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FOLIAGE

VARIOUS POEMS

BY

WILLIAM H. DAVIES

1913

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THUNDERSTORMS

My mind has thunderstorms,

That brood for heavy hours:
Until they rain me words,
My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds.

Yet come, dark thunderstorms,
And brood your heavy hours;
For when you rain me words,
My thoughts are dancing flowers
And joyful singing birds.

STRONG MOMENTS

Sometimes I hear fine ladies sing,
Sometimes I smoke and drink with men;
Sometimes I play at games of cards--
Judge me to be no strong man then.

The strongest moment of my life
Is when I think about the poor;
When, like a spring that rain has fed,
My pity rises more and more.

The flower that loves the warmth and light,
Has all its mornings bathed in dew;
My heart has moments wet with tears,
My weakness is they are so few.

A GREETING

Good morning, Life--and all
Things glad and beautiful.
My pockets nothing hold,
But he that owns the gold,
The Sun, is my great friend--
His spending has no end.

Hail to the morning sky,
Which bright clouds measure high;
Hail to you birds whose throats
Would number leaves by notes;
Hail to you shady bowers,
And you green fields of flowers.

Hail to you women fair,

That make a show so rare
In cloth as white as milk--
Be't calico or silk:
Good morning, Life--and all
Things glad and beautiful.

SWEET STAY-AT-HOME

Sweet Stay-at-Home, sweet Well-content,
Thou knowest of no strange continent:
Thou hast not felt thy bosom keep
A gentle motion with the deep;
Thou hast not sailed in Indian seas,
Where scent comes forth in every breeze.
Thou hast not seen the rich grape grow
For miles, as far as eyes can go;
Thou hast not seen a summer's night
When maids could sew by a worm's light;
Nor the North Sea in spring send out
Bright hues that like birds flit about
In solid cages of white ice--
Sweet Stay-at-Home, sweet Love-one-place.
Thou hast not seen black fingers pick
White cotton when the bloom is thick,
Nor heard black throats in harmony;
Nor hast thou sat on stones that lie
Flat on the earth, that once did rise
To hide proud kings from common eyes,
Thou hast not seen plains full of bloom
Where green things had such little room
They pleased the eye like fairer flowers--
Sweet Stay-at-Home, all these long hours.
Sweet Well-content, sweet Love-one-place,
Sweet, simple maid, bless thy dear face;
For thou hast made more homely stuff
Nurture thy gentle self enough;
I love thee for a heart that's kind--
Not for the knowledge in thy mind.

THE STARVED

My little Lamb, what is amiss?
If there was milk in mother's kiss,
You would not look as white as this.

The wolf of Hunger, it is he
That takes away thy milk from me,
And I have much to do for thee.

If thou couldst live on love, I know
No babe in all the land could show
More rosy cheeks and louder crow.

Thy father's dead, Alas for thee:
I cannot keep this wolf from me,
That takes thy milk so bold and free.

If thy dear father lived, he'd drive
Away this beast with whom I strive,
And thou, my pretty Lamb, wouldst thrive.

Ah, my poor babe, my love's so great
I'd swallow common rags for meat--
If they could make milk rich and sweet.

My little Lamb, what is amiss?
Come, I must wake thee with a kiss,
For Death would own a sleep like this.

A MAY MORNING

The sky is clear,
The sun is bright;
The cows are red,
The sheep are white;
Trees in the meadows
Make happy shadows.

Birds in the hedge
Are perched and sing;
Swallows and larks
Are on the wing:
Two merry cuckoos
Are making echoes.

Bird and the beast
Have the dew yet;
My road shines dry,
Theirs bright and wet:
Death gives no warning,
On this May morning.

I see no Christ
Nailed on a tree,
Dying for sin;

No sin I see:
No thoughts for sadness,
All thoughts for gladness.

THE LONELY DREAMER

He lives his lonely life, and when he dies
A thousand hearts maybe will utter sighs;
Because they liked his songs, and now their bird
Sleeps with his head beneath his wing, unheard.

But what kind hand will tend his grave, and bring
Those blossoms there, of which he used to sing?
Who'll kiss his mound, and wish the time would come
To lie with him inside that silent tomb?

And who'll forget the dreamer's skill, and shed
A tear because a loving heart is dead?
Heigh ho for gossip then, and common sighs--
And let his death bring tears in no one's eyes.

CHRISTMAS

Christmas has come, let's eat and drink--
This is no time to sit and think;
Farewell to study, books and pen,
And welcome to all kinds of men.
Let all men now get rid of care,
And what one has let others share;
Then 'tis the same, no matter which
Of us is poor, or which is rich.
Let each man have enough this day,
Since those that can are glad to pay;
There's nothing now too rich or good
For poor men, not the King's own food.
Now like a singing bird my feet
Touch earth, and I must drink and eat.
Welcome to all men: I'll not care
What any of my fellows wear;
We'll not let cloth divide our souls,
They'll swim stark naked in the bowls.
Welcome, poor beggar: I'll not see
That hand of yours dislodge a flea,--
While you sit at my side and beg,
Or right foot scratching your left leg.

Farewell restraint: we will not now
Measure the ale our brains allow,
But drink as much as we can hold.
We'll count no change when we spend gold;
This is no time to save, but spend,
To give for nothing, not to lend.
Let foes make friends: let them forget
The mischief-making dead that fret
The living with complaint like this--
"He wronged us once, hate him and his."
Christmas has come; let every man
Eat, drink, be merry all he can.
Ale's my best mark, but if port wine
Or whisky's yours--let it be mine;
No matter what lies in the bowls,
We'll make it rich with our own souls.
Farewell to study, books and pen,
And welcome to all kinds of men.

LAUGHING ROSE

If I were gusty April now,
How I would blow at laughing Rose;
I'd make her ribbons slip their knots,
And all her hair come loose.

If I were merry April now,
How I would pelt her cheeks with showers;
I'd make carnations, rich and warm,
Of her vermilion flowers.

Since she will laugh in April's face,
No matter how he rains or blows--
Then O that I wild April were,
To play with laughing Rose.

SEEKING JOY

Joy, how I sought thee!
Silver I spent and gold,
On the pleasures of this world,
In splendid garments clad;
The wine I drank was sweet,
Rich morsels I did eat--
Oh, but my life was sad!

Joy, how I sought thee!

Joy, I have found thee!

Far from the halls of Mirth,

Back to the soft green earth,

Where people are not many;

I find thee, Joy, in hours

With clouds, and birds, and flowers--

Thou dost not charge one penny.

Joy, I have found thee!

THE OLD OAK TREE

I sit beneath your leaves, old oak,

You mighty one of all the trees;

Within whose hollow trunk a man

Could stable his big horse with ease.

I see your knuckles hard and strong,

But have no fear they'll come to blows;

Your life is long, and mine is short,

But which has known the greater woes?

Thou has not seen starved women here,

Or man gone mad because ill-fed--

Who stares at stones in city streets,

Mistaking them for hunks of bread.

Thou hast not felt the shivering backs

Of homeless children lying down

And sleeping in the cold, night air--

Like doors and walls in London town.

Knowing thou hast not known such shame,

And only storms have come thy way,

Methinks I could in comfort spend

My summer with thee, day by day.

To lie by day in thy green shade,

And in thy hollow rest at night;

And through the open doorway see

The stars turn over leaves of light.

POOR KINGS

God's pity on poor kings,
They know no gentle rest;
The North and South cry out,
Cries come from East and West--
"Come, open this new Dock,
Building, Bazaar or Fair."
Lord, what a wretched life
Such men must bear.

They're followed, watched and spied,
No liberty they know;
Some eye will watch them still,
No matter where they go.
When in green lanes I muse,
Alone, and hear birds sing,
God's pity then, say I,
On some poor king.

LOVE AND THE MUSE

My back is turned on Spring and all her flowers,
The birds no longer charm from tree to tree;
The cuckoo had his home in this green world
Ten days before his voice was heard by me.

Had I an answer from a dear one's lips,
My love of life would soon regain its power;
And suckle my sweet dreams, that tug my heart,
And whimper to be nourished every hour.

Give me that answer now, and then my Muse,
That for my sweet life's sake must never die,
Will rise like that great wave that leaps and hangs
The sea-weed on a vessel's mast-top high.

MY YOUTH

My youth was my old age,
Weary and long;
It had too many cares
To think of song;
My moulting days all came
When I was young.

Now, in life's prime, my soul

Comes out in flower;
Late, as with Robin, comes
My singing power;
I was not born to joy
Till this late hour.

SMILES

I saw a black girl once,
As black as winter's night;
Till through her parted lips
There came a flood of light;
It was the milky way
Across her face so black:
Her two lips closed again,
And night came back.

I see a maiden now,
Fair as a summer's day;
Yet through her parted lips
I see the milky way;
It makes the broad daylight
In summer time look black:
Her two lips close again,
And night comes back.

MAD POLL

There goes mad Poll, dressed in wild flowers,
Poor, crazy Poll, now old and wan;
Her hair all down, like any child:
She swings her two arms like a man.

Poor, crazy Poll is never sad,
She never misses one that dies;
When neighbours show their new-born babes,
They seem familiar to her eyes.

Her bonnet's always in her hand,
Or on the ground, and lying near;
She thinks it is a thing for play,
Or pretty show, and not to wear.

She gives the sick no sympathy,
She never soothes a child that cries;

She never whimpers, night or day,
She makes no moans, she makes no sighs.

She talks about some battle old,
Fought many a day from yesterday;
And when that war is done, her love--
"Ha, ha!" Poll laughs, and skips away.

JOY SUPREME

The birds are pirates of her notes,
The blossoms steal her face's light;
The stars in ambush lie all day,
To take her glances for the night.
Her voice can shame rain-pelted leaves;
Young robin has no notes as sweet
In autumn, when the air is still,
And all the other birds are mute.

When I set eyes on ripe, red plums
That seem a sin and shame to bite,
Such are her lips, which I would kiss,
And still would keep before my sight.
When I behold proud gossamer
Make silent billows in the air,
Then think I of her head's fine stuff,
Finer than gossamer's, I swear.

The miser has his joy, with gold
Beneath his pillow in the night;
My head shall lie on soft warm hair,
And miser's know not that delight.
Captains that own their ships can boast
Their joy to feel the rolling brine--
But I shall lie near her, and feel
Her soft warm bosom swell on mine.

FRANCIS THOMPSON

Thou hadst no home, and thou couldst see
In every street the windows' light:
Dragging thy limbs about all night,
No window kept a light for thee.

However much thou wert distressed,

Or tired of moving, and felt sick,
Thy life was on the open deck--
Thou hadst no cabin for thy rest.

Thy barque was helpless 'neath the sky,
No pilot thought thee worth his pains
To guide for love or money gains--
Like phantom ships the rich sailed by.

Thy shadow mocked thee night and day,
Thy life's companion, it alone;
It did not sigh, it did not moan,
But mocked thy moves in every way.

In spite of all, the mind had force,
And, like a stream whose surface flows
The wrong way when a strong wind blows,
It underneath maintained its course.

Oft didst thou think thy mind would flower
Too late for good, as some bruised tree
That blooms in Autumn, and we see
Fruit not worth picking, hard and sour.

Some poets _feign_ their wounds and scars.
If they had known real suffering hours,
They'd show, in place of Fancy's flowers,
More of Imagination's stars.

So, if thy fruits of Poesy
Are rich, it is at this dear cost--
That they were nipt by Sorrow's frost,
In nights of homeless misery.

THE BIRD-MAN

Man is a bird:
He rises on fine wings
Into the Heaven's clear light;
He flies away and sings--
There's music in his flight.

Man is a bird:
In swiftest speed he burns,
With twist and dive and leap;
A bird whose sudden turns
Can drive the frightened sheep.

Man is a bird:

Over the mountain high,
Whose head is in the skies,
Cut from its shoulder by
A cloud--the bird-man flies.

Man is a bird:

Eagles from mountain crag
Swooped down to prove his worth;
But now they rise to drag
Him down from Heaven to earth!

WINTER'S BEAUTY

Is it not fine to walk in spring,
When leaves are born, and hear birds sing?
And when they lose their singing powers,
In summer, watch the bees at flowers?
Is it not fine, when summer's past,
To have the leaves, no longer fast,
Biting my heel where'er I go,
Or dancing lightly on my toe?
Now winter's here and rivers freeze;
As I walk out I see the trees,
Wherein the pretty squirrels sleep,
All standing in the snow so deep:
And every twig, however small,
Is blossomed white and beautiful.
Then welcome, winter, with thy power
To make this tree a big white flower;
To make this tree a lovely sight,
With fifty brown arms draped in white,
While thousands of small fingers show
In soft white gloves of purest snow.

THE CHURCH ORGAN

The homeless man has heard thy voice,
Its sound doth move his memory deep;
He stares bewildered, as a man
That's shook by earthquake in his sleep.

Thy solemn voice doth bring to mind
The days that are forever gone:
Thou bringest to mind our early days,
Ere we made second homes or none.

HEIGH HO, THE RAIN

The Lark that in heaven dim
Can match a rainy hour
With his own music's shower,
Can make me sing like him--
Heigh ho! The rain!

Sing--when a Nightingale
Pours forth her own sweet soul
To hear dread thunder roll
Into a tearful tale--
Heigh ho! The rain!

Sing--when a Sparrow's seen
Trying to lie at rest
By pressing his warm breast
To leaves so wet and green--
Heigh ho! The rain!

LOVE'S INSPIRATION

Give me the chance, and I will make
Thy thoughts of me, like worms this day,
Take wings and change to butterflies
That in the golden light shall play;
Thy cold, clear heart--the quiet pool
That never heard Love's nightingale--
Shall hear his music night and day,
And in no seasons shall it fail.

I'll make thy happy heart my port,
Where all my thoughts are anchored fast;
Thy meditations, full of praise,
The flags of glory on each mast.
I'll make my Soul thy shepherd soon,
With all thy thoughts my grateful flock;
And thou shalt say, each time I go--
How long, my Love, ere thou'lt come back?

NIGHT WANDERERS

They hear the bell of midnight toll,
And shiver in their flesh and soul;
They lie on hard, cold wood or stone,
Iron, and ache in every bone;
They hate the night: they see no eyes
Of loved ones in the starlit skies.
They see the cold, dark water near;
They dare not take long looks for fear
They'll fall like those poor birds that see
A snake's eyes staring at their tree.
Some of them laugh, half-mad; and some
All through the chilly night are dumb;
Like poor, weak infants some converse,
And cough like giants, deep and hoarse.

YOUNG BEAUTY

When at each door the ruffian winds
Have laid a dying man to groan,
And filled the air on winter nights
With cries of infants left alone;
And every thing that has a bed
Will sigh for others that have none:

On such a night, when bitter cold,
Young Beauty, full of love thoughts sweet,
Can redden in her looking-glass;
With but one gown on, in bare feet,
She from her own reflected charms
Can feel the joy of summer's heat.

WHO I KNOW

I do not know his grace the Duke,
Outside whose gilded gate there died
Of want a feeble, poor old man,
With but his shadow at his side.

I do not know his Lady fair,
Who in a bath of milk doth lie;
More milk than could feed fifty babes,
That for the want of it must die.

But well I know the mother poor,
Three pounds of flesh wrapped in her shawl:
A puny babe that, stripped at home,
Looks like a rabbit skinned, so small.

And well I know the homeless waif,
Fed by the poorest of the poor;
Since I have seen that child alone,
Crying against a bolted door.

SWEET BIRDS, I COME

The bird that now
On bush and tree,
Near leaves so green
Looks down to see
Flowers looking up--
He either sings
In ecstasy
Or claps his wings.

Why should I slave
For finer dress
Or ornaments;
Will flowers smile less
For rags than silk?
Are birds less dumb
For tramp than squire?
Sweet birds, I come.

THE TWO LIVES

Now how could I, with gold to spare,
Who know the harlot's arms, and wine,
Sit in this green field all alone,
If Nature was not truly mine?

That Pleasure life wakes stale at morn,
From heavy sleep that no rest brings:
This life of quiet joy wakes fresh,
And claps its wings at morn, and sings.

So here sit I, alone till noon,
In one long dream of quiet bliss;
I hear the lark and share his joy,

With no more wine-drops than were his.

Such, Nature, is thy charm and power--
Since I have made the Muse my wife--
To keep me from the harlot's arms,
And save me from a drunkard's life.

HIDDEN LOVE

The bird of Fortune sings when free,
But captured, soon grows dumb; and we,
To hear his fast declining powers,
Must soon forget that he is ours.
So, when I win that maid, no doubt
Love soon will seem to be half out;
Like blighted leaves drooped to the ground,
Whose roots are still untouched and sound,
So will our love's root still be strong
When others think the leaves go wrong.
Though we may quarrel, 'twill not prove
That she and I are less in love;
The parrot, though he mocked the dove,
Died when she died, and proved his love.
When merry springtime comes, we hear
How all things into love must stir;
How birds would rather sing than eat,
How joyful sheep would rather bleat:
And daffodils nod heads of gold,
And dance in April's sparkling cold.
So in our early love did we
Dance much and skip, and laugh with glee:
But let none think our love is flown
If, when we're married, little's shown:
E'en though our lips be dumb of song,
Our hearts can still be singing strong.

LIFE IS JOLLY

This life is jolly, O!
I envy no man's lot;
My eyes can much admire,
And still my heart crave not;
There's no true joy in gold,
It breeds desire for more;
Whatever wealth man has,

Desire can keep him poor.

This life is jolly, O!

Power has his fawning slaves,
But if he rests his mind,
Those wretches turn bold knaves.
Fame's field is full of flowers,
It dazzles as we pass,
But men who walk that field
Starve for the common grass.

This life is jolly, O!

Let others know they die,
Enough to know I live,
And make no question why;
I care not whence I came,
Nor whither I shall go;
Let others think of these--
This life is jolly, O!

THE FOG

I saw the fog grow thick,
Which soon made blind my ken;
It made tall men of boys,
And giants of tall men.

It clutched my throat, I coughed;
Nothing was in my head
Except two heavy eyes
Like balls of burning lead.

And when it grew so black
That I could know no place,
I lost all judgment then,
Of distance and of space.

The street lamps, and the lights
Upon the halted cars,
Could either be on earth
Or be the heavenly stars.

A man passed by me close,
I asked my way, he said,
"Come, follow me, my friend"--
I followed where he led.

He rapped the stones in front,
"Trust me," he said, "and come";

I followed like a child--
A blind man led me home.

A WOMAN'S CHARMS

My purse is yours, Sweet Heart, for I
Can count no coins with you close by;
I scorn like sailors them, when they
Have drawn on shore their deep-sea pay;
Only my thoughts I value now,
Which, like the simple glowworms, throw
Their beams to greet thee bravely, Love--
Their glorious light in Heaven above.
Since I have felt thy waves of light,
Beating against my soul, the sight
Of gems from Afric's continent
Move me to no great wonderment.
Since I, Sweet Heart, have known thine hair,
The fur of ermine, sable, bear,
Or silver fox, for me can keep
No more to praise than common sheep.
Though ten Isaiahs' souls were mine,
They could not sing such charms as thine.
Two little hands that show with pride,
Two timid, little feet that hide;
Two eyes no dark Senoras show
Their burning like in Mexico;
Two coral gates wherein is shown
Your queen of charms, on a white throne;
Your queen of charms, the lovely smile
That on its white throne could beguile
The mastiff from his gates in hell;
Who by no whine or bark could tell
His masters what thing made him go--
And countless other charms I know.
October's hedge has far less hues
Than thou hast charms from which to choose.

DREAMS OF THE SEA

I know not why I yearn for thee again,
To sail once more upon thy fickle flood;
I'll hear thy waves wash under my death-bed,
Thy salt is lodged forever in my blood.

Yet I have seen thee lash the vessel's sides
In fury, with thy many tailed whip;
And I have seen thee, too, like Galilee,
When Jesus walked in peace to Simon's ship

And I have seen thy gentle breeze as soft
As summer's, when it makes the cornfields run;
And I have seen thy rude and lusty gale
Make ships show half their bellies to the sun.

Thou knowest the way to tame the wildest life,
Thou knowest the way to bend the great and proud:
I think of that Armada whose puffed sails,
Greedy and large, came swallowing every cloud.

But I have seen the sea-boy, young and drowned,
Lying on shore and by thy cruel hand,
A seaweed beard was on his tender chin,
His heaven-blue eyes were filled with common sand.

And yet, for all, I yearn for thee again,
To sail once more upon thy fickle flood:
I'll hear thy waves wash under my death-bed,
Thy salt is lodged forever in my blood.

THE WONDER MAKER

Come, if thou'rt cold to Summer's charms,
Her clouds of green, her starry flowers,
And let this bird, this wandering bird,
Make his fine wonder yours;
He, hiding in the leaves so green,
When sampling this fair world of ours,
Cries cuckoo, clear; and like Lot's wife,
I look, though it should cost my life.

When I can hear that charmed one's voice,
I taste of immortality;
My joy's so great that on my heart
Doth lie eternity,
As light as any little flower--
So strong a wonder works in me;
Cuckoo! he cries, and fills my soul
With all that's rich and beautiful.

THE HELPLESS

Those poor, heartbroken wretches, doomed
To hear at night the clocks' hard tones;
They have no beds to warm their limbs,
But with those limbs must warm cold stones;
Those poor weak men, whose coughs and ailings
Force them to tear at iron railings.

Those helpless men that starve, my pity;
Whose waking day is never done;
Who, save for their own shadows, are
Doomed night and day to walk alone:
They know no bright face but the sun's,
So cold and dark are human ones.

AN EARLY LOVE

Ah, sweet young blood, that makes the heart
So full of joy, and light,
That dying children dance with it
From early morn till night.

My dreams were blossoms, hers the fruit,
She was my dearest care;
With gentle hand, and for it, I
Made playthings of her hair.

I made my fingers rings of gold,
And bangles for my wrist;
You should have felt the soft, warm thing
I made to glove my fist.

And she should have a crown, I swore,
With only gold enough
To keep together stones more rich
Than that fine metal stuff.

Her golden hair gave me more joy
Than Jason's heart could hold,
When all his men cried out--Ah, look!
He has the Fleece of Gold!

DREAM TRAGEDIES

Thou art not always kind, O sleep:
What awful secrets them dost keep
In store, and oft-times make us know;
What hero has not fallen low
In sleep before a monster grim,
And whined for mercy unto him;
Knights, constables, and men-at-arms
Have quailed and whined in sleep's alarms.
Thou wert not kind last night to make
Me like a very coward shake--
Shake like a thin red-currant bush
Robbed of its fruit by a strong thrush.
I felt this earth did move; more slow,
And slower yet began to go;
And not a bird was heard to sing,
Men and great beasts were shivering;
All living things knew well that when
This earth stood still, destruction then
Would follow with a mighty crash.
'Twas then I broke that awful hush:
E'en as a mother, who does come
Running in haste back to her home,
And looks at once, and lo, the child
She left asleep is gone; and wild
She shrieks and loud--so did I break
With a mad cry that dream, and wake.

CHILDREN AT PLAY

I hear a merry noise indeed:
Is it the geese and ducks that take
Their first plunge in a quiet pond
That into scores of ripples break--
Or children make this merry sound?

I see an oak tree, its strong back
Could not be bent an inch though all
Its leaves were stone, or iron even:
A boy, with many a lusty call,
Rides on a bough bareback through Heaven.

I see two children dig a hole
And plant in it a cherry-stone:
"We'll come to-morrow," one child said--
"And then the tree will be full grown,
And all its boughs have cherries red."

Ah, children, what a life to lead:

You love the flowers, but when they're past
No flowers are missed by your bright eyes;
And when cold winter comes at last,
Snowflakes shall be your butterflies.

WHEN THE CUCKOO SINGS

In summer, when the Cuckoo sings,
And clouds like greater moons can shine;
When every leafy tree doth hold
A loving heart that beats with mine:
Now, when the Brook has cresses green,
As well as stones, to check his pace;
And, if the Owl appears, he's forced
By small birds to some hiding-place:
Then, like red Robin in the spring,
I shun those haunts where men are found;
My house holds little joy until
Leaves fall and birds can make no sound;
Let none invade that wilderness
Into whose dark green depths I go--
Save some fine lady, all in white,
Comes like a pillar of pure snow.

RETURN TO NATURE

My song is of that city which
Has men too poor and men too rich;
Where some are sick, too richly fed,
While others take the sparrows' bread:
Where some have beds to warm their bones,
While others sleep on hard, cold stones
That suck away their bodies' heat.
Where men are drunk in every street;
Men full of poison, like those flies
That still attack the horses' eyes.
Where some men freeze for want of cloth,
While others show their jewels' worth
And dress in satin, fur or silk;
Where fine rich ladies wash in milk,
While starving mothers have no food
To make them fit in flesh and blood;
So that their watery breasts can give
Their babies milk and make them live.
Where one man does the work of four,

And dies worn out before his hour;
While some seek work in vain, and grief
Doth make their fretful lives as brief.
Where ragged men are seen to wait
For charity that's small and late;
While others haunt in idle leisure,
Theatre doors to pay for pleasure.
No more I'll walk those crowded places
And take hot dreams from harlots' faces;
I'll know no more those passions' dreams,
While musing near these quiet streams;
That biting state of savage lust
Which, true love absent, burns to dust.
Gold's rattle shall not rob my ears
Of this sweet music of the spheres.
I'll walk abroad with fancy free;
Each leafy, summer's morn I'll see
The trees, all legs or bodies, when
They vary in their shapes like men.
I'll walk abroad and see again
How quiet pools are pricked by rain;
And you shall hear a song as sweet
As when green leaves and raindrops meet.
I'll hear the Nightingale's fine mood,
Rattling with thunder in the wood,
Made bolder by each mighty crash;
Who drives her notes with every flash
Of lightning through the summer's night.
No more I'll walk in that pale light
That shows the homeless man awake,
Ragged and cold; harlot and rake,
That have their hearts in rags, and die
Before that poor wretch they pass by.
Nay, I have found a life so fine
That every moment seems divine;
By shunning all those pleasures full,
That bring repentance cold and dull.
Such misery seen in days gone by,
That, made a coward, now I fly
To green things, like a bird. Alas!
In days gone by I could not pass
Ten men but what the eyes of one
Would burn me for no kindness done;
And wretched women I passed by
Sent after me a moan or sigh.
Ah, wretched days: for in that place
My soul's leaves sought the human face,
And not the Sun's for warmth and light--
And so was never free from blight.
But seek me now, and you will find
Me on some soft green bank reclined;
Watching the stately deer close by,
That in a great deep hollow lie

Shaking their tails with all the ease
That lambs can. First, look for the trees,
Then, if you seek me, find me quick.
Seek me no more where men are thick,
But in green lanes where I can walk
A mile, and still no human folk
Tread on my shadow. Seek me where
The strange oak tree is, that can bear
One white-leaved branch among the green--
Which many a woodman has not seen.
If you would find me, go where cows
And sheep stand under shady boughs;
Where furious squirrels shake a tree
As though they'd like to bury me
Under a leaf shower heavy, and
I laugh at them for spite, and stand.
Seek me no more in human ways--
Who am a coward since those days
My mind was burned by poor men's eyes,
And frozen by poor women's sighs.
Then send your pearls across the sea,
Your feathers, scent and ivory,
You distant lands--but let my bales
Be brought by Cuckoos, Nightingales,
That come in spring from your far shores;
Sweet birds that carry richer stores
Than men can dream of, when they prize
Fine silks and pearls for merchandise;
And dream of ships that take the floods
Sunk to their decks with such vain goods;
Bringing that traitor silk, whose soft
Smooth tongue persuades the poor too oft
From sweet content; and pearls, whose fires
Make ashes of our best desires.
For I have heard the sighs and whines
Of rich men that drink costly wines
And eat the best of fish and fowl;
Men that have plenty, and still growl
Because they cannot like kings live--
"Alas!" they whine, "we cannot save."
Since I have heard those rich ones sigh,
Made poor by their desires so high,
I cherish more a simple mind;
That I am well content to find
My pictures in the open air,
And let my walls and floors go bare;
That I with lovely things can fill
My rooms, whene'er sweet Fancy will.
I make a fallen tree my chair,
And soon forget no cushion's there;
I lie upon the grass or straw,
And no soft down do I sigh for;
For with me all the time I keep

Sweet dreams that, do I wake or sleep,
Shed on me still their kindly beams;
Aye, I am richer with my dreams
Than banks where men dull-eyed and cold
Without a tremble shovel gold.
A happy life is this. I walk
And hear more birds than people talk;
I hear the birds that sing unseen,
On boughs now smothered with leaves green;
I sit and watch the swallows there,
Making a circus in the air;
That speed around straight-going crow,
As sharks around a ship can go;
I hear the skylark out of sight,
Hid perfectly in all this light.
The dappled cows in fields I pass,
Up to their bosoms in deep grass;
Old oak trees, with their bowels gone,
I see with spring's green finery on.
I watch the buzzing bees for hours,
To see them rush at laughing flowers--
And butterflies that lie so still.
I see great houses on the hill,
With shining roofs; and there shines one,
It seems that heaven has dropped the sun.
I see yon cloudlet sail the skies,
Racing with clouds ten times its size.
I walk green pathways, where love waits
To talk in whispers at old gates;
Past stiles--on which I lean, alone--
Carved with the names of lovers gone;
I stand on arches whose dark stones
Can turn the wind's soft sighs to groans.
I hear the Cuckoo when first he
Makes this green world's discovery,
And re-creates it in my mind,
Proving my eyes were growing blind.
I see the rainbow come forth clear
And wave her coloured scarf to cheer
The sun long swallowed by a flood--
So do I live in lane and wood.
Let me look forward to each spring
As eager as the birds that sing;
And feed my eyes on spring's young flowers
Before the bees by many hours,
My heart to leap and sing her praise
Before the birds by many days.
Go white my hair and skin go dry--
But let my heart a dewdrop lie
Inside those leaves when they go wrong,
As fresh as when my life was young.

A STRANGE CITY

A wondrous city, that had temples there
More rich than that one built by David's son,
Which called forth Ophir's gold, when Israel
Made Lebanon half naked for her sake.
I saw white towers where so-called traitors died--
True men whose tongues were bells to honest hearts,
And rang out boldly in false monarch's ears.
Saw old black gateways, on whose arches crouched
Stone lions with their bodies gnawed by age.
I looked with awe on iron gates that could
Tell bloody stones if they had our tongues.
I saw tall mounted spires shine in the sun,
That stood amidst their army of low streets.
I saw in buildings pictures, statues rare,
Made in those days when Rome was young, and new
In marble quarried from Carrara's hills;
Statues by sculptors that could almost make
Fine cobwebs out of stone--so light they worked.
Pictures that breathe in us a living soul,
Such as we seldom feel come from that life
The artist copies. Many a lovely sight--
Such as the half sunk barge with bales of hay,
Or sparkling coals--employed my wondering eyes.
I saw old Thames, whose ripples swarmed with stars
Bred by the sun on that fine summer's day;
I saw in fancy fowl and green banks there,
And Liza's barge rowed past a thousand swans.
I walked in parks and heard sweet music cry
In solemn courtyards, midst the men-at-arms;
Which suddenly would leap those stony walls
And spring up with loud laughter into trees.
I walked in busy streets where music oft
Went on the march with men; and oftimes heard
The organ in cathedral, when the boys
Like nightingales sang in that thunderstorm;
The organ, with its rich and solemn tones--
As near a God's voice as a man conceives;
Nor ever dreamt the silent misery
That solemn organ brought to homeless men.
I heard the drums and soft brass instruments,
Led by the silver cornets clear and high--
Whose sounds turned playing children into stones.

I saw at night the City's lights shine bright,
A greater milky way; how in its spell
It fascinated with ten thousand eyes;
Like those sweet wiles of an enchantress who
Would still detain her knight gone cold in love;

It was an iceberg with long arms unseen,
That felt the deep for vessels far away.
All things seemed strange, I stared like any child
That pores on some old face and sees a world
Which its familiar granddad and his dame
Hid with their love and laughter until then.
My feet had not yet felt the cruel rocks
Beneath the pleasant moss I seemed to tread.
But soon my ears grew weary of that din,
My eyes grew tired of all that flesh and stone;
And, as a snail that crawls on a smooth stalk,
Will reach the end and find a sharpened thorn--
So did I reach the cruel end at last.
I saw the starving mother and her child,
Who feared that Death would surely end its sleep,
And cursed the wolf of Hunger with her moans.
And yet, methought, when first I entered there,
Into that city with my wondering mind,
How marvellous its many sights and sounds;
The traffic with its sound of heavy seas
That have and would again unseat the rocks.
How common then seemed Nature's hills and fields
Compared with these high domes and even streets,
And churches with white towers and bodies black.
The traffic's sound was music to my ears;
A sound of where the white waves, hour by hour,
Attack a reef of coral rising yet;
Or where a mighty warship in a fog,
Stears into a large fleet of little boats.
Aye, and that fog was strange and wonderful,
That made men blind and grope their way at noon.
I saw that City with fierce human surge,
With millions of dark waves that still spread out
To swallow more of their green boundaries.
Then came a day that noise so stirred my soul,
I called them hellish sounds, and thought red war
Was better far than peace in such a town.

To hear that din all day, sometimes my mind
Went crazed, and it seemed strange, as I were lost
In some vast forest full of chattering apes.
How sick I grew to hear that lasting noise,
And all those people forced across my sight,
Knowing the acres of green fields and woods
That in some country parts outnumbered men;
In half an hour ten thousand men I passed--
More than nine thousand should have been green trees.
There on a summer's day I saw such crowds
That where there was no man man's shadow was;
Millions all cramped together in one hive,
Storing, methought, more bitter stuff than sweet.
The air was foul and stale; from their green homes
Young blood had brought its fresh and rosy cheeks,

Which soon turned colour, like blue streams in flood.
Aye, solitude, black solitude indeed,
To meet a million souls and know not one;
This world must soon grow stale to one compelled
To look all day at faces strange and cold.
Oft full of smoke that town; its summer's day
Was darker than a summer's night at sea;
Poison was there, and still men rushed for it,
Like cows for acorns that have made them sick.
That town was rich and old; man's flesh was cheap,
But common earth was dear to buy one foot.
If I must be fenced in, then let my fence
Be some green hedgerow; under its green sprays,
That shake suspended, let me walk in joy--
As I do now, in these dear months I love.

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