

SELECTED POEMS

WILLIAM WATSON



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S E L E C T E D
P O E M S

B Y

BY WILLIAM WATSON



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SELECTED POEMS

ODE IN MAY

LET me go forth, and share
The overflowing Sun
With one wise friend, or one
Better than wise, being fair,
Where the pewit wheels and dips
On heights of bracken and ling,
And Earth, unto her leaflet tips,
Tingles with the Spring.

What is so sweet and dear
As a prosperous morn in May,
The confident prime of the day,
And the dauntless youth of the year,

When nothing that asks for bliss,
Asking aright, is denied,
And half of the world a bridegroom is,
And half of the world a bride ?

The Song of Mingling flows,
Grave, ceremonial, pure,
As once, from lips that endure,
The cosmic descant rose,
When the temporal lord of life,
Going his golden way,
Had taken a wondrous maid to wife
That long had said him nay.

For of old the Sun, our sire,
Came wooing the mother of men,
Earth, that was virginal then,
Vestal fire to his fire.
Silent her bosom and coy,
But the strong god sued and pressed ;
And born of their starry nuptial joy
Are all that drink of her breast.

And the triumph of him that begot,
And the travail of her that bore,
Behold, they are evermore
As warp and weft in our lot.
We are children of splendour and flame,
Of shuddering, also, and tears.
Magnificent out of the dust we came,
And abject from the Spheres.

O bright irresistible lord,
We are fruit of Earth's womb, each one,
And fruit of thy loins, O Sun,
Whence first was the seed outpoured.
To thee as our Father we bow,
Forbidden thy Father to see,
Who is older and greater than thou, as thou
Art greater and older than we.

Thou art but as a word of his speech,
Thou art but as a wave of his hand ;
Thou art brief as a glitter of sand
'Twi'x tide and tide on his beach ;

Thou art less than a spark of his fire,
Or a moment's mood of his soul :
Thou art lost in the notes on the lips of
his choir
That chant the chant of the Whole.

ODE TO AUTUMN

THOU burden of all songs the earth hath sung,
Thou retrospect in Time's reverted eyes,
Thou metaphor of everything that dies,
That dies ill-starred, or dies beloved and young
And therefore blest and wise,—

O be less beautiful, or be less brief,
Thou tragic splendour, strange, and full of
fear!

In vain her pageant shall the Summer rear?
At thy mute signal, leaf by golden leaf,
Crumbles the gorgeous year.

Ah, ghostly as remembered mirth, the tale
Of Summer's bloom, the legend of the Spring!
And thou, too, flutterest an impatient wing,
Thou presence yet more fugitive and frail,
Thou most unbodied thing,

Whose very being is thy going hence,
And passage and departure all thy theme ;
Whose life doth still a splendid dying seem,
And thou at height of thy magnificence
A figment and a dream.

Stilled is the virgin rapture that was June,
And cold is August's panting heart of fire ;
And in the storm-dismantled forest-choir
For thine own elegy thy winds attune
Their wild and wizard lyre :
And poignant grows the charm of thy decay,
The pathos of thy beauty, and the sting,
Thou parable of greatness vanishing !
For me, thy woods of gold and skies of grey
With speech fantastic ring.

For me, to dreams resigned, there come and go,
'Twixt mountains draped and hooded night
and morn,
Elusive notes in wandering wafture borne,
From undiscoverable lips that blow
An immaterial horn ;

And spectral seem thy winter-boding trees,
Thy ruinous bowers and drifted foliage wet—
O Past and Future in sad bridal met,
O voice of everything that perishes,
And soul of all regret !

THE FIRST SKYLARK OF SPRING

Two worlds hast thou to dwell in, Sweet,—
The virginal, untroubled sky,
And this vext region at my feet.—
Alas, but one have I !

To all my songs there clings the shade,
The dulling shade, of mundane care.
They amid mortal mists are made,—
Thine, in immortal air.

My heart is dashed with griefs and fears ;
My song comes fluttering, and is gone.
O high above the home of tears,
Eternal Joy, sing on !

Not loftiest bard, of mightiest mind,
Shall ever chant a note so pure,
Till he can cast this earth behind
And breathe in heaven secure.

We sing of Life, with stormy breath
That shakes the lute's distempered string :
We sing of Love, and loveless Death
Takes up the song we sing.

And born in toils of Fate's control,
Insurgent from the womb, we strive
With proud, unmanumitted soul
To burst the golden gyve.

Thy spirit knows nor bounds nor bars ;
On thee no shreds of thralldom hang :
Not more enlarged, the morning stars
Their great Te Deum sang.

But I am fettered to the sod,
And but forget my bonds an hour ;
In amplitude of dreams a god,
A slave in dearth of power.

And fruitless knowledge clouds my soul,
And fretful ignorance irks it more.
Thou sing'st as if thou knew'st the whole,
And lightly held'st thy lore !

Somewhat as thou, Man once could sing,
In porches of the lucent morn,
Ere he had felt his lack of wing,
Or cursed his iron bourn.

The springtime bubbled in his throat,
The sweet sky seemed not far above,
And young and lovesome came the note ;—
Ah, thine is Youth and Love !

Thou sing'st of what he knew of old,
 And dreamlike from afar recalls ;
 In flashes of forgotten gold
 An orient glory falls.

And as he listens, one by one
 Life's utmost splendours blaze more nigh ;
 Less inaccessible the sun,
 Less alien grows the sky.

For thou art native to the spheres,
 And of the courts of heaven art free,
 And carriest to his temporal ears
 News from eternity ;

And lead'st him to the dizzy verge,
 And lur'st him o'er the dazzling line,
 Where mortal and immortal merge,
 And human dies divine.

ODE TO LICINIUS

(HOR. II. x.)

LICINIUS, wouldst thou wisely steer
The pinnacle of thy soul,
Not always trust her without fear
Where deep-sea billows roll ;
Nor, to the sheltered beach too near,
Risk shipwreck on the shoal.

Who sees in fortune's golden mean
All his desires comprised,
Midway the cot and court between
Hath well his life devised ;
For riches, hath not envied been,
Nor, for their lack, despised.

Most rocks the pine that soars afar,
 When leaves are tempest-whirled.
Direst the crash when turrets are
 In dusty ruin hurled.
The thunder loveth best to scar
 The bright brows of the world.

The steadfast mind, that to the end
 Is fortune's victor still,
Hath yet a fear, though Fate befriend,
 A hope, though all seem ill.
Jove can at will the winter send,
 Or call the spring at will.

Full oft the darkest day may be
 Of morrows bright the sire.
His bow not everlastingly
 Apollo bends in ire.
At times the silent Muses he
 Wakes with his dulcet lyre.

When life's straits roar and hem thee sore,
 Be bold ; naught else avails.
But when thy canvas swells before
 Too proudly prospering gales,
For once be wise with coward's lore,
 And timely reef thy sails.

ELUSION

WHERE shall I find thee, Joy? by what great
marge

With the strong seas exulting? on what peaks
Rapt? or astray within what forest bourn,
Thy light hands parting the resilient boughs?

Hast thou no answer? . . . Ah, in mine own
breast

Except unsought thou spring, though I go forth
And tease the waves for news of thee, and make
Importunate inquisition of the woods
If thou didst pass that way, I shall but find
The brief print of thy footfall on sere leaves
And the salt brink, and woo thy touch in vain.

VITA NUOVA

LONG hath she slept, forgetful of delight :
At last, at last, the enchanted princess, Earth,
Claimed with a kiss by Spring the adventurer,
In slumber knows the destined lips, and thrilled
Through all the deeps of her unageing heart
With passionate necessity of joy,
Wakens, and yields her loveliness to love.

O ancient streams, O far-descended woods
Full of the fluttering of melodious souls ;
O hills and valleys that adorn yourselves
In solemn jubilation ; winds and clouds,
Ocean and land in stormy nuptials clasped,
And all exuberant creatures that acclaim
The Earth's divine renewal : lo, I too
With yours would mingle somewhat of glad song.

I too have come through wintry terrors—yea,
Through tempest and through cataclysm of soul
Have come, and am delivered. Me the Spring,
Me also, dimly with new life hath touched,
And with regenerate hope, the salt of life ;
And I would dedicate these thankful tears
To whatsoever power beneficent,
Veiled though his countenance, undivulged his
thought,
Hath led me from the haunted darkness forth
Into the gracious air and vernal morn,
And suffers me to know my spirit a note
Of this great chorus, one with bird and stream
And voiceful mountain—nay, a string, how jarred
And all but broken ! of that lyre of life
Whereon himself, the master harp-player,
Resolving all its mortal dissonance
To one immortal and most perfect strain,
Harps without pause, building with song the world.

18TH MARCH 1893.

THE SOVEREIGN POET

HE sits above the clang and dust of Time,
With the world's secret trembling on his lip.
He asks not converse nor companionship
In the cold starlight where thou canst not climb.

The undelivered tidings in his breast
Suffer him not to rest.
He sees afar the immemorable throng,
And binds the scattered ages with a song.

The glorious riddle of his rhythmic breath,
His might, his spell, we know not what they be :
We only feel, whate'er he uttereth,
This savours not of death,
This hath a relish of eternity.

LUX PERDITA

THINE were the weak, slight hands
That might have taken this strong soul, and
 bent
Its stubborn substance to thy soft intent,
And bound it unresisting, with such bands
As not the arm of envious heaven had rent.

Thine were the calming eyes
That round my pinnace could have stilled the
 sea,
And drawn thy voyager home, and bid him be
Pure with their pureness, with their wisdom
 wise,
Merged in their light, and greatly lost in thee.

But thou—thou passed'st on,
With whiteness clothed of dedicated days,
Cold, like a star ; and me in alien ways
Thou leftest following life's chance lure, where
 shone
The wandering gleam that beckons and betrays.

ENGLAND MY MOTHER

I

ENGLAND my mother,
Wardress of waters,
Builder of peoples,
Maker of men,—

Hast thou yet leisure
Left for the muses?
Heed'st thou the songsmith
Forging the rhyme?

Deafened with tumults,
How canst thou hearken?
Strident is faction,
Demos is loud.

Lazarus, hungry,
Menaces Dives ;
Labour the giant
 Chafes in his hold.

Yet do the songsmiths
Quit not their forges ;
Still on life's anvil
 Forge they the rhyme.

Still the rapt faces
Glow from the furnace :
Breath of the smithy
 Scorches their brows.

Yea, and thou hear'st them ?
So shall the hammers
Fashion not vainly
 Verses of gold.

II

Lo, with the ancient
Roots of man's nature
Twines the eternal
Passion of song.

Ever Love fans it,
Ever Life feeds it ;
Time cannot age it,
Death cannot slay.

Deep in the world-heart
Stand its foundations,
Tangled with all things,
Twin-made with all.

Nay, what is Nature's
Self, but an endless
Strife toward music,
Euphony, rhyme ?

Trees in their blooming,
Tides in their flowing,
Stars in their circling,
Tremble with song.

God on His throne is
Eldest of poets :
Unto His measures
Moveth the Whole.

III

Therefore deride not
Speech of the muses,
England my mother,
Maker of men.

Nations are mortal,
Fragile is greatness ;
Fortune may fly thee,
Song shall not fly.

Song the all-girdling,
Song cannot perish :
Men shall make music,
 Man shall give ear.

Not while the choric
Chant of creation
Floweth from all things,
 Poured without pause,

Cease we to echo
Faintly the descant
Whereto for ever
 Dances the world.

IV

So let the songsmith
Proffer his rhyme-gift,
England my mother,
 Maker of men.

Grey grows thy count'nance,
Full of the ages ;
Time on thy forehead
Sits like a dream :

Song is the potion
All things renewing,
Youth's one elixir,
Fountain of morn.

Thou, at the world-loom
Weaving thy future,
Fitly may'st temper
Toil with delight.

Deemest thou, labour
Only is earnest ?
Grave is all beauty,
Solemn is joy.

Song is no bauble—
Slight not the songsmith,
England my mother,
Maker of men.

THE FRONTIER

At the hushed brink of twilight, — when, as
though

Some solemn journeying phantom paused to lay
An ominous finger on the awestruck day,
Earth holds her breath till that great presence go, —
A moment comes of visionary glow,
Pendulous 'twixt the gold hour and the grey,
Lovelier than these, more eloquent than they
Of memory, foresight, and life's ebb and flow.

So have I known, in some fair woman's face,
While viewless yet was Time's more gross im-
print,
The first, faint, hesitant, elusive hint
Of that invasion of the vandal years
Seem deeper beauty than youth's cloudless grace,
Wake subtler dreams, and touch me nigh to tears.

THE WORLD IN ARMOUR

I

UNDER this shade of crimson wings abhorred
 That never wholly leaves the sky serene,—
 While Vengeance sleeps a sleep so light, between
 Dominions that acclaim Thee overlord,—
 Sadly the blast of Thy tremendous word,
 Whate'er its mystic purport may have been,
 Echoes across the ages, Nazarene :
Not to bring peace Mine errand, but a sword.

For lo, Thy world uprises and lies down
 In armour, and its Peace is War, in all
 Save the great death that weaves War's dreadful
 crown ;
 War unennobled by heroic pain,
 War where none triumph, none sublimely fall,
 War that sits smiling, with the eyes of Cain.

II

When London's Plague, that day by day enrolled
His thousands dead, nor deigned his rage to
abate

Till grass was green in silent Bishopsgate,
Had come and passed like thunder,—still, 'tis
told,

The monster, driven to earth, in hovels old
And haunts obscure, though dormant, lingered
late,

Till the dread Fire, one roaring wave of fate,
Rose, and swept clean his last retreat and
hold.

In Europe live the dregs of Plague to-day,
Dregs of full many an ancient plague and dire,
Old wrongs, old lies of ages blind and cruel.
What if alone the world-war's world-wide fire
Can purge the ambushed pestilence away?
Yet woe to him that idly lights the fuel!

III

A moment's fantasy, the vision came
Of Europe dipped in fiery death, and so
Mounting re-born, with vestal limbs aglow,
Splendid and fragrant from her bath of flame.
It fled ; and a phantom without name,
Sightless, dismembered, terrible, said : " Lo,
*I am that ravished Europe men shall know
After the morn of blood and night of shame.*"

The spectre passed, and I beheld alone
The Europe of the present, as she stands,
Powerless from terror of her own vast power,
'Neath novel stars, beside a brink unknown ;
And round her the sad Kings, with sleepless
 hands,
Piling the fagots, hour by doomful hour.

SONNET

I THINK the immortal servants of mankind,
Who, from their graves, watch by how slow
degrees

The World-Soul greatens with the centuries,
Mourn most Man's barren levity of mind, /
The ear to no grave harmonies inclined,
The witless thirst for false wit's worthless lees,
The laugh mistimed in tragic presences,
The eye to all majestic meanings blind.

O prophets, martyrs, saviours, ye were great,
All truth being great to you : ye deemed Man
more

Than a dull jest, God's ennui to amuse :
The world, for you, held purport : Life ye wore
Proudly, as Kings their solemn robes of state ;
And humbly, as the mightiest monarchs use.

CHRISTMAS DAY

THE morn broke bright : the thronging people
wore

Their best ; but in the general face I saw

No touch of veneration or of awe.

Christ's natal day ? 'Twas merely one day more

On which the mart agreed to close its door ;

A lounging-time by usage and by law

Sanctioned ; nor recked they, beyond this, one
straw

Of any meaning which for man it bore !

Fated among time's fallen leaves to stray,

We breathe an air that savours of the tomb,

Heavy with dissolution and decay ;

Waiting till some new world-emotion rise,

And with the shattering might of the simoom

Sweep clean this dying Past that never dies.

NIGHT ON CURBAR EDGE

No echo of man's life pursues my ears ;
Nothing disputes this Desolation's reign ;
Change comes not, this dread temple to profane,
Where time by æons reckons, not by years.
Its patient form one crag, sole stranded, rears,
Type of whate'er is destined to remain
While you still host encamped on night's waste
plain
Keeps armèd watch, a million quivering spears.

Hushed are the wild and wing'd lives of the
moor ;
The sleeping sheep nestle 'neath ruined wall,
Or unhewn stones in random concourse hurled :
Solitude, sleepless, listens at Fate's door ;
And there is built and 'stablished over all
Tremendous silence, older than the world.

ESTRANGEMENT

So, without overt breach, we fall apart,
Tacitly sunder—neither you nor I
Conscious of one intelligible Why,
And both, from severance, winning equal smart.
So, with resigned and acquiescent heart,
Whene'er your name on some chance lip may
lie,

I seem to see an alien shade pass by,
A spirit wherein I have no lot or part.
Thus may a captive, in some fortress grim,
From casual speech betwixt his warders, learn
That June on her triumphal progress goes
Through arched and bannered woodlands ; while
for him

She is a legend emptied of concern,
And idle is the rumour of the rose.

WORDSWORTH'S GRAVE

I

THE old rude church, with bare, bald tower, is
here ;

Beneath its shadow high-born Rotha flows ;
Rotha, remembering well who slumbers near,
And with cool murmur lulling his repose.

Rotha, remembering well who slumbers near.

His hills, his lakes, his streams are with him yet.
Surely the heart that read her own heart clear
Nature forgets not soon : 'tis we forget.

We that with vagrant soul his fixity

Have slighted ; faithless, done his deep faith
wrong ;

Left him for poorer loves, and bowed the knee
To misbegotten strange new gods of song.

Yet, led by hollow ghost or beckoning elf
 Far from her homestead to the desert bourn,
 The vagrant soul returning to herself
 Wearily wise, must needs to him return.

To him and to the powers that with him
 dwell :—

Inflowings that divulged not whence they
 came ;

And that secluded spirit unknowable,

The mystery we make darker with a name ;

The Somewhat which we name but cannot
 know,

Ev'n as we name a star and only see

His quenchless flashings forth, which ever show

And ever hide him, and which are not he.

II

Poet who sleepest by this wandering wave !

When thou wast born, what birth-gift hadst
 thou then ?

38 WORDSWORTH'S GRAVE

To thee what wealth was that the Immortals
gave,

The wealth thou gavest in thy turn to men ?

Not Milton's keen, translunar music thine ;

Not Shakespeare's cloudless, boundless human
view ;

Not Shelley's flush of rose on peaks divine ;

Nor yet the wizard twilight Coleridge knew.

What hadst thou that could make so large
amends

For all thou hadst not and thy peers possessed,
Motion and fire, swift means to radiant ends ?—

Thou hadst, for weary feet, the gift of rest.

From Shelley's dazzling glow or thunderous haze,

From Byron's tempest-anger, tempest-mirth,
Men turned to thee and found—not blast and
blaze,

Tumult of tottering heavens, but peace on
earth.

Nor peace that grows by Lethe, scentless flower,
 There in white languors to decline and cease ;
 But peace whose names are also rapture, power,
 Clear sight, and love : for these are parts of
 peace.

III

I hear it vouched the Muse is with us still ;—
 If less divinely frenzied than of yore,
 In lieu of feelings she has wondrous skill
 To simulate emotion felt no more.

Not such the authentic Presence pure, that made
 This valley vocal in the great days gone !—
 In *his* great days, while yet the spring-time played
 About him, and the mighty morning shone.

No word-mosaic artificer, he sang
 A lofty song of lowly weal and dole.
 Right from the heart, right to the heart it sprang,
 Or from the soul leapt instant to the soul.

He felt the charm of childhood, grace of
youth,

Grandeur of age, insisting to be sung.

The impassioned argument was simple truth
Half-wondering at its own melodious
tongue.

Impassioned? ay, to the song's ecstatic core!

But far removed were clangour, storm and
feud;

For plenteous health was his, exceeding store
Of joy, and an impassioned quietude.

IV

A hundred years ere he to manhood came,

Song from celestial heights had wandered
down,

Put off her robe of sunlight, dew and flame,

And donned a modish dress to charm the
Town.

Thenceforth she but festooned the porch of
things ;

Apt at life's lore, incurious what life meant.

Dextrous of hand, she struck her lute's few
strings ;

Ignobly perfect, barrenly content.

Unflushed with ardour and unblanched with awe,

Her lips in profitless derision curled,

She saw with dull emotion—if she saw—

The vision of the glory of the world.

The human masque she watched, with dream-
less eyes

In whose clear shallows lurked no trembling
shade :

The stars, unkennd by her, might set and rise,

Unmarked by her, the daisies bloom and fade.

The age grew sated with her sterile wit.

Herself waxed weary on her loveless throne.

Men felt life's tide, the sweep and surge of it,

And craved a living voice, a natural tone.

For none the less, though song was but half
true,

The world lay common, one abounding theme.
Man joyed and wept, and fate was ever new,
And love was sweet, life real, death no dream.

In sad stern verse the rugged scholar-sage
Bemoaned his toil unvalued, youth uncheered.
His numbers wore the vesture of the age,
But, 'neath it beating, the great heart was
heard.

From dewy pastures, uplands sweet with thyme,
A virgin breeze freshened the jaded day.
It wafted Collins' lonely vesper-chime,
It breathed abroad the frugal note of Gray.

It fluttered here and there, nor swept in vain
The dusty haunts where futile echoes dwell,—
Then, in a cadence soft as summer rain,
And sad from Auburn voiceless, drooped and
fell.

It drooped and fell, and one 'neath northern
 skies,
 With southern heart, who tilled his father's
 field,
 Found Poesy a-dying, bade her rise
 And touch quick Nature's hem and go forth
 healed.

On life's broad plain the ploughman's conquering
 share
 Upturned the fallow lands of truth anew,
 And o'er the formal garden's trim parterre
 The peasant's team a ruthless furrow drew.

Bright was his going forth, but clouds ere long
 Whelmed him; in gloom his radiance set,
 and those
 Twin morning stars of the new century's
 song,
 Those morning stars that sang together,
 rose.

In elvish speech the *Dreamer* told his tale
 Of marvellous oceans swept by fateful wings.—
 The *Scër* strayed not from earth's human pale,
 But the mysterious face of common things

He mirrored as the moon in Rydal Mere
 Is mirrored, when the breathless night hangs
 blue :
 Strangely remote she seems and wondrous near,
 And by some nameless difference born anew.

V

Peace—peace—and rest ! Ah, how the lyre is
 loth,
 Or powerless now, to give what all men seek !
 Either it deadens with ignoble sloth
 Or deafens with shrill tumult, loudly weak.

Where is the singer whose large notes and clear
 Can heal, and arm, and plenish, and sustain ?
 Lo, one with empty music floods the ear,
 And one, the heart refreshing, tires the brain.

And idly tuneful, the loquacious throng
 Flutter and twitter, prodigal of time,
 And little masters make a toy of song
 Till grave men weary of the sound of rhyme.

And some go pranked in faded antique dress,
 Abhorring to be hale and glad and free ;
 And some parade a conscious naturalness,
 The scholar's not the child's simplicity.

Enough ;—and wisest who from words forbear.
 The kindly river rails not as it glides ;
 And suave and charitable, the winning air
 Chides not at all, or only him who chides.

VI

Nature ! we storm thine ear with choric notes.
 Thou answerest through the calm great nights
 and days,
 “Laud me who will : not tuneless are your
 throats ;
 Yet if ye paused I should not miss the praise.”

We falter, half-rebuked, and sing again.

We chant thy desertness and haggard gloom,
Or with thy splendid wrath inflate the strain,
Or touch it with thy colour and perfume.

One, his melodious blood aflame for thee,
Wooed with fierce lust, his hot heart world-
defiled.

One, with the upward eye of infancy,
Looked in thy face, and felt himself thy child.

Thee he approached without distrust or dread—
Beheld thee throned, an awful queen, above—
Climbed to thy lap and merely laid his head
Against thy warm wild heart of mother-love.

He heard that vast heart beating—thou didst
press
Thy child so close, and lov'dst him unaware.
Thy beauty gladdened him ; yet he scarce less
Had loved thee, had he never found thee
fair !

For thou wast not as legendary lands
 To which with curious eyes and ears we roam.
 Nor wast thou as a fane 'mid solemn sands,
 Where palmers halt at evening. Thou wast
 home.

And here, at home, still bides he ; but he sleeps ;
 Not to be wakened even at thy word ;
 Though we, vague dreamers, dream he some-
 where keeps
 An ear still open to thy voice still heard,—

Thy voice, as heretofore, about him blown,
 For ever blown about his silence now ;
 Thy voice, though deeper, yet so like his own
 That almost, when he sang, we deemed 'twas
 thou !

VII

Behind Helm Crag and Silver Howe the sheen
 Of the retreating day is less and less.
 Soon will the lordlier summits, here unseen,
 Gather the night about their nakedness.

The half-heard bleat of sheep comes from the hill.

Faint sounds of childish play are in the air.

The river murmurs past. All else is still.

The very graves seem stiller than they were.

Afar though nation be on nation hurled,

And life with toil and ancient pain depressed,

Here one may scarce believe the whole wide world

Is not at peace, and all man's heart at rest.

Rest! 'twas the gift *he* gave; and peace! the shade

He spread, for spirits fevered with the sun.

To him his bounties are come back—here laid

In rest, in peace, his labour nobly done.

1884-87.

SHELLEY'S CENTENARY

(4TH AUGUST 1892)

WITHIN a narrow span of time,
Three princes of the realm of rhyme,
At height of youth or manhood's prime
 From earth took wing,
To join the fellowship sublime
 Who, dead, yet sing.

He, first, his earliest wreath who wove
Of laurel grown in Latmian grove,
Conquered by pain and hapless love
 Found calmer home,
Roofed by the heaven that glows above
 Eternal Rome.

A fierier soul, its own fierce prey,
And cumbered with more mortal clay,
At Missolonghi flamed away,
 And left the air
Reverberating to this day
 Its loud despair.

Alike remote from Byron's scorn
And Keats's magic as of morn
Bursting for ever newly-born
 On forests old,
To wake a hoary world forlorn
 With touch of gold,

Shelley, the cloud-begot, who grew
Nourished on air and sun and dew,
Into that Essence whence he drew
 His life and lyre
Was fittingly resolved anew
 Through wave and fire.

'Twas like his rapid soul ! 'Twas meet
 That he, who brooked not Time's slow feet,
 With passage thus abrupt and fleet
 Should hurry hence,
 Eager the Great Perhaps to greet
 With Why ? and Whence ?

Impatient of the world's fixed way,
 He ne'er could suffer God's delay,
 But all the future in a day
 Would build divine,
 And the whole past in ruins lay,
 An emptied shrine.

Vain vision ! but the glow, the fire,
 The passion of benign desire,
 The glorious yearning, lift him higher
 Than many a soul
 That mounts a million paces nigher
 Its meaner goal.

And power is his, if naught besides,
In that thin ether where he rides,
Above the roar of human tides
 To ascend afar,
Lost in a storm of light that hides
 His dizzy car.

Below, the unhasting world toils on,
And here and there are victories won,
Some dragon slain, some justice done,
 While, through the skies,
A meteor rushing on the sun,
 He flares and dies.

But, as he cleaves yon ether clear,
Notes from the unattempted Sphere
He scatters to the enchanted ear
 Of earth's dim throng,
Whose dissonance doth more endear
 The showering song.

In other shapes than he forecast
 The world is moulded : his fierce blast,—
 His wild assault upon the Past,—
 These things are vain ;
 Revolt is transient : what *must* last
 Is that pure strain,

Which seems the wandering voices blent
 Of every virgin element,—
 A sound from ocean caverns sent,—
 An airy call
 From the pavilioned firmament
 O'erdoming all.

And in this world of wordlings, where
 Souls rust in apathy, and ne'er
 A great emotion shakes the air,
 And life flags tame,
 And rare is noble impulse, rare
 The impassioned aim,

'Tis no mean fortune to have heard
A singer who, if errors blurred
His sight, had yet a spirit stirred
 By vast desire,
And ardour fledging the swift word
 With plumes of fire.

A creature of impetuous breath,
Our torpor deadlier than death
He knew not ; whatsoe'er he saith
 Flashes with life :
He spurreth men, he quickeneth
 To splendid strife.

And in his gusts of song he brings
Wild odours shaken from strange wings,
And unfamiliar whisperings
 From far lips blown,
While all the rapturous heart of things
 Throbs through his own,—

His own that from the burning pyre
One who had loved his wind-swept lyre
Out of the sharp teeth of the fire
 Unmolten drew,
Beside the sea that in her ire
 Smote him and slew.

THE FATHER OF THE FOREST

I

OLD emperor Yew, fantastic sire,
Girt with thy guard of dotard kings,—
What ages hast thou seen retire
Into the dusk of alien things?
What mighty news hath stormed thy shade,
Of armies perished, realms unmade?

Already wast thou great and wise,
And solemn with exceeding eld,
On that proud morn when England's eyes,
Wet with tempestuous joy, beheld
Round her rough coasts the thundering main
Strewn with the ruined dream of Spain.

Hardly thou count'st them long ago,
The warring faiths, the wavering land,
The sanguine sky's delirious glow,
And Cranmer's scorched, uplifted hand.
Wailed not the woods their task of shame,
Doomed to provide the insensate flame ?

Mourned not the rumouring winds, when she,
The sweet queen of a tragic hour,
Crowned with her snow-white memory
The crimson legend of the Tower ?
Or when a thousand witcheries lay
Felled with one stroke, at Fotheringay ?

Ah, thou hast heard the iron tread
And clang of many an armoured age,
And well recall'st the famous dead,
Captains or counsellors brave or sage,
Kings that on kings their myriads hurled,
Ladies whose smile embroidered the world.

58. THE FATHER OF THE FOREST

Rememberest thou the perfect knight,
The soldier, courtier, bard in one,
Sidney, that pensive Hesper-light
O'er Chivalry's departed sun ?
Knew'st thou the virtue, sweetness, lore,
Whose nobly hapless name was More ?

The roystering prince, that afterward
Belied his madcap youth, and proved
A greatly simple warrior lord
Such as our warrior fathers loved—
Lives he not still ? for Shakespeare sings
The last of our adventurer kings.

His battles o'er, he takes his ease,
Glory put by, and sceptred toil.
Round him the carven centuries
Like forest branches arch and coil.
In that dim fane, he is not sure
Who lost or won at Azincour !

Roofed by the mother minster vast
That guards Augustine's rugged throne,
The darling of a knightly Past
Sleeps in his bed of sculptured stone,
And flings, o'er many a warlike tale,
The shadow of his dusky mail.

The monarch who, albeit his crown
Graced an august and sapient head,
Rode roughshod to a stained renown
O'er Wallace and Llewellyn dead,
And perished in the hostile land,
With restless heart and ruthless hand ;

Or that disastrous king on whom
Fate, like a tempest, early fell,
And the dark secret of whose doom
The Keep of Pomfret kept full well ;
Or him that with half careless words
On Becket drew the dastard swords ;

Or Eleanor's undaunted son,
 That, starred with idle glory, came
 Bearing from leaguered Ascalon
 The barren splendour of his fame,
 And, vanquished by an unknown bow,
 Lies vainly great at Fontevraud ;

Or him, the footprints of whose power
 Made mightier whom he overthrew ;
 A man built like a mountain-tower,
 A fortress of heroic thew ;
 The Conqueror, in our soil who set
 This stem of Kinghood flowering yet ;—

These, or the living fame of these,
 Perhaps thou minglest—who shall say ?—
 With thrice remoter memories,
 And phantoms of the mistier day,
 Long ere the tanner's daughter's son
 From Harold's hands this realm had won.

THE FATHER OF THE FOREST 61

What years are thine, not mine to guess !

The stars look youthful, thou being by ;
Youthful the sun's glad-heartedness ;

Witless of time the unageing sky !
And these dim-groping roots around
So deep a human Past are wound,

That, musing in thy shade, for me

The tidings scarce would strangely fall
Of fair-haired despots of the sea

Scaling our eastern island-wall,
From their long ships of norland pine,
Their "surf-deer," driven o'er wilds of brine.

Nay, hid by thee from Summer's gaze

That seeks in vain this couch of loam,
I should behold, without amaze,

Camped on yon down the hosts of Rome,
Nor start though English woodlands heard
The self-same mandatory word

As by the Cataracts of the Nile
 Marshalled the legions long ago,
Or where the lakes are one blue smile
 'Neath pageants of Helvetian snow,
Or 'mid the Syrian sands that lie
Sick of the day's great tearless eye,

Or on barbaric plains afar,
 Where, under Asia's fevering ray,
The long lines of imperial war
 O'er Tigris passed, and with dismay
In fanged and iron deserts found
Embattled Persia closing round,

And 'mid their eagles watched on high
 The vultures gathering for a feast,
Till, from the quivers of the sky,
 The gorgeous star-flight of the East
Flamed, and the bow of darkness bent
O'er Julian dying in his tent.

II

Was it the wind befooling me
 With ancient echoes, as I lay ?
Was it the antic fantasy
 Whose elvish mockeries cheat the day ?
Surely a hollow murmur stole
From wizard bough and ghostly bole :

“ Who prates to me of arms and kings,
 Here in these courts of old repose ?
Thy babble is of transient things,
 Broils, and the dust of foolish blows.
Thy sounding annals are at best
The witness of a world's unrest.

“ Goodly the ostents are to thee,
 And pomps of Time : to me more sweet
The vigils of Eternity,
 And Silence patient at my feet ;
And dreams beyond the deadening range
And dull monotonies of Change.

“Often an air comes idling by
With news of cities and of men.
I hear a multitudinous sigh,
And lapse into my soul again.
Shall her great noons and sunsets be
Blurred with thine infelicity ?

“Now from these veins the strength of old,
The warmth and lust of life depart ;
Full of mortality, behold
The cavern that was once my heart !
Me, with blind arm, in season due,
Let the aërial woodman hew.

“For not though mightiest mortals fall,
The starry chariot hangs delayed.
His axle is uncooled, nor shall
The thunder of His wheels be stayed.
A changeless pace His coursers keep,
And halt not at the wells of sleep.

THE FATHER OF THE FOREST 65

“The South shall bless, the East shall blight,
The red rose of the Dawn shall blow ;
The million-lilied stream of Night
Wide in ethereal meadows flow ;
And Autumn mourn ; and everything
Dance to the wild pipe of the Spring.

“With oceans heedless round her feet,
And the indifferent heavens above,
Earth shall the ancient tale repeat
Of wars and tears, and death and love ;
And, wise from all the foolish Past,
Shall peradventure hail at last

“The advent of that morn divine
When nations may as forests grow,
Wherein the oak hates not the pine,
Nor beeches wish the cedars woe,
But all, in their unlikeness, blend
Confederate to one golden end—

66 THE FATHER OF THE FOREST

“Beauty : the Vision whereunto,
In joy, with pantings, from afar,
Through sound and odour, form and hue,
And mind and clay, and worm and star—
Now touching goal, now backward hurled—
Toils the indomitable world.”

THE LOST EDEN

BUT yesterday was Man from Eden driven.
His dream, wherein he dreamed himself the first
Of creatures, fashioned for eternity—
This was the Eden that he shared with Eve.

Eve, the adventurous soul within his soul !
The sleepless, the unslaked ! She showed him
 where
Amidst his pleasance hung the bough whose fruit
Is disenchantment and the perishing
Of many glorious errors. And he saw
His paradise how narrow : and he saw,—
He, who had well-nigh deemed the world itself
Of less significance and majesty
Than his own part and business in it !—how
Little that part, and in how great a world.

And an imperative world-thirst drave him forth,
And the gold gates of Eden clanged behind.

Never shall he return : for he hath sent
His spirit abroad among the infinitudes,
And may no more to the ancient pales recall
The travelled feet. But oftentimes he feels
The intolerable vastness bow him down,
The awful homeless spaces scare his soul ;
And half-regretful he remembers then
His Eden lost, as some grey mariner
May think of the far fields where he was bred,
And woody ways unbreathed-on by the sea,
Though more familiar now the ocean-paths
Gleam, and the stars his fathers never knew.

THE UNKNOWN GOD

WHEN, overarched by gorgeous night,
I wave my trivial self away ;
When all I was to all men's sight
Shares the erasure of the day ;
Then do I cast my cumbering load,
Then do I gain a sense of God.

Not him that with fantastic boasts
A sombre people dreamed they knew ;
The mere barbaric God of Hosts
That edged their sword and braced their
thew :
A God they pitted 'gainst a swarm
Of neighbour Gods less vast of arm ;

A God like some imperious king,
Wroth, were his realm not duly awed ;
A God for ever hearkening
Unto his self-commanded laud ;
A God for ever jealous grown
Of carven wood and graven stone ;

A God whose ghost, in arch and aisle,
Yet haunts his temple—and his tomb ;
But follows in a little while
Odin and Zeus to equal doom ;
A God of kindred seed and line ;
Man's giant shadow, hailed divine.

O streaming worlds, O crowded sky,
O Life, and mine own soul's abyss,
Myself am scarce so small that I
Should bow to Deity like this !
This my Begetter ? This was what
Man in his violent youth begot.

The God I know of, I shall ne'er
 Know, though he dwells exceeding nigh.
Raise thou the stone and find me there,
Cleave thou the wood and there am I.
 Yea, in my flesh his spirit doth flow,
 Too near, too far, for me to know.

Whate'er my deeds, I am not sure
 That I can pleasure him or vex :
 I that must use a speech so poor
 It narrows the Supreme with sex.
 Notes he the good or ill in man ?
 To hope he cares is all I can.

I hope—with fear. For did I trust
 This vision granted me at birth,
 The sire of heaven would seem less just
 Than many a faulty son of earth.
 And so he seems indeed ! But then,
 I trust it not, this bounded ken.

And dreaming much, I never dare
To dream that in my prisoned soul
The flutter of a trembling prayer
Can move the Mind that is the Whole.
Though kneeling nations watch and yearn,
Does the primordial purpose turn ?

Best by remembering God, say some,
We keep our high imperial lot.
Fortune, I fear, hath oftenest come
When we forgot—when we forgot !
A lovelier faith their happier crown,
But history laughs and weeps it down !

Know they not well, how seven times seven,
Wronging our mighty arms with rust,
We dared not do the work of heaven
Lest heaven should hurl us in the dust ?
The work of heaven ! 'Tis waiting still
The sanction of the heavenly will.

Unmeet to be profaned by praise
Is he whose coils the world enfold ;
The God on whom I ever gaze,
The God I never once behold :
Above the cloud, beneath the clod :
The Unknown God, the Unknown God.

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

I

HIGHER than heaven they sit,
Life and her consort Law ;
And One whose countenance lit
In mine more perfect awe,
I fain had deemed their peer,
Beside them throned above :
Ev'n him who casts out fear,
Unconquerable Love.

Ah, 'twas on earth alone that I his beauty
saw.

II

On earth, in homes of men,
 In hearts that crave and die.
 Dwells he not also, then,
 With Godhead, throned on high ?
 This and but this I know :
 His face I see not there :
 Here find I him below,
 Nor find him elsewhere ;
 Born of an aching world, Pain's bridegroom,
 Death's ally.

III

Did Heaven vouchsafe some sign
 That through all Nature's frame
 Boundless ascent benign
 Is everywhere her aim,
 Such as man hopes it here,
 Where he from beasts hath risen,—
 Then might I read full clear,
 Ev'n in my sensual prison,
 That Life and Law and Love are one sym-
 phonious name.

IV

Such sign hath Heaven yet lent ?

Nay, on this earth, are we
So sure 'tis real ascent

And inmost gain we see ?
'Gainst Evil striving still,

Some spoils of war we wrest :
Not to discover Ill

Were haply state as blest.

We vaunt, o'er doubtful foes, a dubious victory.

V

In cave and bosky dene

Of old there crept and ran
The gibbering form obscene

That was and was not man.
With fairer covering clad

The desert beasts went by ;
The couchant lion had

More speculative eye,
And goodlier speech the birds, than we when
we began.

VI

A flattering dream were this—
 That Earth, from primal bloom,
 With pangs of prescient bliss
 Divined us in her womb ;
 That fostering powers have made
 Our fate their secret care,
 And wooed us, grade by grade,
 Up winding stair on stair :
 But not for golden fancies iron truths make
 room.

VII

Rather, some random throw
 Of heedless Nature's die
 'Twould seem, that from so low
 Hath lifted man so high.
 Through untold æons vast
 She let him lurk and cower :
 'Twould seem he climbed at last
 In mere fortuitous hour,
 Child of a thousand chances 'neath the indif-
 ferent sky.

VIII

A soul so long deferred
 In his blind brain he bore,
 It might have slept unstirred
 Ten million noontides more.
 Yea, round him Darkness might
 Till now her folds have drawn,
 O'er that enormous night
 So casual came the dawn,
 Such hues of hap and hazard Man's Emergence
 wore !

IX

If, then, our rise from gloom
 Hath this capricious air,
 What ground is mine to assume
 An upward process *there*,
 In yonder worlds that shine
 From alien tracts of sky ?
 Nor ground to assume is mine
 Nor warrant to deny.
 Equal, my source of hope, my reason for despair.

X

And though within me here
 Hope lingers unsubdued,
 'Tis because airiest cheer
 Suffices for her food !
 As some adventurous flower,
 On savage crag-side grown,
 Seems nourished hour by hour
 From its wild self alone,
 So lives inveterate Hope, on her own hardihood.

XI

She tells me, whispering low :
 "Wherefore and whence thou wast,
 Thou shalt behold and know
 When the great bridge is crossed.
 For not in mockery He
 Thy gift of wondering gave,
 Nor bade thine answer be
 The blank stare of the grave.
 Thou shalt behold and know ; and find again
 thy lost."

XII

With rapt eyes fixed afar,
 She tells me : " Throughout Space,
 Godward each peopled star
 Runs with thy Earth a race.
 Wouldst have the goal so nigh,
 The course so smooth a field,
 That Triumph should thereby
 One half its glory yield ?
 And can Life's pyramid soar all apex and no base ? "

XIII

She saith : " Old dragons lie
 In bowers of pleasance curled ;
 And dost thou ask me why ?
 It is a Wizard's world !
 Enchanted princes these,
 Who yet their scales shall cast,
 And through his sorceries
 Die into kings at last.
 Ambushed in Winter's heart the rose of June is
 furred."

XIV

Such are the tales she tells :

Who trusts, the happier he :

But nought of *virtue* dwells

In that felicity !

I think the harder feat

Were his who should *withstand*

A voice so passing sweet,

And so profuse a hand.—

Hope, I forego the wealth thou fling'st abroad
so free !

XV

Carry thy largesse hence,

Light Giver ! Let me learn

To abjure the opulence

I have done nought to earn ;

And on this world no more

To cast ignoble slight,

Counting it but the door

Of other worlds more bright.

Here, where I fail or conquer, here is my
concern :

XVI

Here, where perhaps alone
I conquer or I fail.
Here, o'er the dark Deep blown,
I ask no perfumed gale ;
I ask the unpampering breath
That fits me to endure
Chance, and victorious Death,
Life, and my doom obscure,
Who know not whence I am sped, nor to what
port I sail.

SONG

APRIL, April,
Laugh thy girlish laughter ;
Then, the moment after,
Weep thy girlish tears !
April, that mine ears
Like a lover greetest,
If I tell thee, sweetest,
All my hopes and fears,
April, April,
Laugh thy golden laughter,
But, the moment after,
Weep thy golden tears !

SONG IN IMITATION OF THE
ELIZABETHANS

SWEETEST sweets that time hath rifled,
Live anew on lyric tongue—
Tresses with which Paris trifled,
Lips to Antony's that clung.
These surrender not their rose,
Nor their golden puissance those.

Vain the envious loam that covers
Her of Egypt, her of Troy :
Helen's, Cleopatra's lovers
Still desire them, still enjoy.
Fate but stole what Song restored :
Vain the aspic, vain the cord.

Idly clang'd the sullen portal,
Idly the sepulchral door :
Fame the mighty, Love the immortal,
These than foolish dust are more :
Nor may captive Death refuse
Homage to the conquering Muse.

SONG

OH, like a queen's her happy tread,
And like a queen's her golden head !
But oh, at last, when all is said,
Her woman's heart for me !

We wandered where the river gleamed
'Neath oaks that mused and pines that
dreamed.
A wild thing of the woods she seemed,
So proud, and pure, and free !

All heaven drew nigh to hear her sing,
When from her lips her soul took wing ;
The oaks forgot their pondering,
The pines their reverie.

SONG

87

And oh, her happy queenly tread,
And oh, her queenly golden head !
But oh, her heart, when all is said,
Her woman's heart for me !

TELL ME NOT NOW

TELL me not now, if love for love
Thou canst return,—
Now while around us and above
Day's flambeaux burn.
Not in clear noon, with speech as clear,
Thy heart avow,
For every gossip wind to hear ;
Tell me not now !

Tell me not now the tidings sweet,
The news divine ;
A little longer at thy feet
Leave me to pine.
I would not have the gadding bird
Hear from his bough ;
Nay, though I famish for a word,
Tell me not now !

But when deep trances of delight
 All Nature seal,
When round the world the arms of Night
 Caressing steal,
When rose to dreaming rose says, “*Dear,*
 Dearest,”—and when
Heaven sighs her secret in earth’s ear,
 Ah, tell me then !

APOLOGIA

THUS much I know : what dues soc'er be mine,
Of fame or of oblivion, Time the just,
Punctiliously assessing, shall award.

This have I doubted never ; this is sure.

But one meanwhile shall chide me,—one shall
curl

Superior lips,—because my handiwork,

The issue of my solitary toil,

The harvest of my spirit, even these

My numbers, are not something, good or ill,

Other than I have ever striven, in years

Lit by a conscious and a patient aim,

With hopes and with despairs, to fashion them ;

Or, it may be, because I have full oft

In singers' selves found me a theme of song,

Holding these also to be very part
Of Nature's greatness, and accounting not
Their descants least heroical of deeds ;
Or, yet again, because I bring nought new,
Save as each noontide or each Spring is new,
Into an old and iterative world,
And can but proffer unto whoso will
A cool and nowise turbid cup, from wells
Our fathers digged ; and have not thought it
shame

To tread in nobler footprints than mine own,
And travel by the light of purer eyes.
Ev'n such offences am I charged withal,
Till, breaking silence, I am moved to cry,
What would ye, then, my masters? Is the
Muse

Fall'n to a thing of Mode, that must each year
Supplant her derelict self of yester-year ?
Or do the mighty voices of old days
At last so tedious grow, that one whose lips
Inherit some far echo of their tones—
How far, how faint, none better knows than he

Who hath been nourished on their utterance—can
But irk the ears of such as care no more
The accent of dead greatness to recall ?
If, with an ape's ambition, I rehearse
Their gestures, trick me in their stolen robes,
The sorry mime of their nobility,
Dishonouring whom I vainly emulate,
The poor imposture soon shall shrink revealed
In the ill grace with which their gems bestar
An abject brow ; but if I be indeed
Their true descendant, as the veriest hind
May yet be sprung of kings, their lineaments
Will out, the signature of ancestry
Leap unobscured, and somewhat of themselves
In me, their lowly scion, live once more.
With grateful, not vainglorious joy, I dreamed
It did so live ; and ev'n such pride was mine
As is next neighbour to humility.
For he that claims high lineage yet may feel
How thinned in the transmission is become
The ancient blood he boasts ; how slight he stands
In the great shade of his majestic sires.

But it was mine endeavour so to sing
As if these lofty ones a moment stooped
From their still spheres, and undisdainful graced
My note with audience, nor incurious heard
Whether, degenerate irredeemably,
The faltering minstrel shamed his starry kin.
And though I be to these but as a knoll
About the feet of the high mountains, scarce
Remarked at all save when a valley cloud
Holds the high mountains hidden, and the knoll
Against the cloud shows briefly eminent ;
Yet ev'n as they, I too, with constant heart,
And with no light or careless ministry,
Have served what seemed the Voice ; and un-
 profane,
Have dedicated to melodious ends
All of myself that least ignoble was.
For though of faulty and of erring walk,
I have not suffered aught in me of frail
To blur my song ; I have not paid the world
The evil and the insolent courtesy
Of offering it my baseness for a gift.

And unto such as think all Art is cold,
All music unimpassioned, if it breathe
An ardour not of Eros' lips, and glow
With fire not caught from Aphrodite's breast,
Be it enough to say, that in Man's life
Is room for great emotions unbegot
Of dalliance and embracement, unbegot
Ev'n of the purer nuptials of the soul ;
And one not pale of blood, to human touch
Not tardily responsive, yet may know
A deeper transport and a mightier thrill
Than comes of commerce with mortality,
When, rapt from all relation with his kind,
All temporal and immediate circumstance,
In silence, in the visionary mood
That, flashing light on the dark deep, perceives
Order beyond this coil and errancy,
Isled from the fretful hour he stands alone
And hears the eternal movement, and beholds
Above him and around and at his feet,
In million-billowed consentaneousness,
The flowing, flowing, flowing of the world.

Such moments, are they not the peaks of life?
Enough for me, if on these pages fall
The shadow of the summits, and an air
Not dim from human hearth-fires sometimes
 blow.

THEY AND WE

WITH stormy joy, from height on height,
The thundering torrents leap.
The mountain tops, with still delight,
Their great inaction keep.

Man only, irked by calm, and rent
By each emotion's throes,
Neither in passion finds content,
Nor finds it in repose.

TOO LATE

Too late to say farewell,
To turn, and fall asunder, and forget,
And take up the dropped life of yesterday !
So ancient, so far-off, is yesterday,
To the last hour ere I had kissed thy cheek !
Too late to say farewell.

Too late to say farewell.
Can aught remain hereafter as of old ?
A touch, a tone hath changed the heaven and
earth,
And in a hand-clasp all begins anew.
Somewhat of me is thine, of thee is mine.
Too late to say farewell.

Too late to say farewell.

We are not May-day masquers, thou and I!

We have lived deep life, we have drunk of tragic
springs.

'Tis for light hearts to take light leave of love,

But ah, for me, for thee, too late, dear Spirit!

Too late to say farewell.

AN INSCRIPTION AT WINDERMERE

GUEST of this fair abode, before thee rise
No summits vast, that icily remote
Cannot forget their own magnificence
Or once put off their kingdom ; but withal
A confraternity of stateliest brows,
As Alp or Atlas noble, in port and mien ;
Old majesties, that on their secular seats
Enthroned, are yet of affable access
And easy audience, not too great for praise,
Not arrogantly aloof from thy concerns,
Not vaunting their indifference to thy fate,
Nor so august as to contemn thy love.
Do homage to these suavely eminent ;
But privy to their bosoms wouldst thou be,
There is a vale, whose seaward-parted lips

Murmur eternally some half-divulged
Reluctant secret, where thou may'st o'erhear
The mountains interchange their confidences,
Peak with his federate peak, that think aloud
Their broad and lucid thoughts, in liberal day :
Thither repair alone : the mountain heart
Not two may enter ; thence returning, tell
What thou hast heard ; and 'mid the immortal
 friends
Of mortals, the selectest fellowship
Of poets divine, place shall be found for thee.

EUROPE AT THE PLAY*

O LANGUID audience, met to see
 The last act of the tragedy
 On that terrific stage afar,
 Where burning towns the footlights are,—
 O listless Europe, day by day
 Callously sitting out the play !

So sat, with loveless count'nance cold,
 Round the arena, Rome of old.
 Pain, and the ebb of life's red tide,
 So, with a calm regard, she eyed,
 Her gorgeous vesture, million-pearled,
 Splashed with the blood of half the world.
 High was her glory's noon : as yet
 She had not dreamed her sun could set !

* Written during the late Armenian persecution.

As yet she had not dreamed how soon
 Shadows should vex her glory's noon.
 Another's pangs she counted nought ;
 Of human hearts she took no thought ;
 But God, at nightfall, in her ear
 Thundered *His* thought exceeding clear.

Perchance in tempest and in blight,
 On Europe, too, shall fall the night !
 She sees the victim overborne,
 By worse than ravening lions torn.
 She sees, she hears, with soul unstirred,
 And lifts no hand, and speaks no word,
 But vaunts a brow like theirs who deem
 Men's wrongs a phrase, men's rights a dream.
 Yet haply she shall learn, too late,
 In some blind hurricane of Fate,
 How fiercely alive the things
 She held as fool's imaginings,
 And, though circuitous and obscure,
 The feet of Nemesis how sure.

I DO not ask to have my fill
Of wine, or love, or fame.
I do not, for a little ill,
Against the gods exclaim.

One boon of Fortune I implore,
With one petition kneel :
At least caress me not, before
Thou break me on thy wheel.

A RIDDLE OF THE THAMES

AT windows that from Westminster
 Look southward to the Lollard's Tower,
 She sat, my lovely friend. A blur
 Of gilded mist, — ('twas morn's first
 hour,)—
 Made vague the world : and in the gleam
 Shivered the half-awakened stream.

Through tinted vapour looming large,
 Ambiguous shapes obscurely rode.
 She gazed where many a laden barge
 Like some dim-moving saurian showed.
 And 'midst them, lo ! two swans appeared,
 And proudly up the river steered.

Two stately swans ! What did they there ?
 Whence came they ? Whither would they
 go ?

Think of them,—things so faultless fair,—
 'Mid the black shipping down below !
 On through the rose and gold they passed,
 And melted in the morn at last.

Ah, can it be, that they had come,
 Where Thames in sullied glory flows,
 Fugitive rebels, tired of some
 Secluded lake's ornate repose,
 Eager to taste the life that pours
 Its muddier wave 'twixt mightier shores ?

We ne'er shall know : our wonderment
 No barren certitude shall mar.
 They left behind them, as they went,
 A dream than knowledge ampler far ;
 And from our world they sailed away
 Into some visionary day.

LINES WRITTEN IN RICHMOND
PARK

LADY, were you but here !
 The Autumn flames away,
 And pensive in the antlered shade I stray.
 The Autumn flames away, his end is near.
 I linger where deposed and fall'n he lies,
 Prankt in his last poor tattered braveries,
 And think what brightness would enhance the
 Day,
 Lady, were you but here.
 Though hushed the woodlands, though sedate
 the skies,
 Though dank the leaves and sere,
 The storèd sunlight in your hair and eyes
 Would vernalise
 November, and renew the agèd year,
 Lady ! were you but here.

THY voice from inmost dreamland calls ;
 The wastes of sleep thou makest fair ;
 Bright o'er the ridge of darkness falls
 The cataract of thy hair.

The morn renews its golden birth :
 Thou with the vanquished night dost fade ;
 And leav'st the ponderable earth
 Less real than thy shade.

THE SAINT AND THE SATYR

(MEDIÆVAL LEGEND)

SAINT ANTHONY the eremite
He wandered in the wold,
And there he saw a hoofèd wight
That blew his hands for cold.

“What dost thou here in misery,
That better far wert dead?”
The eremite Saint Anthony
Unto the Satyr said.

“Lorn in the wold,” the thing replied,
“I sit and make my moan,
For all the gods I loved have died,
And I am left alone.

“ Silent in Paphos Venus sleeps,
And Jove on Ida mute ;
And every living creature weeps
Pan and his perished flute.

“ The Faun, his laughing heart is broke ;
The nymph, her fountain fails ;
And driven from out the hollow oak
The Hamadryad wails.

“ A God more beautiful than mine
Hath conquered mine, they say.—
Ah, to that fair young God of thine,
For me I pray thee pray !”

A GOLDEN HOUR

A BECKONING spirit of gladness seemed afloat,
That lightly danced in laughing air before us :
The earth was all in tune, and you a note
Of Nature's happy chorus.

'Twas like a vernal morn, yet overhead
The leafless boughs across the lane were
knitting :
The ghost of some forgotten Spring, we said,
O'er Winter's world comes flitting.

Or was it Spring herself, that, gone astray,
Beyond the alien frontier chose to tarry ?
Was it some bold outrider of the May,
Some April-emissary ?

The apparition faded on the air,
Capricious and incalculable comer.—
Wilt thou too pass, and leave my chill days bare,
And fall'n my phantom Summer?

THE GREAT MISGIVING

“NOT ours,” say some, “the thought of death
to dread ;

Asking no heaven, we fear no fabled hell :
Life is a feast, and we have banqueted—
Shall not the worms as well ?

“The after-silence, when the feast is o’er,
And void the places where the minstrels stood,
Differs in nought from what hath been before,
And is nor ill nor good.”

Ah, but the Apparition—the dumb sign—
The beckoning finger bidding me forego
The fellowship, the converse, and the wine,
The songs, the festal glow !

THE GREAT MISGIVING 113

And ah, to know not, while with friends I sit,
And while the purple joy is passed about,
Whether 'tis ampler day divinelier lit
Or homeless night without ;

And whether, stepping forth, my soul shall see
New prospects, or fall sheer—a blinded thing !
There is, O grave, thy hourly victory,
And there, O death, thy sting.

THE GLIMPSE

JUST for a day you crossed my life's dull track,
Put my ignobler dreams to sudden shame,
Went your bright way, and left me to fall back
On my own world of poorer deed and aim ;

To fall back on my meaner world, and feel
Like one who, dwelling 'mid some smoke-
dimmed town,—
In a brief pause of labour's sullen wheel,—
'Scaped from the street's dead dust and factory's
frown,—

In stainless daylight saw the pure seas roll,
Saw mountains pillaring the perfect sky :
Then journeyed home, to carry in his soul
The torment of the difference till he die.

FELICITY

A SQUALID, hideous town, where streams run
black

With vomit of a hundred roaring mills,—
Hither occasion calls me ; and ev'n here,
All in the sable reek that wantonly
Defames the sunlight and deflowers the morn,
One may at least surmise the sky still blue.
Ev'n here, the myriad slaves of the machine
Deem life a boon ; and here, in days far sped,
I overheard a kind-eyed girl relate
To her companions, how a favouring chance
By some few shillings weekly had increased
The earnings of her household, and she said :
“So now we are happy, having all we wished,”—
Felicity indeed ! though more it lay
In wanting little than in winning all.

Felicity indeed ! Across the years
To me her tones come back, rebuking ; me,
Spreader of toils to snare the wandering Joy
No guile may capture and no force surprise—
Only by them that never wooed her, won.

O curst with wide desires and spacious
dreams,
Too cunningly do ye accumulate
Appliances and means of happiness,
E'er to be happy ! Lavish hosts, ye make
Elaborate preparation to receive
A shy and simple guest, who, warned of all
The ceremony and circumstance wherewith
Ye mean to entertain her, will not come.

WHEN birds were songless on the bough
I heard thee sing.
The world was full of winter, thou
Wert full of spring.

To-day the world's heart feels anew
The vernal thrill,
And thine beneath the rueful yew
Is wintry chill.

ENGLAND AND HER COLONIES

SHE stands, a thousand-wintered tree,
By countless morns impearled ;
Her broad roots coil beneath the sea,
Her branches sweep the world ;
Her seeds, by careless winds conveyed,
Clothe the remotest strand
With forests from her scatterings made,
New nations fostered in her shade,
And linking land with land.

O ye by wandering tempest sown
'Neath every alien star,
Forget not whence the breath was blown
That wafted you afar !

For ye are still her ancient seed
On younger soil let fall—
Children of Britain's island-breed,
To whom the Mother in her need
Perchance may one day call.

1892.

WORLD-STRANGENESS

STRANGE the world about me lies,
 Never yet familiar grown—
Still disturbs me with surprise,
 Haunts me like a face half known.

In this house with starry dome,
 Floored with gemlike plains and seas,
Shall I never feel at home,
 Never wholly be at ease?

On from room to room I stray,
 Yet my Host can ne'er espy,
And I know not to this day
 Whether guest or captive I.

So, between the starry dome
And the floor of plains and seas,
I have never felt at home,
Never wholly been at ease.

THE MOCK SELF

Few friends are mine, though many wights
there be

Who, meeting oft a phantasm that makes claim
To be myself, and hath my face and name,
And whose thin fraud I wink at privily,
Account this light impostor very me.

What boots it undeceive them, and proclaim
Myself myself, and whelm this cheat with
shame?

I care not, so he leave my true self free,
Impose not on me also ; but alas !
I too, at fault, bewildered, sometimes take
Him for myself, and far from mine own sight,
Torpido, indifferent, doth mine own self pass ;
And yet anon leaps suddenly awake,
And spurns the gibbering mime into the night.

TO EDWARD DOWDEN

ON RECEIVING FROM HIM A COPY OF "THE LIFE
OF SHELLEY"

FIRST, ere I slake my hunger, let me thank
The giver of the feast. For feast it is,
Though of ethereal, translunary fare—
His story who pre-eminently of men
Seemed nourished upon starbeams and the stuff
Of rainbows, and the tempest, and the foam ;
Who hardly brooked on his impatient soul
The fleshly trammels ; whom at last the sea
Gave to the fire, from whose wild arms the winds
Took him, and shook him broadcast to the world.

In my young days of fervid poesy
He drew me to him with his strange far light,—
He held me in a world all clouds and gleams,

124 TO EDWARD DOWDEN

And vasty phantoms, where ev'n Man himself
 Moved like a phantom 'mid the clouds and
 gleams.

Anon the Earth recalled me, and a voice
 Murmuring of dethroned divinities
 And dead times deathless upon sculptured urn—
 And Philomela's long-descended pain
 Flooding the night—and maidens of romance
 To whom asleep St. Agnes' love-dreams come—
 Awhile constrained me to a sweet duresse
 And thraldom, lapping me in high content,
 Soft as the bondage of white amorous arms.
 And then a third voice, long unheeded—held
 Claustral and cold, and dissonant and tame—
 Found me at last with ears to hear. It sang
 Of lowly sorrows and familiar joys,
 Of simple manhood, artless womanhood,
 And childhood fragrant as the limpid morn ;
 And from the homely matter nigh at hand
 Ascending and dilating, it disclosed
 Spaces and avenues, calm heights and breadths
 Of vision, whence I saw each blade of grass

With roots that groped about eternity,
 And in each drop of dew upon each blade
 The mirror of the inseparable All.
 The first voice, then the second, in their turns
 Had sung me captive. This voice sang me free.
 Therefore, above all vocal sons of men,
 Since him whose sightless eyes saw hell and
 heaven,
 To Wordsworth be my homage, thanks, and
 love.
 Yet dear is Keats, a lucid presence, great
 With somewhat of a glorious soullessness.
 And dear, and great with an excess of soul,
 Shelley, the hectic flamelike rose of verse,
 All colour, and all odour, and all bloom,
 Steeped in the noonlight, glutted with the sun,
 But somewhat lacking root in homely earth,
 Lacking such human moisture as bedews
 His not less starward stem of song, who, rapt
 Not less in glowing vision, yet retained
 His clasp of the prehensible, retained
 The warm touch of the world that lies to hand,

Not in vague dreams of man forgetting men,
Nor in vast morrows losing the to-day ;
Who trusted nature, trusted fate, nor found
An Ogre, sovereign on the throne of things ;
Who felt the incumbence of the unknown, yet
bore

Without resentment the Divine reserve ;
Who suffered not his spirit to dash itself
Against the crags and wavelike break in spray,
But 'midst the infinite tranquillities
Moved tranquil, and henceforth, by Rotha stream
And Rydal's mountain-mirror, and where flows
Yarrow thrice sung or Duddon to the sea,
And wheresoe'er man's heart is thrilled by tones
Struck from man's lyric heartstrings, shall survive.

HYMN TO THE SEA

I

GRANT, O regal in bounty, a subtle and delicate
largess ;

Grant an ethereal alms, out of the wealth of
thy soul :

Suffer a tarrying minstrel, who finds, not fashions
his numbers,—

Who, from the commune of air, cages the
volatile song,—

Here to capture and prison some fugitive breath
of thy descant,

Thine and his own as thy roar lisp'd on the
lips of a shell,

Now while the vernal impulsion makes lyrical
all that hath language,

While, through the veins of the Earth, riots
 the ichor of Spring,
 While, with throes, with raptures, with loosing
 of bonds, with unsealings,—
 Arrowy pangs of delight, piercing the core of
 the world,—
 Tremors and coy unfoldings, reluctances, sweet
 agitations,—
 Youth, irrepressibly fair, wakes like a won-
 dering rose.

II

Lover whose vehement kisses on lips irrespon-
 sive are squandered,
 Lover that woest in vain Earth's imperturb-
 able heart ;
 Athlete mightily frustrate, who pittest thy thews
 against legions,
 Locked with fantastical hosts, bodiless arms of
 the sky ;

HYMN TO THE SEA 129

Sea that breakest for ever, that breakest and
never art broken,

Like unto thine, from of old, springeth the
spirit of man,—

Nature's wooer and fighter, whose years are a
suit and a wrestling,

All their hours, from his birth, hot with desire
and with fray ;

Amorist agonist man, that, immortally pining
and striving,

Snatches the glory of life only from love and
from war ;

Man that, rejoicing in conflict, like thee when
precipitate tempest,

Charge after thundering charge, clangs on thy
resonant mail,

Seemeth so easy to shatter, and proveth so hard
to be cloven ;

Man whom the gods, in his pain, curse with
a soul that endures ;

Man whose deeds, to the doer, come back as
thine own exhalations

Into thy bosom return, weepings of mountain
and vale ;
Man with the cosmic fortunes and starry vicis-
situdes tangled,
Chained to the wheel of the world, blind
with the dust of its speed,
Even as thou, O giant, whom trailed in the
wake of her conquests
Night's sweet despot draws, bound to her
ivory car ;
Man with inviolate caverns, impregnable holds
in his nature,
Depths no storm can pierce, pierced with a
shaft of the sun :
Man that is galled with his confines, and bur-
dened yet more with his vastness,
Born too great for his ends, never at peace
with his goal ;
Man whom Fate, his victor, magnanimous,
clement in triumph,
Holds as a captive king, mewed in a palace
divine :

Wide its leagues of pleasance, and ample of pur-
view its windows ;

Airily falls, in its courts, laughter of fountains
at play ;

Nought, when the harpers are harping, untimely
reminds him of durance ;

None, as he sits at the feast, whisper Cap-
tivity's name ;

But, would he parley with Silence, withdraw
for awhile unattended,

Forth to the beckoning world 'scape for an
hour and be free,

Lo, his adventurous fancy coercing at once and
provoking,

Rise the unscalable walls, built with a word
at the prime ;

Lo, immobile as statues, with pitiless faces of
iron,

Armed at each obstinate gate, stand the im-
passable guards.

III

Miser whose coffered recesses the spoils of eternity cumber,
Spendthrift foaming thy soul wildly in fury away,—
We, self-amorous mortals, our own multitudinous image
Seeking in all we behold, seek it and find it in thee :
Seek it and find it when o'er us the exquisite fabric of Silence
Perilous-turreted hangs, trembles and dulcetly falls ;
When the aerial armies engage amid orgies of music,
Braying of arrogant brass, whimper of querulous reeds ;
When, at his banquet, the Summer is purple and drowsed with repletion ;

HYMN TO THE SEA 133

- When, to his anchorite board, taciturn Winter repairs ;
- When by the tempest are scattered magnificent ashes of Autumn ;
- When, upon orchard and lane, breaks the white foam of the Spring :
- When, in extravagant revel, the Dawn, a bacchante upleaping,
Spills, on the tresses of Night, vintages golden and red ;
- When, as a token at parting, munificent Day, for remembrance,
Gives, unto men that forget, Ophirs of fabulous ore ;
- When, invincibly rushing, in luminous palpitant deluge,
Hot from the summits of Life, poured is the lava of noon ;
- When, as yonder, thy mistress, at height of her mutable glories,
Wise from the magical East, comes like a sorceress pale.

Ah, she comes, she arises,—impassive, emotion-
less, bloodless,

Wasted and ashen of cheek, zoning her ruins
with pearl.

Once she was warm, she was joyous, desire in
her pulses abounding :

Surely thou lovedst her well, then, in her con-
quering youth !

Surely not all unimpassioned, at sound of thy
rough serenading,

She, from the balconied night, unto her
melodist leaned,—

Leaned unto thee, her bondsman, who keepest
to-day her commandments,

All for the sake of old love, dead at thy heart
though it lie.

IV

Yea, it is we, light perverts, that waver, and shift
our allegiance ;

We, whom insurgence of blood dooms to be
barren and waste ;

We, unto Nature imputing our frailties, our fever
and tumult ;

We, that with dust of our strife sully the hue
of her peace.

Thou, with punctual service, fulfillest thy task,
being constant ;

Thine but to ponder the Law, labour and
greatly obey :

Wherefore, with leapings of spirit, thou chantest
the chant of the faithful,

Chantest aloud at thy toil, cleansing the Earth
of her stain ;

Leagued in antiphonal chorus with stars and the
populous Systems,

Following these as their feet dance to the
rhyme of the Suns ;

Thou thyself but a billow, a ripple, a drop of
that Ocean,

Which, labyrinthine of arms, folding us meshed
in its coil,

Shall, as now, with elations, august exultations
and ardours,

Pour, in unfaltering tide, all its unanimous
waves,
When, from this threshold of being, these steps
of the Presence, this precinct,
Into the matrix of Life darkly divinely re-
sumed,
Man and his littleness perish, erased like an error
and cancelled,
Man and his greatness survive, lost in the
greatness of God.

LACHRYMÆ MUSARUM

(6TH OCTOBER 1892)

Low, like another's, lies the laurelled head :
The life that seemed a perfect song is o'er :
Carry the last great bard to his last bed.
Land that he loved, thy noblest voice is mute.
Land that he loved, that loved him ! nevermore
Meadow of thine, smooth lawn or wild sea-shore,
Gardens of odorous bloom and tremulous fruit,
Or woodlands old, like Druid couches spread,
The master's feet shall tread.
Death's little rift hath rent the faultless lute :
The singer of undying songs is dead.

Lo, in this season pensive-hued and grave,
While fades and falls the doomed, reluctant leaf

From withered Earth's fantastic coronal,
 With wandering sighs of forest and of wave
 Mingles the murmur of a people's grief
 For him whose leaf shall fade not, neither fall.
 He hath fared forth, beyond these suns and
 showers.

For us, the autumn glow, the autumn flame,
 And soon the winter silence shall be ours :
 Him the eternal spring of fadeless fame
 Crowns with no mortal flowers.

What needs his laurel our ephemeral tears,
 To save from visitation of decay ?
 Not in this temporal sunlight now, that bay
 Blooms, nor to perishable mundane ears
 Sings he with lips of transitory clay.
 Rapt though he be from us,
 Virgil salutes him, and Theocritus ;
 Catullus, mightiest-brained Lucretius, each
 Greets him, their brother, on the Stygian beach ;
 Proudly a gaunt right hand doth Dante reach ;
 Milton and Wordsworth bid him welcome home ;

Keats, on his lips the eternal rose of youth,
 Doth in the name of Beauty that is Truth
 A kinsman's love beseech ;
 Coleridge, his locks aspersed with fairy foam,
 Calm Spenser, Chaucer suave,
 His equal friendship crave :
 And godlike spirits hail him guest, in speech
 Of Athens, Florence, Weimar, Stratford, Rome.

He hath returned to regions whence he came.
 Him doth the spirit divine
 Of universal loveliness reclaim.
 All nature is his shrine.
 Seek him henceforward in the wind and sea,
 In earth's and air's emotion or repose,
 In every star's august serenity,
 And in the rapture of the flaming rose.
 There seek him if ye would not seek in vain,
 There, in the rhythm and music of the Whole ;
 Yea, and for ever in the human soul
 Made stronger and more beauteous by his strain.

For lo ! creation's self is one great choir,
 And what is nature's order but the rhyme
 Whereto in holiest unanimity
 All things with all things move unfalteringly,
 Infolded and communal from their prime ?
 Who shall expound the mystery of the lyre ?
 In far retreats of elemental mind
 Obscurely comes and goes
 The imperative breath of song, that as the
 wind
 Is trackless, and oblivious whence it blows.
 Demand of lilies wherefore they are white,
 Extort her crimson secret from the rose,
 But ask not of the Muse that she disclose
 The meaning of the riddle of her might :
 Somewhat of all things sealed and recondite,
 Save the enigma of herself, she knows.
 The master could not tell, with all his lore,
 Wherefore he sang, or whence the mandate
 sped:
 Ev'n as the linnet sings, so I, he said ;—
 Ah, rather as the imperial nightingale,

That held in trance the ancient Attic shore,
 And charms the ages with the notes that o'er
 All woodland chants immortally prevail !
 And now, from our vain plaudits greatly fled,
 He with diviner silence dwells instead,
 And on no earthly sea with transient roar,
 Unto no earthly airs, he trims his sail,
 But far beyond our vision and our hail
 Is heard for ever and is seen no more.

No more, O never now,
 Lord of the lofty and the tranquil brow
 Whereon nor snows of time
 Have fall'n, nor wintry rime,
 Shall men behold thee, sage and mage sublime.
 Once, in his youth obscure,
 The maker of this verse, which shall endure
 By splendour of its theme that cannot die,
 Beheld thee eye to eye,
 And touched through thee the hand
 Of every hero of thy race divine,
 Ev'n to the sire of all the laurelled line,

The sightless wanderer on the Ionian strand,
 With soul as healthful as the poignant brine,
 Wide as his skies and radiant as his seas,
 Starry from haunts of his Familiars nine,
 Glorious Mæonides.

Yea, I beheld thee, and behold thee yet :
 Thou hast forgotten, but can I forget ?
 The accents of thy pure and sovereign tongue,
 Are they not ever goldenly impressed
 On memory's palimpsest ?
 I see the wizard locks like night that hung,
 I tread the floor thy hallowing feet have trod ;
 I see the hands a nation's lyre that strung,
 The eyes that looked through life and gazed on
 God.

The seasons change, the winds they shift and
 veer ;
 The grass of yesteryear
 Is dead ; the birds depart, the groves decay :
 Empires dissolve and peoples disappear :
 Song passes not away.

Captains and conquerors leave a little dust,
And kings a dubious legend of their reign ;
The swords of Cæsars, they are less than rust :
The poet doth remain.

Dead is Augustus, Maro is alive ;
And thou, the Mantuan of our age and clime,
Like Virgil shalt thy race and tongue survive,
Bequeathing no less honeyed words to time,
Embalmed in amber of eternal rhyme,
And rich with sweets from every Muse's hive ;
While to the measure of the cosmic rune
For purer ears thou shalt thy lyre attune,
And heed no more the hum of idle praise
In that great calm our tumults cannot reach,
Master who crown'st our immelodious days
With flower of perfect speech.

A LIST OF
MR. WATSON'S WORKS
WITH THE
CONTENTS OF EACH VOLUME

NOTE
COLLECTED POEMS
BY WILLIAM WATSON

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