



**The Wild Knight and Other Poems**

**By**

**Gilbert Chesterton**

## NOTE

My thanks are due to the Editors of the Outlook and the Speaker for the kind permission they have given me to reprint a considerable number of the following poems. They have been selected and arranged rather with a view to unity of spirit than to unity of time or value; many of them being juvenile.

CONTENTS

BY THE BABE UNBORN

THE WORLD'S LOVER

THE SKELETON

A CHORD OF COLOUR

THE HAPPY MAN

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

A NOVELTY

ULTIMATE

THE DONKEY

THE BEATIFIC VISION

THE HOPE OF THE STREETS

ECCLESIASTES

SONG OF THE CHILDREN

THE FISH

GOLD LEAVES

THOU SHALT NOT KILL A CERTAIN EVENING

A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

THE MARINER

THE TRIUMPH OF MAN

CYCLOPEAN

JOSEPH

MODERN ELFLAND

ETERNITIES

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

ALONE

KING'S CROSS STATION

THE HUMAN TREE

TO THEM THAT MOURN

THE OUTLAW

BEHIND

THE END OF FEAR

THE HOLY OF HOLIES

THE MIRROR OF MADMEN

E. C. B.

THE DESECRATERS

AN ALLIANCE

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

THE LAST MASQUERADE

THE EARTH'S SHAME

VANITY

THE LAMP POST

THE PESSIMIST

A FAIRY TALE

A PORTRAIT

FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM

TO A CERTAIN NATION

THE PRAISE OF DUST

THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

'VULGARISED'

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

AT NIGHT

THE WOODCUTTER

ART COLOURS

THE TWO WOMEN

THE WILD KNIGHT

Another tattered rhymster in the ring,  
With but the old plea to the sneering schools,  
That on him too, some secret night in spring  
Came the old frenzy of a hundred fools

To make some thing: the old want dark and deep,  
The thirst of men, the hunger of the stars,  
Since first it tinged even the Eternal's sleep,  
With monstrous dreams of trees and towns and mars.

When all He made for the first time He saw,  
Scattering stars as misers shake their pelf.  
Then in the last strange wrath broke His own law,  
And made a graven image of Himself.

BY THE BABE UNBORN

If trees were tall and grasses short,

As in some crazy tale,

If here and there a sea were blue

Beyond the breaking pale,

If a fixed fire hung in the air

To warm me one day through,

If deep green hair grew on great hills,

I know what I should do.

In dark I lie: dreaming that there

Are great eyes cold or kind,

And twisted streets and silent doors,

And living men behind.

Let storm-clouds come: better an hour,

And leave to weep and fight,

Than all the ages I have ruled

The empires of the night.

I think that if they gave me leave

Within that world to stand,

I would be good through all the day

I spent in fairyland.

They should not hear a word from me

Of selfishness or scorn,

If only I could find the door,

If only I were born.

THE WORLD'S LOVER

My eyes are full of lonely mirth:

Reeling with want and worn with scars,

For pride of every stone on earth,

I shake my spear at all the stars.

A live bat beats my crest above,

Lean foxes nose where I have trod,

And on my naked face the love

Which is the loneliness of God.

Outlawed: since that great day gone by--

When before prince and pope and queen

I stood and spoke a blasphemy--

'Behold the summer leaves are green.'

They cursed me: what was that to me

Who in that summer darkness furred,

With but an owl and snail to see,

Had blessed and conquered all the world?

They bound me to the scourging-stake,

They laid their whips of thorn on me;

I wept to see the green rods break,

Though blood be beautiful to see.

Beneath the gallows' foot abhorred  
The crowds cry 'Crucify!' and 'Kill!'  
Higher the priests sing, 'Praise the Lord,  
The warlock dies'; and higher still

Shall heaven and earth hear one cry sent  
Even from the hideous gibbet height,  
'Praise to the Lord Omnipotent,  
The vultures have a feast to-night.'

## THE SKELETON

Chattering finch and water-fly  
Are not merrier than I;  
Here among the flowers I lie  
Laughing everlastingly.  
No: I may not tell the best;  
Surely, friends, I might have guessed  
Death was but the good King's jest,  
It was hid so carefully.

## A CHORD OF COLOUR

My Lady clad herself in grey,  
That caught and clung about her throat;  
Then all the long grey winter day  
On me a living splendour smote;  
And why grey palmers holy are,  
And why grey minsters great in story,  
And grey skies ring the morning star,  
And grey hairs are a crown of glory.

My Lady clad herself in green,  
Like meadows where the wind-waves pass;  
Then round my spirit spread, I ween,  
A splendour of forgotten grass.  
Then all that dropped of stem or sod,  
Hoarded as emeralds might be,  
I bowed to every bush, and trod  
Amid the live grass fearfully.

My Lady clad herself in blue,  
Then on me, like the seer long gone,  
The likeness of a sapphire grew,  
The throne of him that sat thereon.  
Then knew I why the Fashioner  
Splashed reckless blue on sky and sea;  
And ere 'twas good enough for her,

He tried it on Eternity.

Beneath the gnarled old Knowledge-tree

Sat, like an owl, the evil sage:

'The World's a bubble,' solemnly

He read, and turned a second page.

'A bubble, then, old crow,' I cried,

'God keep you in your weary wit!

'A bubble--have you ever spied

'The colours I have seen on it?'

THE HAPPY MAN

To teach the grey earth like a child,

To bid the heavens repent,

I only ask from Fate the gift

Of one man well content.

Him will I find: though when in vain

I search the feast and mart,

The fading flowers of liberty,

The painted masks of art.

I only find him at the last,

On one old hill where nod

Golgotha's ghastly trinity--

Three persons and one god.

## THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

I do not cry, beloved, neither curse.

Silence and strength, these two at least are good.

He gave me sun and stars and ought He could,

But not a woman's love; for that is hers.

He sealed her heart from sage and questioner--

Yea, with seven seals, as he has sealed the grave.

And if she give it to a drunken slave,

The Day of Judgment shall not challenge her.

Only this much: if one, deserving well,

Touching your thin young hands and making suit,

Feel not himself a crawling thing, a brute,

Buried and bricked in a forgotten hell;

Prophet and poet be he over sod,

Prince among angels in the highest place,

God help me, I will smite him on the face,

Before the glory of the face of God.

A NOVELTY

Why should I care for the Ages

Because they are old and grey?

To me, like sudden laughter,

The stars are fresh and gay;

The world is a daring fancy,

And finished yesterday.

Why should I bow to the Ages

Because they were drear and dry?

Slow trees and ripening meadows

For me go roaring by,

A living charge, a struggle

To escalate the sky.

The eternal suns and systems,

Solid and silent all,

To me are stars of an instant,

Only the fires that fall

From God's good rocket, rising

On this night of carnival.

ULTIMATE

The vision of a haloed host  
That weep around an empty throne;  
And, aureoles dark and angels dead,  
Man with his own life stands alone.

'I am,' he says his bankrupt creed:  
'I am,' and is again a clod:  
The sparrow starts, the grasses stir,  
For he has said the name of God.

## THE DONKEY

When fishes flew and forests walked  
And figs grew upon thorn,  
Some moment when the moon was blood  
Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry  
And ears like errant wings,  
The devil's walking parody  
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,  
Of ancient crooked will;  
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,  
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;  
One far fierce hour and sweet:  
There was a shout about my ears,  
And palms before my feet.

THE BEATIFIC VISION

Through what fierce incarnations, furled

In fire and darkness, did I go,

Ere I was worthy in the world

To see a dandelion grow?

Well, if in any woes or wars

I bought my naked right to be,

Grew worthy of the grass, nor gave

The wren, my brother, shame for me.

But what shall God not ask of him

In the last time when all is told,

Who saw her stand beside the hearth,

The firelight garbing her in gold?

## THE HOPE OF THE STREETS

The still sweet meadows shimmered: and I stood  
And cursed them, bloom of hedge and bird of tree,  
And bright and high beyond the hunch-backed wood  
The thunder and the splendour of the sea.

Give back the Babylon where I was born,  
The lips that gape give back, the hands that grope,  
And noise and blood and suffocating scorn  
An eddy of fierce faces--and a hope

That 'mid those myriad heads one head find place,  
With brown hair curled like breakers of the sea,  
And two eyes set so strangely in the face  
That all things else are nothing suddenly.

## ECCLESIASTES

There is one sin: to call a green leaf grey,

Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.

There is one blasphemy: for death to pray,

For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

There is one creed: 'neath no world-terror's wing

Apples forget to grow on apple-trees.

There is one thing is needful--everything--

The rest is vanity of vanities.

## THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN

The World is ours till sunset,  
Holly and fire and snow;  
And the name of our dead brother  
Who loved us long ago.

The grown folk mighty and cunning,  
They write his name in gold;  
But we can tell a little  
Of the million tales he told.

He taught them laws and watchwords,  
To preach and struggle and pray;  
But he taught us deep in the hayfield  
The games that the angels play.

Had he stayed here for ever,  
Their world would be wise as ours--  
And the king be cutting capers,  
And the priest be picking flowers.

But the dark day came: they gathered:  
On their faces we could see  
They had taken and slain our brother,  
And hanged him on a tree.

## THE FISH

Dark the sea was: but I saw him,  
One great head with goggle eyes,  
Like a diabolic cherub  
Flying in those fallen skies.

I have heard the hoarse deniers,  
I have known the wordy wars;  
I have seen a man, by shouting,  
Seek to orphan all the stars.

I have seen a fool half-fashioned  
Borrow from the heavens a tongue,  
So to curse them more at leisure--  
--And I trod him not as dung.

For I saw that finny goblin  
Hidden in the abyss untrod;  
And I knew there can be laughter  
On the secret face of God.

Blow the trumpets, crown the sages,  
Bring the age by reason fed!  
(He that sitteth in the heavens,  
'He shall laugh'--the prophet said.)

## GOLD LEAVES

Lo! I am come to autumn,  
When all the leaves are gold;  
Grey hairs and golden leaves cry out  
The year and I are old.

In youth I sought the prince of men,  
Captain in cosmic wars,  
Our Titan, even the weeds would show  
Defiant, to the stars.

But now a great thing in the street  
Seems any human nod,  
Where shift in strange democracy  
The million masks of God.

In youth I sought the golden flower  
Hidden in wood or wold,  
But I am come to autumn,  
When all the leaves are gold.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

I had grown weary of him; of his breath  
And hands and features I was sick to death.  
Each day I heard the same dull voice and tread;  
I did not hate him: but I wished him dead.  
And he must with his blank face fill my life--  
Then my brain blackened; and I snatched a knife.

But ere I struck, my soul's grey deserts through  
A voice cried, 'Know at least what thing you do.'  
'This is a common man: knowest thou, O soul,  
What this thing is? somewhere where seasons roll  
There is some living thing for whom this man  
Is as seven heavens girt into a span,  
For some one soul you take the world away--  
Now know you well your deed and purpose. Slay!'

Then I cast down the knife upon the ground  
And saw that mean man for one moment crowned.  
I turned and laughed: for there was no one by--  
The man that I had sought to slay was I.

A CERTAIN EVENING

That night the whole world mingled,

The souls were babes at play,

And angel danced with devil.

And God cried, 'Holiday!'

The sea had climbed the mountain peaks,

And shouted to the stars

To come to play: and down they came

Splashing in happy wars.

The pine grew apples for a whim,

The cart-horse built a nest;

The oxen flew, the flowers sang,

The sun rose in the west.

And 'neath the load of many worlds,

The lowest life God made

Lifted his huge and heavy limbs

And into heaven strayed.

To where the highest life God made

Before His presence stands;

But God himself cried, 'Holiday!'

And she gave me both her hands.

## A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

All day the nations climb and crawl and pray  
In one long pilgrimage to one white shrine,  
Where sleeps a saint whose pardon, like his peace,  
Is wide as death, as common, as divine.

His statue in an aureole fills the shrine,  
The reckless nightingale, the roaming fawn,  
Share the broad blessing of his lifted hands,  
Under the canopy, above the lawn.

But one strange night, a night of gale and flood,  
A sound came louder than the wild wind's tone;  
The grave-gates shook and opened: and one stood  
Blue in the moonlight, rotten to the bone.

Then on the statue, graven with holy smiles,  
There came another smile--tremendous--one  
Of an Egyptian god. 'Why should you rise?  
'Do I not guard your secret from the sun?

The nations come; they kneel among the flowers  
Sprung from your blood, blossoms of May and June,  
Which do not poison them--is it not strange?  
Speak!' And the dead man shuddered in the moon.

Shall I not cry the truth?'--the dead man cowered--

Is it not sad, with life so tame and cold,

What earth should fade into the sun's white fires

With the best jest in all its tales untold?

'If I should cry that in this shrine lie hid

Stories that Satan from his mouth would spew;

Wild tales that men in hell tell hoarsely--speak!

Saint and Deliverer! Should I slander you?'

Slowly the cowering corpse reared up its head,

'Nay, I am vile ... but when for all to see,

You stand there, pure and painless--death of life!

Let the stars fall--I say you slander me!

'You make me perfect, public, colourless;

You make my virtues sit at ease--you lie!

For mine were never easy--lost or saved,

I had a soul--I was. And where am I?

Where is my good? the little real hoard,

The secret tears, the sudden chivalries;

The tragic love, the futile triumph--where?

Thief, dog, and son of devils--where are these?

I will lift up my head: in leprous loves

Lost, and the soul's dishonourable scars--

By God I was a better man than This  
That stands and slanders me to all the stars.

'Come down!' And with an awful cry, the corse  
Sprang on the sacred tomb of many tales,  
And stone and bone, locked in a loathsome strife,  
Swayed to the singing of the nightingales.

Then one was thrown: and where the statue stood  
Under the canopy, above the lawn,  
The corse stood; grey and lean, with lifted hands  
Raised in tremendous welcome to the dawn.

'Now let all nations climb and crawl and pray;  
Though I be basest of my old red clan,  
They shall not scale, with cries or sacrifice,  
The stature of the spirit of a man.'

## THE MARINER

The violet scent is sacred  
Like dreams of angels bright;  
The hawthorn smells of passion  
Told in a moonless night.

But the smell is in my nostrils,  
Through blossoms red or gold,  
Of my own green flower unfading,  
A bitter smell and bold.

The lily smells of pardon,  
The rose of mirth; but mine  
Smells shrewd of death and honour,  
And the doom of Adam's line.

The heavy scent of wine-shops  
Floats as I pass them by,  
But never a cup I quaff from,  
And never a house have I.

Till dropped down forty fathoms,  
I lie eternally;  
And drink from God's own goblet  
The green wine of the sea.

## THE TRIUMPH OF MAN

I plod and peer amid mean sounds and shapes,  
I hunt for dusty gain and dreary praise,  
And slowly pass the dismal grinning days,  
Monkeying each other like a line of apes.

What care? There was one hour amid all these  
When I had stripped off like a tawdry glove  
My starriest hopes and wants, for very love  
Of time and desolate eternities.

Yea, for one great hour's triumph, not in me  
Nor any hope of mine did I rejoice,  
But in a meadow game of girls and boys  
Some sunset in the centuries to be.

## CYCLOPEAN

A mountainous and mystic brute  
No rein can curb, no arrow shoot,  
Upon whose domed deformed back  
I sweep the planets scorching track.

Old is the elf, and wise, men say,  
His hair grows green as ours grows grey;  
He mocks the stars with myriad hands.  
High as that swinging forest stands.

But though in pigmy wanderings dull  
I scour the deserts of his skull,  
I never find the face, eyes, teeth.  
Lowering or laughing underneath.

I met my foe in an empty dell,  
His face in the sun was naked hell.  
I thought, 'One silent, bloody blow.  
No priest would curse, no crowd would know.'

Then cowered: a daisy, half concealed,  
Watched for the fame of that poor field;  
And in that flower and suddenly  
Earth opened its one eye on me.

JOSEPH

If the stars fell; night's nameless dreams  
Of bliss and blasphemy came true,  
If skies were green and snow were gold,  
And you loved me as I love you;

O long light hands and curled brown hair,  
And eyes where sits a naked soul;  
Dare I even then draw near and burn  
My fingers in the aureole?

Yes, in the one wise foolish hour  
God gives this strange strength to a man.  
He can demand, though not deserve,  
Where ask he cannot, seize he can.

But once the blood's wild wedding o'er,  
Were not dread his, half dark desire,  
To see the Christ-child in the cot,  
The Virgin Mary by the fire?

MODERN ELFLAND

I Cut a staff in a churchyard copse,  
I clad myself in ragged things,  
I set a feather in my cap  
That fell out of an angel's wings.

I filled my wallet with white stones,  
I took three foxgloves in my hand,  
I slung my shoes across my back,  
And so I went to fairyland.

But Lo, within that ancient place  
Science had reared her iron crown,  
And the great cloud of steam went up  
That telleth where she takes a town.

But cowed with smoke and starred with lamps  
That strange land's light was still its own;  
The word that witched the woods and hills  
Spoke in the iron and the stone.

Not Nature's hand had ever curved  
That mute unearthly porter's spine.  
Like sleeping dragon's sudden eyes  
The signals leered along the line.

The chimneys thronging crooked or straight

Were fingers signalling the sky;

The dog that strayed across the street

Seemed four-legged by monstrosity.

'In vain,' I cried, 'though you too touch

The new time's desecrating hand,

Through all the noises of a town

I hear the heart of fairyland.'

I read the name above a door,

Then through my spirit pealed and passed:

'This is the town of thine own home,

And thou hast looked on it at last.'

## ETERNITIES

I cannot count the pebbles in the brook.

Well hath He spoken: 'Swear not by thy head,

Thou knowest not the hairs,' though He, we read,

Writes that wild number in his own strange book.

I cannot count the sands or search the seas,

Death cometh, and I leave so much untrod.

Grant my immortal aureole, O my God,

And I will name the leaves upon the trees.

In heaven I shall stand on gold and glass,

Still brooding earth's arithmetic to spell;

Or see the fading of the fires of hell

Ere I have thanked my God for all the grass.

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap,

His hair was like a light.

(O weary, weary were the world,

But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast,

His hair was like a star.

(O stern and cunning are the kings,

But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,

His hair was like a fire.

(O weary, weary is the world,

But here the world's desire.)

The Christ-child stood at Mary's knee,

His hair was like a crown,

And all the flowers looked up at him.

And all the stars looked down.

ALONE

Blessings there are of cradle and of clan,  
Blessings that fall of priests' and princes' hands;  
But never blessing full of lives and lands,  
Broad as the blessing of a lonely man.

Though that old king fell from his primal throne,  
And ate among the cattle, yet this pride  
Had found him in the deepest grass, and cried  
An 'Ecce Homo' with the trumpets blown.

And no mad tyrant, with almighty ban,  
Who in strong madness dreams himself divine,  
But hears through fumes of flattery and of wine  
The thunder of this blessing name him man.

Let all earth rot past saints' and seraphs' plea,  
Yet shall a Voice cry through its last lost war,  
'This is the world, this red wreck of a star,  
That a man blessed beneath an alder-tree.'

KING'S CROSS STATION

This circled cosmos whereof man is god  
Has suns and stars of green and gold and red,  
And cloudlands of great smoke, that range o'er range  
Far floating, hide its iron heavens o'erhead.

God! shall we ever honour what we are,  
And see one moment ere the age expire,  
The vision of man shouting and erect,  
Whirled by the shrieking steeds of flood and fire?

Or must Fate act the same grey farce again,  
And wait, till one, amid Time's wrecks and scars,  
Speaks to a ruin here, 'What poet-race  
Shot such cyclopean arches at the stars?'

## THE HUMAN TREE

Many have Earth's lovers been,  
Tried in seas and wars, I ween;  
Yet the mightiest have I seen:

Yea, the best saw I.

One that in a field alone  
Stood up stiller than a stone  
Lest a moth should fly.

Birds had nested in his hair,  
On his shoon were mosses rare.  
Insect empires flourished there,

Worms in ancient wars;

But his eyes burn like a glass,  
Hearing a great sea of grass

Roar towards the stars.

From, them to the human tree

Rose a cry continually,

'Thou art still, our Father, we

Fain would have thee nod.

Make the skies as blood below thee,

Though thou slay us, we shall know thee.

Answer us, O God!

'Show thine ancient flame and thunder,

Split the stillness once asunder,

Lest we whisper, lest we wonder

Art thou there at all?'

But I saw him there alone,

Standing stiller than a stone

Lest a moth should fall.

TO THEM THAT MOURN

(W.E.G., May 1898)

Lift up your heads: in life, in death,

God knoweth his head was high.

Quit we the coward's broken breath

Who watched a strong man die.

If we must say, 'No more his peer

Cometh; the flag is furled.'

Stand not too near him, lest he hear

That slander on the world.

The good green earth he loved and trod

Is still, with many a scar,

Writ in the chronicles of God,

A giant-bearing star.

He fell: but Britain's banner swings

Above his sunken crown.

Black death shall have his toll of kings

Before that cross goes down.

Once more shall move with mighty things

His house of ancient tale,

Where kings whose hands were kissed of kings

Went in: and came out pale.

O young ones of a darker day,

In art's wan colours clad,

Whose very love and hate are grey--

Whose very sin is sad.

Pass on: one agony long-drawn

Was merrier than your mirth,

When hand-in-hand came death and dawn,

And spring was on the earth.

## THE OUTLAW

Priest, is any song-bird stricken?

Is one leaf less on the tree?

Is this wine less red and royal

That the hangman waits for me?

He upon your cross that hangeth,

It is writ of priestly pen,

On the night they built his gibbet,

Drank red wine among his men.

Quaff, like a brave man, as he did,

Wine and death as heaven pours--

This is my fate: O ye rulers,

O ye pontiffs, what is yours?

To wait trembling, lest yon loathly

Gallows-shape whereon I die,

In strange temples yet unbuilted,

Blaze upon an altar high.

BEHIND

I saw an old man like a child,  
His blue eyes bright, his white hair wild,  
Who turned for ever, and might not stop,  
Round and round like an urchin's top.

'Fool,' I cried, 'while you spin round,  
'Others grow wise, are praised, are crowned.'  
Ever the same round road he trod,  
'This is better: I seek for God.'

'We see the whole world, left and right,  
Yet at the blind back hides from sight  
The unseen Master that drives us forth  
To East and West, to South and North.

'Over my shoulder for eighty years  
I have looked for the gleam of the sphere of spheres.'  
'In all your turning, what have you found?'  
'At least, I know why the world goes round.'

THE END OF FEAR

Though the whole heaven be one-eyed with the moon,  
Though the dead landscape seem a thing possessed,  
Yet I go singing through that land oppressed  
As one that singeth through the flowers of June.

No more, with forest-fingers crawling free  
O'er dark flint wall that seems a wall of eyes,  
Shall evil break my soul with mysteries  
Of some world-poison maddening bush and tree.

No more shall leering ghosts of pimp and king  
With bloody secrets veiled before me stand.  
Last night I held all evil in my hand  
Closed: and behold it was a little thing.

I broke the infernal gates and looked on him  
Who fronts the strong creation with a curse;  
Even the god of a lost universe,  
Smiling above his hideous cherubim.

And pierced far down in his soul's crypt unriven  
The last black crooked sympathy and shame,  
And hailed him with that ringing rainbow name  
Erased upon the oldest book in heaven.

Like emptied idiot masks, sin's loves and wars

Stare at me now: for in the night I broke

The bubble of a great world's jest, and woke

Laughing with laughter such as shakes the stars.

THE HOLY OF HOLIES

'Elder father, though thine eyes  
Shine with hoary mysteries,  
Canst thou tell what in the heart  
Of a cowslip blossom lies?

'Smaller than all lives that be,  
Secret as the deepest sea,  
Stands a little house of seeds,  
Like an elfin's granary,

'Speller of the stones and weeds,  
Skilled in Nature's crafts and creeds,  
Tell me what is in the heart  
Of the smallest of the seeds.'

'God Almighty, and with Him  
Cherubim and Seraphim,  
Filling all eternity--  
Adonai Elohim.'

## THE MIRROR OF MADMEN

I dreamed a dream of heaven, white as frost,  
The splendid stillness of a living host;  
Vast choirs of upturned faces, line o'er line.  
Then my blood froze; for every face was mine.

Spirits with sunset plumage throng and pass,  
Glassed darkly in the sea of gold and glass.  
But still on every side, in every spot,  
I saw a million selves, who saw me not.

I fled to quiet wastes, where on a stone,  
Perchance, I found a saint, who sat alone;  
I came behind: he turned with slow, sweet grace,  
And faced me with my happy, hateful face.

I cowered like one that in a tower doth bide,  
Shut in by mirrors upon every side;  
Then I saw, islanded in skies alone  
And silent, one that sat upon a throne.

His robe was bordered with rich rose and gold,  
Green, purple, silver out of sunsets old;  
But o'er his face a great cloud edged with fire,  
Because it covereth the world's desire.

But as I gazed, a silent worshipper,  
Methought the cloud began to faintly stir;  
Then I fell flat, and screamed with grovelling head,  
'If thou hast any lightning, strike me dead!

'But spare a brow where the clean sunlight fell,  
The crown of a new sin that sickens hell.  
Let me not look aloft and see mine own  
Feature and form upon the Judgment-throne.'

Then my dream snapped: and with a heart that leapt  
I saw across the tavern where I slept,  
The sight of all my life most full of grace,  
A gin-damned drunkard's wan half-witted face.

E.C.B.

Before the grass grew over me,  
I knew one good man through and through,  
And knew a soul and body joined  
Are stronger than the heavens are blue.

A wisdom worthy of thy joy,  
O great heart, read I as I ran;  
Now, though men smite me on the face,  
I cannot curse the face of man.

I loved the man I saw yestreen  
Hanged with his babe's blood on his palms.  
I loved the man I saw to-day  
Who knocked not when he came with alms.

Hush!--for thy sake I even faced  
The knowledge that is worse than hell;  
And loved the man I saw but now  
Hanging head downwards in the well.

## THE DESECRATERS

Witness all: that unrepenting,  
Feathers flying, music high,  
I go down to death unshaken  
By your mean philosophy.

For your wages, take my body,  
That at least to you I leave;  
Set the sulky plumes upon it,  
Bid the grinning mummers grieve.

Stand in silence: steep your raiment  
In the night that hath no star;  
Don the mortal dress of devils,  
Blacker than their spirits are.

Since ye may not, of your mercy,  
Ere I lie on such a hearse,  
Hurl me to the living jackals  
God hath built for sepulchres.

AN ALLIANCE

This is the weird of a world-old folk,  
That not till the last link breaks,  
Not till the night is blackest,  
The blood of Hengist wakes.  
When the sun is black in heaven,  
The moon as blood above,  
And the earth is full of hatred,  
This people tells its love.

In change, eclipse, and peril,  
Under the whole world's scorn,  
By blood and death and darkness  
The Saxon peace is sworn;  
That all our fruit be gathered,  
And all our race take hands,  
And the sea be a Saxon river  
That runs through Saxon lands.

Lo! not in vain we bore him;  
Behold it! not in vain,  
Four centuries' dooms of torture  
Choked in the throat of Spain,  
Ere priest or tyrant triumph--  
We know how well--we know--  
Bone of that bone can whiten,

Blood of that blood can flow.

Deep grows the hate of kindred,

Its roots take hold on hell;

No peace or praise can heal it,

But a stranger heals it well.

Seas shall be red as sunsets,

And kings' bones float as foam,

And heaven be dark with vultures,

The night our son comes home.

## THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

A child sits in a sunny place,  
Too happy for a smile,  
And plays through one long holiday  
With balls to roll and pile;  
A painted wind-mill by his side  
Runs like a merry tune,  
But the sails are the four great winds of heaven,  
And the balls are the sun and moon.

A staring doll's-house shows to him  
Green floors and starry rafter,  
And many-coloured graven dolls  
Live for his lonely laughter.  
The dolls have crowns and aureoles,  
Helmets and horns and wings.  
For they are the saints and seraphim,  
The prophets and the kings.

THE LAST MASQUERADE

A wan new garment of young green

Touched, as you turned your soft brown hair

And in me surged the strangest prayer

Ever in lover's heart hath been.

That I who saw your youth's bright page,

A rainbow change from robe to robe,

Might see you on this earthly globe,

Crowned with the silver crown of age.

Your dear hair powdered in strange guise,

Your dear face touched with colours pale:

And gazing through the mask and veil

The mirth of your immortal eyes.

## THE EARTH'S SHAME

Name not his deed: in shuddering and in haste

We dragged him darkly o'er the windy fell:

That night there was a gibbet in the waste,

And a new sin in hell.

Be his deed hid from commonwealths and kings,

By all men born be one true tale forgot;

But three things, braver than all earthly things,

Faced him and feared him not.

Above his head and sunken secret face

Nested the sparrow's young and dropped not dead.

From the red blood and slime of that lost place

Grew daisies white, not red.

And from high heaven looking upon him,

Slowly upon the face of God did come

A smile the cherubim and seraphim

Hid all their faces from.

VANITY

A wan sky greener than the lawn,

A wan lawn paler than the sky.

She gave a flower into my hand,

And all the hours of eve went by.

Who knows what round the corner waits

To smite? If shipwreck, snare, or slur

Shall leave me with a head to lift,

Worthy of him that spoke with her.

A wan sky greener than the lawn,

A wan lawn paler than the sky.

She gave a flower into my hand,

And all the days of life went by.

Live ill or well, this thing is mine,

From all I guard it, ill or well.

One tawdry, tattered, faded flower

To show the jealous kings in hell.

THE LAMP POST

Laugh your best, O blazoned forests,

Me ye shall not shift or shame

With your beauty: here among you

Man hath set his spear of flame.

Lamp to lamp we send the signal,

For our lord goes forth to war;

Since a voice, ere stars were builded,

Bade him colonise a star.

Laugh ye, cruel as the morning,

Deck your heads with fruit and flower,

Though our souls be sick with pity,

Yet our hands are hard with power.

We have read your evil stories,

We have heard the tiny yell

Through the voiceless conflagration

Of your green and shining hell.

And when men, with fires and shouting,

Break your old tyrannic pales;

And where ruled a single spider

Laugh and weep a million tales.

This shall be your best of boasting:

That some poet, poor of spine.

Full and sated with our wisdom,

Full and fiery with our wine,

Shall steal out and make a treaty

With the grasses and the showers,

Rail against the grey town-mother,

Fawn upon the scornful flowers;

Rest his head among the roses,

Where a quiet song-bird sounds,

And no sword made sharp for traitors,

Hack him into meat for hounds.

## THE PESSIMIST

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go--  
I know your hoary question, the riddle that all men know.  
You have weighed the stars in a balance, and grasped the skies in a span:  
Take, if you must have answer, the word of a common man.

Deep in my life lies buried one love unhealed, unshriven,  
One hunger still shall haunt me--yea, in the streets of heaven;  
This is the burden, babbler, this is the curse shall cling,  
This is the thing I bring you; this is the pleasant thing.

'Gainst you and all your sages, no joy of mine shall strive,  
This one dead self shall shatter the men you call alive.  
My grief I send to smite you, no pleasure, no belief,  
Lord of the battered grievance, what do you know of grief?

I only know the praises to heaven that one man gave,  
That he came on earth for an instant, to stand beside a grave,  
The peace of a field of battle, where flowers are born of blood.  
I only know one evil that makes the whole world good.

Beneath this single sorrow the globe of moon and sphere  
Turns to a single jewel, so bright and brittle and dear  
That I dread lest God should drop it, to be dashed into stars below.

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go.

A FAIRY TALE

All things grew upwards, foul and fair:  
The great trees fought and beat the air  
With monstrous wings that would have flown;  
But the old earth clung to her own,  
Holding them back from heavenly wars,  
Though every flower sprang at the stars.

But he broke free: while all things ceased,  
Some hour increasing, he increased.  
The town beneath him seemed a map,  
Above the church he cocked his cap,  
Above the cross his feather flew  
Above the birds and still he grew.

The trees turned grass; the clouds were riven;  
His feet were mountains lost in heaven;  
Through strange new skies he rose alone,  
The earth fell from him like a stone,  
And his own limbs beneath him far  
Seemed tapering down to touch a star.

He reared his head, shaggy and grim,  
Staring among the cherubim;  
The seven celestial floors he rent,

One crystal dome still o'er him bent:  
Above his head, more clear than hope,  
All heaven was a microscope.

A PORTRAIT

Fair faces crowd on Christmas night

Like seven suns a-row,

But all beyond is the wolfish wind

And the crafty feet of the snow.

But through the rout one figure goes

With quick and quiet tread;

Her robe is plain, her form is frail--

Wait if she turn her head.

I say no word of line or hue,

But if that face you see,

Your soul shall know the smile of faith's

Awful frivolity.

Know that in this grotesque old masque

Too loud we cannot sing,

Or dance too wild, or speak too wide

To praise a hidden thing.

That though the jest be old as night,

Still shaketh sun and sphere

An everlasting laughter

Too loud for us to hear.

FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM

The sun was black with judgment, and the moon

Blood: but between

I saw a man stand, saying, 'To me at least

The grass is green.

'There was no star that I forgot to fear

With love and wonder.

The birds have loved me'; but no answer came--

Only the thunder.

Once more the man stood, saying, 'A cottage door,

Wherethrough I gazed

That instant as I turned--yea, I am vile;

Yet my eyes blazed.

'For I had weighed the mountains in a balance,

And the skies in a scale,

I come to sell the stars--old lamps for new--

Old stars for sale.'

Then a calm voice fell all the thunder through,

A tone less rough:

'Thou hast begun to love one of my works

Almost enough.'

TO A CERTAIN NATION

We will not let thee be, for thou art ours.

We thank thee still, though thou forget these things,  
For that hour's sake when thou didst wake all powers  
With a great cry that God was sick of kings.

Leave thee there grovelling at their rusted greaves,  
These hulking cowards on a painted stage,  
Who, with imperial pomp and laurel leaves,  
Show their Marengo--one man in a cage.

These, for whom stands no type or title given  
In all the squalid tales of gore and pelf;  
Though cowed by crashing thunders from all heaven.  
Cain never said, 'My brother slew himself.'

Tear you the truth out of your drivelling spy,  
The maniac whom you set to swing death's scythe.  
Nay; torture not the torturer--let him lie:  
What need of racks to teach a worm to writhe?

Bear with us, O our sister, not in pride,  
Nor any scorn we see thee spoiled of knaves,  
But only shame to hear, where Danton died,  
Thy foul dead kings all laughing in their graves.

Thou hast a right to rule thyself; to be

The thing thou wilt; to grin, to fawn, to creep:

To crown these clumsy liars; ay, and we

Who knew thee once, we have a right to weep.

THE PRAISE OF DUST

'What of vile dust?' the preacher said.

    Methought the whole world woke,  
The dead stone lived beneath my foot,  
    And my whole body spoke.

'You, that play tyrant to the dust,  
    And stamp its wrinkled face,  
This patient star that flings you not  
    Far into homeless space.

'Come down out of your dusty shrine  
    The living dust to see,  
The flowers that at your sermon's end  
    Stand blazing silently.

'Rich white and blood-red blossom; stones,  
    Lichens like fire encrust;  
A gleam of blue, a glare of gold,  
    The vision of the dust.

'Pass them all by: till, as you come  
    Where, at a city's edge,  
Under a tree--I know it well--  
    Under a lattice ledge,

'The sunshine falls on one brown head.

You, too, O cold of clay,

Eater of stones, may haply hear

The trumpets of that day

'When God to all his paladins

By his own splendour swore

To make a fairer face than heaven,

Of dust and nothing more.'

## THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

Five kings rule o'er the Amorite,  
Mighty as fear and old as night;  
Swathed with unguent and gold and jewel,  
Waxed they merry and fat and cruel.  
Zedek of Salem, a terror and glory,  
Whose face was hid while his robes were gory;  
And Hoham of Hebron, whose loathly face is  
Heavy and dark o'er the ruin of races;  
And Piram of Jarmuth, drunk with strange wine,  
Who dreamed he had fashioned all stars that shine;  
And Debir of Eglon wild, without pity,  
Who raged like a plague in the midst of his city;  
And Japhia of Lachish, a fire that flameth,  
Who did in the daylight what no man nameth.

These five kings said one to another,  
'King unto king o'er the world is brother,  
Seeing that now, for a sign and a wonder,  
A red eclipse and a tongue of thunder,  
A shape and a finger of desolation,  
Is come against us a kingless nation.  
Gibeon hath failed us: it were not good  
That a man remember where Gibeon stood.'  
Then Gibeon sent to our captain, crying,  
'Son of Nun, let a shaft be flying,

For unclean birds are gathering greedily;  
Slack not thy hand, but come thou speedily.  
Yea, we are lost save thou maintain'st us,  
For the kings of the mountains are gathered against us.'

Then to our people spake the Deliverer,  
'Gibeon is high, yet a host may shiver her;  
Gibeon hath sent to me crying for pity,  
For the lords of the cities encompass the city  
With chariot and banner and bowman and lancer,  
And I swear by the living God I will answer.  
Gird you, O Israel, quiver and javelin,  
Shield and sword for the road we travel in;  
Verily, as I have promised, pay I  
Life unto Gibeon, death unto Ai.'

Sudden and still as a bolt shot right  
Up on the city we went by night.  
Never a bird of the air could say,  
'This was the children of Israel's way.'

Only the hosts sprang up from sleeping,  
Saw from the heights a dark stream sweeping;  
Sprang up straight as a great shout stung them,  
And heard the Deliverer's war-cry among them,  
Heard under cupola, turret, and steeple  
The awful cry of the kingless people.

Started the weak of them, shouted the strong of them,  
Crashed we a thunderbolt into the throng of them,  
Blindly with heads bent, and shields forced before us,  
We heard the dense roar of the strife closing o'er us.  
And drunk with the crash of the song that it sung them,  
We drove the great spear-blade in God's name among them.

Redder and redder the sword-flash fell.  
Our eyes and our nostrils were hotter than hell;  
Till full all the crest of the spear-surge shocking us,  
Hoham of Hebron cried out mocking us,  
'Nay, what need of the war-sword's plying,  
Out of the desert the dust comes flying.  
A little red dust, if the wind be blowing--  
Who shall reckon of its coming or going?'  
Back the Deliverer spake as a clarion,  
'Mock at thy slaves, thou eater of carrion!  
Laughest thou at us, in thy kingly clowning,  
We, that laughed upon Ramases frowning.  
We that stood up proud, unpardoned,  
When his face was dark and his heart was hardened?  
Pharaoh we knew and his steeds, not faster  
Than the word of the Lord in thine ear, O master.

Sheer through the turban his wantons wove him,  
Clean to the skull the Deliverer clove him;

And the two hosts reeled at the sign appalling,  
As the great king fell like a great house falling.

Loudly we shouted, and living and dying.

Bore them all backward with strength and strong crying;

And Caleb struck Zedek hard at the throat,

And Japhia of Lachish Zebulon smote.

The war-swords and axes were clashing and groaning,

The fallen were fighting and foaming and moaning;

The war-spears were breaking, the war-horns were braying,

Ere the hands of the slayers were sated with slaying.

And deep in the grasses grown gory and sodden,

The treaders of all men were trampled and trodden;

And over them, routed and reeled like cattle,

High over the turn of the tide of the battle,

High over noises that deafen and cover us,

Rang the Deliverer's voice out over us.

'Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,

Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!

Shout thou, people, a cry like thunder,

For the kings of the earth are broken asunder.

Now we have said as the thunder says it,

Something is stronger than strength and slays it.

Now we have written for all time later,

Five kings are great, yet a law is greater.

Stare, O sun! in thine own great glory,

This is the turn of the whole world's story.  
Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,  
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!

'Smite! amid spear-blades blazing and breaking.  
More than we know of is rising and making.  
Stab with the javelin, crash with the car!  
Cry! for we know not the thing that we are.  
Stand, O sun! that in horrible patience  
Smiled on the smoke and the slaughter of nations.  
Thou shalt grow sad for a little crying,  
Thou shalt be darkened for one man's dying--  
Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,  
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!'

After the battle was broken and spent  
Up to the hill the Deliverer went,  
Flung up his arms to the storm-clouds flying,  
And cried unto Israel, mightily crying,  
'Come up, O warriors! come up, O brothers!  
Tribesmen and herdsmen, maidens and mothers;  
The bondman's son and the bondman's daughter,  
The hewer of wood and the drawer of water,  
He that carries and he that brings,  
And set your foot on the neck of kings.'

This is the story of Gibeon fight--

Where we smote the lords of the Amorite;  
Where the banners of princes with slaughter were sodden.  
And the beards of seers in the rank grass trodden;  
Where the trees were wrecked by the wreck of cars,  
And the reek of the red field blotted the stars;  
Where the dead heads dropped from the swords that sever,  
Because His mercy endureth for ever.

'VULGARISED'

All round they murmur, 'O profane,  
Keep thy heart's secret hid as gold';  
But I, by God, would sooner be  
Some knight in shattering wars of old,

In brown outlandish arms to ride,  
And shout my love to every star  
With lungs to make a poor maid's name  
Deafen the iron ears of war.

Here, where these subtle cowards crowd,  
To stand and so to speak of love,  
That the four corners of the world  
Should hear it and take heed thereof.

That to this shrine obscure there be  
One witness before all men given,  
As naked as the hanging Christ,  
As shameless as the sun in heaven.

These whimperers--have they spared to us  
One dripping woe, one reeking sin?  
These thieves that shatter their own graves  
To prove the soul is dead within.

They talk; by God, is it not time

Some of Love's chosen broke the girth,

And told the good all men have known

Since the first morning of the earth?

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

A bird flew out at the break of day  
From the nest where it had curled,  
And ere the eve the bird had set  
Fear on the kings of the world.

The first tree it lit upon  
Was green with leaves unshed;  
The second tree it lit upon  
Was red with apples red;

The third tree it lit upon  
Was barren and was brown,  
Save for a dead man nailed thereon  
On a hill above a town.

That right the kings of the earth were gay  
And filled the cup and can;  
Last night the kings of the earth were chill  
For dread of a naked man.

'If he speak two more words,' they said,  
'The slave is more than the free;  
If he speak three more words,' they said,  
'The stars are under the sea.'

Said the King of the East to the King of the West,

I wot his frown was set,

'Lo; let us slay him and make him as dung,

It is well that the world forget.'

Said the King of the West to the King of the East,

I wot his smile was dread,

'Nay, let us slay him and make him a god,

It is well that our god be dead.'

They set the young man on a hill,

They nailed him to a rod;

And there in darkness and in blood

They made themselves a god.

And the mightiest word was left unsaid,

And the world had never a mark,

And the strongest man of the sons of men

Went dumb into the dark.

Then hymns and harps of praise they brought,

Incense and gold and myrrh,

And they thronged above the seraphim,

The poor dead carpenter.

'Thou art the prince of all,' they sang,

'Ocean and earth and air.'

Then the bird flew on to the cruel cross,  
And hid in the dead man's hair.

'Thou art the sun of the world,' they cried,  
'Speak if our prayers be heard.'  
And the brown bird stirred in the dead man's hair,  
And it seemed that the dead man stirred.

Then a shriek went up like the world's last cry  
From all nations under heaven,  
And a master fell before a slave  
And begged to be forgiven.

They cowered, for dread in his wakened eyes  
The ancient wrath to see;  
And the bird flew out of the dead Christ's hair,  
And lit on a lemon-tree.

AT NIGHT

How many million stars there be,  
That only God hath numberéd;  
But this one only chosen for me  
In time before her face was fled.  
Shall not one mortal man alive  
Hold up his head?

## THE WOOD-CUTTER

We came behind him by the wall,  
My brethren drew their brands,  
And they had strength to strike him down--  
And I to bind his hands.

Only once, to a lantern gleam,  
He turned his face from the wall,  
And it was as the accusing angel's face  
On the day when the stars shall fall.

I grasped the axe with shaking hands,  
I stared at the grass I trod;  
For I feared to see the whole bare heavens  
Filled with the face of God.

I struck: the serpentine slow blood  
In four arms soaked the moss--  
Before me, by the living Christ,  
The blood ran in a cross.

Therefore I toil in forests here  
And pile the wood in stacks,  
And take no fee from the shivering folk  
Till I have cleansed the axe.

But for a curse God cleared my sight,

And where each tree doth grow

I see a life with awful eyes,

And I must lay it low.

ART COLOURS

On must we go: we search dead leaves,  
We chase the sunset's saddest flames,  
The nameless hues that o'er and o'er  
In lawless wedding lost their names.

God of the daybreak! Better be  
Black savages; and grin to gird  
Our limbs in gaudy rags of red,  
The laughing-stock of brute and bird;

And feel again the fierce old feast,  
Blue for seven heavens that had sufficed,  
A gold like shining hoards, a red  
Like roses from the blood of Christ.

## THE TWO WOMEN

Lo! very fair is she who knows the ways

Of joy: in pleasure's mocking wisdom old,

The eyes that might be cold to flattery, kind;

The hair that might be grey with knowledge, gold.

But thou art more than these things, O my queen,

For thou art clad in ancient wars and tears.

And looking forth, framed in the crown of thorns,

I saw the youngest face in all the spheres.

THE WILD KNIGHT

The wasting thistle whitens on my crest,  
The barren grasses blow upon my spear,  
A green, pale pennon: blazon of wild faith  
And love of fruitless things: yea, of my love,  
Among the golden loves of all the knights,  
Alone: most hopeless, sweet, and blasphemous,  
The love of God:

I hear the crumbling creeds  
Like cliffs washed down by water, change, and pass;  
I hear a noise of words, age after age,  
A new cold wind that blows across the plains,  
And all the shrines stand empty; and to me  
All these are nothing: priests and schools may doubt  
Who never have believed; but I have loved.  
Ah friends, I know it passing well, the love  
Wherewith I love; it shall not bring to me  
Return or hire or any pleasant thing--  
Ay, I have tried it: Ay, I know its roots.  
Earthquake and plague have burst on it in vain  
And rolled back shattered--

Babbling neophytes!  
Blind, startled fools--think you I know it not?  
Think you to teach me? Know I not His ways?  
Strange-visaged blunders, mystic cruelties.  
All! all! I know Him, for I love Him. Go!

So, with the wan waste grasses on my spear,  
I ride for ever, seeking after God.

My hair grows whiter than my thistle plume,  
And all my limbs are loose; but in my eyes  
The star of an unconquerable praise:  
For in my soul one hope for ever sings,  
That at the next white corner of a road  
My eyes may look on Him....

Hush--I shall know

The place when it is found: a twisted path  
Under a twisted pear-tree--this I saw  
In the first dream I had ere I was born,  
Wherein He spoke....

But the grey clouds come down  
In hail upon the icy plains: I ride,  
Burning for ever in consuming fire.

## THE WILD KNIGHT

A dark manor-house shuttered and unlighted, outlined against a pale sunset: in front a large, but neglected, garden. To the right, in the foreground, the porch of a chapel, with coloured windows lighted. Hymns within.

Above the porch a grotesque carved bracket, supporting a lantern. Astride of it sits CAPTAIN REDFEATHER, a flagon in his hand.

REDFEATHER.

I have drunk to all I know of,  
To every leaf on the tree,  
To the highest bird of the heavens,  
To the lowest fish of the sea.  
What toast, what toast remaineth,  
Drunk down in the same good wine,  
By the tippler's cup in the tavern,  
And the priest's cup at the shrine?

[A Priest comes out, stick in hand, and looks right and left.]

VOICES WITHIN.

The brawler ...

PRIEST.

He has vanished

REDFEATHER.

To the stars.

[The Priest looks up.]

PRIEST [angrily].

What would you there, sir?

REDFEATHER.

Give you all a toast.

[Lifts his flagon. More priests come out.]

I see my life behind me: bad enough--  
Drink, duels, madness, beggary, and pride,  
The life of the unfit: yet ere I drop  
On Nature's rubbish heap, I weigh it all,  
And give you all a toast--

[Reels to his feet and stands.]

The health of God!

[They all recoil from him.]

Let's give the Devil of the Heavens His due!  
He that made grass so green, and wine so red,  
Is not so black as you have painted him.

[Drinks.]

PRIEST.

Blaspheming profligate!

REDFEATHER [hurls the flagon among them.]

How! ye dumb dogs,  
I named your King--let me have one great shout,  
Flutter the seraphim like startled birds;  
Make God recall the good days of His youth  
Ere saints had saddened Him: when He came back  
Conqueror of Chaos in a six days' war,  
With all the sons of God shouting for joy ...

PRIEST.

And you--what is your right, and who are you,  
To praise God?

REDFEATHER.

A lost soul. In earth or heaven  
What has a better right?

PRIEST.

Go, pagan, go!

Drink, dice, and dance: take no more thought than blind

Beasts of the field....

REDFEATHER.

Or ... lilies of the field,

To quote a pagan sage. I go my way.

PRIEST [solemnly].

And when Death comes....

REDFEATHER.

He shall not find me dead.

[Puts on his plumed hat. The priests go out.]

REDFEATHER.

These frozen fools....

[The Lady Olive comes out of the chapel. He sees her.]

Oh, they were right enough.

Where shall I hide my carrion from the sun?

[Buries his face. His hat drops to the ground.]

OLIVE [looking up.]

Captain, are you from church? I saw you not.

REDFEATHER.

No, I am here.

[Lays his hand on a gargoyle.]

I, too, am a grotesque,  
And dance with all the devils on the roof.

OLIVE [with a strange smile.]

For Satan, also, I have often prayed.

REDFEATHER [roughly].

Satan may worry women if he will,  
For he was but an angel ere he fell,  
But I--before I fell--I was a man.

OLIVE.

He too, my Master, was a man: too strong  
To fear a strong man's sins: 'tis written He  
Descended into hell.

REDFEATHER.

Write, then, that I

[Leaps to the ground before her.]

Descended into heaven....

You are ill?

OLIVE.

No, well....

REDFEATHER.

You speak the truth--you are the Truth--  
Lady, say once again then, 'I am well.'

OLIVE.

I--ah! God give me grace--I am nigh dead.

REDFEATHER [quietly.]

Lord Orm?

OLIVE.

Yes--yes.

REDFEATHER.

Is in your father's house--  
Having the title-deeds--would drive you forth.  
Homeless, and with your father sick to death,  
Into this winter, save on a condition  
Named....

OLIVE.

And unnameable. Even so; Lord Orm--  
Ah! do you know him?

REDFEATHER.

Ay, I saw him once.  
The sun shone on his face, that smiled and smiled,  
A sight not wholesome to the eyes of man.

OLIVE.

Captain, I tell you God once fell asleep.  
And in that hour the world went as it would;  
Dogs brought forth cats, and poison grew in grapes,  
And Orm was born....

REDFEATHER.

Why, curse him! can he not  
Be kicked or paid?

OLIVE [feverishly].

Hush! He is just behind  
There in the house--see how the great house glares,  
Glares like an ogre's mask--the whole dead house  
Possessed with bestial meaning....

[Screams]

Ah! the face!  
The whole great grinning house--his face! his face!  
His face!

REDFEATHER [in a voice of thunder, pointing away from the house].

Look there--look there!

OLIVE.

What is it? What?

REDFEATHER.

I think it was a bird.

OLIVE.

What thought you, truly?

REDFEATHER.

I think a mighty thought is drawing near.

[Enter THE WILD KNIGHT.]

THE WILD KNIGHT.

That house....

[Points.]

OLIVE.

Ah Christ! [Shudders.] I had forgotten it.

THE WILD KNIGHT [still pointing].

That house! the house at last, the house of God,

Wherein God makes an evening feast for me.

The house at last: I know the twisted path

Under the twisted pear-tree: this I saw

In the first dream I had ere I was born.

It is the house of God. He welcomes me.

[Strides forward.]

REDFEATHER.

That house. God's blood!

OLIVE [hysterically].

Is not this hell's own wit?

THE WILD KNIGHT.

God grows impatient, and His wine is poured,

His bread is broken.

[Rushes forward.]

REDFEATHER [leaps between].

Stand away, great fool,  
There is a devil there!

THE WILD KNIGHT [draws his sword, and waves it as he rushes].

God's house!--God's house!

REDFEATHER [plucks out his own sword].

Better my hand than his.

[The blades clash.]

God alone knows  
What That within might do to you, poor fool,  
I can but kill you.

[They fight. OLIVE tries to part them.]

REDFEATHER.

Olive, stand away!

OLIVE.

I will not stand away!

[Steps between the swords.]

Stranger, a word,  
Yes--you are right--God is within that house.

REDFEATHER.

Olive!

OLIVE.

But He is all too beautiful  
For us who only know of stars and flowers.  
The thing within is all too pure and fair,

[Shudders.]

Too awful in its ancient innocence,  
For men to look upon it and not die;  
Ourselves would fade into those still white fires  
Of peace and mercy.

[Struggles with her voice.]

There ... enough ... the law--

No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

REDFEATHER [sticking his sword in the ground].

You are the bravest lady in the world.

THE WILD KNIGHT [dazed].

May I not go within?

REDFEATHER.

Keep you the law--

No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

THE WILD KNIGHT [sadly].

Then I will go and lay me in the flowers,

For He may haply, as in ancient time,

Walk in the garden in the cool of day.

[He goes out.]

[OLIVE reels. REDFEATHER catches her.]

You are the strongest woman upon earth.  
The weakest woman than the strongest man  
Is stronger in her hour: this is the law.  
When the hour passes--then may we be strong.

OLIVE [wildly.]

The House ... the Face.

REDFEATHER [fiercely].

I love you. Look at me!

OLIVE [turns her face to him.]

I hear six birds sing in that little tree,  
Say, is the old earth laughing at my fears?  
I think I love you also....

REDFEATHER.

What I am  
You know. But I will never curse a man,  
Even in a mirror.

OLIVE [smiling at him].

And the Devil's dance?

REDFEATHER.

The Devil plotted since the world was young

With alchemies of fire and witches' oils

And magic. But he never made a man.

OLIVE.

No; not a man.

REDFEATHER.

Not even my Lord Orm.

Look at the house now--

[She starts and looks.]

Honest brick and tiles.

OLIVE.

You have a strange strength in this hour.

REDFEATHER.

This hour

I see with mortal eye as in one flash

The whole divine democracy of things,

And dare the stars to scorn a scavenge-heap.

Olive, I tell you every soul is great.

Weave we green crowns--how noble and how high;

Fling we white flowers--how radiant and how pure

Is he, whoe'er he be, who next shall cross

This scrap of grass....

[Enter LORD ORM. ]

OLIVE [screams].

Ah!

REDFEATHER [pointing to the chapel].

Olive, go and pray  
for a man soon to die. Good-day, my Lord.

[She goes in.]

LORD ORM.

Good-day.

REDFEATHER.

I am a friend to Lady Olive.

LORD ORM.

Sir, you are fortunate.

REDFEATHER.

Most fortunate

In finding, sword on thigh and ready, one

Who is a villain and a gentleman.

LORD ORM [picks up the flagon].

Empty, I see.

REDFEATHER.

Oh sir, you never drink.

You dread to lose yourself before the stars--

Do you not dread to sleep?

LORD ORM [violently].

What would you here?

REDFEATHER.

Receive from you the title-deeds you hold.

LORD ORM.

You entertain me.

REDFEATHER.

With a bout at foils?

LORD ORM.

I will not fight.

REDFEATHER.

I know you better, then.

I have seen men grow mangier than the beasts,

Eat bread with blood upon their fingers, grin

While women burned: but one last law they served.

When I say 'Coward,' is the law awake?

LORD ORM.

Hear me, then, too: I have seen robbers rule,  
And thieves go clad in gold--age after age--  
Because, though sordid, ragged, rude, and mean,  
They saw, like gods, no law above their heads.  
But when they fell--then for this cause they fell,  
This last mean cobweb of the fairy tales  
Of good and ill: that they must stand and fight  
When a man bade, though they had chose to stand  
And fight not. I am stronger than the world.

[Folds his arms.]

REDFEATHER [lifts his hand].

If in your body be the blood of man,

[Strikes him.]

Now let it rush to the face--

God! Have you sunk

Lower than anger?

LORD ORM.

How I triumph now.

REDFEATHER [stamps wildly].

Damned, whimpering dog! vile, snivelling, sick poltroon!

Are you alive?

LORD ORM.

Evil, be thou my good;

Let the sun blacken and the moon be blood:

I have said the words.

REDFEATHER [studying him].

And if I struck you dead,

You would turn to daisies!

LORD ORM.

And you do not strike.

REDFEATHER [dreamily].

Indeed, poor soul, such magic would be kind

And full of pity as a fairy-tale:

One touch of this bright wand [Lifts his sword]

and down would drop

The dark abortive blunder that is you.

And you would change, forgiven, into flowers.

LORD ORM.

And yet--and yet you do not strike me dead.  
I do not draw: the sword is in your hand--  
Drive the blade through me where I stand.

REDFEATHER.

Lord Orm,  
You asked the Lady Olive (I can speak  
As to a toad to you, my lord)--you asked  
Olive to be your paramour: and she--

LORD ORM.

Refused.

REDFEATHER.

And yet her father was at stake,  
And she is soft and kind. Now look at me,  
Ragged and ruined, soaked in bestial sins:  
My lord, I too have my virginity--  
Turn the thing round, my lord, and topside down,  
You cannot spell it. Be the fact enough,  
I use no sword upon a swordless man.

LORD ORM.

For her?

REDFEATHER.

I too have my virginity.

LORD ORM.

Now look on me: I am the lord of earth,  
For I have broken the last bond of man.  
I stand erect, crowned with the stars--and why?  
Because I stand a coward--because you  
Have mercy--on a coward. Do I win?

REDFEATHER.

Though there you stand with moving mouth and eyes,  
I think, my lord, you are not possible--  
God keep you from my dreams.

[Goes out.]

LORD ORM.

Alone and free.

Since first in flowery meads a child I ran,  
My one long thirst--to be alone and free.  
Free of all laws, creeds, codes, and common tests,  
Shameless, anarchic, infinite.

Why, then,

I might have done in that dark liberty--  
If I should say 'a good deed,' men would laugh,  
But here are none to laugh.

The godless world

Be thanked there is no God to spy on me,  
Catch me and crown me with a vulgar crown  
For what I do: if I should once believe  
The horror of that ancient Eavesdropper  
Behind the starry arras of the skies,  
I should--well, well, enough of menaces--  
should not do the thing I come to do.  
What do I come to do? Let me but try  
To spell it to my soul.

Suppose a man

Perfectly free and utterly alone,  
Free of all love of law, equally free  
Of all the love of mutiny it breeds,  
Free of the love of heaven, and also free  
Of all the love of hell it drives us to;  
Not merely void of rules, unconscious of them;  
So strong that naught alive could do him hurt,

So wise that he knew all things, and so great  
That none knew what he was or what he did--  
A lawless giant.

[A pause: then in a low voice.]

Would he not be good?

Hate is the weakness of a thwarted thing,  
Pride is the weakness of a thing unpraised.  
But he, this man....  
He would be like a child  
Girt with the tomes of some vast library,  
Who reads romance after romance, and smiles  
When every tale ends well: impersonal  
As God he grows--melted in suns and stars;  
So would this boundless man, whom none could spy,  
Taunt him with virtue, censure him with vice,  
Rejoice in all men's joys; with golden pen  
Write all the live romances of the earth  
To a triumphant close....

Alone and free--

In this grey, cool, clean garden, washed with winds,  
What do I come to do among the grass,  
The daisies, and the dews? An awful thing,  
To prove I am that man.

That while these saints

Taunt me with trembling, dare me to revenge,

I breathe an upper air of ancient good  
And strong eternal laughter; send my sun  
And rain upon the evil and the just,  
Turn my left cheek unto the smiter. He  
That told me, sword in hand, that I had fallen  
Lower than anger, knew not I had risen  
Higher than pride....

Enough, the deeds are mine.

[Takes out the title-deeds.]

I come to write the end of a romance.  
A good romance: the characters--Lord Orm.  
Type of the starvéd heart and storéd brain,  
Who strives to hate and cannot; fronting him--  
Redfeather, rake in process of reform,  
At root a poet: I have hopes of him:  
He can love virtue, for he still loves vice.  
He is not all burnt out. He beats me there  
(How I beat him in owning it!); in love  
He is still young, and has the joy of shame.  
And for the Lady Olive--who shall speak?  
A man may weigh the courage of a man,  
But if there be a bottomless abyss  
It is a woman's valour: such as I  
Can only bow the knee and hide the face  
(Thank God there is no God to spy on me

And bring his curséd crowns).

No, there is none:

The old incurable hunger of the world

Surges in wolfish wars, age after age.

There was no God before me: none sees where,

Between the brute-womb and the deaf, dead grave,

Unhoping, unrecorded, unrepaid,

I make with smoke, fire, and burnt-offering

This sacrifice to Chaos. [Lights the papers.] None behold

Me write in fire the end of the romance.

Burn! I am God, and crown myself with stars.

Upon creation day: before was night

And chaos of a blind and cruel world.

I am the first God; I will trample hell,

Fight, conquer, make the story of the stars,

Like this poor story, end like a romance:

[The paper burns.]

Before was brainless night: but I am God

In this black world I rend. Let there be light!

[The paper blazes up, illuminating the garden.]

I, God ...

THE WILD KNIGHT [rushes forward].

God's Light! God's Voice; yes, it is He  
Walking in Eden in the cool of the day!

LORD ORM [screams].

Tricked! Caught!  
Damned screeching rat in a hole!

[Stabs him again and again with his sword; stamps on his face.]

THE WILD KNIGHT [faintly].

Earth grows too beautiful around me: shapes  
And colours fearfully wax fair and clear,  
For I have heard, as thro' a door ajar,  
Scraps of the huge soliloquy of God  
That moveth as a mask the lips of man,  
If man be very silent: they were right,  
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

[Dies.]

LORD ORM [staggers back laughing].

Saved, saved, my secret.

REDFEATHER [rushing in, sword in hand].

The drawn sword at last!

Guard, son of hell!

[They fight. ORM falls. OLIVE comes in.]

He too can die. Keep back!

Olive, keep back from him! I did not fear  
Him living, and he fell before my sword;  
But dead I fear him. All is ended now;  
A man's whole life tied in a bundle there,  
And no good deed. I fear him. Come away.

GOOD NEWS

Between a meadow and a cloud that sped

In rain and twilight, in desire and fear.

I heard a secret--hearken in your ear,

'Behold the daisy has a ring of red.'

That hour, with half of blessing, half of ban,

A great voice went through heaven, and earth and hell,

Crying, 'We are tricked, my great ones, is it well?

Now is the secret stolen by a man.'

Then waxed I like the wind because of this,  
And ran, like gospel and apocalypse,  
From door to door, with new anarchic lips,  
Crying the very blasphemy of bliss.

In the last wreck of Nature, dark and dread,  
Shall in eclipse's hideous hieroglyph,  
One wild form reel on the last rocking cliff,  
And shout, 'The daisy has a ring of red.'