

A Century of Roundels

Algernon Charles Swinburne

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This etext was produced by David Price,
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DEDICATION

TO CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI

Songs light as these may sound, though deep and strong
The heart spake through them, scarce should hope to please
Ears tuned to strains of loftier thoughts than throng
Songs light as these.

Yet grace may set their sometime doubt at ease,
Nor need their too rash reverence fear to wrong
The shrine it serves at and the hope it sees.

For childlike loves and laughters thence prolong
Notes that bid enter, fearless as the breeze,
Even to tit serves at and the hope it sees.

For childlike loves and laughters thence prolong
Notes that bid enter, fearless as the breeze,
Even to the shrine of holiest-hearted song,
Songs light as these.

IN HARBOUR

I.

Goodnight and goodbye to the life whose signs denote us
As mourners clothed with regret for the life gone by;
To the waters of gloom whence winds of the dayspring float us
 Goodnight and goodbye.

A time is for mourning, a season for grief to sigh;
But were we not fools and blind, by day to devote us
As thralls to the darkness, unseen of the sundawn's eye?

We have drunken of Lethe at length, we have eaten of lotus;
What hurts it us here that sorrows are born and die?
We have said to the dream that caressed and the dread that smote us
 Goodnight and goodbye.

II.

Outside of the port ye are moored in, lying
Close from the wind and at ease from the tide,
What sounds come swelling, what notes fall dying
 Outside?

They will not cease, they will not abide:
Voices of presage in darkness crying
Pass and return and relapse aside.

Ye see not, but hear ye not wild wings flying
To the future that wakes from the past that died?
Is grief still sleeping, is joy not sighing
 Outside?

THE WAY OF THE WIND

The wind's way in the deep sky's hollow
None may measure, as none can say
How the heart in her shows the swallow
The wind's way.

Hope nor fear can avail to stay
Waves that whiten on wrecks that wallow,
Times and seasons that wane and slay.

Life and love, till the strong night swallow
Thought and hope and the red last ray,
Swim the waters of years that follow
The wind's way.

'HAD I WIST'

Had I wist, when life was like a warm wind playing
Light and loud through sundawn and the dew's bright trust,
How the time should come for hearts to sigh in saying
'Had I wist' –

Surely not the roses, laughing as they kissed,
Not the lovelier laugh of seas in sunshine swaying,
Should have lured my soul to look thereon and list.

Now the wind is like a soul cast out and praying
Vainly, prayers that pierce not ears when hearts resist:
Now mine own soul sighs, adrift as wind and straying,
'Had I wist.'

RECOLLECTIONS

I.

Years upon years, as a course of clouds that thicken
Thronging the ways of the wind that shifts and veers,
Pass, and the flames of remembered fires requicken
Years upon years.

Surely the thought in a man's heart hopes or fears
Now that forgetfulness needs must here have stricken
Anguish, and sweetened the sealed-up springs of tears.

Ah, but the strength of regrets that strain and sicken,
Yearning for love that the veil of death endears,
Slackens not wing for the wings of years that quicken –
Years upon years.

II.

Years upon years, and the flame of love's high altar
Trembles and sinks, and the sense of listening ears
Heeds not the sound that it heard of love's blithe psalter
Years upon years.

Only the sense of a heart that hearkens hears,
Louder than dreams that assail and doubts that palter,
Sorrow that slept and that wakes ere sundawn peers.

Wakes, that the heart may behold, and yet not falter,
Faces of children as stars unknown of, spheres
Seen but of love, that endures though all things alter,
Years upon years.

III.

Years upon years, as a watch by night that passes,
Pass, and the light of their eyes is fire that sears
Slowly the hopes of the fruit that life amasses
Years upon years.

Pale as the glimmer of stars on moorland meres
Lighten the shadows reverberate from the glasses
Held in their hands as they pass among their peers.

Lights that are shadows, as ghosts on graveyard grasses,

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Moving on paths that the moon of memory cheers,
Shew but as mists over cloudy mountain passes
Years upon years.

TIME AND LIFE

I.

Time, thy name is sorrow, says the stricken
Heart of life, laid waste with wasting flame
Ere the change of things and thoughts requicken,
Time, thy name.

Girt about with shadow, blind and lame,
Ghosts of things that smite and thoughts that sicken
Hunt and hound thee down to death and shame.

Eyes of hours whose paces halt or quicken
Read in bloodred lines of loss and blame,
Writ where cloud and darkness round it thicken,
Time, thy name.

II.

Nay, but rest is born of me for healing,
—So might haply time, with voice repress,
Speak: is grief the last gift of my dealing?
Nay, but rest.

All the world is wearied, east and west,
Tired with toil to watch the slow sun wheeling,
Twelve loud hours of life's laborious quest.

Eyes forspent with vigil, faint and reeling,
Find at last my comfort, and are blest,
Not with rapturous light of life's revealing —
Nay, but rest.

A DIALOGUE

I.

Death, if thou wilt, fain would I plead with thee:
Canst thou not spare, of all our hopes have built,
One shelter where our spirits fain would be,
Death, if thou wilt?

No dome with suns and dews impearled and gilt,
Imperial: but some roof of wildwood tree,
Too mean for sceptre's heft or swordblade's hilt.

Some low sweet roof where love might live, set free
From change and fear and dreams of grief or guilt;
Canst thou not leave life even thus much to see,
Death, if thou wilt?

II.

Man, what art thou to speak and plead with me?
What knowest thou of my workings, where and how
What things I fashion? Nay, behold and see,
Man, what art thou?

Thy fruits of life, and blossoms of thy bough,
What are they but my seedlings? Earth and sea
Bear nought but when I breathe on it must bow.

Bow thou too down before me: though thou be
Great, all the pride shall fade from off thy brow,
When Time and strong Oblivion ask of thee,
Man, what art thou?

III.

Death, if thou be or be not, as was said,
Immortal; if thou make us nought, or we
Survive: thy power is made but of our dread,
Death, if thou be.

Thy might is made out of our fear of thee:
Who fears thee not, hath plucked from off thine head
The crown of cloud that darkens earth and sea.

Earth, sea, and sky, as rain or vapour shed,

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Shall vanish; all the shows of them shall flee:
Then shall we know full surely, quick or dead,
Death, if thou be.

PLUS ULTRA

Far beyond the sunrise and the sunset rises
Heaven, with worlds on worlds that lighten and respond:
Thought can see not thence the goal of hope's surmises
Far beyond.

Night and day have made an everlasting bond
Each with each to hide in yet more deep disguises
Truth, till souls of men that thirst for truth despond.

All that man in pride of spirit slights or prizes,
All the dreams that make him fearful, fain, or fond,
Fade at forethought's touch of life's unknown surprises
Far beyond.

A DEAD FRIEND

I.

Gone, O gentle heart and true,
Friend of hopes foregone,
Hopes and hopeful days with you
Gone?

Days of old that shone
Saw what none shall see anew,
When we gazed thereon.

Soul as clear as sunlit dew,
Why so soon pass on,
Forth from all we loved and knew
Gone?

II.

Friend of many a season fled,
What may sorrow send
Toward thee now from lips that said
'Friend'?

Sighs and songs to blend
Praise with pain uncomforted
Though the praise ascend?

Darkness hides no dearer head:
Why should darkness end
Day so soon, O dear and dead
Friend?

III.

Dear in death, thou hast thy part
Yet in life, to cheer
Hearts that held thy gentle heart
Dear.

Time and chance may sear
Hope with grief, and death may part
Hand from hand's clasp here:

Memory, blind with tears that start,

A Century of Roundels

Sees through every tear
All that made thee, as thou art,
Dear.

IV.

True and tender, single-souled,
What should memory do
Weeping o'er the trust we hold
True?

Known and loved of few,
But of these, though small their fold,
Loved how well were you!

Change, that makes of new things old,
Leaves one old thing new;
Love which promised truth, and told
True.

V.

Kind as heaven, while earth's control
Still had leave to bind
Thee, thy heart was toward man's whole
Kind.

Thee no shadows blind
Now: the change of hours that roll
Leaves thy sleep behind.

Love, that hears thy death-bell toll
Yet, may call to mind
Scarce a soul as thy sweet soul
Kind.

VI.

How should life, O friend, forget
Death, whose guest art thou?
Faith responds to love's regret,
How?

Still, for us that bow
Sorrowing, still, though life be set,
Shines thy bright mild brow.

Yea, though death and thou be met,
Love may find thee now
Still, albeit we know not yet
How.

A DEAD FRIEND

VII.

Past as music fades, that shone
While its life might last;
As a song-bird's shadow flown
Past!

Death's reverberate blast
Now for music's lord has blown
Whom thy love held fast.

Dead thy king, and void his throne:
Yet for grief at last
Love makes music of his own
Past.

PAST DAYS

I.

Dead and gone, the days we had together,
Shadow–stricken all the lights that shone
Round them, flown as flies the blown foam's feather,
Dead and gone.

Where we went, we twain, in time foregone,
Forth by land and sea, and cared not whether,
If I go again, I go alone.

Bound am I with time as with a tether;
Thee perchance death leads enfranchised on,
Far from deathlike life and changeful weather,
Dead and gone.

II.

Above the sea and sea–washed town we dwelt,
We twain together, two brief summers, free
From heed of hours as light as clouds that melt
Above the sea.

Free from all heed of aught at all were we,
Save chance of change that clouds or sunbeams dealt
And gleam of heaven to windward or to lee.

The Norman downs with bright grey waves for belt
Were more for us than inland ways might be;
A clearer sense of nearer heaven was felt
Above the sea.

III.

Cliffs and downs and headlands which the forward–hasting
Flight of dawn and eve empurples and embrowns,
Wings of wild sea–winds and stormy seasons wasting
Cliffs and downs,

These, or ever man was, were: the same sky frowns,
Laughs, and lightens, as before his soul, forecasting
Times to be, conceived such hopes as time discrowns.

These we loved of old: but now for me the blasting

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Breath of death makes dull the bright small seaward towns,
Clothes with human change these all but everlasting
Cliffs and downs.

AUTUMN AND WINTER

I.

Three months bade wane and wax the wintering moon
Between two dates of death, while men were fain
Yet of the living light that all too soon
Three months bade wane.

Cold autumn, wan with wrath of wind and rain,
Saw pass a soul sweet as the sovereign tune
That death smote silent when he smote again.

First went my friend, in life's mid light of noon,
Who loved the lord of music: then the strain
Whence earth was kindled like as heaven in June
Three months bade wane.

II.

A herald soul before its master's flying
Touched by some few moons first the darkling goal
Where shades rose up to greet the shade, espying
A herald soul;

Shades of dead lords of music, who control
Men living by the might of men undying,
With strength of strains that make delight of dole.

The deep dense dust on death's dim threshold lying
Trembled with sense of kindling sound that stole
Through darkness, and the night gave ear, descrying
A herald soul.

III.

One went before, one after, but so fast
They seem gone hence together, from the shore
Whence we now gaze: yet ere the mightier passed
One went before;

One whose whole heart of love, being set of yore
On that high joy which music lends us, cast
Light round him forth of music's radiant store.

Then went, while earth on winter glared aghast,

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The mortal god he worshipped, through the door
Wherethrough so late, his lover to the last,
One went before.

IV.

A star had set an hour before the sun
Sank from the skies wherethrough his heart's pulse yet
Thrills audibly: but few took heed, or none,
A star had set.

All heaven rings back, sonorous with regret,
The deep dirge of the sunset: how should one
Soft star be missed in all the concourse met?

But, O sweet single heart whose work is done,
Whose songs are silent, how should I forget
That ere the sunset's fiery goal was won
A star had set?

THE DEATH OF RICHARD WAGNER

I.

Mourning on earth, as when dark hours descend,
Wide-winged with plagues, from heaven; when hope and mirth
Wane, and no lips rebuke or reprehend
Mourning on earth.

The soul wherein her songs of death and birth,
Darkness and light, were wont to sound and blend,
Now silent, leaves the whole world less in worth.

Winds that make moan and triumph, skies that bend,
Thunders, and sound of tides in gulf and firth,
Spake through his spirit of speech, whose death should send
Mourning on earth.

II.

The world's great heart, whence all things strange and rare
Take form and sound, that each inseparate part
May bear its burden in all tuned thoughts that share
The world's great heart –

The fountain forces, whence like steeds that start
Leap forth the powers of earth and fire and air,
Seas that revolve and rivers that depart –

Spake, and were turned to song: yea, all they were,
With all their works, found in his mastering art
Speech as of powers whose uttered word laid bare
The world's great heart.

III.

From the depths of the sea, from the wellsprings of earth, from the
wastes of the midmost night,
From the fountains of darkness and tempest and thunder, from heights
where the soul would be,
The spell of the mage of music evoked their sense, as an unknown
light
From the depths of the sea.

As a vision of heaven from the hollows of ocean, that none but a god
might see,

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Rose out of the silence of things unknown of a presence, a form, a
might,
And we heard as a prophet that hears God's message against him, and
may not flee.

Eye might not endure it, but ear and heart with a rapture of dark
delight,
With a terror and wonder whose core was joy, and a passion of thought
set free,
Felt inly the rising of doom divine as a sundawn risen to sight
From the depths of the sea.

TWO PRELUDES

I.

LOHENGRIN

Love, out of the depth of things,
As a dewfall felt from above,
From the heaven whence only springs
Love,

Love, heard from the heights thereof,
The clouds and the watersprings,
Draws close as the clouds remove.

And the soul in it speaks and sings,
A swan sweet-souled as a dove,
An echo that only rings
Love.

II.

TRISTAN UND ISOLDE

Fate, out of the deep sea's gloom,
When a man's heart's pride grows great,
And nought seems now to foredoom
Fate,

Fate, laden with fears in wait,
Draws close through the clouds that loom,
Till the soul see, all too late,

More dark than a dead world's tomb,
More high than the sheer dawn's gate,
More deep than the wide sea's womb,
Fate.

THE LUTE AND THE LYRE

Deep desire, that pierces heart and spirit to the root,
Finds reluctant voice in verse that yearns like soaring fire,
Takes exultant voice when music holds in high pursuit
 Deep desire.

Keen as burns the passion of the rose whose buds respire,
Strong as grows the yearning of the blossom toward the fruit,
Sounds the secret half unspoken ere the deep tones tire.

Slow subsides the rapture that possessed love's flower—soft lute,
Slow the palpitation of the triumph of the lyre:
Still the soul feels burn, a flame unslaked though these be mute,
 Deep desire.

PLUS INTRA

I.

Soul within sense, immeasurable, obscure,
Insepulchred and deathless, through the dense
Deep elements may scarce be felt as pure
Soul within sense.

From depth and height by measurers left immense,
Through sound and shape and colour, comes the unsure
Vague utterance, fitful with supreme suspense.

All that may pass, and all that must endure,
Song speaks not, painting shews not: more intense
And keen than these, art wakes with music's lure
Soul within sense.

CHANGE

But now life's face beholden
Seemed bright as heaven's bare brow
With hope of gifts withholden
But now.

From time's full-flowering bough
Each bud spake bloom to embolden
Love's heart, and seal his vow.

Joy's eyes grew deep with olden
Dreams, born he wist not how;
Thought's meanest garb was golden;
But now!

A BABY'S DEATH

I.

A little soul scarce fledged for earth
Takes wing with heaven again for goal
Even while we hailed as fresh from birth
A little soul.

Our thoughts ring sad as bells that toll,
Not knowing beyond this blind world's girth
What things are writ in heaven's full scroll.

Our fruitfulness is there but dearth,
And all things held in time's control
Seem there, perchance, ill dreams, not worth
A little soul.

II.

The little feet that never trod
Earth, never strayed in field or street,
What hand leads upward back to God
The little feet?

A rose in June's most honied heat,
When life makes keen the kindling sod,
Was not so soft and warm and sweet.

Their pilgrimage's period
A few swift moons have seen complete
Since mother's hands first clasped and shod
The little feet.

III.

The little hands that never sought
Earth's prizes, worthless all as sands,
What gift has death, God's servant, brought
The little hands?

We ask: but love's self silent stands,
Love, that lends eyes and wings to thought
To search where death's dim heaven expands.

Ere this, perchance, though love know nought,

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Flowers fill them, grown in lovelier lands,
Where hands of guiding angels caught
The little hands.

IV.

The little eyes that never knew
Light other than of dawning skies,
What new life now lights up anew
The little eyes?

Who knows but on their sleep may rise
Such light as never heaven let through
To lighten earth from Paradise?

No storm, we know, may change the blue
Soft heaven that haply death describes
No tears, like these in ours, bedew
The little eyes.

V.

Was life so strange, so sad the sky,
So strait the wide world's range,
He would not stay to wonder why
Was life so strange?

Was earth's fair house a joyless grange
Beside that house on high
Whence Time that bore him failed to estrange?

That here at once his soul put by
All gifts of time and change,
And left us heavier hearts to sigh
'Was life so strange?'

VI.

Angel by name love called him, seeing so fair
The sweet small frame;
Meet to be called, if ever man's child were,
Angel by name.

Rose-bright and warm from heaven's own heart he came,
And might not bear
The cloud that covers earth's wan face with shame.

His little light of life was all too rare
And soft a flame:
Heaven yearned for him till angels hailed him there
Angel by name.

A BABY'S DEATH

VII.

The song that smiled upon his birthday here
Weeps on the grave that holds him undefiled
Whose loss makes bitterer than a soundless tear
The song that smiled.

His name crowned once the mightiest ever styled
Sovereign of arts, and angel: fate and fear
Knew then their master, and were reconciled.

But we saw born beneath some tenderer sphere
Michael, an angel and a little child,
Whose loss bows down to weep upon his bier
The song that smiled.

ONE OF TWAIN

I.

One of twain, twin-born with flowers that waken,
Now hath passed from sense of sun and rain:
Wind from off the flower-crowned branch hath shaken
 One of twain.

One twin flower must pass, and one remain:
One, the word said soothly, shall be taken,
And another left: can death refrain?

Two years since was love's light song mistaken,
Blessing then both blossoms, half in vain?
Night outspeeding light hath overtaken
 One of twain.

II.

Night and light? O thou of heart unwary,
Love, what knowest thou here at all aright,
Lured, abused, misled as men by fairy
 Night and light?

Haply, where thine eyes behold but night,
Soft as o'er her babe the smile of Mary
Light breaks flowerwise into new-born sight.

What though night of light to thee be chary?
What though stars of hope like flowers take flight?
Seest thou all things here, where all see vary
 Night and light?

DEATH AND BIRTH

Death and birth should dwell not near together:
Wealth keeps house not, even for shame, with dearth:
Fate doth ill to link in one brief tether
 Death and birth.

Harsh the yoke that binds them, strange the girth
Seems that girds them each with each: yet whether
Death be best, who knows, or life on earth?

Ill the rose-red and the sable feather
Blend in one crown's plume, as grief with mirth:
Ill met still are warm and wintry weather,
 Death and birth.

BIRTH AND DEATH

Birth and death, twin–sister and twin–brother,
Night and day, on all things that draw breath,
Reign, while time keeps friends with one another
 Birth and death.

Each brow–bound with flowers diverse of wreath,
Heaven they hail as father, earth as mother,
Faithful found above them and beneath.

Smiles may lighten tears, and tears may smother
Smiles, for all that joy or sorrow saith:
Joy nor sorrow knows not from each other
 Birth and death.

BENEDICTION

Blest in death and life beyond man's guessing
Little children live and die, possest
Still of grace that keeps them past expressing
Blest.

Each least chirp that rings from every nest,
Each least touch of flower—soft fingers pressing
Aught that yearns and trembles to be prest,

Each least glance, gives gifts of grace, redressing
Grief's worst wrongs: each mother's nurturing breast
Feeds a flower of bliss, beyond all blessing
Blest.

ETUDE REALISTE

I.

A Baby's feet, like sea-shells pink,
Might tempt, should heaven see meet,
An angel's lips to kiss, we think,
A baby's feet.

Like rose-hued sea-flowers toward the heat
They stretch and spread and wink
Their ten soft buds that part and meet.

No flower-bells that expand and shrink
Gleam half so heavenly sweet
As shine on life's untrodden brink
A baby's feet.

II.

A baby's hands, like rosebuds furled
Whence yet no leaf expands,
Ope if you touch, though close upcurled,
A baby's hands.

Then, fast as warriors grip their brands
When battle's bolt is hurled,
They close, clenched hard like tightening bands.

No rosebuds yet by dawn impearled
Match, even in loveliest lands,
The sweetest flowers in all the world –
A baby's hands.

III.

A baby's eyes, ere speech begin,
Ere lips learn words or sighs,
Bless all things bright enough to win
A baby's eyes.

Love, while the sweet thing laughs and lies,
And sleep flows out and in,
Sees perfect in them Paradise.

Their glance might cast out pain and sin,

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Their speech make dumb the wise,
By mute glad godhead felt within
A baby's eyes.

BABYHOOD

I.

A baby shines as bright
If winter or if May be
On eyes that keep in sight
A baby.

Though dark the skies or grey be,
It fills our eyes with light,
If midnight or midday be.

Love hails it, day and night,
The sweetest thing that may be
Yet cannot praise aright
A baby.

II.

All heaven, in every baby born,
All absolute of earthly leaven,
Reveals itself, though man may scorn
All heaven.

Yet man might feel all sin forgiven,
All grief appeased, all pain outworn,
By this one revelation given.

Soul, now forget thy burdens borne:
Heart, be thy joys now seven times seven:
Love shows in light more bright than morn
All heaven.

III.

What likeness may define, and stray not
From truth's exactest way,
A baby's beauty? Love can say not
What likeness may.

The Mayflower loveliest held in May
Of all that shine and stay not
Laughs not in rosier disarray.

Sleek satin, swansdown, buds that play not

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As yet with winds that play,
Would fain be matched with this, and may not:
What likeness may?

IV.

Rose, round whose bed
Dawn's cloudlets close,
Earth's brightest-bred
Rose!

No song, love knows,
May praise the head
Your curtain shows.

Ere sleep has fled,
The whole child glows
One sweet live red
Rose.

FIRST FOOTSTEPS

A little way, more soft and sweet
Than fields aflower with May,
A babe's feet, venturing, scarce complete
A little way.

Eyes full of dawning day
Look up for mother's eyes to meet,
Too blithe for song to say.

Glad as the golden spring to greet
Its first live leaflet's play,
Love, laughing, leads the little feet
A little way.

A NINTH BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY 4, 1883

I.

Three times thrice hath winter's rough white wing
Crossed and curdled wells and streams with ice
Since his birth whose praises love would sing
Three times thrice.

Earth nor sea bears flower nor pearl of price
Fit to crown the forehead of my king,
Honey meet to please him, balm, nor spice.

Love can think of nought but love to bring
Fit to serve or do him sacrifice
Ere his eyes have looked upon the spring
Three times thrice.

II.

Three times thrice the world has fallen on slumber,
Shone and waned and withered in a trice,
Frost has fettered Thames and Tyne and Humber
Three times thrice,

Fogs have swoln too thick for steel to slice,
Cloud and mud have soiled with grime and umber
Earth and heaven, defaced as souls with vice,

Winds have risen to wreck, snows fallen to cumber,
Ships and chariots, trapped like rats or mice,
Since my king first smiled, whose years now number
Three times thrice.

III.

Three times thrice, in wine of song full-flowing,
Pledge, my heart, the child whose eyes suffice,
Once beheld, to set thy joy-bells going
Three times thrice.

Not the lands of palm and date and rice
Glow more bright when summer leaves them glowing,
Laugh more light when suns and winds entice.

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Noon and eve and midnight and cock-crowing,
Child whose love makes life as paradise,
Love should sound your praise with clarions blowing
Three times thrice.

NOT A CHILD

I.

'Not a child: I call myself a boy,'
Says my king, with accent stern yet mild,
Now nine years have brought him change of joy;
 'Not a child.'

How could reason be so far beguiled,
Err so far from sense's safe employ,
Stray so wide of truth, or run so wild?

Seeing his face bent over book or toy,
Child I called him, smiling: but he smiled
Back, as one too high for vain annoy –
 Not a child.

II.

Not a child? alack the year!
What should ail an undefiled
Heart, that he would fain appear
 Not a child?

Men, with years and memories piled
Each on other, far and near,
Fain again would so be styled:

Fain would cast off hope and fear,
Rest, forget, be reconciled:
Why would you so fain be, dear,
 Not a child?

III.

Child or boy, my darling, which you will,
Still your praise finds heart and song employ,
Heart and song both yearning toward you still,
 Child or boy.

All joys else might sooner pall or cloy
Love than this which inly takes its fill,
Dear, of sight of your more perfect joy.

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Nay, be aught you please, let all fulfil
All your pleasure; be your world your toy:
Mild or wild we love you, loud or still,
Child or boy.

TO DORA DORIAN

Child of two strong nations, heir
Born of high-souled hope that smiled,
Seeing for each brought forth a fair
Child,

By thy gracious brows, and wild
Golden-clouded heaven of hair,
By thine eyes elate and mild,

Hope would fain take heart to swear
Men should yet be reconciled,
Seeing the sign she bids thee bear,
Child.

THE ROUNDEL

A roundel is wrought as a ring or a starbright sphere,
With craft of delight and with cunning of sound unsought,
That the heart of the hearer may smile if to pleasure his ear
A roundel is wrought.

Its jewel of music is carven of all or of aught –
Love, laughter, or mourning—remembrance of rapture or fear –
That fancy may fashion to hang in the ear of thought.

As a bird's quick song runs round, and the hearts in us hear
Pause answer to pause, and again the same strain caught,
So moves the device whence, round as a pearl or tear,
A roundel is wrought.

AT SEA

'Farewell and adieu' was the burden prevailing
Long since in the chant of a home-faring crew;
And the heart in us echoes, with laughing or wailing,
Farewell and adieu.

Each year that we live shall we sing it anew,
With a water untravelled before us for sailing
And a water behind us that wrecks may bestrew.

The stars of the past and the beacons are paling,
The heavens and the waters are hoarier of hue:
But the heart in us chants not an all unavailing
Farewell and adieu.

WASTED LOVE

What shall be done for sorrow
With love whose race is run?
Where help is none to borrow,
What shall be done?

In vain his hands have spun
The web, or drawn the furrow:
No rest their toil hath won.

His task is all gone thorough,
And fruit thereof is none:
And who dare say to-morrow
What shall be done?

BEFORE SUNSET

Love's twilight wanes in heaven above,
On earth ere twilight reigns:
Ere fear may feel the chill thereof,
Love's twilight wanes.

Ere yet the insatiate heart complains
'Too much, and scarce enough,'
The lip so late athirst refrains.

Soft on the neck of either dove
Love's hands let slip the reins:
And while we look for light of love
Love's twilight wanes.

A SINGING LESSON

Far-fetched and dear-bought, as the proverb rehearses,
Is good, or was held so, for ladies: but nought
In a song can be good if the turn of the verse is
Far-fetched and dear-bought.

As the turn of a wave should it sound, and the thought
Ring smooth, and as light as the spray that disperses
Be the gleam of the words for the garb thereof wrought.

Let the soul in it shine through the sound as it pierces
Men's hearts with possession of music unsought;
For the bounties of song are no jealous god's mercies,
Far-fetched and dear-bought.

FLOWER-PIECES

I.—LOVE LIES BLEEDING

Love lies bleeding in the bed whereover
Roses lean with smiling mouths or pleading:
Earth lies laughing where the sun's dart clove her:
 Love lies bleeding.

Stately shine his purple plumes, exceeding
Pride of princes: nor shall maid or lover
Find on earth a fairer sign worth heeding.

Yet may love, sore wounded scarce recover
Strength and spirit again, with life receding:
Hope and joy, wind-winged, about him hover:
 Love lies bleeding.

II.—LOVE IN A MIST

Light love in a mist, by the midsummer moon misguided,
Scarce seen in the twilight garden if gloom insist,
Seems vainly to seek for a star whose gleam has derided
 Light love in a mist.

All day in the sun, when the breezes do all they list,
His soft blue raiment of cloudlike blossom abided
Unrent and unwithered of winds and of rays that kissed.

Blithe-hearted or sad, as the cloud or the sun subsided,
Love smiled in the flower with a meaning whereof none wist
Save two that beheld, as a gleam that before them glided,
 Light love in a mist.

THREE FACES

I.—VENTIMIGLIA

The sky and sea glared hard and bright and blank:
Down the one steep street, with slow steps firm and free,
A tall girl paced, with eyes too proud to thank
The sky and sea.

One dead flat sapphire, void of wrath or glee,
Through bay on bay shone blind from bank to bank
The weary Mediterranean, drear to see.

More deep, more living, shone her eyes that drank
The breathless light and shed again on me,
Till pale before their splendour waned and shrank
The sky and sea.

II.—GENOA

Again the same strange might of eyes, that saw
In heaven and earth nought fairer, overcame
My sight with rapture of reiterate awe,
Again the same.

The self-same pulse of wonder shook like flame
The spirit of sense within me: what strange law
Had bid this be, for blessing or for blame?

To what veiled end that fate or chance foresaw
Came forth this second sister face, that came
Absolute, perfect, fair without a flaw,
Again the same?

III.—VENICE

Out of the dark pure twilight, where the stream
Flows glimmering, streaked by many a birdlike bark
That skims the gloom whence towers and bridges gleam
Out of the dark,

Once more a face no glance might choose but mark
Shone pale and bright, with eyes whose deep slow beam
Made quick the twilight, lifeless else and stark.

The same it seemed, or mystery made it seem,

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As those before beholden; but St. Mark
Ruled here the ways that showed it like a dream
Out of the dark.

EROS

I.

Eros, from rest in isles far-famed,
With rising Anthesterion rose,
And all Hellenic heights acclaimed
Eros.

The sea one pearl, the shore one rose,
All round him all the flower-month flamed
And lightened, laughing off repose.

Earth's heart, sublime and unashamed,
Knew, even perchance as man's heart knows,
The thirst of all men's nature named
Eros.

II.

Eros, a fire of heart untamed,
A light of spirit in sense that glows,
Flamed heavenward still ere earth defamed
Eros.

Nor fear nor shame durst curb or close
His golden godhead, marred and maimed,
Fast round with bonds that burnt and froze.

Ere evil faith struck blind and lamed
Love, pure as fire or flowers or snows,
Earth hailed as blameless and unblamed
Eros.

III.

Eros, with shafts by thousands aimed
At laughing lovers round in rows,
Fades from their sight whose tongues proclaimed
Eros.

But higher than transient shapes or shows
The light of love in life inflamed
Springs, toward no goal that these disclose.

Above those heavens which passion claimed

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Shines, veiled by change that ebbs and flows,
The soul in all things born or framed,
Eros.

SORROW

Sorrow, on wing through the world for ever,
Here and there for awhile would borrow
Rest, if rest might haply deliver
Sorrow.

One thought lies close in her heart gnawn thorough
With pain, a weed in a dried-up river,
A rust-red share in an empty furrow.

Hearts that strain at her chain would sever
The link where yesterday frets to-morrow:
All things pass in the world, but never
Sorrow.

SLEEP

Sleep, when a soul that her own clouds cover
Wails that sorrow should always keep
Watch, nor see in the gloom above her
Sleep,

Down, through darkness naked and steep,
Sinks, and the gifts of his grace recover
Soon the soul, though her wound be deep.

God beloved of us, all men's lover,
All most weary that smile or weep
Feel thee afar or anear them hover,
Sleep.

ON AN OLD ROUNDEL

TRANSLATED BY D. C. ROSSETTI FROM THE FRENCH OF VILLON

I.

Death, from thy rigour a voice appealed,
And men still hear what the sweet cry saith,
Crying aloud in thine ears fast sealed,
 Death.

As a voice in a vision that vanisheth,
Through the grave's gate barred and the portal steeled
The sound of the wail of it travelleth.

Wailing aloud from a heart unhealed,
It woke response of melodious breath
From lips now too by thy kiss congealed,
 Death

II.

Ages ago, from the lips of a sad glad poet
Whose soul was a wild dove lost in the whirling snow,
The soft keen plaint of his pain took voice to show it
 Ages ago.

So clear, so deep, the divine drear accents flow,
No soul that listens may choose but thrill to know it,
Pierced and wrung by the passionate music's throe.

For us there murmurs a nearer voice below it,
Known once of ears that never again shall know,
Now mute as the mouth which felt death's wave o'erflow it
 Ages ago.

A LANDSCAPE BY COURBET

Low lies the mere beneath the moorside, still
And glad of silence: down the wood sweeps clear
To the utmost verge where fed with many a rill
 Low lies the mere.

The wind speaks only summer: eye nor ear
Sees aught at all of dark, hears aught of shrill,
From sound or shadow felt or fancied here.

Strange, as we praise the dead man's might and skill,
Strange that harsh thoughts should make such heavy cheer,
While, clothed with peace by heaven's most gentle will,
 Low lies the mere.

A FLOWER-PIECE BY FANTIN

Heart's ease or pansy, pleasure or thought,
Which would the picture give us of these?
Surely the heart that conceived it sought
Heart's ease.

Surely by glad and divine degrees
The heart impelling the hand that wrought
Wrought comfort here for a soul's disease.

Deep flowers, with lustre and darkness fraught,
From glass that gleams as the chill still seas
Lean and lend for a heart distraught
Heart's ease.

A NIGHT-PIECE BY MILLET

Wind and sea and cloud and cloud-forsaking
Mirth of moonlight where the storm leaves free
Heaven awhile, for all the wrath of waking
 Wind and sea.

Bright with glad mad rapture, fierce with glee,
Laughs the moon, borne on past cloud's o'ertaking
Fast, it seems, as wind or sail can flee.

One blown sail beneath her, hardly making
Forth, wild-winged for harbourage yet to be,
Strives and leaps and pants beneath the breaking
 Wind and sea.

'MARZO PAZZO'

Mad March, with the wind in his wings wide-spread,
Leaps from heaven, and the deep dawn's arch
Hails re-risen again from the dead
 Mad March.

Soft small flames on rowan and larch
Break forth as laughter on lips that said
Nought till the pulse in them beat love's march.

But the heartbeat now in the lips rose-red
Speaks life to the world, and the winds that parch
Bring April forth as a bride to wed
 Mad March.

DEAD LOVE

Dead love, by treason slain, lies stark,
White as a dead stark—stricken dove:
None that pass by him pause to mark
 Dead love.

His heart, that strained and yearned and strove
As toward the sundawn strives the lark,
Is cold as all the old joy thereof.

Dead men, re—risen from dust, may hark
When rings the trumpet blown above:
It will not raise from out the dark
 Dead love.

DISCORD

Unreconciled by life's fleet years, that fled
With changeful clang of pinions wide and wild,
Though two great spirits had lived, and hence had sped
Unreconciled;

Though time and change, harsh time's imperious child,
That wed strange hands together, might not wed
High hearts by hope's misprision once beguiled;

Faith, by the light from either's memory shed,
Sees, radiant as their ends were undefiled,
One goal for each—not twain among the dead
Unreconciled.

CONCORD

Reconciled by death's mild hand, that giving
Peace gives wisdom, not more strong than mild,
Love beholds them, each without misgiving
Reconciled.

Each on earth alike of earth reviled,
Hated, feared, derided, and forgiving,
Each alike had heaven at heart, and smiled.

Both bright names, clothed round with man's thanksgiving,
Shine, twin stars above the storm-drifts piled,
Dead and deathless, whom we saw not living
Reconciled.

MOURNING

Alas my brother! the cry of the mourners of old
That cried on each other,
All crying aloud on the dead as the death-note rolled,
Alas my brother!

As flashes of dawn that mists from an east wind smother
With fold upon fold,
The past years gleam that linked us one with another.

Time sunders hearts as of brethren whose eyes behold
No more their mother:
But a cry sounds yet from the shrine whose fires wax cold,
Alas my brother!

APEROTOS EROS

Strong as death, and cruel as the grave,
Clothed with cloud and tempest's blackening breath,
Known of death's dread self, whom none outbrave,
Strong as death,

Love, brow-bound with anguish for a wreath,
Fierce with pain, a tyrant-hearted slave,
Burns above a world that groans beneath.

Hath not pity power on thee to save,
Love? hath power no pity? Nought he saith,
Answering: blind he walks as wind or wave,
Strong as death.

TO CATULLUS

My brother, my Valerius, dearest head
Of all whose crowning bay-leaves crown their mother
Rome, in the notes first heard of thine I read
 My brother.

No dust that death or time can strew may smother
Love and the sense of kinship inly bred
From loves and hates at one with one another.

To thee was Caesar's self nor dear nor dread,
Song and the sea were sweeter each than other:
How should I living fear to call thee dead
 My brother?

'INSULARUM OCELLE'

Sark, fairer than aught in the world that the lit skies cover,
Laughs inly behind her cliffs, and the seafarers mark
As a shrine where the sunlight serves, though the blown clouds hover,
Sark.

We mourn, for love of a song that outsang the lark,
That nought so lovely beholden of Sirmio's lover
Made glad in Propontis the flight of his Pontic bark.

Here earth lies lordly, triumphal as heaven is above her,
And splendid and strange as the sea that upbears as an ark,
As a sign for the rapture of storm-spent eyes to discover,
Sark.

IN SARK

Abreast and ahead of the sea is a crag's front cloven asunder
With strong sea-breach and with wasting of winds whence terror is
shed
As a shadow of death from the wings of the darkness on waters that
thunder

Abreast and ahead.

At its edge is a sepulchre hollowed and hewn for a lone man's bed,
Propped open with rock and agape on the sky and the sea thereunder,
But roofed and walled in well from the wrath of them slept its dead.

Here might not a man drink rapture of rest, or delight above wonder,
Beholding, a soul disembodied, the days and the nights that fled,
With splendour and sound of the tempest around and above him and
under,

Abreast and ahead?

IN GUERNSEY

TO THEODORE WATTS

I.

The heavenly bay, ringed round with cliffs and moors,
Storm–stained ravines, and crags that lawns inlay,
Soothes as with love the rocks whose guard secures
The heavenly bay.

O friend, shall time take ever this away,
This blessing given of beauty that endures,
This glory shown us, not to pass but stay?

Though sight be changed for memory, love ensures
What memory, changed by love to sight, would say –
The word that seals for ever mine and yours
The heavenly bay.

II.

My mother sea, my fostress, what new strand,
What new delight of waters, may this be,
The fairest found since time's first breezes fanned
My mother sea?

Once more I give me body and soul to thee,
Who hast my soul for ever: cliff and sand
Recede, and heart to heart once more are we.

My heart springs first and plunges, ere my hand
Strike out from shore: more close it brings to me,
More near and dear than seems my fatherland,
My mother sea.

III.

Across and along, as the bay's breadth opens, and o'er us
Wild autumn exults in the wind, swift rapture and strong
Impels us, and broader the wide waves brighten before us
Across and along.

The whole world's heart is uplifted, and knows not wrong;
The whole world's life is a chant to the sea–tide's chorus;
Are we not as waves of the water, as notes of the song?

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Like children unworn of the passions and toils that wore us,
We breast for a season the breadth of the seas that throng,
Rejoicing as they, to be borne as of old they bore us
 Across and along.

IV.

On Dante's track by some funereal spell
Drawn down through desperate ways that lead not back
We seem to move, bound forth past flood and fell
 On Dante's track.

The grey path ends: the gaunt rocks gape: the black
Deep hollow tortuous night, a soundless shell,
Glares darkness: are the fires of old grown slack?

Nay, then, what flames are these that leap and swell
As 'twere to show, where earth's foundations crack,
The secrets of the sepulchres of hell
 On Dante's track?

V.

By mere men's hands the flame was lit, we know,
From heaps of dry waste whin and casual brands:
Yet, knowing, we scarce believe it kindled so
 By mere men's hands.

Above, around, high-vaulted hell expands,
Steep, dense, a labyrinth walled and roofed with woe,
Whose mysteries even itself not understands.

The scorn in Farinata's eyes aglow
Seems visible in this flame: there Geryon stands:
No stage of earth's is here, set forth to show
 By mere men's hands.

VI.

Night, in utmost noon forlorn and strong, with heart athirst and
fasting,
Hungers here, barred up for ever, whence as one whom dreams affright
Day recoils before the low-browed lintel threatening doom and casting
 Night.

All the reefs and islands, all the lawns and highlands, clothed with
light,
Laugh for love's sake in their sleep outside: but here the night
speaks, blasting
Day with silent speech and scorn of all things known from depth to
height.

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Lower than dive the thoughts of spirit-stricken fear in souls
forecasting
Hell, the deep void seems to yawn beyond fear's reach, and higher
than sight
Rise the walls and roofs that compass it about with everlasting
Night.

VII.

The house accurst, with cursing sealed and signed,
Heeds not what storms about it burn and burst:
No fear more fearful than its own may find
The house accurst.

Barren as crime, anhungered and athirst,
Blank miles of moor sweep inland, sere and blind,
Where summer's best rebukes not winter's worst.

The low bleak tower with nought save wastes behind
Stares down the abyss whereon chance reared and nursed
This type and likeness of the accurst man's mind,
The house accurst.

VIII.

Beloved and blest, lit warm with love and fame,
The house that had the light of the earth for guest
Hears for his name's sake all men hail its name
Beloved and blest.

This eyrie was the homeless eagle's nest
When storm laid waste his eyrie: hence he came
Again, when storm smote sore his mother's breast.

Bow down men bade us, or be clothed with blame
And mocked for madness: worst, they sware, was best:
But grief shone here, while joy was one with shame,
Beloved and blest.

ENVOI

Fly, white butterflies, out to sea,
Frail pale wings for the winds to try,
Small white wings that we scarce can see
Fly.

Here and there may a chance-caught eye
Note in a score of you twain or three
Brighter or darker of tinge or dye.

Some fly light as a laugh of glee,
Some fly soft as a low long sigh:
All to the haven where each would be
Fly.