Charles Warren Stoddard (1843-1909)

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Expectation

What news, I wonder, from the South!
    I saw a sail blow past the Head.
I wonder if my lovers still
Are watching for me from the hill,
    Whereon the palms are dry with drouth,
    And ferns are crisp and dead.

I wonder if my lovers yet
Are all beginning to forget
How dear that day was when we sat
Upon our Island Ararat,
    While floods were beating at its base,
And winds in anger seemed to fret
    Our new-found dwelling place!

The bark was driving on the beach;
How far life seemed beyond our reach!
The shore was thronged with savage men;
They plunged into the surf, and then,
    Above the breakers' deafening roar,
They gave us each some cheering speech,
    And helped us to the shore.

What sweet, unprofitable hours
    We passed within the silent land:
Calm, or impatient, sadly mute,
Or merry in a mild dispute;
Long days of summer, ripe and hale,
Horizons all hemmed in with flowers,
Till, rescued by a passing sail,
    We gave each dusky friend a hand,
And parted on the sand.

I wonder how my lovers are!
I wonder if the lime has shed
    The name I cut upon its bark!
I wonder if they speared the shark
We chased one night by torch and star—
    He had our pet kid in his mouth!
The sea rolls in with easy swell;
    I saw a sail blow past the Head;
    "She's from the Line," I heard it said—
And there is where my lovers dwell,
    Along the burning South.

**Utopia**

Scene: Moku, in the South Sea.
The poet under his vine and fig-tree.
Piolani, his “Man Friday,” in attendance.

The Poet speaks:
A cottage on a cliff,
And a vine beside the door;
While the wind with fragrant whiff,
Wakes the parrot in a tiff,
Puffs the matting from the floor,
Swings the window open wide.
   —Piolani, please to slide
Wine-jar or a calabash
Close against the window-sash.
Drops a spider from the thatch
Down upon my writing table;
Splendid specimen to catch,
I'll secure him with dispatch,
Pin him up and write his label.

   With her song so bland,
By the cocoas in the sand,
Singing with her siren's voice,
The sea leans on the land.
I listen and rejoice,
For I like this tawny hour;
When the stars begin to flower,
As it were; and day is pleading,
With those heavy drooping lids,
And a glance of love exceeding,
For one moment more of power.
Thrumming crickets, katydids,
Clouds of giddy butterflies;
Oddest fowls of every feather
Hail me with their plaintive cries.
Moths and insects of all breeding
Upon one another feeding,
Huddle here together.

—Piolani, take the broom,
Chase that lizard from the room.
There's another on the wall!
How the slimy creatures crawl
Over everything and all.

After hours of heat,
And leagues of burning dust,
How soft and passing sweet
Is the turf beneath my feet.
See this wondrous blossom thrust
From its dusky tent of green,
In its splendid pride and lust,
Like a painted savage queen.

—Piolani, do you know
Of the nature of this shrub?
Why the waters ebb and flow?
Where the butterflies all go,
Or the future of the grub?
You have never thought of these,
Yet are happier than I,
Who am trying to descry
What my brother watcher sees
In a very distant sky.
Do you ever question fate?
Do you hate with burning hate
One who cannot think with you?
Do you send us white-faced men
To a hot perdition, when
You have found our faith untrue?
That is what we Christians do.
Do you pity when you hear
How we turn about and dread
Being numbered with the dead,
And the only God we know
Is a God to scorn or fear?
Do not tell me that your foe
Meets you with unflinching gaze,
Certainly that the weaker dies!
That you let the life-blood flow,
For a coward you despise!
So your soul through endless days
Walks the valley of its youth;
Goes the old familiar ways;
And shall sleep no more, forsooth!
Do not say we cannot touch
The one God we fear so much!
Do not say we cannot prove
The one volume that we love!
Do not scorn us when you see
How we never can agree—
How we never have agreed!
—Kill that scudding centipede
In the corner on the floor!
Would you land upon our shore
And destroy our too frail hopes?
Better is the mind that gropes
Toward some divine ideal
Than the mind that sleeps in sloth!
Hopeless, aimless, hating both;
Doubting what the years reveal.
Let us worship each his way,
Though some saints would doubtless say
That this very liberal view,
And the plan in question, too,
Can't, of course, apply to you.

Piolani, if you like,
Having brought my coffee in,
Strip your body to the skin,
Don't imagine you will strike
Consternation to this breast.
Thus it was we found you drest,
Nature in this case knew best.
Take your little Idol down;
Cold and stony, rude and brown,
Eyeless, earless, noseless too,
But it's all the same to you.
Nor foot, nor hand in any part,
Utterly devoid of art,
But a comfort to your heart.
Fall before it as of old,
Sing your melis manifold.
Burn the boughs of resinous trees,
Solemn incantations blending
With the savory smoke ascending.
Prone upon your hands and knees,
Care not that a stranger sees;
Be a savage as you please.
Be not watchful nor alert,
Nor regard with eye suspicious
Any matter I assert.
Do not try with surreptitious
Spell my spirit to convert.
Union we can scarce expect—
Let our hearts our ways direct—
I will call you some new sect.

Piolani, I can hear
Your sweet voice rise strong and clear.
Is it god or goddess now
Whom you flatter with a vow?
Under deepest tropic skies
Let our two-fold prayer arise.
Question not but in the end
It will reach the self-same friend,
Who will judge us well indeed—
Each according to his meed.

Piolani, this is all,
Swing the hammock in the hall,
Roll your mat out at my feet,
Day is weary, night is sweet.
Day with toil and trouble teems,
Night is hallowed with dreams.
Asleep already, at the start!
Piolani, bless your heart!
If peace of spirit rest insures
What a conscience must be yours.

So I swing, and think of this;
Saying as I shut my eyes,
This is ignorance and bliss.
If it isn't then what is,
And who of us is wise?
The Secret Well

I know a well so deep and cool
And hid, the crystal-hearted pool
Hath never thrilled a swallow's throat
Or sweetened one lark's note.

No fainting stag, though perishing,
Hath ventured to disturb this spring:
No leopard with its fiery breast
This fountain dares molest.

No cunning, silver-caséd trout
The sheltered source can e'er find out—
No tongue but mine may ever tell
The secret of this well.

I build about its guarded rim
With added stones; I know the dim,
Still twilight of its mossy cell
Where the sweet waters dwell.

For spirits go between us two
With flasks; they brim with softest dew.
I drink and am refreshed, and seem
As living in a dream.

This well, that is alone for me,
Is but a fount of memory:
And every year that I have known
Is but an added stone.

My willing thoughts, as spirits, haste
To draw the draught I love to taste.
There is an ever full supply,
Yet who may drink but I?