea sang in one's ears all day there, and all night, too. The shimmer and flash of sunshine on breaking water filled the upper rooms all day; and all night they were filled with the wavering silver of reflected starshine. The coral rocks in the surf were black with wind and sea; the sand was lilac; and the surf riding in from the blue and green was white as washed wool.

PPIPE, bird, in the tamarind tree.
Pipe, wind, on the azure sea.
Here is the Season of Peace on Earth.
Pipe merrily.

Roar, surf, on the outer reef.
Sing, bird, on the plantain leaf.
Here is the Season of Joyous Living!
Have done with grief.

Whiter than snow, the surf rides in.
In the tamarind trees the songs begin.
Out in the tumble of blue upstarts
A flashing fin.

Shout, surf; and pipe, wind;
Though seas are wide, the world is kind.
Joy has a nest in the tamarind tree
For Love to find.

Over the cane-fields breaks the day.
The boats are out in Martin's Bay;
Sliding and plunging into the surf,
Seaward to safety they bear away.

The salty sails flap up and fill;
The men at the wet sheets whistle shrill;
The glad wind wrinkles the sea, and leaps
To the coconut trees on the crooked hill.

The planter's windmill, heavy and slow,
Turns its arms in the azure glow,
Waves a hand to the sea, and sweeps
The trampled canes in the yard below.

The morning smoke-wreaths fade away
In the brighter blue of the sudden day;
And naked children play in the sun,
Racing the surf of Martin's Bay.

The palms, high-crested and straight and fine,
Swing and bend in line on line.
The tall canes rustle and clash and sigh
As the winter wind goes over and by.

Our shutters creak in the breath of the sea;
And blackbirds hop in the almond tree.
Across the surf at the outer reef,
With skill and valour beyond belief,
The tiny fishing-boats plunge and strain,
Race and soar and top the surf,
And win to the lilac sands again.

The lithe brown children have gone to rest—
Shell-hunting over for one more day.
Purple the east and purple the west,
And white stars over Martin's Bay.

The boats, dismasted, gunwale to side,
Rest and forget the turmoil and spray;
A dreamless sleep, till to-morrow's tide
Slips from the sands of Martin's Bay.

The salt wind turns in the crested grove;
The shutters creak in the turning wind;
But the lamps are lit for hearts that rove,
And the path is bright for joy to find.

THE FIDDLER

BLACK as iron is the landwash
Under the wet fog;
And green sucks the tide.
Back of all lie barren and bog.

Up here, amid granite and spruce-tuck,
Drift sounds as of fairies singing,
And lost souls sighing,
And far bells ringing,
And lovers laughing and crying;
And out of the fog, like a ghost,
Steps simple Black Jarge Crew,
Playing his fiddle, poor fellow!—
Knowing naught else to do.

He sees granite and spruce-tuck,
Juniper, pond and bog,
And down past the broken cliff
The green tide under the fog:
But he sees more beside,

Does simple Black Jarge Crew
Stepping above the tide
And abroad in the barren places:
He sees flickery faces
Peeping out from the fern:
He knows where the Good People hide—
The little, gay, soulless fairies—
And the Lost Gunner walks by his side.
He hears a whisper of singing
From deep and deep underground
Of gnomes a-sweat at their anvils;
And his fiddle mimics the sound.

He has no luck at the fishing:
He's good for nothing: but when
These skiffs and stages are rotted
And dead are these fishermen,
And Skipper Flynn is forgotten
And naught of his store's to be found,
This barren above the tides
Will still be "Fiddler's Ground."

EIGHTY FATHOM DEEP

OFF Roma, eighty fathom deep,
With roofs of coral and pale shell,
Lies Neptune's city, wherein sleep
The weary sailors, wherein dwell
The weavers of the Sea Queen's Spell.

Fair sisters, you have lured him far;
But at the last, Death shared the prize!
From guiding light and pilot star
Your singing turned his eager eyes.
Now wake him with your witcheries.

Cradle his head between those breasts
Foam-tender and like foam a gleam.
Perchance he follows some old quest
Along the windings of his dream,
By ferny track and upland stream.

Perchance this mortal is not made
As you are? Take your harp of shell,
All gold-embossed and gem-inlaid,
And strike the strings, and break the spell.
Strike the sweet strings: Sing him awake:
Strike the loud strings until they break!

THE WRECKERS' PRAYER

In the old days before the building of the lighthouses, the poor "noddies" of many a Newfoundland outpost prayed for wrecks—aye, and with easy consciences. Only the few hundreds of them who took to deep-sea voyaging ever learned anything of the world and its peoples. All the world excepting their own desolate bays and "down Nort", was "up-along" to them. Montreal, Pernambuco, London, Oporto, Boston, Halifax—all were included in up-along to them; and up-along was a grand, rich place where all men were gentlemen wearing collars and coats, eating figgy-duff every day and smoking all they wanted to. The folk of up-along had the easy end of life; so why shouldn't they contribute something of their goods and gear to poor but honest noddies now and then, even if against their inclinations—aye, even if at the cost of their lives?

GIVE us a wrack or two, Good Lard,
For winter in Tops'il Tickle bes hard,
Wid grey frost creepin' like mortal sin
And perishin' lack of bread in the bin.

A grand, rich wrack, us do humbly pray,
Busted abroad at the break o' day
An' hove clear in 'crost Tops'il Reef,
Wid victuals an' gear to beguile our grief.

God of reefs an' tides an' sky,
Heed Ye our need an' hark to our cry!
Bread by the bag an' beef by the cask.
Ease for sore bellies bes all we ask.

One grand wrack—or maybe two?—
Wid gear an' victuals to see us through
'Til Spring starts up like the leap of day
An' the fish strike back into Tops'il Bay.

One rich wrack—for Thy hand bes strong!
A barque or a brig from up-along
Bemused by Thy twisty tides, O Lard!
For winter in Tops'il Tickle bes hard.

Loud an' long will us sing Yer praise,
Marciful Fadder, O Ancient of Days,
Master of fog an' tide an' reef!
Heave us a wrack to beguile our grief. Amen.

NIGHT WIND OF BARBADOS

BEYOND the surf and the reef,
Beyond the gloom and the gleam,
Beyond the purple veils
Where lost sailors dream,
The Wind of the Night awakes
In fenceless pastures of din;
Seizing their manes of foam,
She gallops her horses in.

White is her face and fair;
Her hands are like palest shells;
She sleeps where sea-fire burns
And mermaids weave their spells.
All day she drifts and dreams,
With a cheek in an idle hand,—
But as soon as the stars flame out,
She gallops the waves to land.

Mad, at the urge of her hand
They plunge and rear at the bit:
Arching their foaming necks
And tossing their manes a-lit
They hurdle the frothy reef;
To the cruel lash of her hand,
They stagger the marshalled rocks
And trample the flinching sand.

All night long, till dawn,
The furious herds race in.
Back in the fields of cane
The salty spray drifts thin.
She charges the sloshing reef,
And black rocks heave and dip.
Under the eaves of our house
Resounds the lash of her whip.

Along the hills in the east
A yellow flame upwaves;
Behind the crested palms
A tide of saffron laves;
Then, in rose and gold,
The glad lights flare and flee,
And the Night Wind herds her horses
To the pastures of the sea.

THE DYING PIRATE'S PRAYER

In "Treasure Island," Long John Silver states that the pirate Flint, a man of dreadful notoriety and power in his heyday, died miserably, of too much rum and kindred ailments, in some foul port of Central or South America, deserted by all his "gentlemen of fortune" save only a former cabin-boy named Darby Tuzzard.

OUT from these rotting barnacles, this harbour
stench!

Out from this rust and rot of hulks and mud!

Out from this curdled roadstead green and blue

Let me go!—'tis all I ask of You—

Out and away, out and through,

To the burst of clean sea spray across the outer blue.

Leave me clear for sea and pull aboard

Any old craft that pumps will float, O Lord!

Float me out and through the spoutin' reef,

Clear o' festerin' mud and sweatin' leaf,

Out to the slosh and heave of off-shore blue.

Hark to my prayer! I'd do the same for You!

For I was bred a seaman, in my pride.

I crave a deep grave in a dredgin' tide—

Deep an' deep, where the cool eels glide

And ice-cold sea-blooms blossom white and wide.

There lays the careenage, white in the sun—

White as curds . . . God, the deeds I've done,

Since that red night I boarded the *Sea Rover!*

Fetch aft the rum, Darby!

Lay aft and ease me over.

Aye, the careenage, white as fire in the sun—
Hot as God's wrath for the deeds I've done. . . .
Fetch aft the rum, Darby! Lay aft an' raise my
head;
And pity a poor seaman burning in his bed—
Bedded on Hell's hatch, shimmerin' white and red—
And faces crowdin' round—mostly a long time dead!

I SAILED A VOYAGE

WHEN I was very young, I sailed a voyage
South and away,
And lost my heart in Numo and Recefe
And Castle Bay.

O Heart of Youth, it was the world we loved!—
Life and its glinting;
Beauty and laughter; jealousies ajar
And shadows hinting;

New harbour-lights, and surf along old reefs,
And queer streets shining;
And candle-lit decanters with red hearts
For people dining

Behind hushed gardens; and the sweet allure,
Out of the green,
Of fluttered hand—or was it fluttering moth?
Quick and half-seen;

And whispered promises and singing strings
And kisses, too;
And back of all the white surf riding in
From the wide blue.

When I was very young, I sailed a voyage
South and away
And lost my heart in Nevis and Castries
And Turtle Bay:

And yet I was not left without a heart,
(Nor have I been)
For mermaids to ensnare and nymphs to lure
Through the dusk green.

THE LOVER

NEVER had inland garden seemed
So still, so drugged with dew:
Never had green trees held such peace
Beneath the arching blue

“As when he came, so gay, so sad,
And won the heart of me
With those quick moods of his, like shades
Cloud-drawn along the sea.

“With tender songs of magic isles
Gleaming at lift of day
Like pearls with hearts of ice and fire
He stole my heart away.

“He told of comradeship; of men
Red blooded and clear eyed
Who knew all risks of war and chance
And reef and wind and tide.

“He sang of brave adventurings;
And of those nameless quests
Which lead men down to death, or home
With stars upon their breasts.

“He told of love. Ah! tenderly
He told his dreams of love:
Dreams spun by him of white sea-fire
And the white stars above.

“Never has inland garden seemed
So still, so kind, so sweet,
Since he went through the narrow gate
And down the silent street.

“What mattered all his ringing vows—
So false, so fine, so brave!
I gave him all my heart. Dear God,
What death-in-life he gave!”

.
Beneath the wave, beneath the weed,
In those deep ways and dim,
Death holds him in a dream of her.
Doubt brings no pang to him.

FROM CARLISLE BAY

SKIPPER'S watch and mate's watch:
Day and night and day
We've reefed and squared and steered her
All up from Carlisle Bay,
With humming trades above us
And rolling seas below,
Hemmed in by hazed horizons
Where tall cloud squadrons go.

Skipper's watch and mate's watch:
Through nights and days and nights
We've done our sailor duty
According to our lights.
We've squared and reefed and steered her
By sun and moon and stars,
And seen the ghostly corpus lights
Slide out the heaving spars.

We know the vasty ocean
In calm and breeze and gale,
And a thousand gleaming wonders
All round the heaving rail.
We know the spicy islands—
Roadstead, wharf and street;
And our hands are hard with manning
Downhaul, brace and sheet.

To-morrow, lads, we'll raise it!—
A landfall we all know
Of straight cliffs, brown and purple,
With smoking surf below.
To-morrow, lads, we'll make it!—
And to-morrow night we'll be
In the old house in the old street
In the town above the sea.

LIFE WILL NOT WAIT

DEAR, we must up and out! Life will not wait,
Like village beau, beside your garden gate.
Dear, the world calls; and Love, who knows the
the way,
Bids us join hands before the fuller day.
Together, Dear, from morning on to noon,
How gaily Life will pipe his gladdest tune!
Together, Dear, from noon to creeping night
How kindly Life will lift his surest light!
Dear, we must up and out! and hand in hand
Taste the glad vintage of the farthest land.
The world is wide and the bright seas are wide,
And isles of magic gleam along the tide;
And ancient marvels are forever new
Where the foam-lilies blossom on the blue;
And Life calls to us. Morning-crowned, elate,
He'll bide no longer at your garden gate.

THE MAD SAILOR

MAD, they call me. Mad Dick Chant I be;
Struck so, folk say, by the crashing of reef
and sea

That night I was hove ashore in Hermitage Bay
Along wid the timbers an' spars of *The Mary J.*

Daft, they call me. Daft Dick Chant be I,
Weeping when others be merry, laughing when
others cry;
Running the frothy landwash when the night blows
wild,
Or smoking a pipe by the red stove, contented and
mild.

Strangers are warned I be queer; a touch on the
forehead, so,
Some don't look at me eye to eye, for fear I'd guess
they know.
They give me tobacco and pity an' leave me go my
way—
Sole survivor—Mad Dick Chant—of *The Mary J.*

They give me bread and meat; a roof to shelter my
head;
Tea for my smoky kettle and blankets enough to
my bed.
They leave me sit, or step abroad, at my own wild
whim.
“But for the Mercy of God,” they say, “we'd be
like him.”

But for the Mercy of God! I have my laugh at
that. . . .

When the moon is round and the tide all shiny and flat
I steal away in the shadows of rocks, and wet rocks let
me through. . . .

But for the Mercy of God, say I, I'd be the same as you!

Deep in Witchery Cave the tides and moon spin green,
Spinning a gleam the noddies ashore have never guessed
nor seen:

And old King Neptune's daughters there are playing on
harps of shell:

They sing for me and laugh like bells at the sailor yarns
I tell.

Skipper Nolas's got a girl from Bully Bay for his bride.
I know a room by sea-lamps lit, down under the
swelling tide—

A secret place; and a king's daughter with breasts
agleam like pearl:

And poor Dick Chant is a prince down there in the arms
of his deep-sea girl.

When the blind gale blows black and loud I hear her
call to me—

The silver voice, through the crashing surf, of my
sweatheart under-sea:

And so I run the spouting reef, splashing the wild
night through,

Breasting the surf with my strong heart—for my mad
dreams are true.

And when the moon is white and round I wade into the
tide
To sink among the oaring fish and glide where black
eels glide;
And silky curtains of purple weed part and let me down
To where the love of my true heart waits in a tide-spun
gown.

Mad, they call me. Mad Dick Chant I be—
A poor, daft seafaring fool ashore but a lover under the
sea.
Meat and bread they give me, and leave me go my way
Down to the arms of a king's daughter under the shiny
bay.

Mad Dick Chant they call me. Mad as the wind be I,
Running all night along the rocks to hear my dear
love's cry.
Pity and blankets they give me and a roof to shelter my
head;
And little they guess of the truth of the place I make
my bed!

Down in Witchery Cave the tides and moon spin green:
Green gowns for a sea-king's daughters and for a king
and queen,
And a princely robe for a laughing sailor, courting his
gentle bride.
Poor Dick Chant I be ashore—but a lover under the
tide!

MOTHER CAREY'S CHICKENS

THEY say these slim brown birds that flee
And skim in our wake, when the wind is free,
Are the souls of sailormen lost at sea,
Waiting to pilot their fellows down
To the swaying streets of a coral town
Where the Mother sits in a green gown.

'Tis said her song has a magic ring
To brave lads weary of seafaring;
That bright eyes close in a lotus sleep—
(All's well! and never a watch to keep!);
That the joy of life seems a faded thing
When they follow the flash of the dipping wing.

Their eager voices shall lift no more
When the anchor is catted for some far shore:
Heartache and toil and fear are past,
And red weeds cling to the drifting mast
And yellow shells to the broken oar.

When scud flies white and winds are high
And torn clouds race in a roaring sky
Then Mother Carey, under the sea,
Startles her brown birds up from her knee:
With tears and laughter she bids them fly.

PERNAMBUCO IN MAY.

The harbour and city of Pernambuco are behind a reef. The reef is topped by a brick wall built long ago, when the port was a possession of Holland, by workmen who knew their trade of raising barriers against the sea. But the rollers of three hundred years have knocked a few holes in the good Dutch brickwork through which spray bursts upon the opaque green (and shark infested) waters of the harbour like the smoke of great guns and with a booming as of guns.

I was there in May, which is not the best time to visit Pernambuco.

NOT a leaf stirs in the rubbery looking trees.
The Skipper's shirt is wilted and he's dripping
at the knees.

Whistle a breeze!

Brown girls move along on slithery dry feet,

Selling sticky sweets;

And brown men squat asleep in the hot street—

In all the hot streets—

With their shins in their hands and chins on their
knees.

Whistle a breeze!

Narrow dark doors stand open here and there,
Inviting mates and masters in from the glare,
Through high dark stores to dusky cool bars,
Smelling of green limes and oily cigars,
Of bitters and pale rum and white anisette
And the slow blue smoke of a brown cigarette.
Whistle a drink!

“What will you have, Sir? Just name your fancy!
“Gin and green cocoanut?—called a ‘Miss Nancy.’
“A long lime-squash, Sir, laced with white rum?—
“Known in these parts as a ‘Skippers’ Kingdom
Come.’”

In Tucker’s dusky bar we give noon the slip:
But the more we cool our necks the more we drip-
drip,
Dripping at the shoulders and wilting at the
knees.
Whistle a breeze!
While I blow smoke of a fat green cigar,
The Skipper sings a ditty of a sailor and a star—
Of how a sailor’s sweetie a sailor’s star should
be . . .
One more “Miss Nancy” will be enough for me!

CAP’N ENGLISH’S GHOST

Soon after the violent death of the notorious Richard English at the yard-arm of a frigate, a lubberly fellow with a fast schooner and plenty of luck reaped a rich harvest in the same seas which the late Richard had stained with blood, and so began to fancy himself as a pirate of the first class.

A SCHOONER up from Santa Cruz
With treasure in her hold
Of candle-sticks and chalices
And pearls and minted gold!
A schooner up from Santa Cruz
With jibs and topsails set,
And rubies on the captain’s hands
And in the lazarette.

A stranger came aboard soon after sunset, in a mysterious manner, joined tipsy Captain Duffer in the cabin and there rattled and rolled the bones for extraordinary stakes. The stranger had all the luck, to the disgust and displeasure of Duffer.

The captain sloped his liquor;
He cursed and banged the board.
The stranger's smile was pale and thin;
His glance was like a sword,
Sudden and cold. The lantern swung
And tossed the shadows wide.
"I win again, you fool!" he said.
"Ye're mine now, hair an' hide!

"Ye played like a fool an' lost like a fool;
And a scurvy fool you be,
Fatted on knavish tricks ashore
And a drunkard's luck at sea:
But now ye've fumbled yer last throw
And lost the utmost stake.
*As my name be Richard English,
What I win, I take!"*

The captain spilled his liquor.
His red nose greyed to ash.
With furtive, rummy fingers
He fumbled at his sash.
The lantern tost its murky gleam
From the ringbolt overhead.
"To Hell wid old Dick English!—
For he bes hanged an' dead!"

"Not so!" the stranger whispered.

"There's some as never die!"

The captain's face went white as milk,

And grievous was his cry.

"But ye'll cheat the Law," the stranger said,—

"Yard-arm an' gallows-tree.

So down yer last wet drink, poor fool,

And come along with me."

The lantern swung and shattered

On the deckbeam overhead;

The bulkheads buckled and split;

The spars came down like lead;

And loud the mysterious stranger laughed

As the schooner heaved and broke

And foundered in a cloud of foam

All white and hot like smoke.

THE FORSAKEN MISTRESS

THE Sea, my mistress, called to me out of the night,
When the streets of the town were hard and the
lips of the tide were white,
And life was weary of waiting and dreams were as
driven spray:
I rose and went to her arms before the lift of day.

Queen Sea, how fare your lovers?—Hood and Nelson
and Drake;
Olaf and Cook and Hudson; Colombo, Rodney and
Blake;
And Conrad who knew you fair and false? What
is one lover more
To the love that counts its cheated dead ten
thousand score!

The Sea, my mistress, called to me out of the night,
When the streets of the town were friendly and the
windows all alight,
And life was glad of waiting, and fear and doubt
were gone:
But I went to the arms of a kinder love before the
lift of dawn!

From Arcadian Vats

THE HAMADRYAD

WAS it the wind I heard, starting the leaves
a-thrill—

A wind in the golden birch, when the rest of the
wood was still?

Was it the wing of a bird, high up in that leafy place,
That gleamed from the beryl dusk like the mask
of a peering face?

A round moon washed the forest an indescribable
blue—

Blue of the unfound rose, colour of dreams come true;
And there in the elfin radiance, deep in the elfin land,
Drunk with the elfin hour, my fingers enclosed her
hand.

She led me by aisles of azure and floating ramparts
of dream

To a tower of April sunrise set in a silver stream.
She led me beyond remembrance of toil and failure
and fame

Back to the glory of youth and the longing that
has no name.

Was it a wind I heard, starting the leaves a-thrill—
A wind in the golden birch, when the rest of the
wood was still?

Was it a wing a-gleam, or her breast, in that leafy
place,

When I opened my eyes to the dawn and felt the
dew on my face?

LOVE AND THE YOUNG KNIGHT

SAID Love to the young knight,
"I am the spur and the prize.
I am the hand of thy squire
And the light in thy lady's eyes.
I am the force of thy arm
That is more than of sinew and bone.
I am the favour of Arthur
Smiling down from his throne.

"I am the spirit of Christ,
High and white as a star.
I am the crown of Mary,
Outlasting the helmets of war.
I am valour and peace,
Anger and gentleness.
I am the master of pride
And servant of distress."

Said Love to the young knight,
"I am the humble task.
I am the high adventure
Behind the visored mask.
I am the fire of faith
That cools not with the years.
I am the lord of passion
And comforter of tears."

SONG OF A LOST HEART

BETWEEN the hill and the tide,
The cane-fields and the bay,
I lost my heart and did not care—
And that was yesterday
In a pink-walled house
Between the hill and the tide,
Where all day long the palms shake
And seas ride.

Between the fog and the fire,
Between the kiss and the play,
I lost my heart and did not grieve—
And that was yesterday
In a grey-walled house
In veiled London town,
Where all day long the hopeless shapes
Go up and down.

Between the wood and the shore,
The moss and the river clay,
I lost my heart and did not fear—
And that was yesterday
In a grey-roofed house
Between the wood and the stream,
Where all day long the ancient fir
Whispers his dream.

You of the palms and the tide,
You of the fog and the town,
You of the purple wood
Where winds sweep up and down,
Find me my heart again
And give it to me once more,
And let me lose it again
Between the road and your door—

Between the north and the south—
Between the wood and the tide . . .
My heart has leapt from my side again—
Back to your side.

ORCHESTRAL

STRING and wood and wire and wind and brass:
And glory is; and glories wax and wane:
And beauty is; and beauties gleam and pass:
And youth is lost, and youth is won again:
And life is love; and love as new, as old,
As tender and as sure, precious and dear
As dreams come true and quick surcease from pain.

String and wire and wind and wood and brass:
And life and love and longing gleam and pass.

IN THE HAND OF THE WIND

"Lord, I am passing in the hand of the wind."

LORD, I am passing in the wind's lean hand:
And now, of all my glory what will stand?—
The echo of a love song, like thin smoke
Blown down the valleys of a kindly land.

O green walled gardens, I have loved you so!
Take no heed of the passing when I go.
The wind that spilled your roses yesterday
Blows sharp upon me, heralding the snow:

The wind that blew the yellow buds to bloom,
And filled with dancing gold our vine-girt room
Where I have sung of summer and delight,
Sings now of silence and the roses' doom:

The wind that kissed us yesterday, to-day
Blows sharp upon me with a breath of clay,
Blows cold across the vineyards in the sun
And stills the flutter of the leaves at play.

Lord, I am passing in the wind's lean hand!
And now of all my glory, what will stand?
A whisper in the vines along the wall,
As of a lost song in a haunted land.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

MY heart is like an empty house
With its fair hostess gone.
The halls are laughterless at noon,
The beds are cold at dawn.

My heart is like an empty house
That has no revel there,
With ashes blown about the hearth
And winds across the stair.

The glasses on the sideboard stand
Unused all night, all day:
The brazen fire-dogs grin and grin
A lost, forsaken way:

The spiders weave along the walls
The sunbeams in a thread:
The ghosts of yesterday creep by
Like shadows of the dead.

My heart is like an empty house,
Stiller than death or doom,
With voiceless echoes of lost mirth
Silent in every room:

The foot of fear is on the stair
And noiseless on the floor:
The hand of grief is on the wall
And fumbling at the door.

If love comes back, the fires will light,
The guests will all return,
The wine will fill the cups, all night
The scented candles burn.

TO CAMELOT

IN quest of Beauty I rode far,
With dreams for guide, and a falling star,
A leaping stag and a golden bee:
I found you under a wishing-tree.

I know the road to Camelot,
By leafy glade and ferny grot:
You know, by flash of song and wing,
The silver birds of which I sing.

In Beauty's service still I ride
By grassy track and curling tide.
Now every wood has its wishing-tree
And every rose her golden bee.

THE MAID

THUNDER of riotous hoofs over the quaking
sod;
Clash of reeking squadrons, steel capped and iron
shod;
The White Maid and the white horse and the
flapping banner of God.

Black hearts riding for hire and red hearts riding for
fame;
The maid who rides for France and the king who
rides for shame;
Gentlemen, fools and a saint riding in Christ's high
name.

"Dust to dust," it is written. Wind-scattered are
lance and bow:
Dust is the Cross of Saint George and dust the
banner of snow:
Dust are the bones of the king and dust the shafts
of the foe.

Forgotten the young knights' valour: Forgotten the
captains' skill:
Forgotten, the fear and the hate and the mailed
hands raised to kill.
Blown dust are the shields that crashed and the
arrows that sang so shrill.

A story from some old book, that battle of long
ago—
A dream of echoes and ghosts and dust forever
a-blow;
Shadows, the poor French king and the might of
his English foe;
Shadows, the charging knights and the archers
standing a-row;
But a flame in my heart and my eyes, the Maid
with the banner of snow!

WINGS

I WAS content this side the sunset bars:
I knew the half-god Pan, where the reeds shiver:
I rhymed of pleasant loves and smarting scars;
Of youth and mirth beneath the moon and stars;
Of valley airs, and twilight birds low winging.
I was content with half-gods and half-singing.

Fit wings they gave me for my little flights—
Those little gods, piping by hill and river—
Wings adequate for common days and night,
And little joys and griefs, and mild delights . . .
Now, all ye gods, hark to my suppliant crying
For stronger, braver wings for farther flying!
For I have seen beyond earth's sunset bars
And known the glory of the whirling stars.

MORTALITY

A LITTLE strife—and oh! the long forgetting.
A gust of cheering—and the frozen breath.
A day of singing—and a night of silence.
An hour for living—and an age for death.

So go the great; so goes the shining hero;
So go we all, the weak, the strong, the blind,
The proud, the meek, the saint, the mocking sinner,
Stumbling in front and crowding fast behind.

A little mirth—and oh! the long composure.
A few swift paces—and the fainting breath.
Your day for singing, and God's time for silence.
My day for loving, and God's age for death.

And yet I swear by the Eternal Riddle,
The Holy Mysteries and the Awful Name,
My care is all for mortal human kindness,
My jealousy for this brief minute's fame.

AN EPITAPH

CHANGE was his mistress, Chance his counsellor:
Love could not keep him; Duty forged no chain.
The wide seas and the mountains called to him,
And grey dawns saw his campfires in the rain.

Sweet hands might tremble—ay, but he must go.
Revel might hold him for a little space,
But turning, past the laughter and the lamps,
His eyes must ever catch the luring face.

Kind eyes might question—yea, and melt again;
Dear lips, a-quiver, silently implore—
But he must ever turn his furtive head
To hear that other summons at the door.

Change was his mistress, Chance his counsellor.
The dark firs knew his singing on the trail.
Why tarries he to-day? . . . And all last night
Adventure flashed her stars without avail.

THE GARDEN

I HAVE a garden Lovelace used to know;
Here sings a nightingale Keats may have heard;
Here Herrick's lilies glimmer, all a-row,
And all along the paths his Kentish roses blow:
Roses that fade, and bloom to fade again,
Hedging the bluebells Chaucer's feet have stirred:
Roses of young delight and Love's first pain:
Roses as red and cool as kisses in the rain.

I have a garden hidden from the street,
Walled from the road's dust and the harsh town's
word,
Safe from all jibing tongues and bruising feet.
I have a garden hidden and unguessed—
Ungessed, its yellow moon and singing bird—
Walled on the north and south, hedged east and
west;
Sacred and still and safe in my own breast.

My garden wall is high and rough:
The door is shut and fall'n the bar.
My garden is secure enough.

My dreams are folded from afar.
My nightingale sings all night long,
From waxing moon to waning star.

Here where moon shadows weave and net,
I walk at peace and know how vain
The old, high quest and hot regret,

The thirst and conflict and poor gain.
I smile and let the world go by.
With its dull prizes and mad pain.

The door is open! . . . Who comes now,
Unbidden, to my still retreat,
With enigmatic eyes and brow,
Questioning lips and questing feet?

My garden wall was high and rough:
The strong bolt was not strong enough!

A VIGIL

SLOWLY the first lights break
Across the dewy lawn.
I only am awake, of all the world,
Here in the creeping dawn.

The nightingale has slept,
The rose has fall'n on sleep,
And I alone have kept the watch I pray
My heart may ever keep.

The pale lights of the dawn
To gold fires pass.
Dear girl, when I am gone from this green place,
Pity my footprints in the dewy grass.

SIR PALOMIDES' LAMENT

ISOUND, Isoud, of the brows alight,
The small, proud head and darkling eyes agleam,
Though Tristram wear your favour in men's sight,
I flaunt your guerdon down the lists of dream.

Where other knights win love, I win but fame.
Knaves on spent chargers gain their hearts' desire,
While I—though all the heralds cry my name!—
Break my lost heart to ease my spirit's fire.

What do I know of kisses, who embrace
A poet's vision for my valour's prize—
A madman's dream of pity on your face;
A fool's hope of surrender in your eyes.

Isoud, Isoud, of the brows alight,
The darkling glance and pearly throat agleam,
Though Tristram flaunt your guerdon in men's sight,
I wear your favours in the lists of dream.

EXPECTANS EQUITO

“**E**XPECTANS EQUITO.” Glad the tidings
Of these brave words as I spurred afield.
With hope in the waiting and joy in the riding,
What had to-morrow at heart to yield?

Bright was the shield my fathers gave me.
Light was my heart as I rode along.
With faith and hope and a dream to save me,
Waiting and riding were like a song.

Camps and courts and gilded cities;
Revel and war and the clanging chase;
God's round world, with its joys and pities;
And over my valour a bending face.

“Expectans equito.” Read it, Princess!
These brave words are my wild heart's clue.
Battles may pass and leave me broken,
But waiting and riding will win to you.

"IF LOVE WERE ONLY
THESE THINGS"

IF Love were only these things—moonlight and
kisses;
Music of heart and harp like star-dust shaking;
Glad beauty giving and mad joy taking;
Lawns cool in dawn-dew and a bird's waking;
Veiled eyes and sidelong glance suddenly turning—
Turned suddenly bright and straight, naked and
still—
Sweetest choice and utter trust, to set the heart
aching!

Love is all of these things—moonlight and kisses;
Dream and desire in tune to set the head spinning;
Lips soft as rose petals for mad joy's winning.

If these were all of Love! If Love were these
only! . . .

But Love has a face of fear to set the heart quaking;
Love knows a black doubt sharper than sinning;
Love knows thirst, and salt tears for its slaking;
And Love knows pain to set the soul aching.
O Love must keep a brave heart for black grief's
taking!

But he who denies Love at the dawn's waking—
He who denies Love at the heart's breaking—
Cursed be he for a fool, sleeping and waking!

THE BUILDER

HE builds of dust who builds with senseless
marble:

He builds of rust who builds with iron and brass.
Proud monuments to fair queens dim and crumble:
Their gilding fades, their arching glories pass.

I build with verses frailer than rose petals.

I build to Love and Beauty with frail words.
With my heart's throbs I quicken my slow rhyming
And of my quick soul wing my thoughts like birds.

I build to Love. Dear One, take this my building!

I build to Beauty, dreaming of your eyes.
O beautiful and lovely! in your worship
I raise a gleaming tower to the skies.

Of verses frailer than a rose's petals

And heartbeats tethered in a net of words;
Of thoughts as quick as blowing April shadows,
And dreams a-wing and soaring like bright birds.

Of His Majesty's Rum Jar

A BILLET IN FLANDERS

(1915)

WITHIN, the frowstiness and gloom;
Without, the chill and sodden dark;
Within, pitiful, pale and small,
Christ crucified on the mildewed wall.

Without, the grind of wheels; the ring
Of hoofs and heels on greasy stone:
Within, the old bed, high and damp;
A candle and a smoky lamp.

There I was lonely for sane things:
There I was heartsick for glad days:
And there I knew, with dawning near,
That indecision men call fear.

Heated with wine or caked with mud—
(A revel spent or a day's work done)—
Slowly I turned to that dreary bed
And the pale regard of the imaged dead.

I thought of death; and it did not seem
So dull a thing, nor so sad a jest,
As the dismal nights and the weary round
Of keeping alive on the muddy ground.

Flat ruins now, that house and room
Where I was caged with my soul's gloom
And poor Christ languished, pale and small,
In agony on the mildewed wall.

SALISBURY PLAIN

(December, 1914)

THE grey moon at dawn:
The grey sun at noon:
Dank mists a-crawl,
Grey as the moon.

Furze in the vale:
A farm on the hill;
Wet, grey flocks
Roving at will.

Haws on the bush;
A lark in the sky:
Old Stonehenge counting
Ages go by.

Furze black as grief:
Sward green as Spring
And one grey bird
With heart to sing.

PRIVATE NORTH

HUNCHED in his greatcoat, there he stands,
Sullen of face and hard of hands;
Ready to fight, unready to drill,
Willing to suffer and ready to kill.

What does he offer to you, O King!
Himself: a humble and uncouth thing.
What does he offer you, fit to take?
A life to spend; a body to break.

His mouth is sullen; his ways are rough;
But his untamed heart is true enough.

I've seen his home, low-set and grey
In black woods thousands of miles away,
Where he lived from the loud, mad world removed,
Masterless, gentle and gladly loved.

Hunched in his greatcoat, here he stands,
Offering all with heart and hands.

He offers his life to your needs, O King!
A fearless, humble and steadfast thing;
And with it, for chance to spare or take,
A woman's spirit to wring and break.

TO A KNOWN SOLDIER

This tribute to one under whom I served when he commanded a division, and later when he commanded the strongest army corps in the B.E.F. on the Western Front, was written in admiration and affection at a time when thousands of ignorant persons, and many jealous and wilfully vicious persons, were doing their worst to besmirch his clear fame.

DEAR large and honoured Sir, in every paper
That I, in this seclusion, chance to see,
I find that you are up to some new caper
In your new role of super-dominie—
Giving degrees, and thrilling with addresses
Men of all sorts and various distresses;

And, Sir, I often wonder (in my humble
And aimless manner) how you really feel:
And if you ever cuss, or ever grumble,
When lunched Rotarians demand a spiel,
Or weighty bankers, bowed in sage reflection,
Desire your valued presence and direction.

Yes, Sir, I sometimes wonder (in my simple
And artless manner) if your thoughts go back
To those old days of Vimy and the Pimple—
Along a muddy and be-blooded track
To where, on pitted and hell-harrowed ground,
Such wealth of death and glory lay around.

I think that, wide awake in that still hour
When little doubts and nameless fears expand,
And self-assurance lies bereft of power
And in the awed soul stirs the Almighty Hand,
Your thoughts go back, beyond to-day's distraction,
To eighty thousand nameless men in action:
And you thank God—not for your place and name—
But for their comprehension and acclaim.

TO THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

UNKNOWN, yet known to us: missing, yet
found

To be retombed and reforgotten here
Amid old kings in precious, holy ground:

And with you our own trysts with pain and fear
Are buried pridefully,—to fall to dust

With hearts of poets and spent lusts of kings,
And stricken arrogance and knightly rust,
In England's glory-heap of wornout things.

Sleep well, O unknown soldier!—known and proved:

Cold, unabashed, where storied ghosts confer.

Sleep well, O myriad-heart, well beloved!—

While we forget the splendid dreams that were.

A COOK-HOUSE AT REVEILLE

(December, 1914)

OUTSIDE, the mud between the huts;
The dismal murk of mist and night;
The chill; the sullen waking. Here
The warmth and stir and crimson light.

White steam goes up to misted lamps
From giant caldrons set a-row;
And sleepy cooks stoop to their tasks,
Satanic in the stove's red glow.

And here is one who worked, last year,
With Mitchell's crew on Beaver Lake,
Where the dark spruces lift their spires;
Where axes flash and white frosts ache;

And snows are dry as desert sands,
And only the moose-bird stirs a wing
Till April. . . . Here, in mist and murk,
Puzzled and sad, he serves his king

THE LAST BILLET

SOME day I'll come to that still place,
And bid the old man make my bed.
No hurry of departure then:
No waking when the dawn is red.

The same kind trees will sing to me,
Day after day, night after night:
The wind that wanders in the grass
Will bring no tidings of the fight.

In that still hostelry of rest,
Where time is not, and sleep is long,
I'll clean forget the thing unwon,
And pain of the unfinished song.

Night will not find me journeying,
Where endless roads in dusk are set,
On some fool's errand down the world,
Hag-ridden by an old regret.

Some evening I shall turn aside
To that dark hostelry of rest,
And at the threshold loose my spurs,
And to the wind bequeath my quest.