

Lays and Legends

E. Nesbit

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Lays and Legends

E. Nesbit

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TO TWO WOMEN.

YOU who bore the pain and care
Only women have to bear,
You who staked your life to win
Life for me, to love you in,
You who loved me all these years,
With your kisses, prayers, and tears.

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You whose being gave to earth
All that gives my life its worth,
You who gave me love and praise
In the darkest of my days:
To you both where far you stand,
See, I reach out heart and hand.

Heart that love of you enfolds,
Hand that this poor nosegay holds:
If some weeds about it twine,
Cast them back, for they are mine;
All the flowers were set by you,
And within your garden grew.

TEKEL

WHEN on the West broke light from out the East,
Then from the splendour and the shame of Rome
Renouncing wealth and pleasure, game and feast,
And all the joys of his polluted home, Desiring not the gifts his world could give, If haply he might save his soul
and live
Into the desert's heart a man had come.

His God had died for love of him, and he
For love of God would die to all of these
Sweet sins he had not known for sins, and be
Estranged for evermore from rest and ease; His days in penance spent might half atone For the iniquity of days
bygone,
And in the desert might his soul find peace.

Crossing wide seas, he reached an alien land:
By mighty harbours and broad streams he passed
Into an arid, trackless waste of sand,
And journeying ever faster and more fast, Left men behind, and onward still did press To a ruined city in the
wilderness,
And there he stayed his restless feet at last.

There stood long lines of columns richly wrought,
Colossal statues of forgotten kings,
Vast shadowy temples, court within dim court,
Great shapes of man-faced beasts with wide firm wings; And in and out each broken colonnade The
bright-eyed, swift, green-gleaming lizards played,
In that still place the only living things.

Lays and Legends

But when the moon unveiled her still, white face,
And over sand and stone her glory shed
Another life awoke within the place,
And great beasts stalked, with silent heavy tread, Through pillared vista, over marble floor, And the stern
menace of the lion's roar
Made horrible the city of the dead.

Like a great bird soft sinking on its nest,
Too lightly to disturb its tender brood,
The night, with dark spread wings and cloudy breast,
Sank on the desert city's solitude As he drew near. The shadows grew more dense, The silence stronger;
weariness intense
Fell on him then, and only rest seemed good.

He passed between tall pillars' sculptured gloom,
And entered a deserted, lightless fane,
And knew not if it temple were, or tomb,
But slept and slept, till over all the plain The level sunbeams spread, and earth was bright With morning's radiant
resurrection—light;
Then he awoke, refreshed and strong again.

Through empty courts he passed, and lo! a wall
Whereon was imaged all the languid grace
Of fairest women, and among them all
Shone like a star one lovely Eastern face: Undimmed by centuries the colours were, Bright as when first the
painter found her fair,
And set her there to glorify the place.

All he had fled from suddenly drew near,
And from her eyes a challenge seemed down—thrown;
'Ah, fool!' she seemed to say, 'what dost thou here?
How canst thou bear this stern, sad life alone, When I not just this face that copies me, But I myself stretch
arms and lips to thee,
From that same world whose joys thou hast foregone?'

His heart leaped up like flame she was so fair;
Then with a start he hid his eyes and fled
Into the hotness of the outer air.
His pulse beat quickly. 'Oh, my God!' he said, 'These be the heart made pure, and cleansèd brain! I vow to Thee
to never look again
On women, real or painted, quick or dead!'

So lest within the city he should find,

Lays and Legends

To tempt his soul, still some accursèd thing,
He left the palaces and courts behind,
Found a green spot, with date-palms and a spring
And built himself a rough stone shelter there
And saw no more the face, so strange and fair
That had begot such vain imagining.

He tilled the patch of land, and planted seeds
Which from his own far country he had brought;
And, caring little for his body's needs,
Strove still by blind belief to strangle thought,
By ceaseless penance to deny desire,
To quench in prayer and fast all human fire,
And wrest from Heaven the blessings that he sought.

And there peace found him, and he dwelt alone,
And gladly gave his life to God. Behind
Lay the long dim arcades of graven stone;
Before him lay the desert, burning blind
Sometimes with the dread dance of its own sand,
That wildly whirled in shadowy columns, fanned
By the hot breath of the fierce desert wind.

Each day passed by as had passed other days,
And days gone by were as the days to come,
Save that on some days he was wild with praise,
And weak with vigil and with fast on some;
And no man saw he for long months and years,
But ever did he penance with hot tears,
And but for prayer and praise his lips were dumb.

Sometimes at first, when spent with watch and prayer,
He saw again the Imperial City's towers,
Where, in a mist of music and sweet air,
Thais and Phryne crowned his cup with flowers
He saw the easeful day, the festal night,
The life that was one dream of long delight,
One rose-red glow of rapture and fair hours.

He heard old well-remembered voices cry,
'Come back to us! Think of the joys you miss;
Each moment floats some foregone rapture by,
A cup, a crown, a song, a laugh, a kiss!
Cast down that crown of thorns, return, and be
Once more flower-crowned, love-thrilled, wine-warmed, and see
The old sweet life how good a thing it is!'

But his soul answered, 'Nay, I am content;
Ye call in vain; the desert shuts me in.
Your flowers are sere, your wine with gall is blent,

Lays and Legends

Your sweets have all the sickening taste of sin; Such sin I expiate with ceaseless pain, And world and flesh and devil strive in vain
Back from its sanctuary my soul to win.

'Fair are the Imperial City's towers to see?
I seek the City with the streets of gold.
Beside the lilies God has grown for me
Faint are the roses that your fingers hold. Ear hath not heard the music I shall hear, Eye hath not seen the joys that shall appear,
Nor heart conceived the things I shall behold.'

After long days a stranger halted there,
For some far distant monastery bound.
The hermit fed and lodged, nor could forbear
To tell his guest what rest his soul had found How with the world he long ago had done, How the hard battle had been fought and won,
And he found peace, pure, perfect and profound.

The stranger answered, 'Thou hast watched an hour,
But many hours go to make up our day,
And some of these are dark with fateful power,
And Satan watches for our souls away; The spirit may be willing, but indeed The flesh is weak, and so much more the need
To pray and watch, my brother, watch and pray.'

The Roman bowed his head in mute assent,
And, having served the stranger with his best,
Bade him God-speed, and down the way he went
Gazed sadly after, but within his breast A pale fire of resentment sprang to flame Was he not holy now, and void of blame,
And certain of himself, and pure, and blest?

That night a new-born desolation grew
Within his heart as he made fast the stone
Against the doorway of his hut, and knew
How more than ever he was now alone. He was in darkness, but the moon without Made a new tender daylight round about
The hut, the palms, the plot with millet sown.

Hark! what was that? For many months and years
He had not heard that faint uncertain noise,
Broken, and weak, and indistinct with tears
A voice a human voice a woman's voice. 'Oh, let me in,' it wailed, 'before I die! Oh, let me in, for Holy Charity!'

Lays and Legends

For see my life or death is at thy choice!

Unthinking, swift he rolled the stone away:

There stood a woman, trembling, shrinking, thin;
Her pale hair by the moon's white light looked grey,

And grey her hands and grey her withered skin. 'Oh, save me lest I die among the beasts
Who roam, and roar,
and hold their fearful feasts!

Oh, save me,' she besought him, 'let me in!'

Troubled, he answered, 'Nay, I have a vow

Never again a woman's face to see!'

'But, ah,' she cried, 'thy vow is broken now,

For at this moment thou beholdest me. I cannot journey farther. Help!' she said, 'Or I before the dawning shall be
dead,

And thou repent to all eternity!'

His soul was gentle and compassionate.

'Thou shalt not perish enter here,' he said;

'My vow is broken, and thy need is great.'

She staggered forward to the dry leaf bed, and sank upon it, cold and still and white. 'Perhaps she may not live
until the light,'

He thought, and lifted up her drooping head,

And gave her wine from out a little store

Which he had kept untouched since first he came;

He rolled the stone again before his door

To keep the night air from her wasted frame; and, though his vow was broken, somehow knew
That he was
doing what was right to do,

Yet felt a weight of unacknowledged blame.

And many a day he tended her and fed;

But ever after that first night's surprise

With earnest vigilance he held his head

Averted, and downcast he kept his eyes. His vow, though broken once, was still his law; He looked upon her
face no more, nor saw

Her whom he cared for in such kindly wise.

She never spoke to him, nor he to her

That she was sick and sad was all he knew;

He never asked her what her past days were,

Nor of the future, what she meant to do. So dwelt they, till the full moon's yellow light
Flooded the world once
more. Then came the night

Which all his life had been a prelude to.

Lays and Legends

The stone was moved a little from the door,
And near it he was kneeling rapt in prayer
Upon the cold uneven earthen floor;
The moonbeams passed him by, and rested where
The woman slept her breathing soft and slow,
With rhythmic cadence even, restful, low,
Stirring the stillness of the cool night air

His prayer being ended, as he turned to rest,
He chanced to let his eyes fall carelessly
Upon the figure that the moon caressed,
The woman that his care had not let die.
And now no more he turned his face aside,
But gazed, and gazed, and still unsatisfied
His eager look fed on her, hungrily.

On her? On whom? The suppliant he had saved,
Thin, hollow-cheeked and sunken-eyed had been,
With shrunken brow whereon care-lines were graved,
With withered arms, dull hair, and fingers lean.
'Has my blind care transformed her so?' he said;
For she was gone, and there lay in her stead
The loveliest woman he had ever seen.

The rags she wore but made her seem more sweet,
Since in despite of them she was so fair;
The rough brown leaves quite covered up her feet,
But left one ivory arm and shoulder bare,
The other lay beneath the little head,
And over all the moonlit couch was spread
The sunlight-coloured wonder of her hair.

He could not move, nor turn away his gaze:
How long he stood and looked he could not guess.
At last she faintly sighed, and in her face
Trembled the dawn of coming consciousness;
The eyelids quivered, and the red lips stirred,
As if they tried to find some sweet lost wo

And then her eyelids lifted, and he met
Full in his dazzled eyes the glorious light
Of eyes that he had struggled to forget
Since he had broken from their spells of might
The Eastern eyes that from the painted wall
Had lightened down upon him, to enthrall
Senses and soul with fetters of delight.

He knew her now, his love without a name,
Who in his dreams had looked on him and smiled,

Lays and Legends

And almost back to his old world of shame

His unconsenting manhood had beguiled! There was no world now any more. At last He knew that all his future, present, past

In her sole self was fused and reconciled.

The moments fled as in a dream divine:

Fire filled his veins there beat within his brain

The madness that is born of love or wine;

And her eyes gleamed softened and gleamed again, And in those stormy seas he gazed, until Her beauty seemed the whole vast night to fill,

And all, save her, seemed valueless and vain.

Then, with her eyes still deep in his, she rose

And moved towards him, and a wave of bliss

Flooded his sense with the wild joy that goes

Before a longed-for, almost granted kiss, And slowly she drew nearer to his side Then, with a smile like mid-June's dawn, she sighed,

And turned to him, and laid her hand on his.

And at the touch, all he had deemed effaced

All the heart-searing passions of his past

Surged up, and their destroying wave laid waste

The ordered garden of his soul. At last The spell of silence broke, and suddenly The man's whole heart found voice in one low cry,

As round her perfect head his arms he cast

And did not clasp her, for his foiled arms crossed

Only upon his own tumultuous breast!

His wrecked heart, tempest driven, passion tossed,

Beat fierce against his own hand on it pressed. As on June fields might fall December frost, In one cold breath he knew that she was lost

Eternally foregone and unpossessed.

For even as he clasped she had seemed to melt,

And fade into the misty moonlit air;

His arms were empty, yet his hand still felt

The touch of her hand that had rested there: But she was gone, with all her maddening grace The solitude and silence, in her place,

Like a chill searching wind crept everywhere.

Silence at first. Then suddenly outbroke

A little laugh. And then, above, around,

A hideous peal of laughter, shout on shout,

Re-echoing from sky, and air, and ground; And in his devastated soul had birth A horrid echo of that demon

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mirth,

And with his human voice he swelled its sound.

'Tricked, fooled!' he laughed. 'We laugh, the fiends and I,

They for their triumph, I to feel my fall!

From snares like these is no security,

In desert wild or close-built city wall: And since I must be tempted, let me go
And brave the old temptations
that I know;

Not these, that are but phantoms after all

'Phantoms, not living women, warm and real,

As the fair Roman women were. And yet

The phantom only is my soul's ideal,

Longed for through all the years and never met
Till now; and only now to make hell worse
To fan my fires of
infinite remorse

With the cold wind of infinite regret.

'Back to the world, the world of love and sin!

For since my soul is lost, I claim its price!

Prayers are not heard. The God I trusted in

Has failed me once He shall not fail me twice!
No more of that wild striving and intense
For irrecoverable
innocence

No more of useless, vain self-sacrifice!

'Life is too potent and too passionate,

Against whose force I all these years have striven

In vain, in vain! Our own lives make our Fate;

And by our Fate our lives are blindly driven!
There is no refuge in the hermit's cell
From memories enough to
make a hell

Of chances lost that might have made a heaven!'

Back to his world he went, and plunged anew

Into the old foul life's polluted tide;

But ever in his sweetest feast he knew

A longing never to be satisfied:
This strange wild wickedness, that new mad sin,
Might be the frame to find her
picture in;

And if that failed, some other must be tried.

And in the search, soul, body, heart, and brain

Were blasted and destroyed, and still his prize,

Ever untouched, seemed always just to gain,

And just beyond his reach shone Paradise.
So followed he, too faithfully, too well,
Through death, into the very
gate of hell,

The love-light of those unforgotten eyes!

THE MOAT HOUSE

PART I

I

UNDER the shade of convent towers,
Where fast and vigil mark the hours,
 From childhood into youth there grew
 A maid as fresh as April dew,
And sweet as May's ideal flowers,

Brighter than dawn in wind-swept skies,
Like children's dreams most pure, unwise,
 Yet with a slumbering soul-fire too,
 That sometimes shone a moment through
Her wondrous unawakened eyes.

The nuns, who loved her coldly, meant
The twig should grow as it was bent;
 That she, like them, should watch youth's bier,
 Should watch her day-dreams disappear,
And go the loveless way they went.

The convent walls were high and grey;
How could Love hope to find a way
 Into that citadel forlorn,
 Where his dear name was put to scorn,
Or called a sinful thing to say?

Yet Love did come; what need to tell
Of flowers downcast, that sometimes fell
 Across her feet when dreamily
 She paced, with unused breviary,
Down paths made still with August's spell

Of looks cast through the chapel grate,
Of letters helped by Love and Fate,
 That to cold fingers did not come
 But lay within a warmer home,
Upon her heart inviolate?

Lays and Legends

Somehow he loved her she loved him:
Then filled her soul's cup to the brim,
 And all her daily life grew bright
 With such a flood of rosy light
As turned the altar candles dim.

But love that lights is love that leads,
And lives upon the heart it feeds;
 Soon grew she pale though not less fair,
 And sighed his name instead of prayer,
And told her heart-throbs, not her beads.

How could she find the sunlight fair,
A sunlight that he did not share?
 How could a rose smell sweet within
 The cruel bars that shut her in,
And shut him out while she was there?

He vowed her fealty firm and fast,
Then to the winds her fears she cast;
 They found a way to cheat the bars,
 And in free air, beneath free stars,
Free, and with him, she stood at last.

'Now to some priest,' he said, 'that he
May give thee blessing us to me.'
 'No priest,' she cried in doubt and fear,
 'He would divide, not join us, dear.
I am mine I give myself to thee.

'Since thou and I are mine and thine,
What need to swear it at a shrine?
 Would love last longer if we swore
 That we would love for evermore?
God gives me thee and thou art mine.'

'God weds us now,' he said, 'yet still
Some day shall we all forms fulfil.
 Eternal truth affords to smile
 At laws wherewith man marks his guile,
Yet law shall join us when you will.

Lays and Legends

'So look your last, my love, on these
Forbidding walls and wooing trees.
Farewell to grief and gloom,' said he;
'Farewell to childhood's joy,' said she;
But neither said, 'Farewell to peace.'

Song.

My sweet, my sweet, She is complete
From dainty head to darling feet; So warm and white, So brown and bright,
So made for love and love's delight.

God could but spare One flower so fair,
There is none like her anywhere; Beneath wide skies The whole earth lies,
But not two other such brown eyes.

The world we're in, If one might win?
Not worth that dimple in her chin A heaven to know? I'll let that go
But once to see her lids droop low

Over her eyes, By love made wise:
To see her bosom fall and rise Is more than worth The angels' mirth,
And all the heaven—joys of earth.

This is the hour Which gives me power
To win and wear earth's whitest flower. Oh, Love, give grace, Through all life's ways
Keep pure this heart, her dwelling place.

II

The fields were reaped and the pastures bare,
And the nights grown windy and chill,
When the lovers passed through the beech woods fair,
And climbed the brow of the hill.
In the hill's spread arm the Moat House lies
With elm and willow tree;
'And is that your home at last?' she sighs.
'Our home at last,' laughs he.

Across the bridge and into the hall
Where the waiting housefolk were.
'This is my lady,' he said to them all,
And she looked so sweet and fair
That every maid and serving—boy
God—blessed them then and there,
And wished them luck, and gave them joy,
For a happy, handsome pair.

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And only the old nurse shook her head:
 'Too young,' she said, 'too young.'
She noted that no prayers were read,
 No marriage bells were rung;

No guests were called, no feast was spread,
 As was meet for a marriage tide;
The young lord in the banquet hall broke bread
 Alone with his little bride.

Yet her old heart warmed to the two, and blessed,
 They were both so glad and gay,
By to-morrow and yesterday unoppressed,
 Fulfilled of the joy of to-day;
Like two young birds in that dull old nest,
 So careless of coming care,
So rapt in the other that each possessed,
 The two young lovers were.

He was heir to a stern hard-natured race,
 That had held the Moat House long,
But the gloom of his formal dwelling place
 Dissolved at her voice and song;
So bright, so sweet, to the house she came,
 So winning of way and word,
The household knew her by one pet name,
 'My Lady Ladybird.'

First love so rarely gets leave to bring,
 In our world where money is might,
Its tender buds to blossoming
 With the sun of its own delight.
We love at rose or at vintage prime,
 In the glare and heat of the day,
Forgetting the dawn and the violet time,
 And the wild sweet scent of the may.

These loved like children, like children played,
 The old house laughed with delight
At her song of a voice, at the radiance made
 By her dress's flashing flight.
Up the dark oak stair, through the gallery's gloom,
 She ran like a fairy fleet,
And ever her lover from room to room

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Fast followed her flying feet.

They gathered the buds of the late-lived rose
In the ordered garden ways,
They walked through the sombre yew-walled close
And threaded the pine woods maze,

They rode through woods where their horses came
Knee-deep through the rustling leaves,
Through fields forlorn of the poppies' flame
And bereft of their golden sheaves.

In the mellow hush of October noon
They rowed in the flat broad boat,
Through the lily leaves so thickly strewn
On the sunny side of the moat.
They were glad of the fire of the beech-crowned hill,
And glad of the pale deep sky,
And the shifting shade that the willows made
On the boat as she glided by.

They roamed each room of the Moat House through
And questioned the wraiths of the past,
What legends rare the old dresses knew,
And the swords, what had wet them last?
What faces had looked through the lozenge panes,
What shadows darkened the door,
What feet had walked in the jewelled stains
That the rich glass cast on the floor?

She dressed her beauty in old brocade
That breathed of loss and regret,
In laces that broken hearts had swayed,
In the days when the swords were wet;
And the rubies and pearls laughed out and said,
'Though the lovers for whom we were set,
And the women who loved us, have long been dead,
Yet beauty and we live yet.'

When the wild white winter's spectral hand
Effaced the green and the red,
And crushed the fingers brown of the land
Till they grew death-white instead,
The two found cheer in their dark oak room,

Song.

Lays and Legends

And their dreams of a coming spring,
For a brighter sun shone through winter's gloom
Than ever a summer could bring.

They sat where the great fires blazed in the hall,
Where the wolf-skins lay outspread,
The pictured faces looked down from the wall
To hear his praise of the dead.

He told her ghostly tales of the past,
And legends rare of his house,
Till she held her breath at the shade fire-cast,
And the scamper-rush of the mouse,

Till she dared not turn her head to see
What shape might stand by her chair
Till she cried his name, and fled to his knee,
And safely nestled there.
Then they talked of their journey, the city's crowd,
Of the convent's faint joy and pain,
Till the ghosts of the past were laid in the shroud
Of commonplace things again.

So the winter died, and the baby spring,
With hardly voice for a cry,
And hands too weak the signs to bring
That all men might know her by,
Yet woke, and breathed through the soft wet air
The promise of all things dear,
And poets and lovers knew she was there,
And sang to their hearts, 'She is here.'

Song.

Soft is the ground underfoot,
Soft are the skies overhead,
Green is the ivy round brown hedge root,
Green is the moss where we tread.

Purple the woods are, and brown;
The blackbird is glossy and sleek,
He knows that the worms are no more kept down
By frost out of reach of his beak.

Song.

Grey are the sheep in the fold,
Tired of their turnip and beet,
Dreaming of meadow and pasture and wold,
And turf the warm rain will make sweet.

Leaves sleep, no bud wakens yet,
But we know by the song of the sun,
And the happy way that the world smiles, wet,
That the spring oh, be glad! is begun.

What stirs the heart of the tree?
What stirs the seed the earth bears?
What is it stirring in you and in me
Longing for summer, like theirs?

Longing you cannot explain,
Yearning that baffles me still!
Ah! that each spring should bring longings again
No summer can ever fulfil!



When all the world had echoed the song
That the poet and lover sang,
When 'Glory to spring,' sweet, soft, and strong,
From the ferny woods outrang,
In wet green meadow, in hollow green,
The primrose stars outshone,
And the bluebells balanced their drooping sheen
In copses lovely and lone.

The green earth laughed, full of leaf and flower,
The sky laughed too, full of sun;
Was this the hour for a parting hour,
With the heaven of spring just won?
The woods and fields were echoing
To a chorus of life and bliss.
Oh, hard to sting the face of the spring
With the smart of a parting kiss!

A kinsman ailing, a summons sent
To haste to his dying bed.
'Oh, cruel sentence of banishment!

Lays and Legends

For my heart says "Go"! he said.
'So now good-bye to my home, my dear,
To the spring we watched from its birth;
There is no spring, oh, my sweet, but here,
'Tis winter all over the earth.

'But I come again, oh, spring of my life,
You hold the cord in your hand
That will draw me back, oh, my sweetheart wife,
To the place where your dear feet stand;
But a few short days, and my arms shall be
Once more round your little head,
And you will be weeping glad tears with me
On the grave of our parting, dead!

I leave you my heart for a short short while,
It will ache if 'tis wrapped in fears;
Keep it safe and warm in the sun of your smile,
Not wet with the rain of your tears.

Be glad of the joy that shall soon be won,
Be glad to-day, though we part;
You shall weep for our parting when parting is done,
And drop your tears on my heart.'

Song.

Good-bye, my love, my only dear, I know your heart is true
And that it lingers here with me while mine fares forth with you.
We part? Our hearts are almost one, and are so closely tied
'Tis yours that stirs my bosom-lace, mine beats against your side.

So not at losing you I grieve, since heart and soul stay here,
But all the gladness of my life, I cry to lose it, dear;
Warmth of the sun, sweet of the rose, night's rest and light of day,
I mourn for these, for if you go, you take them all away.

You are sad too not at leaving me, whose heart must with you go,
But at the heaven you leave behind ah, yes you told me so,
You said wherever you might go you could not ever find
A spring so sweet, love so complete, as these you leave behind.

No future joy will ever pay this moment's bitter ache,

Song.

Lays and Legends

Yet I am glad to be so sad, since it is for your sake.
You take so much, I do but wish that you could take the whole,
Could take me, since you take my rest, my light, my joy, my soul.

Song.

Oh, love, I leave This springtide eve,
When woods in sunset shine blood-red; The long road lies
Before my eyes,
My horse goes on with even tread.

I dare not turn These eyes that burn
Back to the terrace where you lean; If I should see
Your tears for me,
I must turn back to dry them, O my queen!

Yet I must go, Fate has it so,
Duty spoke once, and I obey; Sadly I rise,
Leave paradise,
And turn my face the other way.

Nothing is dear On earth but here,
There is no joy away from you; What though there be
New things to see,
New friends, new faces, and adventures new?

Yet since I may Not with you stay,
Hey for the outer world of life! Brace limbs, shake rein,
And seek again
The hurry, jostle, jar and strife.

Hey for the new! Yet, love, for you
I have loved you so the last hand-kiss. How vast a world
Lies here unfurled!
How small, if sweet, home's inner round of bliss!

The road bends right, Leads out of sight,
Here I may turn, nor fear to see; So far away,
One could not say
If you are weeping now for me.

Behind this eve My love I leave,
The big bright world spreads out before; Yet will I come,
To you and home,
Oh, love, and rest beneath your yoke once more.

IV

She stood upon the terrace, gazing still
Down the long road to watch him out of sight,
Dry-eyed at first, until the swelling hill
Hid him. Then turned she to the garden bright,
Whose ways held memories of lover's laughter,
And lover's sadness that had followed after,
Both born of passion's too intense delight.

The garden knew her secrets, and its bowers

Song.

Lays and Legends

Threw her her secrets back in mocking wise;
"Twas here he buried you in lilac flowers.
Here while he slept you covered up his eyes
With primroses. They died; and by that token
Love, like a flower whose stalk has once been broken,
Will live no more for all your tears and sighs.'

The sundial that had marked their happy hours
Cried out to her, 'I know that he is gone;
So many twos have wreathed me round with flowers,
And always one came afterwards alone,
And always wept even as you are weeping.
The flowers while they lived were cold, shade keeping,
But always through the tears the sun still shone.'

She left the garden; but the house still more
Whispered, 'You love him he has gone away.'
Where fell her single footstep sighed the floor,
'Another foot than yours fell here to-day.'
The very hound she stroked looked round and past her,
Then in her face, and whined, 'Where is our master?'
The whole house had the same one thing to say.

Empty, without its soul, disconsolate,
The great house was: through all the rooms went she,
And every room was dark and desolate,
Nothing seemed good to do or good to see.
At last, upon the wolf-skins, worn with weeping,
The old nurse found her, like a tired child, sleeping
With face tear-stained, and sobbing brokenly.

Wearily went the days, all sad the same,
Yet each brought its own added heaviness.
Why was it that no letter from him came
To ease the burden of her loneliness?
Why did he send no message, word, or greeting,
To help her forward to their day of meeting,
No written love no black and white caress?

At last there came a letter, sweet but brief,
'He was so busy had no time for more.'
No time! She had had time enough for grief,
There never had been so much time before;
And yet the letter lay within her bosom,
Pressed closely to her breathing beauty's blossom,
Worn for a balm, because her heart was sore.

She knew not where he stayed, and so could send,
Of all the letters that she wrote, not one;
Hour after soft spring hour the child would spend

Lays and Legends

In pouring out her soul, for, once begun, The tale of all her love and grief flowed over
Upon the letters that she wrote her lover,
And that the fire read when the tale was done.

And yet she never doubted he would come,
If not before, yet when a baby's eyes
Should look for him, when his deserted home
Should waken to a baby's laughs and cries. He judges best perhaps he comes to-morrow,
But come he will, and we shall laugh at sorrow
When in my arms our little baby lies.'

And in the August days a soft hush fell
Upon the house the old nurse kept her place
Beside the little wife and all was well;
After rapt anguish came a breathing space, And she, mid tears and smiles, white-faced, glad-eyed,
Felt her wee baby move against her side,
Kissed its small hands, worshipped its tiny face.

Song.

Oh, baby, baby, baby dear,
We lie alone together here;
The snowy gown and cap and sheet
With lavender are fresh and sweet;
Through half-closed blinds the roses peer
To see and love you, baby dear.

We are so tired, we like to lie
Just doing nothing, you and I,

Within the darkened quiet room.
The sun sends dusk rays through the gloom,
Which is no gloom since you are here,
My little life, my baby dear.

Soft sleepy mouth so vaguely pressed
Against your new-made mother's breast,
Soft little hands in mine I fold,
Soft little feet I kiss and hold,
Round soft smooth head and tiny ear,
All mine, my own, my baby dear.

And he we love is far away!

Song.

Lays and Legends

But he will come some happy day.
You need but me, and I can rest
At peace with you beside me pressed.
There are no questions, longings vain,
No murmuring, nor doubt, nor pain,
Only content and we are here,
My baby dear.

PART II

I

While winged Love his pinions folded in the Moat House by the hill,
In the city there was anger, doubt, distrust, and thoughts of ill;

For his kinsmen, hearing rumours of the life the lovers led,
Wept, and wrung their hands, and sorrowed 'Better that the lad were dead
Than to live thus he, the son of proudest man and noblest earl
Thus in open sin with her, a nameless, shameless, foreign girl.'
(Ever when they thus lamented, 'twas the open sin they named,
Till one wondered whether sinning, if less frank, had been less blamed.)
'Tis our duty to reclaim him mate him to a noble bride
Who shall fitly grace his station, and walk stately by his side
Gently loose him from the fetters of this siren fair and frail
(In such cases time and absence nearly always will prevail).
He shall meet the Duke's fair daughter perfect, saintly Lady May
Beauty is the surest beacon to a young man gone astray!
Not at all precipitately, but with judgment sure and fine,
We will rescue and redeem him from his shameful husks and swine.

So his uncle's long been ailing (gout and dropsy for his sins)
Let that serve for pretext; hither bring the youth his cure begins.'
So they summoned him and welcomed, and their utmost efforts bent
To snatch back a brand from burning and a soul from punishment
Sought to charm him with their feasting, each more sumptuous than the last,
From his yearning recollections of his very sinful past
Strove to wipe his wicked doings from his memory's blotted page
By the chaster, purer interests of the ball-room and the stage.
And for Lady May they hinted to the girl, child-innocent,
That her hand to save the sinner by her Saviour had been sent,
That her voice might bring his voice her Master's triumph choir to swell,
And might save a man from sorrow and a human soul from hell.

So she used her maiden graces, maiden glances, maiden smiles,
To protect the erring pilgrim from the devil's subtle wiles
Saw him daily, sent him letters, pious verses by the score,

Lays and Legends

Every angel's trap she baited with her sweet religious lore
Ventured all she knew, not knowing that her beauty and her youth
Were far better to bait traps with than her odds and ends of truth.
First he listened, vain and flattered that a girl as fair as she
Should be so distinctly anxious for his lost humanity,
Yet determined no attentions, even from the Lady May,
Should delay his home—returning one unnecessary day.
But as she heart—wrung with pity for his erring soul grew kind,
Fainter, fainter grew the image of his sweetheart left behind;
Till one day May spoke of sorrow prayed him to reform repent,
Urged the festival in heaven over every penitent;
Bold in ignorance, spoke vaguely and low—toned of sin and shame,

And at last her voice, half breathless, faltered, broke upon his name,
And two tears fell from her lashes on the roses at her breast,
Far more potent in their silence than her preaching at its best.
And his weak soul thrilled and trembled at her beauty, and he cried,
'Not for me those priceless tears: I am your slave you shall decide.'
'Save your soul,' she sighed. 'Was ever man so tempted, tried, before?
It is yours!' and at the word his soul was lost for evermore.
Never woman pure and saintly did the devil's work so well!
Never soul ensnared for heaven took a surer road to hell!
Lady May had gained her convert, loved him, and was satisfied,
And before the last leaves yellowed she would kneel down as his bride.
She was happy, and he struggled to believe that perfidy
Was repentance reformation was not one with cruelty,

Yet through all congratulations, friends' smiles, lovers' flatteries,
Lived a gnawing recollection of the lost love harmonies.
In the day he crushed it fiercely, kept it covered out of sight,
But it held him by the heart—strings and came boldly out at night:
In the solemn truthful night his soul shrank shuddering from its lies,
And his base self knew its baseness, and looked full in its false eyes.
In the August nights, when all the sky was deep and toneless blue,
And the gold star—points seemed letting the remembered sunlight through,
When the world was hushed and peaceful in the moonlight's searching white,
He would toss and cast his arms out through the silence and the night
To those eyes that through the night and through the silence came again,
Haunting him with the persistence and the passion of their pain.

'Oh, my little love my sweetheart oh, our past our sweet love—day
Oh, if I were only true or you were only Lady May!
But the sunshine scared the vision, and he rose once more love—warm
To the Lady May's perfections and his own proposed reform.
Coward that he was! he could not write and break that loving heart:
To the worn—out gouty kinsman was assigned that pleasing part.
'Say it kindly,' said her lover, 'always friends I can't forget

Lays and Legends

We must meet no more but give her tenderest thought and all regret;
Bid her go back to the convent she and I can't meet as friends
Offer her a good allowance any terms to make amends
For what nought could make amends for for my baseness and my sin.
Oh, I know which side the scale this deed of mine will figure in!
Curse reform! she may forget me 'tis on me the burdens fall,

For I love her only, solely not the Lady May at all!
'Patience,' said the uncle, 'patience, this is but the natural pain
When a young man turns from sinning to the paths of grace again.
Your wild oats are sown you're plighted to the noble Lady May
(Whose estates adjoin your manor in a providential way).
Do your duty, sir, for surely pangs like these are such as win
Pardon and the heavenly blessing on the sinner weaned from sin.'

Song.

Day is fair, and so is she
Whom so soon I wed;
But the night, when memory
Guards my sleepless bed,
And with cold hands brings once more
Thorns from rose-sweet days of yore
Night I curse and dread.

Day is sweet, as sweet as her
Girlish tenderness;
But the night, when near me stir
Rustlings of a dress,

Echoes of a loving tone
Now renounced, forsworn, foregone,
Night is bitterness.

Day can stir my blood like wine
Or her beauty's fire,
But at night I burn and pine,
Torture, turn and tire,
With a longing that is pain,
Just to kiss and clasp again
Love's one lost desire.

Day is glad and pure and bright,
Pure, glad, bright as she;

Song.

Lays and Legends

But the sad and guilty night
 Outlives day for me.
Oh, for days when day and night
Equal balance of delight
 Were alike to me!

In the day I see my feet
 Walk in steadfast wise,
Following my lady sweet
 To her Paradise,
Like some stray–recovered lamb;
But I see the beast I am
 When the night stars rise.

Yet in wedding day there lies
 Magic so they say;
Ghosts will have no chance to rise
 Near my Lady May.
Vain the hope! In good or ill
Those lost eyes will haunt me still
 Till my dying day.

II

Quickly died the August roses, and the kin of Lady May
Dowered her richly, blessed her freely, and announced her wedding day;
And his yearnings and remorse fainter grew as days went on
'Neath the magic of the beauty of the woman he had won;
And less often and less strongly was his fancy caught and crossed
By remembrance of the dearness of the woman he had lost.
Long sweet mornings in the boudoir where the flowers stood about,
Whisperings in the balcony when stars and London lamps came out,

Concerts, flower shows, garden parties, balls and dinners, rides and drives,
All the time–killing distractions of these fashionable lives;
Dreary, joyless as a desert, pleasure's everlasting way,
But enchantment can make lovely even deserts, so they say,
Sandy waste, or waste of London season, where no green leaf grows,
Shone on but by love or passion, each will blossom like the rose!
Came no answer to the letter that announced his marriage day;
But his people wrote that Lady Ladybird had gone away.
So he sent to bid get ready to receive his noble wife.
Two such loving women granted to one man, and in one life!
Though he shuddered to remember with what ghosts the Moat House swarmed
Ghosts of lovely days and dreamings ere the time when he reformed
Yet he said, 'She cannot surely greatly care, or I had heard

Some impulsive, passionate pleading, had some sorrowing written word;
She has journeyed to her convent will be glad as ere I came,
Through her beauty's dear enchantment, to a life of shameless shame;
And the memories of her dearness passion's flaming sword shall slay,
When the Moat House sees the bridal of myself and Lady May!



Bright the mellow autumn sunshine glows upon the wedding day;
Lawns are swept from leaves, and doorways are wreathed round with garlands gay,
Flowery arches span the carriage drive from grass again to grass,
Flowers are ready for the flinging when the wedded pair shall pass;
Bells are ringing, clanging, clamouring from the belfry 'mid the trees,
And the sound rings out o'er woodlands, parks and gardens, lawns and leas;

All the village gay with banners waits the signal, 'Here they come!'
To strew flowers, wave hats, drop curtseys, and hurra its 'Welcome home!'
At the gates the very griffins on the posts are wreathed with green.
In their ordered lines wait servants for the pair to pass between;
But among them there is missing more than one familiar face,
And new faces, blank expectant, fill up each vacated place,
And the other servants whisper, 'Nurse would wail to see this day,
It was well she left the service when "my Lady" ran away.'
Louder, clearer ring the joy-bells through the shaken, shattered air,
Till the echoes of them waken in the hillside far and fair;
Level shine the golden sunbeams in the golden afternoon.
In the east the wan ghost rises of the silver harvest moon.

Hark! wheels was it? No, but fancy. Listen! No yes can you hear?
Yes, it is the coming carriage rolling nearer and more near!
Till the horse-hoofs strike the roadway, unmistakable and clear!
They are coming! shout your welcome to my lord and lady fair:
May God shower his choicest blessings on the happy wedded pair!
Here they are! the open carriage and surrounding dusty cloud,
Whence he smiles his proud acceptance of the homage of the crowd;
And my lady's sweet face! Bless her! there's a one will help the poor,
Eyes like those could never turn a beggar helpless from her door!
Welcome, welcome! scatter flowers: see, they smile bow left and right,
Reach the lodge gates God of heaven! what was that, the flash of white?
She has sprung out from the ambush of the smiling, cheering crowd:

'Fling your flowers here's my welcome!' sharp the cry rings out and loud.
Sudden sight of wild white face, and haggard eyes, and outstretched hands
Just one heart-beat's space before the bridal pair that figure stands,

Lays and Legends

Then the horses, past controlling, forward bound, their hoofs down thrust
And the carriage wheels jolt over something bloody in the dust.
'Stop her! Stop her! Stop the horses!' cry the people all too late,
For my lord and Lady May have had their welcome at their gate.

'Twas the old nurse who sprang to her, raised the brown-haired, dust-soiled head,
Looked a moment, closed the eyelids then turned to my lord and said,
Kneeling still upon the roadway, with her arm flung round the dead,
While the carriage waited near her, blood and dust upon its wheels

(Ask my lord within to tell you how a happy bridegroom feels):
'Now, my lord, you are contented; you have chosen for your bride
This same fine and dainty lady who is sitting by your side.
Did ye tell her ere this bridal of the girl who bore your shame,
Bore your love-vows bore your baby everything except your name?
When they strewed the flowers to greet you, and the banners were unfurled,
She has flung before your feet the sweetest flower in all the world!
Woe's the day I ever nursed you loved your lisping baby word,
For you grew to name of manhood, and to title of my lord;
Woe's the day you ever saw her, brought her home to wreck her life,
Throwing by your human plaything, to seek out another wife.
God will judge, and I would rather be the lost child lying there,

With your babe's milk in her bosom, your horse-hoof marks on her hair,
Than be you when God shall thunder, when your days on earth are filled,
"Where is she I gave, who loved you, whom you ruined, left and killed?"
Murderer, liar, coward, traitor, look upon your work and say
That your heart is glad within you on your happy wedding day!
And for you, my noble lady, take my blessing on your head,
Though it is not like the blessing maidens look for when they wed.
Never bride had such a welcome, such a flower laid on her way,
As was given you when your carriage crushed her out of life to-day.
Take my blessing see her body, see what you and he have done
And I wish you joy, my lady, of the bridegroom you have won.'

Like a beaten cur, that trembles at the whistling of the lash,

He stands listening, hands a-tremble, face as pale as white wood ash;
But the Lady May springs down, her soul shines glorious in her eyes,
Moving through the angry silence comes to where the other lies,
Gazes long upon her silent, but at last she turns her gaze
On the nurse, and lips a-tremble, hands outstretched, she slowly says,
'She is dead but, but her baby ' all her woman's heart is wild
With an infinite compassion for the little helpless child.
Then she turns to snatch the baby from the arms of one near by,

Lays and Legends

Holds it fast and looks towards him with a voiceless bitter cry,
As imploring him to loose her from some nightmare's deadly bands.
Dogged looks he down and past her, and she sees and understands,
Then she speaks 'I keep your baby that's my right in sight of men,
But by God I vow I'll never see your dastard face again.'

So she turned with no word further towards the purple–clouded west,
And passed thither with his baby clasped against her maiden breast.

Little Ladybird was buried in the old ancestral tomb.
From that grave there streams a shadow that wraps up his life in gloom,
And he drags the withered life on, longs for death that will not come,
The interminable night hours riven by that 'Welcome home!'
And he dares not leave this earthly hell of sharp remorse behind,
Lest through death not rest but hotter fire of anguish he should find.
Coward to the last, he will not risk so little for so much,
So he burns, convicted traitor, in the hell self–made of such:
And at night he wakes and shivers with unvanquishable dread
At the ghosts that press each other for a place beside his bed,
And he shudders to remember all the dearness that is dead.

Song.

I had a soul,
Not strong, but following good if good but led.
I might have kept it clean and pure and whole,
And given it up at last, grown strong with days
Of steadfast striving in truth's stern sweet ways;
Instead, I soiled and smutched and smothered it
With poison–flowers it valued not one whit Now it is dead.

I had a heart
Most true, most sweet, that on my loving fed.
I might have kept her all my life, a part
Of all my life I let her starve and pine,
Ruined her life and desolated mine.
Sin brushed my lips I yielded at a touch,
Tempted so little, and I sinned so much, And she is dead.

There was a life
That in my sin I took and chained and wed,
And made perpetual remorse! my wife.
In my sin's harvest she must reap her share,
That makes its sheaves less light for me to bear.
Oh, life I might have left to bloom and grow!
I struck its root of happiness one blow, And it is dead.

Lays and Legends

Once joy I had,
Now I have only agony instead,
That maddens, yet will never send me mad.
The best that comes is numbed half-sick despair,
Remembering how sweet the dear dead were.
My whole life might have been one clear joy song!
Now oh, my heart, how still life is, how long, For joy is dead.

Yet there is this:
I chose the thorns not grapes, the stones not bread;
I had my chance, they say, to gain or miss.
And yet I feel it was predestinate
From the first hour, from the first dawn of fate,
That I, thus placed, when that hour should arise,
Must act thus, and could not act otherwise.
This is the worst of all that can be said; For hope is dead.

UNOFFICIAL

ONE morning, my heart can remember, I sat dreaming there, In the 'governor's' chair
In the office. The month was November, And the weather a subject for prayer.

My mind strayed through visions unbounded Far-off seemed the din That King William Street's in,
And the quill of the 'junior' sounded Like the squeak of an elf's violin.

I was roused with a start some one entered. Though ground-glass divide Off the sanctum inside,
The star where my homage was centred In the office without I descried.

'Oh, kind Fate, to bring me my Kitty! The boy I can send At the bank to attend:
One partner's just gone from the City, And the other is at the West End.

'Change two pounds, boy, for threepenny pieces! And there isn't a franc In the place! I will thank
You to take down these coupons from Creasy's To the London and Westminster Bank.'

He is gone! This can never be Kitty, Alone here with me! Can this ever be she,
Laughing here in the heart of the City, With the old office cat on her knee?

'I hope, Ben,' she says, 'you are stronger, And I hope it's not true Work is injuring you;
And I'd better not stay any longer, As you seem to have **so much** to do!'

But she does not go yet. Still she lingers, Dry deed-boxes press The crisp folds of her dress,

Lays and Legends

While the desk feels inquisitive fingers
In a touch that is half a caress.

Now, dreary and quiet the place is;
Here's the space on the floor I remember of yore,
Which was brushed by her ribbons and laces
As she smiled her 'good-bye' at the door.

The violets she wore in her bosom,
So scented, dew-wet, Are hard to forget;
The dim office grew fair with each blossom,
And their fragrance seems haunting it yet.

I'm in partnership now with old Bradley;
His brother is dead, So I stand as the Head
Of affairs; and I'm thinking thus sadly
Of the sweetness of days that have fled.

My Wimbledon house all that's in it
My life, with its dower Of money-bag power
I would throw to the dogs in a minute,
To recall from those days but one hour.

Lost light of my eyes, little Kitty!
Too late now, too late; But I'd give my estate
To be once more a clerk in the City
In the office with you *tête-à-tête*.

PESSIMISM

I

WHILE baby Spring sticks daisies in her hair,
Or Summer laughs with flushed triumphant face
We crush our heart rebellious at earth's grace,
And smile 'How, like the season, life is fair!'
But when the last leaf falls in the dull air,
And skies grow pale, and fields lie lost a space,
Ere their first furrow ploughs begin to trace,
And pastures shiver desolate and bare

Oh, then one breathes; at last free from the sway
Of selfish spring from summer's insolent reign,
One dares to speak the truth how all life's way
Is blank as autumn skies made grey with rain,
Most blank when most the glad year bade forbear
To mar her grace with our unveiled despair.

II

NOT Spring too lavish of her bud and leaf

Lays and Legends

But Autumn, with sad eyes and brow austere,
When fields are bare, and woods are brown and sere,
And leaden skies weep their exhaustless grief.
Spring is so much too bright, since Spring is brief.
And in our hearts is autumn all the year,
Least sad when the wide pastures are most drear,
And fields grieve most robbed of the last gold sheaf.

For when the plough goes down the brown wet field,
A delicate doubtful throb of hope is ours
What if this coming Spring at last should yield
Joy, with her too profuse unmasked—for flowers?
Not all our Springs of commonplace and pain
Have taught us now that autumn hope is vain.

GHOSTS

YES kiss my forehead where the pain
Is grinding outwards from my brain!
But will not pity teach you, too,
To kiss these lips no fire burns through
These cheeks, made colourless and thin
By years you had no portion in
These weary eyes that wake and ache
Not for your sake not for your sake:
Kiss, child, and let your kisses see
If they can find the heart in me!
There is a heart or used to be!

I think the pain is growing less
Under your passionless caress
Ah! could you teach my lips to crave
But just such kisses as you gave,
And could you, treading my life's ways,
But lay these ghosts of dear dead days

That walk my world by day and night,
And bar the way of all delight
If at your touch should waken . . . Vain!
From heaven itself my soul would plain:
'Give me my ghosts, my ghosts again!'

THE DEAD TO THE LIVING

Work while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

IN the childhood of April, while purple woods
With the young year's blood in them smiled,
I passed through the lanes and the wakened fields,
And stood by the grave of the child.
And the pain awoke that is never dead
Though it sometimes sleeps, and again
It set its teeth in this heart of mine,
And fastened its claws in my brain:
For it seemed so hard that the little hands
And the little well-loved head
Should be out of reach of my living lips,
And be side by side with the dead
Not side by side with us who had loved,
But with these who had never seen
The grace of the smile, the gold of the hair,
And the eyes of my baby-queen.
Yet with trees about where the brown birds build,
And with long green grass above,

She lies in the cold sweet breast of earth
Beyond the reach of our love;
Whatever befalls in the coarse loud world,
We know she will never wake.
When I thought of the sorrow she might have known,
I was almost glad for her sake. . . .
Tears might have tired those kiss-closed eyes,
Grief hardened the mouth I kissed;
I was almost glad that my dear was dead
Because of the pain she had missed.
Oh, if I could but have died a child
With a white child-soul like hers,
As pure as the wind-flowers down in the copse,
Where the soul of the spring's self stirs;
Or if I had only done with it all,
And might lie by her side unmoved!
I envied the very clods of earth
Their place near the child I loved!

And my soul rose up in revolt at life,
As I stood dry-eyed by her grave,
When sudden the grass of the churchyard sod
Rolled back like a green smooth wave;
The brown earth looked like the brown sea rocks,

The tombstones were white like spray,

And white like surf were the curling folds
Of the shrouds where the dead men lay;
For each in his place with his quiet face
I saw the dead lie low,
Who had worked and suffered and found life sad,
So many sad years ago.
Unchanged by time I saw them lie
As when first they were laid to rest,
The tired eyes closed, the sad lips still,
And the work-worn hands on the breast.
There were some who had found the green world so grey,
They had left it before their time,
And some were little ones like my dear,
And some had died in their prime;
And some were old, they had had their fill
Of bitter unfruitful hours,
And knew that none of them, none, had known
A flower of a hope like ours!

Through their shut eyelids the dead looked up,
And without a voice they said:
'We lived without hope, without hope we died,
And hopeless we lie here dead;

And death is better than life that draws
Pain in, as it draws in breath,
If life never dreams of a coming day
When life shall not envy death.
Through the dark of our hours and our times we lived,
Uncheered by a single ray
Of such hope as lightens the lives of you
Who are finding life hard to-day;
With our little lanterns of human love
We lighted our dark warm night
But you in the chill of the dawn are set
With your face to the eastern light.
Freedom is waiting with hands held out
Till you tear the veil from her face
And when once men have seen the light of her eyes,
And felt her divine embrace,
The light of the world will be risen indeed,
And will shine in the eyes of men,
And those who come after will find life fair,
And their lives worth living then!
Will you strive to the light in your loud rough world,

That these things may come to pass,
Or lie in the shadow beside the child,
And strive to the sun through the grass?'

'My world while I may,' I cried; 'but you
Whose lives were as dark as your grave?'
'We too are a part of the coming light,'
They called through the smooth green wave.
Their white shrouds gleamed as the flood of green
Rolled over and hid them from me
Hid all but the little hands and the hair,
And the face that I always see.

THE SPHINX

THIS mystery of golden hair,
Of eyes and lips and bosom fair,
Is not if one could really see
Mere flesh and blood, like you and me:
This is a sphinx whose still lips say
This one thing ever, day by day,
To all who cross her in life's ways:
'Which is the way to love?' she says.

For every man who meets her eyes
In their deep depths the question lies;
And vainly would he seek to fly
Or put the wordless challenge by,
Unless within his soul be set
Some true-love vow as amulet:
This clasping, let him flee her spell,
Nor trust its guardian powers too well.

Nothing seems good to think about
But just to find that secret out;
We bring her fruits of earnest hours,
And offer choice of passion-flowers,
Of crowns, of heart's blood, of heart's ache,
Our hopes we spurn, our joys forsake,
While she looks down upon our pain
Without compassion or disdain.

She does not will to question thus
Fate made her just to torture us;

Nor can she tell you, if she will,
Aught of your guesses, good or ill.
But if you fail to answer well,
Your own foiled heart prepares your hell,
And all your days you walk alone,
And curse the done and the undone.

She does not bid you for her sake
Your soul to wreck, your life to break,
Nor would she choose it for her part.
Only for ever in your heart

The haunting question must abide,
And clamour morn and eventide,
Until no single note your ear
Of all life's harmonies can hear.

Yet to some man it will be given
To find the key that opens heaven;
For him, beloved by all the Fates,
Answer as well as question waits
In those unawakened eyes of hers,
And when their calm that answer stirs,
From her stone sleep the sphinx will wake
Into a woman, for his sake.

What though one's whole life's light grows night
With that unanswered question's blight?
One's one poor chance is richly worth
The richest certainties of earth!
Myself would rather die, I know
Starved, just because I want her so
Than feast in highest heaven of bliss
On any other woman's kiss.

Such spells she has, I would not choose
One look or touch of hers to lose,
Though every touch and look have power
To sting me to my dying hour;
Though every breath of hers should bring
Frost on life's bud and blossoming,
What soul could ask a dearer death
Than to be withered by her breath?

QUIETA NE MOVETE

IF one should wake one's frozen faith
In sunlight of her radiant eyes,
Bid it forget its dream of death,
In this new dream of Paradise,
Bid it forget the long, slow pain,
The agony when, all in vain,
It fought for life, and how one swore,
Once cold, it should not waken more;

If hope one buried long ago
Should thrill beneath those smiles of hers,
Should in one's sere life stir and grow,
As in brown woods the young spring stirs;
If, breaking icy bonds of grief,
One's soul should start to bud and leaf,
It might forget in that springtide
How last year's leaves fell off and died.

If from warm faith and hope set high
A lovely living child was born,
With lips more pure than starlit sky,
And eyes as clear as summer morn,
Child-love might grow till one forgot
Old love, that was and now is not
Forgot that far-off time of tears,
And all these desolated years.

And yet of faith, hope, love, one knows
So well what end the years will make,
If one should dig beneath Time's snows
And wake them now for her sweet sake.
New life may mean new joy; but then,
What lives again may die again,
And to that second death there may
Be no new resurrection-day.

MICROCOSM

SHE and I we kissed and vowed
That should be which could not be;
Just as if mere vows endowed
Love with immortality!

Ah, had vows but kept us true,
As we thought them sure to do!

She and I such tiny parts
Of the Evolution—plan
Yet can hold within our hearts
All the misery of man:
All the ages did prepare,
All we are and all we bear.

She and I mere counters, toys
Nature uses for her game
Pity that we long for joys,
And feel sorrows all the same!
Just as though our wills were free,
As we dreamed them I and she!

THE HUSBAND OF TO-DAY

EYES caught by beauty, fancy by eyes caught;
Sweet possibilities, question, and wonder
What did her smile say? What has her brain thought?
Her standard, what? Am I o'er it or under?Flutter in meeting in absence dreaming;Tremor in greeting for
meeting scheming;
Caught by the senses, and yet all through
True with the heart of me, sweetheart, to you.

Only the brute in me yields to the pressure
Of longings inherent of vices acquired;
All this, my darling, is folly not pleasure,
Only my fancy not soul has been fired.Sense thrills exalted, thrills to love—madness;Fancy grown sad
becomes almost love—sadness;
And yet love has with it nothing to do,
Love is fast fettered, sweetheart, to you.

Lacking fresh fancies, time flags grows wingless;
Life without folly would fail fall flat;
But the love that lights life, and makes death's self stingless
You, and you only, have wakened that.Sweet are all women, you are the best of them;You are so dear because
dear are the rest of them;After each fancy has sprung, grown, and died,Back I come ever, dear, to your side.
The strongest of passions in joy seeks the new,
But in grief I turn ever, sweetheart, to you.

THE WIFE OF ALL AGES

I DO not catch these subtle shades of feeling,
Your fine distinctions are too fine for me;
This meeting, scheming, longing, trembling, dreaming,
To me mean love, and only love, you see;
In me at least 'tis love, you will admit,
And you the only man who wakens it.

Suppose **I** yearned, and longed, and dreamed, and fluttered,
What would you say or think, or further, do?
Why should one rule be fit for me to follow,
While there exists a different law for you?
If all these fires and fancies came my way,
Would you believe love was so far away?

On all these other women never doubt it
'Tis love you lavish, love you promised me!
What do I care to be the first, or fiftieth?
It is the **only one** I care to be.

Dear, I would be your sun, as mine you are,
Not the most radiant wonder of a star.

And so, good-bye! Among such sheaves of roses
You will not miss the flower I take from you;
Amid the music of so many voices
You will forget the little songs I knew
The foolish tender words I used to say,
The little common sweets of every day.

The world, no doubt, has fairest fruits and blossoms
To give to you; but what, ah! what for me?
Nay, after all I am your slave and bondmaid,
And all my world is in my slavery.
So, as before, I welcome any part
Which you may choose to give me of your heart.

TWO VOICES

COUNTRY

SWEET are the lanes and the hedges, the fields made red with the clover,
With tall field-sorrel, and daisies, and golden buttercups glowing;
Sweet is the way through the woods, where at sundown maiden and lover
Linger by stile or by bank where wild clematis is growing.
Fair is our world when the dew and the dawn thrill the half-wakened roses,
Fair when the corn-fields grow warm with poppies in noonlight gleaming,
Fair through the long afternoon, when hedges and hay-fields lie dreaming,
Fair as in lessening light the last convolvulus closes

'Scent of geranium and musk that in cottage windows run riot,
Breath from the grass that is down in the meadows each side the highway,
Slumberous hush of the churchyard where we one day may lie quiet,
Murmuring wind through the leaves bent over the meadow byway,
Deeps of cool shadow, and gleams of light on high elm-tops shining,
Such peace in the dim green brake as the town, save in dreams, knows never,
But in, through, under it all, the old pain follows us ever
Ever the old despair, the old unrest and repining.

'Dark is the City's face; but her children who know her find her
Mother to them who are brothers, mindful of brotherhood's duty;
To each of us, lonely, unhelped, the grave would be warmer, kinder,
Than the cold unloving face of our world of blossom and beauty.

Poverty deep and dark cowers under the thatch with the swallows,
Cruel disease lies hid in the changeful breast of the waters,
Drink sets snares for our sons, and shame digs graves for our daughters,
Want and care crush the flower of a youth that no life-fruit follows.

'What are the woodland sweets the meadow's fair flowery treasure
When we are hungry and sad, and stupid with work and with sorrows?
Leisure for nothing but sleep, and with heart but for sleep in our leisure;
The work of to-day still the same as yesterday's work, and to-morrow's.
Ever the weary round the treadmill of innocent lives
Hopeless and helpless, and bowing our backs like a hound's to the lashes;
What can seem fair to the eyes that are smarting and sore with the ashes
Blown from the fires that consume the souls of our children and wives?

'Dreams sometimes we have had of an hour when we might speak plainly,
Raise the mantle and show how the iron eats into our bosom,
The rotting root of the Nation, the worm at the heart of its blossom,
Dreaming we said, "We will speak, when the time for it comes, not vainly."
Ah but the time comes never Life, we are used to bear it,

Lays and Legends

Starved are our brains and grow not, our hands are fit but for toiling,
If we stretched them out their touch to our masters' hand would be soiling;
Weak is our voice with disuse too weak for our lords to hear it!

CITY

'So has the spark died out that the torch of hope dropped among you?
So is the burden bound more fast to the shrinking shoulder?

Far too faint are your cries to be heard by the men who wrong you?
And if they heard they are high, and the air as men rise grows colder!
Yet you are men though so weak, and in mine and workshop your brothers,
Stronger in head, and in heart not less sad, for deliverance are striving;
These will stand fast, and will face the cruel unjust and ungiving,
And you in our ranks shall be 'listed, our hands fast clasped in each other's!

'For in the night of our sorrow cold lights are breaking and brightening
Out in the eastern sky; through the drifting clouds, wind-driven,
Over the earth new gleams and glories are laughing and lightening,
Clearer the air grows each moment, brighter the face of the heaven.
Turn we our face to the east oh, wind of the dawn, blow to us

Freshness and strength and resolve! The star of old faith grows paler
Before the eyes of Freedom, though still wrath's red mists veil her,
For this is our battle day; revenge, like our blood, runs through us.

'This is our vengeance day. Our masters, made fat with our fasting,
Shall fall before us like corn when the sickle for harvest is strong:
Old wrong shall give might to our arm remembrance of wrong shall make lasting
The graves we will dig for the tyrants we bore with too much and too long.
The sobs of our starving children, the tears of our heart-sick mothers,
The moan of your murdered manhood crushed out by their wanton pressure,
The wail of the life-long anguish that paid the price of their pleasure,
These will make funeral music to speed the lost souls of them, brothers!

'Shoulder to shoulder we march, and for those who go down mid the fighting
With rifles in hand and pikes, and the red flag over them flying,
Glad shall our hearts be for them who die when our sun is lighting
The warm, wide heavens, and sheds its lovely light on their dying.
Fight, though we lose our dearest fight, though the battle rages
Fiercer and hotter than ever was fight in the world before:
We must fight how can men do less? If we die, what can men do more?
And the sun of Freedom shall shine across our graves to the ages!

VIES MANQUÉES

A **YEAR** ago we walked the wood A year ago to-day;
A blackbird fluttered round her brood Deep in the white-flowered may.

We trod the happy woodland ways, Where sunset streamed between
The hazel stems in long dusk rays, And turned to gold the green.

A thrush sang where the ferns uncurled, And clouds of wind-flowers grew:
I missed the meaning of the world From lack of love for you.

You missed the beauty of the year, And failed its self to see,
Through too much doubt and too much fear, And too much love of me.

This year we hear the birds' glad strain, Again the sunset glows,
We walk the wild wet woods again, Again the wind-flower blows.

In cloudy white the falling may Drifts down the scented wind,
And so the secret drifts away Which we shall never find.

Our drifted spirits are not free Spring's secret springs to touch,
For now you do not care for me, And I love you too much.

A LAST APPEAL

KNOWING our needs, hardly knowing our powers,
Hear how we cry to you, brothers of ours!
Brothers in nature, pulse, passions, and pains,
Our sins in you, and your blood in our veins.
First in your palace, or last in our den,
Basest or best, we are all of us men!
Justice eternal cries out in our name,
What is the least common manhood can claim? 'Food that we make for you, Money we earn: Give us our share of them Give us our turn.'

Landowners, bankers, and merchants, we make
Out of our lives this new wealth that you take.
Have we earned only such pitiful dole
As just holds worn body to desolate soul?

Lays and Legends

When that soul is bewildered each day and perplex
With the problem of how to get bread for the next,

Is it better to end it, as some of us do,
Or to fight it out bravely, still calling to you 'Food that we make for you, Money we earn: Give us our share of
them Give us our turn'?

Ever more passionate grows our demand
Give us our share of our food and our land:
Give us our rights, make us equal and free
Let us be all we are not, but might be.
Our sons would be honest, our daughters be pure,
If our wage were more certain, your vices less sure
Oh, you who are forging the fetters we feel,
Hear our wild protest, our maddened appeal 'Food that we make for you, Money we earn: Give us our share of
them Give us our turn.'

Hear us, and answer, while Time is your friend,
Lest we be answered by God in the end;
Lest, when the flame of His patience burns low,
We be the weapon He shapes for His blow

Lest with His foot on your necks He shall stand,
And appeal that you spurned be new-born as command,
And thunder your doom, as you die by the rod
Of the vengeance of man through the justice of God. 'Food that we make for you, Money we earn: Give us our
share of them Give us our turn.'

OVER AND DONE

WE might have held back from Love's draught divine
For many a wistful sad-and-happy day,
Tasting the voluntary sweet delay
Of lips that at the cup's edge touch the wine,
Yet will not drink, knowing that when the fine
Eagerly tasted thirst grows pain, they may
Drink deep. We might have missed Love's only way,
And thou and I been never mine and thine.

Instead, we sprang straight to the hidden shrine,
Nor lingered in the temple's outer part;
We plucked our rose to die upon our heart,
Nor left it on its tree to slowly pine:

OVER AND DONE

It dies more quickly, for our heart is hot;
But, oh, if we had seen, yet plucked it not!

OVER AND UNDONE

IF one might hope that when we say farewell
To life, we two might but be one at last!
But we look back on a divided past,
And a divided future must foretell.
Apart we sowed the seed that flowers in hell,
The seed that blooms in heaven apart we cast:
See what remembrances my heart holds fast
Ask your own heart what deeds you deem done well!

The memory I find my heaven in
Is that one hand–touch you regret as sin;
Your goodness, dear, that stood between us two
And made my hell, may make a heaven for you;
So evermore must lie our souls between
The kiss unknissed, the infinite might–have–been!

CHRISTMAS

WITH garlands to grace it, with laughter to greet it,
Christmas is here, holly–red and snow–white,
Hung round with quaint legends, and old–as–life stories
Of mystical beauty and lifelong delight;
With dreams of the Christ–child, with Santa Claus fables,
Without doubts to trouble or questions to break
The absolute faith in the triumph of goodness,
In God and in nature on guard for its sake;
Without fear of death, with no memories of grief,
Believing life clear as our cloudless belief;
What wonder if rose–coloured Christmas appear
As the happiest day of our happy child year?

With the swiftness of thought, with the spring's incompleteness,
Childhood has passed, and its place is filled up;
Hope suns our youth into midsummer sweetness,
And the roses of love wreath our life's golden cup.

We shall do we shall dare and our faith has no limit,
Wrong must go down 'neath the sword of the right

Lays and Legends

And life is so joyous, and may be so glorious,
And day looks so long, and so distant the night.
We love there are chances and if we should meet
The woman who holds all our heart at her feet
At Christmas would that not make Christmas more dear
Than all other days of our love-lightened year?

With the sadness of tears, with the speed of the swallow,
Youth has gone by, and its hope and its faith;
Love has grown into grief, and remembrance is anguish,
And down the dim years sound the footsteps of death.
There sit at our feast (for we still hold our revels)
The phantom of hope and the spectre of truth.
This life we believed in how has it rewarded
The passionate faith of our long-ago youth?
Our hearth is deserted our Christmas Day seems
But the ghost of a day from a lifetime of dreams.
Oh, lost voices that call us we hear you we hear!
Oh, most desolate day of our desolate year!

NEW YEAR SONG

WE climb the hill; the mist conceals
That valley where we could not stay;
Surely this hill's crest, gained, reveals
The glory of the sunlit day.
The hill is climbed. Still shadow-land
Still darkling looms another hill.
Oh, weary feet! climb that to find
A new ascent, 'mid shadows still!
We dare not stop or think of rest,
This one hill may be all that lies
Between us and our souls' desire
The splendour of the eastern skies.

Through long long lives we till and tend,
Sow, weed, and water, all in vain;
Without the flower we looked to find,
Each year springs blooms and dies again.

Bowed down with our unanswered prayers,
Our face averted from our past,
We watch each year grow green, and cry,
'Surely this brings our flower at last!'
Failure on failure! What! tired out?

Too tired to live? Heart, dare you die
When this new year may bud and bear
Your longed-for flower of Liberty?

THE SINGING OF THE MAGNIFICAT

A LEGEND

IN midst of wide green pasture-lands, cut through
By lines of alders bordering deep-banked streams,
Where bulrushes and yellow iris grew,
And rest and peace, and all the flowers of dreams,
The Abbey stood so still, it seemed a part
Of the marsh-country's almost pulseless heart.

Where grey-green willows fringed the stream and pool,
The lazy meek-faced cattle strayed to graze,
Sheep in the meadows cropped the grasses cool,
And silver fish shone through the watery ways,
And many a load of fruit and load of corn
Into the Abbey storehouses was borne.

Yet though so much they had of life's good things,
The monks but held them as a sacred trust,
Lent from the storehouse of the King of kings
Till they, His stewards, should crumble back to dust.

'Not as our own,' they said, 'but as the Lord's,
All that the stream yields, or the land affords.'

And all the villages and hamlets near
Knew the monks' wealth, and how their wealth was spent.
In tribulation, sickness, want, or fear,
First to the Abbey all the peasants went,
Certain to find a welcome, and to be
Helped in the hour of their extremity.

When plague or sickness smote the people sore,
The Brothers prayed beside the dying bed,
And nursed the sick back into health once more,
And through the horror and the danger said:

Lays and Legends

'How good is God, Who has such love for us,
He lets us tend His suffering children thus!'

They in their simple ways and works were glad:
Yet all men must have sorrows of their own.
And so a bitter grief the Brothers had,
Nor mourned for others' heaviness alone.
This was the secret of their sorrowing,
That not a monk in all the house could sing!

Was it the damp air from the lovely marsh,
Or strain of scarcely intermitted prayer,
That made their voices, when they sang, as harsh
As any frog's that croaks in evening air
That made less music in their hymns to lie
Than in the hoarsest wild-fowl's hoarsest cry?

If love could sweeten voice to sing a song,
Theirs had been sweetest song was ever sung:
But their hearts' music reached their lips all wrong,
The soul's intent foiled by the traitorous tongue
That marred the chapel's peace, and seemed to scare
The rapt devotion lingering in the air.

The birds that in the chapel built their nests,
And in the stone-work found their small lives fair,
Flew thence with hurled wings and fluttering breasts
When rang the bell to call the monks to prayer.
'Why will they sing,' they twittered, 'why at all?
In heaven their silence must be festival!'

The brothers prayed with penance and with tears
That God would let them give some little part

Out for the solace of their own sad ears
Of all the music crowded in their heart.
Their nature and the marsh-air had their way,
And still they sang more vilely every day.

And all their prayers and fasts availing not
To give them voices sweet, their souls' desire,
The Abbot said, 'Gifts He did not allot
God at our hands will not again require;

Lays and Legends

The love He gives us He will ask again
In love to Him and to our fellow-men.

'Praise Him we must, and since we cannot praise
As we would choose, we praise Him as we can.
In heaven we shall be taught the angels' ways
Of singing we afford to wait a span.
In singing, as in toil, do ye your best;
God will adjust the balance do the rest!'

But one good Brother, anxious to remove
This, the reproach now laid on them so long,
Rejected counsel, and for very love
Besought a Brother, skilled in art of song,

To come to them his cloister far to leave
And sing *Magnificat* on Christmas Eve.

So when each brown monk duly sought his place,
By two and two, slow pacing to the choir,
Shrined in his dark oak stall, the strange monk's face
Shone with a light as of devotion's fire,
Good, young and fair, his seemed a form wherein
Pure beauty left no room at all for sin.

And when the time for singing it had come,
'*Magnificat*,' face raised, and voice, he sang:
Each in his stall the monks stood glad and dumb,
As through the chancel's dusk his voice outrang,
Pure, clear, and perfect as the thrushes sing
Their first impulsive welcome of the spring.

At the first notes the Abbot's heart spoke low:
'Oh God, accept this singing, seeing we,
Had we the power, would ever praise Thee so
Would ever, Lord, Thou know'st, sing thus for Thee;
Thus in our hearts Thy hymns are ever sung,
As he Thou blestest sings them with his tongue.'

But as the voice rose higher, and more sweet,
The Abbot's heart said, 'Thou hast heard us grieve,
And sent an angel from beside Thy feet,
To sing *Magnificat* on Christmas Eve;

Lays and Legends

To ease our ache of soul, and let us see
How we some day in heaven shall sing to Thee.'

Through the cold Christmas night the hymn rang out,
In perfect cadence, clear as sunlit rain
Such heavenly music that the birds without
Beat their warm wings against the window pane,
Scattering the frosted crystal snow outspread
Upon the stone-lace and the window-lead.

The white moon through the window seemed to gaze
On the pure face and eyes the singer raised;
The storm-wind hushed the clamour of its ways,
God seemed to stoop to hear Himself thus praised,
And breathless all the Brothers stood, and still
Reached longing souls out to the music's thrill.

Old years came back, and half-remembered hours,
Dreams of delight that never was to be,

Mothers' remembered kiss, the funeral flowers
Laid on the grave of life's felicity;
An infinite dear passion of regret
Swept through their hearts, and left their eyelids wet.

The birds beat ever at the window, till
They broke the pane, and so could entrance win;
Their slender feet clung to the window-sill,
And though with them the bitter air came in,
The monks were glad that the birds too should hear,
Since to God's creatures all, His praise is dear.

The lovely music waxed and waned, and sank,
And brought less conscious sadness in its train,
Unrecognised despair that thinks to thank
God for a joy renounced, a chosen pain
And deems that peace which is but stifled life
Dulled by a too-prolonged unfruitful strife.

When, service done, the Brothers gathered round
To thank the singer modest-eyed, said he:
'Not mine the grace, if grace indeed abound;
God gave the power, if any power there be;

If I in hymn or psalm clear voice can raise,
As His the gift, so His be all the praise!

That night the Abbot lying on his bed
A sudden flood of radiance on him fell,
Poured from the crucifix above his head,
And cast a stream of light across his cell
And in the fullest fervour of the light
An Angel stood, glittering, and great, and white.

His wings of thousand rainbow clouds seemed made,
A thousand lamps of love shone in his eyes,
The light of dawn upon his brows was laid,
Odours of thousand flowers of Paradise
Filled all the cell, and through the heart there stirred
A sense of music that could not be heard.

The Angel spoke his voice was low and sweet
As the sea's murmur on low-lying shore
Or whisper of the wind in ripened wheat:
'Brother,' he said, 'the God we both adore
Has sent me down to ask, is all not right?
Why was *Magnificat* not sung to-night?'

Tranced in the joy the Angel's presence brought,
The Abbot answered: 'All these weary years
We have sung our best but always have we thought
Our voices were unworthy heavenly ears;
And so to-night we found a clearer tongue,
And by it the *Magnificat* was sung.'

The Angel answered, 'All these happy years
In heaven has your *Magnificat* been heard;
This night alone, the angels' listening ears
Of all its music caught no single word.
Say, who is he whose goodness is not strong
Enough to bear the burden of his song?'

The Abbot named his name. 'Ah, why,' he cried,
'Have angels heard not what we found so dear?'
'Only pure hearts,' the Angel's voice replied,
'Can carry human songs up to God's ear;

Lays and Legends

To-night in heaven was missed the sweetest praise
That ever rises from earth's mud-stained maze.

The monk who sang *Magnificat* is filled
With lust of praise, and with hypocrisy;

He sings for earth in heaven his notes are stilled
By muffling weight of deadening vanity;
His heart is chained to earth, and cannot bear
His singing higher than the listening air!

From purest hearts most perfect music springs,
And while you mourned your voices were not sweet,
Marred by the accident of earthly things,
In heaven, God, listening, judged your song complete.
The sweetest of earth's music came from you,
The music of a noble life and true!

LOVE'S SUICIDE

Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.

THIS treasure of love, these passion-flowers,
Dear as desire, are dearly bought:
The sweet unrest of seeing you
For some too-happy hour or two,
Is paid by such a wealth of tears,
Such grief, such bitterness, such fears,
Such wild remorse, such weak regret,
Such tide of longing towards you set,
As poison all my other hours,
And murder every other thought.

I cannot drink joy steeped in fears,
I choose the cold unhurtful days;
The roses you hold out to me
Are red and sweet enough to be
A crown one would so gladly wear
If but one's brows were strong to bear
The weight, and did not ache and ache
For the fair coronation's sake,

And dread of coming crownless years
When tired feet shall tread thorny ways.

There is a peace in sombre skies
Where no sun even tries to shine,
But not in these where transient glow,
And passionate bursts of sunshine show
Only life's dull fields drenched with rain,
And then the clouds set fast again
Into a leaden sky like this is,
Lit by no lightnings of warm kisses,
Whence, while I look into your eyes,
A thunderbolt may fall on mine.

I give you back the rose I stole,
Pluck but pale leaves that near me grow.
I cannot love with half a heart,
'Tis all or nothing for my part;
And since the all may not be ours,
Since we may only pluck Love's flowers,
But may not in his temple stay,
I choose the grey and lonely way
And you be thankful from your soul
That, loving you, I let you go.

CHRISTMAS ROSES

THE summer roses all are gone
Dead, laid in shroud of rain-wet mould;
And passion's lightning time is done,
And Love is laid out white and cold.
Summer and youth for us are dead,
What do old age and winter bring instead?

They bring us memories of old years,
And Christmas roses, cold and sweet,
Which, washed by not unhappy tears,
I bring and lay beside your feet,
With gifts that come with flowers like these
Friendship, remembrance of our past, and peace!

A CHOICE

THE flood of utter change is loosed. A space
Is ours yet, for its coming to prepare.
Shall we build dams with cautious, clumsy care,
Or stand with idle hands and frightened face,
And so be whirled all broken from our place,
And perish with the dams we builded there?
Or shall we dig a broad, deep channel, where
Most fields may feel the flood's benign embrace?

Thus turned 'twill be a calm majestic flood
Of plenty, peace, and fertilising power,
Whose banks fresh flowers of love and joy shall deck.
Oppose it: at the inevitable hour,
Tumultuous, black with ruin, red with blood,
'Twill come and you shall have no chance but wreck!

A LIFE'S STORY

THE morning broke in a pearly haze,
Then the east grew dusky red:
'Oh, my only day, oh, my day of days,
To-day he will come,' I said.

As the sun climbed up in the clearer sky,
The mists fell down at his feet;
'There is sunshine too in my heart,' said I,
'For to-day is the day we meet;

Perhaps even now he is journeying fast
Perhaps he is almost here.'
And my heart leaped up at each foot that passed,
With the thought that he might be near.

In my garden the fairest flowers that grew
I plucked for him, sweet, dew-wet,
And held them ready, the whole day through,
To gladden him when we met.

The sun shone warm on the longing earth,
That thrilled to his fervent kiss;

Lays and Legends

But what to me was the sun's smile worth,
When I longed for that smile of his?

The hours in their flight seemed strangely slow
For the sake of the hour to be;
'Go swiftly now and more slowly go
When he shall be here with me.'

But the level light of late afternoon
Fell cold on me, still alone;
My flowers were dying, gathered too soon,
And my whole day's work undone.

With empty heart and unsatisfied
I turned from the red sunset:
'Short time for his coming is left,' I cried,
'It **shall** not be evening yet.'

But the sky grows pale, and a weak wind wakes,
And long flights of birds go home,
And slowly and surely the day's spell breaks,
And I know that he will not come.

Perhaps he has never turned my way,
Nor known how my heart would wait;
Perhaps he has sought me the whole long day,
And has failed at my very gate;

Perhaps all these hours of increasing pain
Have been only a dream of a day,
And after the night I shall wake again,
And 'To-day he comes,' I shall say.

ABSOLUTION

THREE months had passed since she had knelt before
The grate of the confessional, and he,
The priest had wondered why she came no more
To tell her sinless sins the vanity
Whose valid reason graced her simple dress
The prayers forgotten, or the untold beads
The little thoughtless words, the slight misdeeds,

Lays and Legends

Which made the sum of her unrighteousness.

She was the fairest maiden in his fold,
With her sweet mouth and musical pure voice,
Her deep grey eyes, her hair's tempestuous gold,
Her gracious graceful figure's perfect poise.
Her happy laugh, her wild unconscious grace,
Her gentle ways to old, or sick, or sad,
The comprehending sympathy she had,
Had made of her the idol of the place.

And when she grew so silent and so sad,
So thin and quiet, pale and hollow-eyed,
And cared no more to laugh and to be glad
With other maidens by the waterside
All wondered, kindly grieved the elders were,
And some few girls went whispering about,
'She loves who is it? Let us find it out!'
But never dared to speak of it to her.

But the priest's duty bade him seek her out
And say, 'My child, why dost thou sit apart?
Hast thou some grief? Hast thou some secret doubt?
Come and unfold to me thine inmost heart.
God's absolution can assuage all grief
And all remorse and woe beneath the sun.
Whatever thou hast said, or thought, or done,
The Holy Church can give thy soul relief.'

He stood beside her, young and strong, and swayed
With pity for the sorrow in her eyes
Which, as she raised them to his own, conveyed
Into his soul a sort of sad surprise

For in those grey eyes had a new light grown,
The light that only bitter love can bring,
And he had fancied her too pure a thing
For even happy love to dare to own.

Yet all the more he urged on her 'Confess,
And do not doubt some comfort will be lent
By Holy Church thy penitence to bless.
Trust her, my child.' With unconvinced consent
She answered, 'I will come;' and so at last

Lays and Legends

Out of the summer evening's crimson glow,
With heart reluctant and with footsteps slow
Into the cool great empty church she passed.

'By my own fault, my own most grievous fault,
I cannot say, for it is not!' she said,
Kneeling within the grey stone chapel's vault;
And on the ledge her golden hair was spread
Over the clasping hands that still increased
Their nervous pressure, poor white hands and thin,
While with hot lips she poured her tale of sin
Into the cold ear of the patient priest.

Love broke upon me in a dream; it came
Without beginning, for to me it seemed
That all my life this thing had been the same,
And never otherwise than as I dreamed.
I only knew my heart, entire, complete,
Was given to my other self, my love
That I through all the world would gladly move
So I might follow his adorèd feet.

I dreamed my soul saw suddenly appear
Immense abysses, infinite heights unknown;
Possessed new worlds, new earths, sphere after sphere,
New sceptres, kingdoms, crowns, became my own.
When I had all, all earth, all time, all space,
And every blessing, human and divine,
I hated the possessions that were mine,
And only cared for his belovèd face.

I dreamed that in unmeasured harmony,
Rain of sweet sounds fell on my ravished sense,
And thrilled my soul with swelling ecstasy,
And rose to unimagined excellence.

And while the music bade my heart rejoice,
And on my senses thrust delicious sway,
I wished the perfect melody away,
And in its place longed for his worshipped voice.

'And at the last I felt his arms enfold,
His kisses crown my life his whispered sighs
Echo my own unrest his spirit hold

Lays and Legends

My spirit powerless underneath his eyes,
My face flushed with new joy, and felt more fair:
He clasped me close, and cried, 'My own, my own!'
And then I woke in dawn's chill light, alone,
With empty arms held out to empty air.

'I never knew I loved him till that dream
Drew from my eyes the veil and left me wise.
What I had thought was reverence grew to seem
Only my lifelong love in thin disguise.
And in my dream it looked so sinless too,
So beautiful, harmonious, and right;
The vision faded with the morning light,
The love will last as long as I shall do.

'But in the world where I have wept my tears,
My love is sinful and a bitter shame.
How can I bear the never-ending years,
When every night I hear him call my name?
For though that first dream's dear delight is past,
Yet since that night each night I dream him there
With lips caressing on my brow and hair,
And in my arms I hold my heaven fast!'

'Child, have you prayed against it?' 'Have I prayed?
Have I not clogged my very soul with prayer;
Stopped up my ears with sound of praying, made
My very body faint with kneeling there
Before the sculptured Christ, and all for this,
That when my lips can pray no more, and sleep
Shuts my unwilling eyes, my love will leap
To dreamland's bounds, to meet me with his kiss?

'Strive against this? what profit is the strife?
If through the day a little strength I gain,
At night he comes and calls me "love" and "wife,"
And straightway I am all his own again.

And if from love's besieging force my fight
Some little victory have hardly won,
What do I gain? As soon as day is done,
I yield once more to love's delicious might.'

'Avoid him!' 'Ay, in dewy garden walk

Lays and Legends

How often have I strayed, avoiding him.
And heard his voice mix with the common talk,
Yet never turned his way. My eyes grow dim
With weeping over what I lose by day
And find by night, yet never have to call
My own. O God! is there no help at all
No hope, no chance, and no escapeful way?

'And who is he to whom thy love is given?'
'What? Holy Church demands to know his name?
No rest for me on earth, no hope of heaven
Unless I tell it? Ah, for very shame
I cannot yet why not? I will I can!
I have grown mad with brooding on my curse.
Here! Take the name, no better and no worse
My case will be. Father, thou art the man!'

An icy shock shivered through all his frame
An overwhelming cold astonishment;
But on the instant the revulsion came,
His blood felt what her revelation meant,
And madly rushed along his veins and cried:
'For you too life is possible, and love
No more a word you miss the meaning of,
But all your life's desire unsatisfied.'

Then through his being crept a new strange fear
Fear of himself, and through himself, for her;
His every fibre felt her presence near,
Disquiet in his breast began to stir.
'Lord Christ,' his soul cried, while his heart beat fast,
'Give strength in this, my hour of utmost need.'
And with the prayer strength came to him indeed,
And with calm voice he answered her at last.

'Child, go in peace! Wrestle, and watch, and pray,
And I will spend this night in prayer for thee,
That God will take thy strange great grief away.
Thou hast confessed thy sin. *Absolvo te.*'

Silence most absolute a little while,
Then passed the whisper of her trailing gown
Over the knee-worn stones, and soft died down
The dim deserted incense-memored aisle.

Lays and Legends

She passed away, and yet, when she was gone,
His heart still echoed her remembered sighs:
What sin unpardonable had he done
That evermore those grey unquiet eyes
Floated between him and the dying day?
How had she grown so desperately dear?
Why did her love—words echo in his ear
Through all the prayers he forced his lips to say?

All night he lay upon the chancel floor,
And coined his heart in tears and prayers, and new
Strange longings he had never known before.
Her very memory so thrilled him through,
That to his being's core a shiver stole
Of utter, boundless, measureless delight,
Even while with unceasing desperate might
His lips prayed for God's armour for his soul!

The moon had bathed the chancel with her light,
But now she crept into a cloud. No ray
Was left to break the funeral black of night
That closely hung around the form that lay
So tempest—tossed within, so still without.
'God! I love her, love her, love her so!
Oh, for one spark of heaven's fire to show
Some way to cast this devil's passion out!

I cannot choose but love Thou knowest, Lord
Yet is my spirit strong to fly from sin,
But oh, my flesh is weak, too weak the word
I have to clothe its utter weakness in!
I am Thy priest, vowed to be Thine alone,
Yet if she came here with those love—dimmed eyes,
How could I turn away from Paradise?
Should I not wreck her soul, and blast my own?

'Christ, by Thy passion, by Thy death for men,
Oh, save me from myself, save her from me!
And at the word the moon came out again
From her cloud—palace, and threw suddenly

A shadow from the great cross overhead
Upon the priest; and with it came a sense
Of strength renewed, of perfect confidence

Lays and Legends

In Him who on that cross for men hung dead.

Beneath that shadow safety seemed to lie;
And as he knelt before the altar there,
Beside the King of Heaven's agony
Light seemed all pangs His priest might have to bear
His grief, his love, his bitter wild regret,
Would they not be a fitting sacrifice,
A well-loved offering, blessed in the eyes
That never scorned a sad heart's offering yet?

But as the ghostly moon began to fade,
And moonlight glimmered into ghostlier dawn,
The shadow that the crucifix had made
With twilight mixed; and with it seemed withdrawn
The peace that with its shadowy shape began,
And as the dim east brightened, slowly ceased
The wild devotion that had filled the priest
And with full sunlight he sprang up a man!

'Ten thousand curses on my priestly vow
The hated vow that held me back from thee!
Down with the cross! no death-dark emblems now!
I have done with death: life wakes for thee and me!
He tore the cross from out his breast, and trod
The sacred symbol underfoot and cried,
'I am set free, unbound, unsanctified!
I am thy lover not the priest of God!'

He strode straight down the church and passed along
The grave-set garden's dewy grass-grown slope:
The woods about were musical with song,
The world was bright with youth, and love, and hope;
The flowers were sweet, and sweet his visions were,
The sunlight glittered on the lily's head
And on the royal roses, rich and red,
And never had the earth seemed half so fair.

Soon would he see her soon would kneel before
Her worshipped feet, and cry, 'I am thine own,
As thou art mine, now, and for evermore!'
And she should kiss the lips that had not known

The kiss of love in any vanished year.

Lays and Legends

And as he dreamed of his secured delight,
Round the curved road there slowly came in sight
A mourning band, and in their midst a bier.

He hastened to pass on. Why should he heed
A bier a blot on earth's awakened face?
For to his love—warm heart it seemed indeed
That in sweet summer's bloom death had no place.
Yet still he glanced a pale concealing fold
Veiled the dead, quiet face and yet and yet
Did he not know that hand, so white and wet?
Did he not know those dripping curls of gold?

'We came to you to know what we should do,
Father: we found her body in the stream,
And how it happed, God knows!' One other knew
Knew that of him had been her last wild dream
Knew the full reason of that life—disdain
Knew how the shame of hopeless love confessed
And unreturned had seemed to stain her breast,
Till only death could make her clean again.

They left her in the church where sunbeams bright
Gilded the wreathèd oak and carven stone
With golden floods of consecrating light;
And here at last, together and alone,
The lovers met, and here upon her hair
He set his lips, and dry-eyed kissed her face,
And in the stillness of the holy place
He spoke in tones of bitter blank despair:

'Oh, lips so quiet, eyes that will not see!
Oh, clinging hands that not again will cling!
This last poor sin may well be pardoned thee,
Since for the right's sake thou hast done this thing.
Oh, poor weak heart, for ever laid to rest,
That could no longer strive against its fate,
For thee high heaven will unbar its gate,
And thou shalt enter in and shalt be blessed.

'The chances were the same for us,' he said,
'Yet thou hast won, and I have lost, the whole;
Thou wouldst not live in sin, and thou art dead
But I against thee I have weighed my soul,

And, losing thee, have lost my soul as well.
I have cursed God, and trampled on His cross;
Earth has no measurement for all my loss,
But I shall learn to measure it in hell!

CUL-DE-SAC

COULD I hope that when the brain,
Tired of questions answerless,
Shall slip off the bonds of pain
That enslave it and possess,
I should know how little worth
Were the little things of earth.

'Does it matter,' could I say,
'Whether she were false or true?
Whether life was gold or grey?
Whether skies were grey or blue?
All this matters less, it seems,
Than the threads of broken dreams.'

We may long to rest from strife,
Cease to question or to grieve;
But the sharpest ills of life
Nothing will reverse, retrieve;

For when we at last have rest,
We shall know not we are blest.

While we know, we have the ache;
Consciousness with pain will cease.
Sleep's joy comes not while we wake
Night of life means dawn of peace,
But of peace which cannot be
Ever known by her or me.

Bow the back beneath the cross,
Stagger on a few steps more,
Bear the doubt, the strain, the loss,
As we had to do before!
When at last the burdens fall,
We shall know it not at all.

THE MOORS

NOT in rich glebe and ripe green garden only
Does Summer weave her sweet resistless spells,
But in high hills, and moorlands waste and lonely,
The vast enchantment of her presence dwells.
Wide sky, and sky-wide waste of thyme and heather,
Perpetual sleepy hum of golden bees
If you and I were only there together,
Free from the weight of all your garden's trees!

The north is mine; though bred by elm and meadow,
Pines, torrents, rocks, and moors my heart loves best;
I love the plover's wail, the cleft hill's shadow,
The sun-browned grass that is the skylark's nest.
Ah, yes! you too I love, dear wistful pleader,
You most I love, dear southern rose, half-blown,
And rather lounge with you beneath your cedar,
Than greet the moor's wide heaven-on-earth alone.

SONG

A MONTH of green and tender May,
All woods and walks awake with flowers,
Wide sunlit meadows for the day,
And moon-bathed paths for evening hours;
A bright brief dream that had no past,
And of the future knew no fear;
A kiss at first, a sigh at last Only last year.

Another spring, dim soulless woods;
No farewell kiss, no parting tear;
No stone to mark where silence broods
O'er the dead love we found so dear.
But, oh, to me the green seems grey,
The budding branches all are sere,
For sweet love's sake, that died one day, Only last year.

RICHBOROUGH CASTLE

THESE three grey walls are still stout and strong,
Though the fourth wide wall has crumbled away
Where the sea swept by when the land was young,
And the great waves thundered along the bay,
Under the sailing seagull's feather,
Wildly white in the stormy weather,
And, murmuring ever a restless song,
Shone, crumpled green, on a sunny day.

Through eighteen hundred years of our time,
With their storms and sieges, these walls have stood,
Till the cliff that the waves once strove to climb
Is left in a meadow solitude;
And now no sea-gulls' nests are there,
But ash-trees and thorns make the cliff-side fair,
And the green of the leaves, and the white of the lime,
And the red of the berries is sweet and good.

Over the walls, whence eagle-eyed
The Romans looked for the coming foes,
Swift keen-tongued snakes now curl and glide
Where the heavy weight of the ivy grows.
Oh, hand that builded, oh, scheming brain,
So long made one with the dust again,
Your old cement and your walls abide,
But stronger than they are the ivy and rose!

How the whole dear world is golden and green
With the marshy meadows, the dimpled wheat,
The hot strong sunshine, the ivy's sheen,
And the high white lights on the shiny beet.
See the far blue line the retreating sea!
It is good to be here, it is good to be;
Whatever life is, or whatever has been,
To be now to be here, is nothing but sweet!

There's an underground passage here, they say,
Here is the entrance with green set round;
You must stoop your head in this low-roofed way,
Leave day, light candles pass underground.

Here, under the fields, it is damp and cold,

Lays and Legends

And whatever secret the place may hold
It has held it closely for many a day,
And will hold it for more in its hush profound.

Down here, last year, so the gossips tell,
Some archaeological learned bore
Went chipping with hammer and chisel as well
To chip his way to the secret's core
Shut away from the sun and the browning wheat,
The whitening barley, the purple beet
In the dark with the damp, the earthy smell,
While the days burned through that return no more.

Oh, fool! not to see that the green of the trees,
The blue of the sky and the blue of the sea,
The placid pasture, the baby breeze,
And the outspread meadows' tranquillity,
With eyes to see them, are more than worth
The whole of the secrets of musty earth.
What secret outweighs such delights as these,
Or pays one lost moment's felicity?

Are we wise, we two, when we try to pierce
To the heart of things, to our own hearts' heart,
To learn the secret springs of the years,
And what that is of which we are part?
Free will the Absolute matter mind
Ah, we came like the wind and we go like the wind!
Would solving life's mysteries dry our tears,
Or absolute knowledge heal souls that smart?

And meantime one might lose what I'd die to keep
The power to delight in a day like this,
In the brown wings' whirl, and the faint-bell'd sheep,
In the million things that the millions miss.
And, think, had it happened one's in-turned eyes
Had missed the gateway of Paradise,
Had one questioned of dreams till one fell asleep,
Having never dreamed, oh, my Dream, of your kiss!

AUGUST

LEAVE me alone, for August's sleepy charm
Is on me, and I will not break the spell;

AUGUST

Lays and Legends

My head is on the mighty Mother's arm:
I will not ask if life goes ill or well.
There is no world! I do not care to know
Whence aught has come, nor whither it shall go.

I want to wander over pastures still,
Where sheared white sheep and mild-eyed cattle graze;
To climb the thymy, clover-covered hill,
To look down on the valley's hot blue haze;
And on the short brown turf for hours to lie
Gazing straight up into the clear, deep sky,

I want to walk through crisp gold harvest fields,
Through meadows yellowed by the August heat;
To loiter through the cool dim wood, that yields
Such perfect flowers and quiet so complete
The happy woods, where every bud and leaf
Is full of dreams as life is full of grief.

I want to think no more of all the pain
That in the city thrives, a poison flower
The eternal loss, the never-coming gain,
The lifelong woe the joy that lives an hour,
Bright, evanescent as the dew that dawn
Shows on this silent, wood-encircled lawn.

I want to pull the honey-bud that twines
About the blackberries and gold-leaf sloes;
To part the boughs where the rare water shines,
Tread the soft bank whereby the bulrush grows
I want to be no more myself, but be
Made one with all the beauty that I see.

Oh, happy country, myriad voiced and dear,
I have no heart, no eyes, except for you;
Yours are the only voices I will hear,
Yours is the only bidding I will do:
You bid me be at peace, and let alone
That loud, rough world where peace is never known.

Yet through your voices comes a sterner cry,
A voice I cannot silence if I would;
It mars the song the lark sings to the sky,
It breaks the changeful music of the wood.

'Back to your post a charge you have to keep
Freedom is bleeding while her soldiers sleep.'

Oh, heart of mine I have to carry here,
Will you not let me rest a little while?
A space 'mid doubtful fight and doubtful fear
A little space to see the Mother's smile,
To stretch my hands out to her, and possess
No sense of aught but of her loveliness?

Ah, just this power to feel how she is fair
Means just the power to see how foul life is.
How can I linger in the sacred air
And taste the pure wine of the dear sun's kiss
When in the outer dark my brothers moan,
Nor even guess the joys that I have known?

Back the least soldier goes! To jar and fret,
To hope uncrowned faith tried love wounded sore
To prayers that never have been answered yet,
To dreams that must be dreams for evermore;
To all that, after all, is far more dear
Than all the joys of all the changing year.

THE LAST ENVOY

THIS wind, that through the silent woodland blows,
O'er rippling corn and dreaming pastures goes
Straight to the garden where the heart of spring
Faints in the heart of summer's earliest rose.

Dimpling the meadow's grassy green and grey,
By furze that yellows all the common way,
Gathering the gladness of the flowering broom,
And too persistent fragrance of the may

Gathering whatever is of sweet and dear,
The wandering wind has passed away from here,
Has passed to where within your garden waits
The concentrated sweetness of the year.

Lays and Legends

And in your leafed enclosure as you stood,
Training your flowers to new beatitude
 Ah! did you guess the wind that kissed your hair
Had kissed my forehead in this solitude

Had kissed my lips, and gathered there the heat
It breathed upon your mouth, my only sweet
 Had gathered from my eyes the tender thought
That drooped your eyes, and stirred your pulses' beat?

You only thought the sun's caress too warm
That lay upon your bosom and your arm;
 You did not guess the wind had brought from me
The unacknowledged fancy's fire and charm

You only said, 'Too strong these sunlit skies,
More dear the moments when the daylight dies!'
 And then you dreamed of meetings by your gate
In sanctity of sunset and moonrise.

To-night, when he shall come and meet you there,
To kiss your lips and hands and eyes and hair,
 To light with love and hope youth's waiting shrine
Think of my love, and my assured despair!

To-night the wind will rob the languid flowers
Of secret scents kept close through daylit hours;
 It will blow coolly over dewy lawns,
Where the laburnums fall in silent showers.

I, too, shall learn a secret then shall wrest
Life's hidden things from out her languorous breast,
 Shall learn the way that leads away from life
Into the land where nothing lives but rest.

You will not know that the cold air you prize,
After the stormy sweetness of his sighs,
 Is cold from blowing through a moonlit wood
Over the hollow where a dead man lies!

BABY'S BIRTHDAY

G.T.A.

BEFORE your life that is to come,
Love stands with eager eyes, that vainly
 Seek to discern what gift may fit
 The slow unfolding years of it;
And still Time's lips are sealed and dumb,
And still Love sees no future plainly.

We cannot guess what flowers will spring
Best in your garden, bloom most brightly;
 But some fair flowers in any plot
 Will spring and grow, and wither not;
And such wish-flowers we gladly bring,
And in that small hand lay them lightly.

Baby, we wish that those dear eyes
May see fulfilment of our dreaming,
 Those little feet may turn from wrong,
 Those hands to hold the right be strong,

That heart be pure, that mind be wise
To know the true from the true-seeming.

We wish that all your life may be
A life of selfless brave endeavour
 That for reward the fates allow
 Such love as lines your soft nest now
To warm the years for you, when we,
Who wish you this, are cold for ever.

JANUARY

WHILE yet the air is keen, and no bird sings,
Nor any vaguest thrills of heart declare
 The presence of the springtime in the air,
Through the raw dawn the shepherd homeward brings
The wee white lambs the little helpless things
 For shelter, warmth, and comfortable care.

Without his help how hardly lambs would fare
How hardly live through winter's hours to spring's!

So let me tend and minister apart
To my new hope, which some day you shall know:
It could not live in January wind
Of your disdain; but when within your heart
The bud and bloom of tenderness shall grow,
Amid the flowers my hope may welcome find.

CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS IN THE CITY

THIS is a place where men laid their dead,
Each with his life—tale of good or ill;
Here prayers were murmured and hot tears shed,
And passionate anguish moaned its fill.
Silent now is each voice that cried,
And the tears that were wept have all been dried
In the dust; and dust are the hearts that bled
With hopeless longing for hearts grown still.

Dead and forgotten! for Death, requiter
Of love, taught Memory how to forget!
The love that remembered them died. Grow brighter,
Oh, dim grave—garden, with dead hearts set!
Room for the small flying feet to pass,
The feet of the children over the grass!
The dead, if they knew it, would feel them lighter
Than the weight of a stone that no tears make wet.

We must die too, and the grief that will live
Must die as surely death comes to all;
But you who come after let Nature give
To our graves her tears, to our dust her pall:
Let her hide us away in her cold broad breast,
Let us be forgotten, and be at rest,
And over our heads let the great world strive,
And the children's voices carol and call.

If your heart on the flower of remembrance is set,
There is one way to pluck it and only one:
Dare you ask your country not to forget
A name that needs to be graved on stone?
By grief, strife, sacrifice, scorn of fame,

You may grave on the people's hearts your name,
Or your name may die, and your soul live yet
In the cause you died for the work you have done.

THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA

FOR A PICTURE BY E. BURNE JONES

I

Habes tota quod mente petisti
Infelix.

IN deep vague spaces of the lonely sea
She deemed her soulless life was almost fair,
Yet ever dreamed that in the upper air
Lay happiness supreme in mystery;
Then saw him out of reach as you I see
Worshipped his strength, the brown breast broad and bare,
The arms that bent the oar, and grew aware
Of what life means, and why it is good to be;
And yearned for him with all her body sweet,
Her lithe cold arms, and chill wet bosom's beat, Vowed him her beauty's unillumined shrine:
So I seeing you above me turn and tire,
Sick with an empty ache of long desire To drag you down, to hold you, make you mine!

II

Attained at last the lifelong longing's prize!
Raped from the world of air where warm loves glow,
She bears him through her water-world below;
Yet in those strange, glad, fair, mysterious eyes
The shadow of the after-sorrow lies,
And of the coming hour, when she shall know
What she has lost in having gained him so,
And whether death life's longing satisfies.
She shall find out the meaning of despair,
And know the anguish of a granted prayer, And how, all ended, all is yet undone.
So I I long for what, far off, you shine,
Not what you must be ere you could be mine, That which would crown despair if it were won.

TO HIS LADY,

IMPLORING HER TO BE TRUE

MISTRESS of me, mistress of all the arts
And charms that sway men's hot ungoverned hearts,
 Receive their tribute smile at their defeat;
 I do not ask that you should spare them, sweet.
Only I ask that in the secret shrine
No prayers be heard, no offering laid, but mine.
Each man who sees your eyes must needs lay down
Low at your feet the votive myrtle crown:
 Let them bring crowns to die beneath your feet;
I, only I, must bring the crown you wear
Shadowing the sombre glory of your hair.

AT THE FEAST

EVOLVING, changing, onwards still we press
We must advance, invent, construct, possess;
 No matter what a price we have to pay,
We must obtain perfection, and no less

Perfection in our luxuries, the hours,
Fulfilled of sweetness, must be slaves of ours;
 Our air be rich with music and soft light,
And all our halls be odorous with flowers.

How our least want may best be satisfied,
How not a pleasure may be left untried;
 How to appease each longing and desire,
This we have learned, and something else beside.

Yes, we have learned to know, and not to shrink
From knowing, to what depths our brothers sink;
 And we have learned the lesson 'not to feel,'
And we have learned the lesson 'not to think.'

We must have learned it; otherwise, to-night,
When, sped by wine and feasting, time takes flight,
 When perfect music searches for our soul,

TO HIS LADY,

Lays and Legends

And all these flowers unfold for our delight,

We should not hear the music, but, instead,
Hear that wild, bitter, heart-sick cry for bread,
And in the lamps that light our lavish feast,
Should see but tapers burning for the dead.

We should not see the myriad blossoms waste,
The bloom of them would be thrust back, displaced
By the white faces of the starving children
Wasted and wan, who might have been flower-faced.

Oh, not to think! To think and not to care!
Oh, woman hearts, still do these flowers seem fair?
Can music drown the little piteous voices?
Can you not see the little faces there?

For 'faring sumptuously every day,'
For raiment soft and music on our way,
We give the tortured lives of little children:
For such a purchase, what a price to pay!

SPRING SONG

THE spring is here, and the long nights grow
Less bitterly cold than awhile ago;
Our rags serve their purpose now, and keep
Warmth enough in us to let us sleep.
The rain that trickles down our walls
No longer seems to freeze as it falls;
There was dust, not mud, on our feet to-day;
There's some green in a flower-pot over the way;
The sky-strip over the court's changed hue,
From dull yellow-grey to clear grey-blue;
Through our broken windows no more the storm
Laughs and shrieks as we try to keep warm,
But through dusty panes the long sunbeams peer, For the spring is here.

Small joy the greenness and grace of spring
To grey hard lives like our own can bring.
A drowning man cares little to think
Of the lights on the waves where he soon must sink.

Lays and Legends

The greenest garments the spring can wear
Are black already with our despair:
Earth will be one with us soon shall we care
If snow or sunshine be over us there,
Or if wintry the world be we found so drear, Or if spring be here?

In the western half of our Christian town
The Winter only pretends to frown,
And when his undreaded rage is done,
The 'London season' they say is begun.
With wine, feast, revelling, laugh and song,
The hours rose-garlanded dance along,
The whirl of wickedness wilder grows
In this western camp of our bitter foes;
They fight with each other the victors take
The largest share of the wealth we make;
They spend on their horses, their women, their wives,
The money wrung from our blasted lives:
It is theirs to enjoy it is ours to pay.
Do they never dream of a reckoning day,
When the lives they have wrecked shall be counted up,
And measured the blood that has brightened their cup,
When we who have worked shall take payment due,
And they for their work shall have payment too?

Do they dream of that coming hour? Not they!
Their feet flit fast down the smooth steep way,
They see not the waiting snakes that hide
In the hothouse flowers at their life-path's side,
They know no justice, no pity, no fear But the spring is here!

Yes here! In the hope we had almost lost,
That has sprung to bud after long years' frost;
In this fire in our veins that cries, 'Give youth,
Love, manhood, life, for the Right and the Truth;
In our steady purpose, for Freedom's sake,
Through custom, privilege, 'fate,' to break;
In the brains of the thinkers, the arms of the men
Who will strike, and strike, and still strike again,
Till they cut our way to the land of flowers,
And the summer of freedom at last is ours
In these is the spring. The winter was sore
It is over and done, and will come no more.
The fruit will grow with the changing year,
Though only the blossoms now appear;
For the sake of the fruit the blossoms are dear,
And the spring is here the spring is here.

NEW YEAR

IN the coming year enfolded
Bright and sad hours lie,
Waiting till you reach and live them
As the year rolls by.

In the happy hours and radiant
I would like to be
Somewhere out of sight, forgotten,
Your delight to see.

But when you are tired and saddened,
Vexed with life, dismayed,
I would steal your grief, and lay it
Where my own is laid

Bleed my heart out in your service
If, set free from pain,
You, through me, found life worth living,
Glad and fair again.

A STAR IN THE EAST

FOR THE ART EXHIBITION AT ST. JUDE'S, WHITECHAPEL

LIKE a fair flower springing fresh, sweet, and bright,
Through prison stones; or like one perfect song
Heard in a dream on one remembered night,
When waking worlds were dumb with grief and wrong;
Like the one kiss that links first kiss and last
The inevitable future spent apart
With the immutable divided past:
So in the east shines out this star of Art.

The narrow-shouldered, pale-faced girl and boy
Nestle against Art's new-found, love-warm breast,
And feel vague stirrings of a far-off joy,
Which life has never for themselves possessed,

Lays and Legends

And dimly guess at wonders hardly known
Even as dreams and weep glad tears to see
A loveliness that is at once life's own,
And yet is something life can never be.

Not worse will work the flying busy hand
Because the soul has drunk a cup of pleasure,
Has picked up on its leaden-coloured strand
Some little jewel of Art's splendid treasure,
Nor will less work be done because men see
That work is not the only thing in life,
Because they have been glad at heart and free
A little space 'mid sorrow, sin, and strife.

And this sweet draught may banish men's content?
For this we pray and strive not all in vain
That men may reach such heights of discontent
As never to fall back to peace again
Where no peace is nor rest from strife and prayers,
But tread firm-footed up the thorny way,
Till all that spring of art and joy is theirs
Whereof they taste so small a draught to-day.

PARTING

WHEN hides the sun behind a bank of cloud,
Though well we know the sun is shining still,
No less the shadow falls on down and hill,
And the bright hues grow dull as brows grief-bowed.
So, when thou goest from me into the crowd,
Though well I know thy love through good and ill
Shines steadfastly, thy going seems to fill
The world with shade turn sunshine to a shroud.

But when through clouds the sun returns to bless
Hill, field, and wood with his divine caress,
Ah, how the colours start to life again!
So after absence, when thou comest back
Bright grows the whole thought-world that was so black,
And my heart sings to feel the sunshine then.

TWO CHRISTMAS EVES

I

THE white snow veils the earth's brown face,
Strong frost has bound the veil in place
Under the wide, clear, dark-blue sky
All choked with snow the hollows lie,
Dead-white the fields once summer sweet
And woodlands where we used to meet:
We don't meet now, we never part.
Ever together, heart to heart,
We've worked, lost often, seldom won,
Seen pleasures ended, pains begun,
Have done our best, and faced, we two,
Almost the worst that Fate could do
Yet not Fate's uttermost of ill,
Since here we are together still!

For me you left, my dearest, best,
Your girlhood's safe warm sheltered nest;

For me gave up all else that could
Have made your woman-life seem good.
You thought a man's whole heart was worth
Just all the other wealth of earth;
I thought my painter's brush would be
A magic wand for you and me.
What dreams we had of fame and gold,
Of Art—that never could withhold
From me, who loved her so, full powers
To make my love for her serve ours,
To shape and build a palace fair
Of radiant hours, and place you there!
Art turned away her face from us,
And all the dreaming's ended thus!
Our garret's cold; the wind is keen,
And cuts these rotten boards between.
There is no lock upon the door,
No carpet on the uneven floor,
No curtain to the window where
Through frost-blanch'd panes the moon's cold stare
Fronts us. She's careless used to see
This world of ours, and misery!
Why, how you shiver! Oh, my sweet,
How cold your hands are, and your feet!

How hot this face of yours I kiss!
How could our love have led to this?
What devil is there over all
That lets such things as this befall?
It was not want of striving. Love,
Bear witness for me how I strove,
Worked till I grew quite sick and faint,
Worked till I could not see to paint
Because my eyes were sore and wet,
Yet never sold one picture yet.
We would have worked yes, there's the sting
We would have worked at anything!
Our hands asked work. There's work somewhere,
That makes it all more hard to bear;
Yet we could never understand
Where is the work that asks our hand!

There's no more firing, and the cold
Is biting through your shawl's thin fold,
And both the blankets have been sold.
Nestle beside me, in my arm,
And let me try to keep you warm.
We pawned the table and the bed,
To get our last week's fire and bread,

And now the last crust's eaten. Well,
There's nothing left to pawn or sell!
Our rent is due on Monday too,
How can we pay it I and you?
What shall we do? What shall we do?
And we are what was that you said?
You are so tired ? Your dearest head
Is burning hot, and aching so?
Ah, yes! I know it is I know!
You're tired and weak and faint and ill,
And fevers burn and shiverings chill
This world of mine I'm holding here.
If I could suffer only, dear
But all the burdens on you fall,
And I sit here, and bear it all!
And other men and other wives,
Who never worked in all their lives
No, nor yet loved as we have, sweet
Are wrapped in furs, warm hands and feet,
And feast to-night in homes made bright
With blazing logs and candle-light;
Not dark like this, where we two sit,
Who chose to work, and starve for it!

Don't go to sleep; you mustn't sleep
Here on the frozen floor! Yes, creep
Closer to me. Oh, if I knew
What is this something left to do!

Listen to me! It's Christmas Eve,
When hearts grow warmer, I believe,
And friends forget and friends forgive.
What if we stifled down my pride,
And put your bitter thoughts aside,
And asked your father's help once more?
True, when we asked for it before,
He turned and cursed us both, and swore
That he disowned you. You and I
Had made our bed, and there must lie;
That he would help us not one whit,
Though we should die for want of it.
Now I shall ask his help again.
It's colder now than it was then;
The cold creeps closer to life's core
Death's nearer to us than before;
And when your father sees how near,
He may relent, and save you, dear.

For my sake, love! I am too weak
To bear your tears upon my cheek,
Your sobs against my heart, to bear
Those eyes of yours, and their despair!
Not faltering, my own pain I bore
I cannot bear yours any more!
Stand up. You're stiff? That will not last!
The stairs are dark? They'll soon be passed!
You're tired? My sweet, I know you are;
But try to walk it isn't far.
Oh, that the Christ they say was born
On that dream-distant Christmas morn
May hear and help us now! Be strong!
Yes, lean on me. Perhaps ere long,
All this, gone by, will only seem
A half-remembered evil dream.
Come; I will help you walk. We'll try
Just this last venture, you and I!

Failed! Back again in the ice–gloom
Of our bare, bleak, rat–haunted room!

The moon still looks what does she care
To see my moon–flower lying there?
My rose, once red and white and fair,
Now white and wan, and pinched and thin,
Cold, through the coat I've wrapped her in,
And shivering, even in her sleep,
To hear how wakeful rats can keep.

We dragged our weary faltering feet
Through the bright noisy crowded street,
And reached the square where, stern in stone,
Her father's town–house sulks alone.
Sick, stupid, helpless, wretched, poor,
We waited at her father's door.
They let us in. Then let us tread
Through the warm hall with soft furs spread.
Next, 'Name and business.' Oh, exact
Were the man's orders how to act,
If e'er his master's child should come
To cross the threshold of her home!
I told our name. The man 'would see
If any message was' for me.
We waited there without a word.
How warm the whole house was! We heard

Soft music with soft voices blent,
And smelt sweet flowers with mingled scent,
And heard the wine poured out that chink
That glass makes as the diners drink
The china clatter. We, at least,
Appreciated that night's feast.

Then some one gave a note to me
With insolent smile. I read: '**When she
Is tired of love and poverty,
And chooses to return to what
She left, the duties she forgot,
And never see again this man,
And be here as before she can.'**

We came away: that much is clear;
I don't know how we got back here
I must have carried her somehow,
And have been strong enough. And now
She lies asleep and I, awake,
Must do this something for her sake
The only possible thing to do,
Oh, love! to cut our soul in two,
And take 'this man' away from you!

If now I let your father know
My choice is made, and that I go
And you are here oh, love! oh, wife!
I break my heart and save your life.
Doubt what to do? All doubt's about
The deeds that are not worth a doubt!
This deed takes me, and I obey,
And there is nothing left to say.

Good-bye, dear eyes I cannot see
Weep only gently, eyes, for me;
Dear lips, I've kissed and kissed again,
Lose those encircling lines of pain;
Dear face, so thin and faded now,
Win back youth's grace, and light, and glow;
Oh, hands I hold in mine oh, heart
That holds mine in it we must part!
When you wake up, and find me fled,
And find your father here instead,
Will you not wonder how my feet
Ever could turn from you, my sweet?
Ah, no! your heart and mine are one;
Our heart will tell you how 'twas done.

No more we meet until I've won
Enough to dare be happy on;
And if I fail I have known bliss,
And bliss has bred an hour like this.
I am past Fate's harming all her power
Could mix nought bitterer than this hour.
Good-bye our room our marriage life!
Oh, kiss me through your dreams, my wife!



I have grown rich! I have found out
The thing men break their hearts about!
I have dug gold, and gold, and sold
My diggings, and reaped in more gold
Sowed that, and reaped again, and played
For stakes, and always won, and made
More money than we'll ever spend,
And have forborne one word to send.
It has been easier for her so:
To wait one year, and then to know
How all is well, and how we two
Shall part no more our whole lives through.
It had been harder to have heard
Some incomplete, imperfect word

Of how I prospered, how despaired,
How well I strove, how ill I fared,
Or strove well and fared well, nor know
Each day which way the scale would go;
Rejoice, and grieve, and hope, and fear,
As I have done throughout the year.
The year is over now the prize
Is all our lives of Paradise!
Through all the year her lips and hands
Have drawn me on with passion-bands,
Her soul has held my soul, and taught
The way of storming Fortune's fort.
My little love, those days of ours,
Our dear delight, our sacred hours
Have wrapped me round in all the year;
And brought the gold and brought me here,
And brought this hour than all more fair
Our triumph hour! What shall we care
For all the past's most maddening pain
When you are in my arms again?

The yellow dust I loved to hold
Was like your hair's less heavy gold;
The clear, deep sea, that bore me hence,
Was like your eyes' grey innocence;

And not one fair thing could I see
But somehow seemed yourself to me.
The very work I had to do

Lays and Legends

Easier than rest was, done for you.
And through my dreams you walked all night
And filled sleep's byways with delight!
How I have wondered every day
How you would look, and what would say
On that same day! 'Perhaps she paints,
Thinks of our lessons prays to saints
With my name in her prayers or goes
Through gardens, heaping rose on rose.
How I love roses! Or mayhap
Sits with some work dropped in her lap,
And dreams and dreams what could there be
For her to dream about but me?'

This London how I hated it
A year ago! It now seems fit
Even to be our meeting-place.
It holds the glory of her face,
The wonder of her eyes, the grace
Of lovely lines and curves in fine,
The soul of sweetness that is mine!

I'll seek her at her father's; say,
'I claim my wife. I will repay
A hundredfold all you have spent
On keeping me in banishment,
On keeping her in affluence,
At her heart's dearest coin's expense!
That is past now, and I have come
To take my wife and sweetheart home,
To show her all my golden store,
My heart, hers to the very core,
And never leave her any more!'

But just before that hour supreme,
Close here our old house is, that dream
And daylight have been showing me
The year through. I would like to see
That room I found so hard to leave,
So hard to keep, last Christmas Eve.

Faith's easy now! There is a God
Who trod the earth we two have trod;
He pays me for our pain last year,
For all these months of longing, fear,

Doubt and uncertainty outright,
By letting me come here to-night
And just contrast that dead despair
With the Earth-Heaven we two shall share!

Just one look at the old room's door,
If I can get no chance of more;
Yet gold will buy most things may buy
The leave to see that room. We'll try!

May I go up? Just once to see
The room that sheltered her and me?
My God! the rapture of to-day
Has sent me mad; you did not say
She died the night I went away!

FOR THE NEW YEAR

FLUSHED with a crimson sunrise beauty,
The fair new year its promise gave;
Such dreams we had of love, of duty,
Of heights to scale, of foes to brave!
Oh, how hope's fire our future lighted
How much to do, how much to know,
Yet on its brink we shrank affrighted A year ago.

And now the year is done its pleasure
So brief, so bright its hours of pain;
Some moments' memories we treasure,
Some recollections loathe in vain.
Oh, for a brain where could not waken
Remembrances of purpose crossed,
Of trusts abandoned, aims forsaken, And chances lost!

The changing seasons thrust upon us
Another year, fair-faced and new;

What evil have the old years done us
That this in its turn will not do?
This, too, will die, and leave us grieving
For all the ills its arms enfold
For faiths betrayed, for friends deceiving, And love grown cold.

Lays and Legends

We have been fooled. The hopes that fooled us
We know them now have been a lie;
The star that led, the light that ruled us
We scorn them, and we pass them by.
Shut out hope's light; past is the season
When rose-red glow seemed good to see.
Look by the cold white light of reason, These things shall be:

A long, dim vista, blank and dreary
The same hard failure, small success;
The same tired heart, the brain still weary
Of its intense self-consciousness;
The old despair, the old repining,
And, through the future's deepest night,
Down life's untrodden ways still shining, The old hope's light!

THE FERRY

DRAW close the curtains, and shut out
The spring's green glow and glitter;The resurrection-life of springTo me brings no fresh blossoming;
I'm wearied of the flowers about
The London sparrows' twitter.

If I could dream if I could see
Once more the slow smooth river,The narrow path she used to tread,The sunlight on her little head,
The white fire of the hawthorn tree
But I shall see them never.

Only the boat in dreams I steer
Among the tufted rushes,I see her white gown through the grass,That thrills with love to feel her pass;
Only in dreams again I hear
Those unforgotten thrushes.

Sometimes in dreams I see her stand,
Her hand held out, and makingThe sweet unreal so vivid seem,I only know it is a dream
When I reach out to take her hand,
And find no hand for taking.

So once she stood; and I too weak
To dare to say, 'I love her' I dropped her hand, and took the oarAnd rowed her to the farther shore;
I had my chance, and did not speak,
And chances now are over.

How dark the room has grown! yet no,
The sky is blue above me; This is the boat the hawthorn trees
Is showering blossoms down on me;
And she is here as long ago,
And she has learned to love me!

LOVERS' QUARRELS

JOIN hands, my dear, clasp long and close and fast,
Even this present we shall soon call past,
And lay among the unforgotten days,
Not the less loved because they could not last.

Make haste to put our hasty words away,
And hide them with dead leaves of yesterday,
Cast them aside among forgotten things,
Keep the love warm that turns to green life's grey.

Each little thorn that pricks these present hours
Is sure to hide under our memories' flowers,
Till we shall say, turning the dry wreath over,
'How sweet they were these dear dead days of ours!'

WHEN!

WHEN I am young again I'll hoard my bliss,
Nor deem that inexhaustible it is,
Remembering old age comes after this, Joy grows to pain;
Nor waste one moment of youth's rose-sweet hours,
Nor trample one of all its countless flowers,
But drink the summer sun and soft spring showers, When I am young again.

I will be wise with wisdom dearly won
By those who through life's wood have nearly run;
Learn what to do, and what to leave undone, Risk or refrain.
I will not seek into my mouth to take
The bitter apple of the acrid lake,
But at clear fountains all my thirsts will slake, When I am young again.

I will not brush the bloom to reach the core,
Remembering how it chanced with me before,
And bloom once lost returns not any more, Hard cores remain:

Lays and Legends

I will fence round with prudence and secure
A lasting bloom whose freshness shall endure;
Oh, I will guard my peach of youth, be sure, When I am young again.

When I am young again, I'll spend no breath
On bitter words the heart remembereth
When bitterness is swallowed up by Death Holding sole reign;
I'll love so well that if they pass to sleep
Before me, I shall have no watch to keep
Over their tears—only my tears to weep When I am young again.

I will not lightly joy nor idly grieve,
Nor for a heaven itself one soul deceive,
Nor will I be deceived, vainly believe, Nor love in vain.

Come back, lost youth! Ah, Fate, that one gift give!
Then I will show that I have learned to live;
Youth shall be wise and two and two make five When I am young again!

SONG

WE loved, my love, and now it seems
Our love has brought to birth
Friendship, the fairest child of dreams,
The rarest gift of earth.

Soon die love's roses fresh and frail,
And when their bloom is o'er,
Not all our heart—wrung tears avail
To give them life once more.

But when true love with friendship lives,
As now, for thee and me,
Love brings the roses Friendship gives
Them immortality.

QUAND MÊME