

Swags Up!

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Prefatory Note

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J.L.G.B.

1928

Swags Up!

Maxims

THE heart is hard that cannot feel
The bruising of a light appeal.

The heart is deaf that cannot hear
The splashing of a tiny tear.

The heart is dumb that cannot say
“God speed you, comrades,” night and day.

The heart is blind that cannot see
The beckoning soul of mystery.

The heart is lame that cannot rise
From clamouring earth to silent skies.

And O that heart were better dead
That truckles to the prudent head.

Buffalo Creek

A TIMID child with heart oppressed
By images of sin,
I slunk into the bush for rest,
And found my fairy kin.

The fire I carried kept me warm:
The friendly air was chill.
The laggards of the lowing storm
Trailed gloom along the hill.

I watched the crawling monsters melt
And saw their shadows wane,
As on my satin skin I felt
The fingers of the rain.

The sunlight was a golden beer,
I drank a magic draught,
The sky was clear and, void of fear,
I stood erect and laughed.

And sudden laughter, idly free,
About me trilled and rang,
And love was shed from every tree,
And little bushes sang.

The bay of conscience' bloody hound
That tears the world apart
Has never drowned the silent sound
Within my happy heart.

The Domain

THE bulging cloud mounts lazily
In shade where sunlight glances through,
And sweeping lightly from the tree
Melts indolently in the blue.

The scanty grass-blades yonder shake,
A tremulous flurry takes the smoke,
And ancient memories start awake
At pungent scent of fig and oak.

For here of old an urchin strayed
And gloomed in lonely pride the while,
An outlaw in a forest glade
Or pirate on a tropic isle.

Here where a staid policeman strolls
Ned Kelly in his armour stood,
And underneath the roadway rolls
The river of the Haunted Wood.

And yonder, couched in phantom fern,
Not far from Nelson's rolling ship,
I spied the antler'd head of Herne
And saw the startled rabbit skip.

And Will Wing shook in desperate strife
Defiantly his bloody hand,
And heard the waves of daily life
Drone on the reef-ring, far from land.

Not Robin, clad in verdant baize,
Nor Britain's silver-plated king,
Was master of the winning ways
That drew me to the flag of Wing.

He sauntered on the southern isle
In garments of eccentric cut,
And, with his grim sardonic smile,
Would masticate his coco-nut.

Within his cave, upon a heap
Of Spanish coin and rubies red,
I've seen him lying half-asleep
And dreaming of the blood he'd shed.

The gold-duft, spilled about the ground,
Made common dirt a treasure rare,

And if you fingered it you found
The flashing jewels buried there.

The seabird, sweeping free and far
On wings of wonder, will not see
That green isle and its coral bar,
That corsair and his mystery.

As when a lump of sugar shrinks,
When coffee waves about it glide,
Crumbles and topples, melts and sinks,
And mingles with the sombre tide,

So is the islet vanished; yet
As now I gulp a bitter draught
The sweetness lingers. Up, and set
The canvas of the rakish craft!

The Bold Buccaneer

ONE very rough day on the *Pride of the Fray*
In the scuppers a poor little cabin-boy lay,
When the Bosun drew nigh with wrath in his eye
And gave him a kick to remember him by,
As he cried with a sneer: "What good are you here?
Go home to your mammy, my bold buccaneer."

Now the Captain beheld, and his pity upwelled:
With a plug in the peeper the Bosun he felled.
With humility grand he extended his hand
And helped the poor lad, who was weeping, to stand,
As he cried: "Have no fear; I'm the manager here.
Take heart, and you'll yet be a bold buccaneer."

But how he did flare when the lad then and there
Doffed his cap and shook down a gold banner of hair.
Though his movements were shy, he'd a laugh in his eye,
And he sank on the Captain's broad breast with a sigh,
As he cried: "Is it queer that I've followed you here?
I'm your sweetheart from Bristol, my bold buccaneer."

On an isle in the west, by the breezes caressed,
The bold buccaneer has a warm little nest,
And he sits there in state amid pieces of eight
And tackles his rum with a manner elate,
As he cries: "O my dear little cabin-boy, here
Is a toast to the babe of the bold buccaneer!"

The Faun

WHEN I was but a little boy
Who hunted in the wood
To scare or mangle or destroy
— A freakish elemental joy
That tasted life and found it good —

I hardly heard the awful ban
That mutters round the free,
But followed where the waters ran,
And wondered when the pipe of Pan
Shook silence with its minstrelsy.

Where sun-spray glittered on my limbs
I danced, and laughed, and trilled
My happy incoherent hymns,
Sped only by the whirling whims
With which my eager heart was filled.

The wind was glad and so was I;
My soul lay open wide,
Reflecting all the starry sky;
The swallows called to me to fly;
I dreamed of how the fishes glide.

But while my errant feet were set
On mosses cool and sweet,
The great grey phantoms brooding met
Within the shades, and cast a net
With dreary charms about my feet.

They pent me in a barren place,
A city, so they said,
Of gallant wonder-working grace
— But haunted, haunted by a race
Of rigid unperceptive dead.

With sightless eyes they pored on books,
And scrawled on many a sheet
Their regimental strokes and hooks,
And stalked about with pompous looks,
Top-hatted, in the civil street.

I strove to flee, but everywhere
Met solid-seeming walls;
And yet I knew the world was fair,
And, hearkening well, heard, even there,

A bird and distant waterfalls.

And love which I had scarcely known
Leaped upward as I heard;
I blessed the creek, the mossy stone,
The fern along the gully strown,
The little beasts, the piping bird.

Could walls o'er-master one who knew
The world of outer light?
The very shadow that they threw
Was tintured with a deeper blue
Because the quickening sun was bright.

I laughed aloud, as one who leaps
Against a curling wave,
And, as a widening ripple creeps,
A shudder caught the stony steeps,
And life shook, laughing, in the grave.

“O phantoms, who are you to fix
Eternal towers of pride?”
I mocked at their fantastic tricks,
I thrust my fingers through the bricks
And felt the flowers the other side.

I pricked my pointed ears to hear
The love-song of the bird,
And dear was every note, and dear
The myriad sounds that echoed near
The magically chorus'd word.

I saw the fading phantoms glare;
Their tones to silence hissed.
The walls bulged, brightening everywhere,
And thinned and melted in the air
To ragged streams of rosy mist.

Trill, happy bird, for ever trill,
For I have learned to bless
The great grey shades whose thwarted will
Turned earth to heaven; and I am still
A dweller in the wilderness.

The Child Impaled

BESIDE the path, on either hand,
To keep the garden beds,
The rusted iron pickets stand
—Thin shafts and pointed heads.

And straight my spirit swooping goes
Across the waves of time
Till I'm a little boy who knows
A fence is made to climb;

And bed and lawn and gloomy space
By thicket overgrown
Are wonderlands where I may trace
The beckoning Unknown.

But O the cruelty that strikes
My elder heart with dread
—The writhing form upon the spikes,
The trickled pool of red!

So, every day I pass and see
The fence the urchin scales,
The little boy stands up in me
To curse the iron rails.

Erskine

A SINGING voice is in my dream
— The voice of Erskine, on his boulders,
Babbling and shouting till he shoulders
Stoutly against the heavier stream.

No longer now my curtained sight,
On serried books and pictures dwelling,
Of long-neglected work is telling,
But looks beyond the travelling night.

And here no longer is my home,
For you and I are far asunder:
I hear again the cascade thunder
And watch the little pool of foam.

And where the water, pouring sleek,
In sudden whiteness flings his treasure,
I see you sitting, Queen of Pleasure,
Clad only by the glittering creek.

I hold my arms to you once more,
For O my longing flesh is aching,
And you, your rocky throne forsaking,
Come cool and radiant to the shore.

I see my girl of girls recline
On smooth rock sloping to the water;
Then savagely have leapt and caught her,
And limpid eyes look up at mine.

Love, Love, O Love, the embracing sun,
The trees, the creek, the earth our mother,
Who made that hour, give such another,
And make us — see us — know us one.

The Liner

THE foamy waves are swishing
As patiently we thud,
But O the wave of wishing
That surges in my blood!

Along the ocean's rim, now,
With never-ceasing song,
I wish that I could swim now
And shove the boat along.

My heart is crying, tireless,
The word it has to say.
What need have we of wireless
Who know a better way?

The slow craft plunges nor'ward
And welters on the blue:
My thoughts are floating forward
And swooping home to you.

Your magic love is tingling
In every vein of me,
And you and I are mingling
In spite of rolling sea.

Yet O that I could borrow
That albatross's flight!
To-morrow, Love, to-morrow
Is our supreme delight.

Love Is Blind

AND can you tell me Love is blind
Because your faults he will not find,
Because the image that he sees
Is one of splendid mysteries?
And if he lack the power to look
On what he will, as on a book,
And read therein the heart of it,
Why are his ways with wonder lit?
Why think you he should bind his eyes
And hide the many-tinted skies,
But that he sees too well to trust
The shadows on an orb of dust?
For he hath vision keener far
Than poring Thought's and Fancy's are
—An inward vision, full and clear
When night has flung her mantle sheer
Across the world we stumble through
In search of Truth's evasive clue.
He looks, and straight there fall away
The flutt'ring rags of your array,
The far-fet gem, th' indecent drape,
The pads that mar the perfect shape,
And naked to his reverent view
Is beauty's self, essential you.

The Touch Of Time

TIME, who with soft pale ashes veils the brand
Of many a hope that flared against the sky
To plant its heaven-storming banners high,
Has touched you with no desecrating hand;
Your beauty wins a ripeness sweet and bland
As opulent summer, and your glancing eye
Glow with a deeper lustre, and your sigh
Of love is still my clamouring heart's command.

Yet what if all your fairness were defaced,
Wilted by passionate whirlwinds, battle-scarred,
Your skin of delicate satin hard and dry?
Still you would be the laughing girl who graced
A gloomy manhood, by forebodings marred,
In the deep wood where still we love to lie.

The Nepean

FAR down the reach a creeping mist
Hung dim along the mountain side;
On shadowed water, sleek and whist,
I let the lazy shallop glide —

The ripple scarcely cut the green
That edged the central path of grey.
I drew the oars, and, all unseen,
Gave reverent greeting to the day.

Naked I stood with arms outspread
That opened wide the gates of dream;
Then breathless bent my wondering head
And sprang to meet the silent stream.

I slid and floated like a seal,
And bade my senses revel free —
From cheek to footsole I could feel
Her soft cool hands caressing me.

A noise of tiny wavelets woke,
I quenched my drouth with delicate sips,
And, as I drank, the surface broke
In eager kisses on my lips.

The scented breath of morning turned
To incense as toward the west
At last, rock-altar'd, I discerned
The sunshine on the mountain crest.

That light of blessing from the sky
Made us the fuel of its blaze,
And fragrant bush and stream and I
Were one aspiring cry of praise.

Middle Harbour

LONELY wonder, delight past hoping!
Sky-line broken by stirring trees,
Grey rocks hither and shoreward sloping,
Silent bracken about my knees.

Dusky scrub where the sunlight splashes,
Glimmer of waters barely seen
—Here the hope that was dust and ashes
Leaps and flashes in flames of green.

Through the boughs that are still before me,
Misty blue of the harbour hills;
Mighty Spirit of Earth who bore me,
Here the peace of thy love distils.

Fools have harried me; hell has driven,
Bidding me toil for its fading shows:
Back I spring to your arms, forgiven,
Back to the truth that a dreamer knows.

Gold and glory and fleeting pleasure
Pass in dust or as melting cloud:
You can dower with eternal treasure
Heart uplifted and head unbowed.

Arms outstretched, and the hill-top hushes;
Long deep breath, and the whole scene fades;
Sweeping homeward, my soul outrushes,
My heart the heart of the world invades.

Fleshly trammels no longer bind me,
Joyous, forgetting that such things be;
Time and space have been left behind me,
Brother of stars, I am soaring, free.

Cramped no more, I exult, extended,
All I think of I hold within;
Secret surety of vision splendid
Makes me one with my lordly kin.

Out of the vast I return, and slowly
Into the prison of sense I glide,
Yet the splendour is gone not wholly,
Yet the love and the peace abide.

Soft wind rustles the leaves, and brightly
Wavers the light on the ferns and trees;

Water-ripples are laughing lightly,
 Played upon by the sun and breeze.

There the robin, a friendly fellow,
 Clings to a sapling stem and waits
Just where I noted his breast of yellow
 Ere I ventured beyond the gates.

Only a moment, as clocks can reckon,
 Dwells the soul at that height of heights;
Ah, but I know why the wood-gods beckon,
 Why the stars are as beacon lights.

Rebel Hearts

AN outcry in the bush below,
A crash, and boughs that sway,
And shouts of laughter let me know
Where my two ruffians play.

Barelegged, bareheaded, brown and free,
They lurk and prowl and spring;
Like tiger-cubs they disagree,
Like honeysuckers sing.

For in their hearts are echoes yet
From ages when they knew
The caves of green they now forget,
Though there they climbed or flew.

No cage set limits to their pace;
They held the hunt at bay;
And in their careless mien I trace
The savage mood to-day.

They'll take no tidal drift, nor lie
And rot like souls of mud,
For sullen lip and flashing eye
Betray the rebel blood.

Go, flout the law your hearts disdain
— Your foes are well arrayed —
And take for guerdon love and pain,
And triumph unafraid.

In jungles where the night imparts
Her secret lore to you,
Lie still and listen to your hearts.
Be true, my sons, be true!

Merlin

O MERLIN, how the magic from your eyes
 Bids the world flame about your idle feet,
 And makes a marvel of the humming street,
The watchful bush, the starry-haunted skies!
Dear, do you know that all such magic dies
 In foolish hearts that regularly beat?
 Blinded with dust, the elders in retreat
Shake their thin locks to prove that they are wise.

God help them in their tameness: you are wild.
 Hold fast your faith, for love has mightier spells
 Than yet your mouth has chattered, sung or laughed;
Be drunk still with th' enchanted wine you've quaffed.
 Awe spreads her wings above the hut where dwells,
 Rapt in his glow of gramarye, the child.

Disillusion

WHEN fires have burnt your forest bare and black,
And you are parched and dizzy, and search in vain
For pools in dust unvisited of rain,
And shamble, lost, along a shimmering track,
This is the comfort of the world: "Alack!
So youth's illusions die, that we may gain
Wisdom and strength to face our lifelong pain,
The truth, from which no man shall turn him back."

Falter for no such melancholy lies,
For by one holy touch the spirit is healed
To know its treasure of sight and sound and scent;
Veil after veil the earthborn fogs arise,
Star beyond star the heavens are then revealed,
And truth is fair in love's enlightenment.

Lali

WHILE the summer day is hot
 You and I will loaf awhile,
Lolling in a leafy spot,
 Lali of the cunning smile.

You and I have little care
 How the “precious moments” pass
While we snuff the drowsy air
 Rich in fragrance of the grass.

Stupid people boom or squeal
 Lessons drawn from daily strife;
“Time,” they cry, “is on the wheel;
 Death puts out the gas of life.

Imitate the prudent ant,
 Labour like the busy bee.”
O the everlasting cant!
 Loafing's good for you and me.

Here we watch the ants that haul
 Loads by weary jungle ways!
If they like it, let them crawl
 Laden through the heavy blaze.

We've no time for moral tags;
 We can hear a sleepy sound —
With his yellow tucker-bags
 Brother Bee is bumming round.

Little souls are vexed to see
 How their hours of toil decrease:
Floating dreams for you and me,
 Lazy joy in starry peace.

A Prologue

WHILE to the clarion blown by Marlowe's breath
Tall Tragedy tramped by in hues of death,
And Shakespeare yet was tuning string by string —
With English hawthorn crowned, in that glad spring
When bright clouds melted in a sky serene,
Romance moved lightly to the pipe of Greene.
As fresh as buds half-open, pure as dew,
Two damsels came in forefront of her crew —
One native to the hedgerows and the meads,
The keeper's lass, in simple country weeds,
Her firm white arms, as delicate as silk,
Below her smock-sleeve shining wet with milk;
No marvel the young noble learnt to woo
A maid so merry and frank and homely true.
The other with sad mien, though yet a bride,
Clad in man's raiment softly stole aside
And grieved that he who should have been her stay
Would privily have done her life away,
For still his crime with bloodshot eyeballs grim
And dripping fangs turned back and hunted him.
Cast off, contemned and hated, stabbed, discrowned,
Still in her heart wide realm for him she found,
When earth and love and joy seemed to his hand,
Gripped madly, a waning measure of slipping sand.
Though lust and murder made of him a slave,
Her love set free, her purity forgave.
Humbled and hopeless, all his sins confessed,
By miracle his contrite soul was blessed,
And heavy tolling of those haunted days
Was turned to golden peals of joyous praise.
Ah, but this woeful lady, lily-pale,
Is no mere vision drifting through a tale;
The sad sweet picture of the patient Queen
Betrays the rebel heart of Robert Greene.

Marlowe

THE spell of Shakespeare fills the heart
 With earthly music loud and low;
But Marlowe drives the clouds apart,
 And through their thundering rifts we go.

The Chain Gang

BORNE in the car along a crowded way,
Sun-soaked, I saw the world like shadows glide,
Or phantom boats, upon a running tide,
Driven through flying fog at break of day.
“The chain gang? Yes,” I heard a woman say,
“Here in this very street.” I glanced aside
And saw the fetters that she flashed in pride,
And turned again to watch the world's array.

Clearly I saw men scurrying on the hour,
Young girls who weary all day on dainty feet,
Dandies whose socks betoken infinite pains,
The life that springs and withers like a flower:
I heard the gangs go clanking down the street,
Intolerably patient of their chains.

The Grey Tide

THE cold green rocks and lapping waves
Are all my world as here I sit
With downcast eye and heart that craves
The bush and blue sky over it.

The tide of years is washing by,
The misty water drifts between
A soul with wings that may not fly
And shadowy realms that might have been.

Too late, too late, alas, I know
The track that winds by shining leaves
From where the flood reflects, below,
The greyness of the heart that grieves.

Another yet may tread the way,
And offer at that hidden shrine
His gift of rolled and twisted clay,
And set his lips to holy wine.

Another yet may tinge the flame
Upon that altar blue or red,
And freely call upon Her name,
And taste at will the blessed bread.

The waves are grey about the rocks,
A cold wind sets across the sea,
A travelling ray of sunlight mocks
The shadow on the heart of me.

The Guest House

WHAT imps are these that come with scowl and leer?

Black motes upon the morning's amber beam,

They crowd and float about each happy dream

And blow upon pure joy the taint of fear.

Perforce those muttered hideous words we hear,

Yet bid our nobler nature rise supreme

And, sunlike, dry to naught th' infernal steam

Till all our day is luminous and clear.

“What cruel beasts find refuge in the soul

Amid the murky deep of sightless flame

Whose waves are flatten'd by a rain of blood!”

Nay, but however pure the waters roll,

The offal thrown therein will rise and shame

Their glittering pride with bubbles from the mud.

Sonnets Of Old Egypt

I

The Sphinx

THE spires of sand spring up at every gust
That bids them dance and scatter and lays them low:
He sits impassive, as the ages flow
And bear superbly the mirage of lust.
The moonbright steel he has witnessed redden and rust,
He has seen storm-proud deep-rooted empires grow,
And watched victorious gods flash forth and go;
And still before him spins the aspiring dust.

What has he seen in that hoar-centuried land
More strange and dreadful in its long delight
Of vain hope-haunted ever-starting quest
Than I can follow across this burning sand
Wherefrom the dizzying phantoms take their flight
Within the compass of a wanderer's breast?

II

Nicholson Museum: Exhibit 32

THE curious look and pass, beholding naught
But yellow skin and small contorted toes:
I see a burning wilderness of woes
And stagger through its quivering air distraught.
I know the paradise a baby wrought
Of old where still the dear blue river flows,
And there's a crouching fear within that knows
To what a desperate havoc it was brought.

Dear Isis, have you not heard Horus sing
His infant ditties, kissed his radiant head,
And laughed at legs that learned to leap and run?
Forget it not. My heart in offering
Lies bare before you; take it, Queen, and spread
Thy sheltering wings about my little son.

III

Nefert

THE gaudy pageant of the ages hies
Down the dim years, yet many a look is cast
That calls us dumbly, from the abysmal past,
In love that lives amid a world that dies.
I thrill to look on Nefert's friendly eyes,
Mad to recall the night I saw her last,
And yet across that memory has the blast
Whirled the deep desert sand of centuries.

Forgive if I forget thee now, my sweet,
If other eyes have led me to the source
Wherefrom the thirsting heart draws sustenance.
Can pallid marble feel my pulses beat?
We approach the limit of our dusty course
When hearts must live on store of old romance.

IV

Shu

SPREAD on the desert, Seb of mighty thew
Felt cloudy hair, trailed by the evening breeze,
Tingling along each nerve, as by degrees
Nub bowed above him, till his brown arms drew
Her body upon his; so, all night through,
The desert bloomed in starry ecstasies,
Till, even as she sighed in overburdened ease,
Between them thrust the radiant arm of Shu.

Yet they are of the gods, and evermore
Their joy renews itself when earth and sky
Are all one substance in the odorous gloom.
But when two lovers drain their little store
Of mortal bliss and yet are thirsting, why
Inflict on us thy peremptory doom?

V

Khonsu

“HAVE I not smiled and kept the world at bay,
Given my friends the joy that dried my tears
And left a savour of salt, and filled the years
With desolate wreckage of each yesterday?
O Khonsu,” with uplifted hands I pray,
“O Master of Love, give respite to my fears;
Before the dust is in my eyes and ears,

Grant me thy light upon the darkening way.”

He gazes mildly from the crescent moon;

 The sea grows silent and its shimmering space

 Is wave upon wave of sand beyond all sight;

I stretch my arms to take whate'er the boon,

 And feel imagined kisses on my face,

 Lonely amid the desert of the night.

In A Tram

ONE of the twain was long and dusty grey,
And like a spark that in the ashes lies,
Satiric laughter glinted in his eyes
And made his nose auroral with its ray:
The other like a huge black bird of prey,
His hat enorm, his pipe of awful size,
His coat hung empty-sleeved in careless wise,
Loomed a fat angel from the pit astray.

A voice was booming ever: laugh and jeer
Mingled with noble praise of battling right,
And verse and girls were mixed with radiant beer
And all the city tram was given sight
Of the invisible dark and bidden hear
Unsplashing silence of the pouring light.

Microcosmography

HE looks beyond the veils of night and day;
He hearkens in the silence, and has heard
The ancient woods by dryad singing stirred,
To mortal ears how thin and far away.
With what gross laughter yet he turns to play
With slaves of vice and virtue and the herd
Of flopping little Calibans, that gird
At muddy boots and call them feet of clay.

Here you may loaf the valley or breast the hill,
Dive deep for pearl or sink your shaft for gold,
Or watch Love, laughing, flit in the summer nights.
Sit by the mud and sniff it as you will,
If you but lift your eyes an inch, behold
The moving tide and broken glimmer of lights.

Twenty-One

THE world, all busy round us here of late,
Is still unchanged: but you are twenty-one.
The mind, victorious with the rising sun,
Steps boldly and blithely through the imagined gate
On greener grass where brighter flowers await
The quickened senses and the waters run
With livelier music — and a web is spun
Of loveliest pattern on the loom of fate.

Doubt nothing, fare right on with manly trust,
And know, whatever failures be in store,
Though all your light seem shimmering blinding haze,
And flowers and grass fly up in choking dust,
Better than you can fancy waits before
For those who find the secret of the maze.

David

ETERNAL cold of silence, where each sound
Dies in its birth, and Death's pale henchmen meet
With soft Lethean traps unwary feet
Or ride with hell's white steed and slaving hound;
Which of us, searching selfward, has not found
This desolate realm, and long black seams, that greet
Our souls with recollections of defeat,
And torrid fossils in the frozen ground?

Not he, who comes among us as a king;
Strange were the secret waste and granite walls
To him whose reverent feet have travelled far
Where duty beckons and adventure calls.
He steers his course, by one red tropic star,
Where ripples the green robe of the lilting spring.

Yorick

A GOLDEN largesse from a store untold
Announced the ruddy day's imperial birth,
And woke a loyal world to jubilant mirth
And hopes that boasted, madly over-bold.
Shadow and thunder from a dull cloud rolled,
A shiver chilled the lately glittering firth,
As gloom set heavy hand upon the earth;
Yet look — on westward hills a gleam of gold.

You have laughed and bidden us laugh, O lord of jest;
You have wept and given us grief, O lonely friend;
And now we sit with silent lips and white,
And dream what craggy ways thou wanderest,
Not finding yet of hope or strife an end,
O soul set free from bondage of the night.

Rod Quinn

How many years, how many years have fled,
 Since in the cool dim parlour sat the three —
 Lawson and I and, lounging easily,
The beaming indolent poet! Then instead
Of labouring weary at the mill, we led
 The careless life of wanderers, frank and free,
 And had the wealth of a new-found world in fee:
How pitiless time gropes on with tireless tread!

A glass was raised, and golden liquor glowed
 When a ray from summer streets came piercing in;
 He drank the sunlight in the gloomy place!
And now I know the magic drink bestowed
 A vital golden splendour on Roderic Quinn,
 Which fumbling fingers of Time will scarce efface.

To My Mother

ONCE more the Christian festival is near,
And I, for whom each day repeats all days
Continuously in ecstasy of praise,
Love's birthday lasting through the unending year,
Am dreaming how the spirit draws me sheer
From farthest wandering in the illusive maze
To that white centre whose creative blaze
Spun me aloft and sets me tremulous here.

And since all heaven is figured in my heart,
As in a dewdrop ere it change and live
There shines the glory of the eternal dome,
Mother, to you the showering meteors dart
Of free affection, fancies fugitive,
And flare, with increasing heat and splendour, home.

An Epitaph

(On a monument formed as a curving wave)

BY ceaseless waves, that break and waste,
All human record is effaced:
Only our love in brief defence
Shall hold the billow in suspense.

Toby

HEY, Toby, Toby, Toby! — Dead?
The silence is a flood
That closes, choking, overhead,
And chills the living blood.

The leaping friend, whose jolly bark
Was greeting every night,
No more to thrill the summer dark
With welcome of delight?

Beside his grave I bend the knee,
And O, my eyes are dim.
He hunted for the dog in me:
I found the man in him.

Kretschmann

LOVE may trace his echoing footsteps, yet we never more shall meet
Rugged Kretschmann, the musician, plodding down a Sydney street,
Never see the low broad figure, massive head and shaggy mane
And the quiet furrowed features, never hear his voice again.

But from many a home there rises many a note that lingering rings
Ever since his cunning fingers touched and drew it from the strings;
All our land is full of noises; happy phantom fields of scent,
Bright with sunlit blossoms, echo bird-like music where he went.

He was old and grey and weary, death and he were long at grips,
Evil whispers hissed behind him, German to the finger-tips,
War's wild fury snarled about him, so he gently stepped aside,
Loving us and loving Germans, heavy-hearted, and he died.

Crusted shells, by ocean battered, taken from the barren shore
Bear within their hearts a murmur of the sea's eternal roar;
Who shall say what vital music, all unheard by duller ears,
Swept the soul of good old Kretschmann to his home amid the spheres?

Harmony was all his being, and he held the music sweet
Welling up in baby voices, beaten out by tiny feet;
Still with playthings in his pockets, rest and solace may he know,
Welcomed gladly to the kingdom where the little children go.

Unborn

O WISTFUL eyes that haunt the gloom of sleep,
Are you my own, remembered from the night
I sat before my glass in dumb affright
And saw my cowering soul afraid to weep?
Perhaps you are his, foreshadowed, when I creep
Behind him and confess the hopeless blight
That wilts the bloom of our supreme delight
— The breath of horror from the unknown deep.

Eyes that have never seen a mother's face,
Have you no mercy that you stare and stare,
Although I never felt the hope I slew?
Wide eyes, but when I kneel to God for grace,
Your steadfast pity deepens my despair;
The darkness I desire is full of you.

Spring

SPRING, and the wispy clouds that fade away
And draw the ecstatic soul in pain to aspire
In maddening flight through heaven's thin flood of fire
To melt in rapture at the heart of day,
The powers of the world that promise and betray
Have dragged me from you in their icy ire
And set me spinning at their loom, for hire,
The shroud in which my senses must decay.

For hire I give myself, and cannot tell
If the blind force that flings me in the chest
Have power or will to pay the bargained price,
Yet for a word of love I gladly quell
The quivering hope of not inactive rest
And very humbly make my sacrifice.

Winter

WHEN winter chills your aged bones
As by the fire you sit and nod,
You'll hear a passing wind that moans,
And think of one beneath the sod.

You'll feebly sleek your hair of grey,
And mutter words that none may know,
And dream you touch the sodden clay
That laps the dream of long ago.

The shrinking ash may fall apart
And show a gleam that lingers yet.
A moment in your cooling heart
May shine a sparkle of regret.

And where the pit is chill and deep,
And bones are mouldering in the clay,
A thrill of buried love will creep
And shudder aimlessly away.

Beauty And Hate

I HAVE sought and followed you, drunk with your sacred wine;
Led out by a laughing wind on a tumbling sea,
On crags amid clouds, in cups that allure the bee,
And deep in the gem-lit gloom of the tortuous mine,
And on widespread wings where the great worlds dance and shine
I have sought by the golden light; but have bent the knee
At last where you lie, a humble goddess and free,
Naked and flushed in the warmth of a crimson shrine.

The hordes of hate have trampled your blooms in mire,
And cackle and roar as their mockery priests blaspheme,
And sing the marching hymn of a wingless might.
They forge their god in the heat of unholy fire
— The squat strong incubus born of an evil dream;
And it shrinks and crumbles away in the golden light.

The Carillon

ALONE

I sit in the dusk and see
Surely the living faces, dear to me,
Of comrades who have thrown
All that they had, the fruit of all desire,
Upon an altar fire.

They heard,
Above all clamour of the crowd,
The music of their own hearts throbbing loud
Until the air was stirred
Into a summoning harmony; and so
We saw them rise, and go.

The sound,
That love set ringing in those years
Of agony, exultation, voiceless fears,
And hopes now underground,
Shall not be silenced; it is thrilling yet,
And we shall not forget.

But clear
The mellow tone of mingled notes,
Triumph and sorrow made one spirit, floats
To my prophetic ear;
That is their music echoing, echoing still
From our remembering hill.

The Explorer

I

DEAREST, when I left your side,
I stood a moment, hesitating,
And plunged. The boiling tide
Of darkness took me, and down I went
Swift as a bird with folded wing,
And upward sent
The bubbles of my vital breath
That shuddered from my secret deeps
To freedom and light;
Then, dimly, on my sight
Opened the still abode of living death.
Amid the mire,
In which invisibly sightless horror creeps,
Sat, each intent on his own woe,
The host that burns with inward fire,
Crowded like monuments of memorial stone
Beneath a pitchy sky
Where even the flash of tempest dare not show,
Yet each of them alone;
And each was I.

II

Breathless I struggled up,
As if the gloom had arms to clutch at me
And drag and hold,
Until the daylight's gold
Shook faintly above my dizzy head
And parted suddenly, that I might see
The sky, a sheltering cup
Of hopeful azure, and your eyes of blue,
One promise and yet two
Of harbouring bliss;
And your lips parted and said,
"Shall not we twain
Find joy upon joy on earth
Together and see,
In the kinship of all that has birth
From the mutual reach of desire,
A joy beyond this,
A fire at the heart of the fire?"

And we clung till our spirit was free
As the flame of a kiss.

III

So we soared and the earth fell away, and the region of night
Was melted in limitless day of ineffable light
Till the myriad souls of the dead were united as we,
Themselves, and yet merged in the spread of an infinite sea —
The joy that is life, and around us, below and above,
The One that all lovers have found, our eternity, Love.

The Clay

WHEN I cast my slough of clay
Put it quietly away.

Let no bloom untimely fade
Where my empty heart is laid.

Ask no folk to crowd around
With an air of woe profound.

Those who love me know that I
Cannot in a coffin lie —

Let them go where'er they will,
Dreaming of me living still.

Let no formal words be said
Customary for the dead.

Plant no stone above the pit:
Let the grass run over it.

When My Time Is Come

WHEN my time is come to die,
I would shun the decent gloom,
Whispered word and weeping eye,
Fitful hum of knowing fly
Questing through the darkened room.

I would lay my skin and bone
Where no busy care could trace
Failing steps by bush and stone,
With my farewell dream alone
In a bird-frequented place.

So the sounds that bless my ear
When my weary eyelids close
Will be songs of hope and cheer;
So departing, I shall hear
How the tide of living flows.

So my memories shall not be
Blurred by griefs however true;
So my drowsy sense may see
Eyes that light in love on me;
So I'll not be leaving you.

Hesper

NOT till the sun, that brings to birth
The myriad marvels of the earth
And bids us look with wandering eyes
On all that here about us lies,
 Has gone behind the hill,
Do you, O peaceful evening star,
Gaze on the dusk in which we are
And draw the heart of hope and love
To infinite deep on deep above
 And bid our care be still.

All glorious pleasures of the day,
When every sense may have its way
And thought may touch the tiniest fact
And gauge the motive and the act
 And measure our delight,
Depart, and leave us to the quest
Of quiet solitude and rest
And knowledge that the plotting brain
With all its science cannot gain
 But from the soul of Night.

Vixit

NURSE not your grief, nor make obsequious moan
 When I have shed this flesh I love so well,
 Nor slowly toll the dull heart-bruising knell,
Nor carve my name in customary stone;
But let the generous earth reclaim her own —
 And my usurious profit who can tell?
 Dash tears aside, let joy resume her spell;
Stars glitter where the storm is overblown.

Because I have lived I would not have one say:
 “Here long ago a man of such a name
Was left to moulder in his pit of clay.”
 Let only love remember how I came
And built an earthen altar in my day
 And lit thereon a comfortable flame.

Swags Up!

SWAGS up! and yet I turn upon the way.
The yellow hill against a dapple sky,
With tufts and clumps of thorn, the bush whereby
All through the wonder-pregnant night I lay
Until the silver stars were merged in grey
— Our fragrant camp — demand a parting sigh:
New tracks, new camps, and hearts for ever high,
Yet brief regret with every welcome day.

Dear dreamy earth, receding flickering lamp,
Dear dust wherein I found this night a home,
Still for a memory's sake I turn and cling,
Then take the road for many a distant camp,
Among what hills, by what pale whispering foam,
With eager faith for ever wandering.

The Robe Of Grass

HERE lies the woven garb he wore
Of grass he gathered by the shore
Whereon the phantom waves still fret and foam
And sigh along the visionary sand.
“Where is he now?” you cry. “What desolate land
Gleams round him in dull mockery of home?”

You knew him by the robe he cast
About him, grey and worn at last.
“It fades,” you murmur, “changes, lives and dies.
Why has he vanished? Whither is he fled?
And is there any light among the dead?
Can any dream come singing where he lies?”

Ah peace! lift up your clouded eyes,
Nor where this curious relic lies
Grope in the blown dust for the print of feet.
Dim, twittering, ghastly sounds are these; but he
Laughs now as ever, still aloof and free,
Eager and wild and passionate and fleet.

Because he has dropped the part he played,
Shall love be baffled and dismayed?
Let the frail earth and all its visions melt,
And let the heart that loves, the eye that sees,
Seek him amid immortal mysteries,
For lo, he dwells where he has ever dwelt.

Dedication

GRANT me a moment of peace,
Let me but open mine eyes,
Forgetting the empire of lies
And warfare's majestic increase
Of national folly and hate;
Ere I return to my fate,
Grant me a moment of peace.

To what is I would turn from what seems
— From a world where men fall and adore
The god that Fear shuddering bore
To Greed in the desert of dreams,
Unholy, inhuman, impure;
From the State to the loves that endure,
To what is I would turn from what seems.

No man has been richer than I,
Though he staggered with infinite gold
And bought of whatever is sold
Of the beauty that money can buy.
In the wealth that is lost in the mart
And is stored in the innermost heart
No man has been richer than I.

Humbly, a pilgrim, I stood,
Weary and hungry and lame,
And out of the multitude came
Friends who were better than good,
Friends who would not be denied
Where by the palpitant tide
Humbly, a pilgrim, I stood.

Now to my army of friends
A handful of petals I fling,
Strays of perennial spring,
Weeds, but the lover who sends
Bled that each blossom might live.
This is myself that I give
Now to my army of friends.

Comrade in exile, to you
Chiefly the gift should belong,
You who will hear in my song
Echoes of days that we knew
Blue and deep-droning and clear

Far in the hills that are dear,
Comrade in exile, to you.

Pause and remember them now,
Plunge, as you dived in the stream,
To the sweet cool depth of your dream.
The drooping, sheltering bough,
The brown rock lettered above,
The still interfusion of love,
Pause and remember them now.

There as we lay in the cave
And saw, as an eye of the dark,
The camp-fire's slumbering spark,
And heard the cataract rave,
Your soul and my soul were as one;
Our life in one channel has run
There as we lay in the cave.

Forth to the task of a man!
Youth and the valour of youth,
Force and the ardour of truth
Give you a place in the van,
Love keeping step at your side
Chanting aloud as you stride
Forth to the task of a man.

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