The Poetry of John Gray

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Unpublished and Uncollected

Early Poems
The eternal dying of a summer day, *
Cooled by the young moon's horizontal beams,
Lulls in that dreamy atmosphere; no sound,
Save the soft murmur of the breathing leaves,
Or the low voice of faintest cloudlets, borne
By winds so gentle that the snail's sad march
Seems as a flight precipitous to them.
There the bright spider toils with patient breath
To close at last his geometric toil
Of centuries unnumbered. And the soul,
Clad in a body sweeter, purer, far,
Than on a lily's lip a drop of dew,
Drinks in the bliss unending. Peace, O peace,
After the torment of the eons, while
Time's weary revolutions still be told.

Sonnet  *
(Translated from Paul Verlaine)

Beauty, the fickleness of woman, her hands pale
That often work for good, with every power for ill;
And in her docile eyes the brute lurks only still
Enough to say, enough! and quell the fearful male.

And ah! low lullaby to lull the guttural wail
Of pain, e'en where it lies—her voice! Its morning trill
Of wakening, sweet chant at eve; signal shrill
Or passionate sob; its music tremulous and frail!

Ferocious men! atrocious selfish ugly life!
Ah! of your charity, far from your lust and strife
Let somewhat still endure, be pure, upon the height.

Somewhat of gentleness, somewhat of childlike mind,
Goodness, respect, for who goes with us through the night
Of death? When we set forth, we leave all else behind.

Vauxhall. 17.-. *

Peerless ZELINDA, Can I fitly write
The joy still lingering of Yesternight?
You dined with LADY CAROLINE, and I
In the adjacent Bower. Though so nigh
To all I worship that the World can give—
But for your Charms, ZELINDA, need I live?
You seemed, for me, more distant than the Stars.
I hazarded and lost while you waged Wars
Of Ombre. Later, on the Promenade,
Among the Throng we passed, Your fan kept guard
Upon your Glances; then you dropped your Mask.
ZELINDA, it was mine, oh, grateful task!
To snatch it from the Ground, ere PETERHAM stoops—
And tangles his red Heels with CELIA'S Hoops—
And kiss the Hand that takes it. Not your Glove
You dropped, nor Fan, nor Kerchief. For my Love
Your Mask you dropped, that all Vauxhall might see
It was ZELINDA threw her Gage to me.
What I have else to tell you, will be soon;
I'll see you at the Play this afternoon,
Or in the Park. ZELINDA, credit me,
Your humble Servant, and Eternally,
John Gray

Fragments *

I

I think I saw you at the Private View... .
I wasn't there. Do you like this? — it's new.
Or at the catshow... . . . Didn't go to that []
I meant a visitor and not as a cat []
I've heard that shepherds mostly speak in rhyme [ ]

II

A double coat the queynte the temple vests.
I am Diana and the crouching stags
Lick virgin nourishment from the strong tags
My hunter breasts.

Passing the Love of Women *

In the twilight darkling
  When the sky was violet
And the stars were faintly sparkling
  Thus it was we met,
Unpublished and Uncollected Early Poems

In a lonely meadow
   Carpeted with crocuses
Underneath the tangled shadow
   Of the apple trees.

Long and fain we lingered
   Whilst the world lay hushed in sleep
Till the dawning rosy-fingered
   Clomb the eastern steep.

Priest nor ceremony
   Or of Orient or Rome
Bound to me my love, mine honey
   In the honey-comb,

Who, albeit of human
   Things the most sublime he knew,
Left me, to espouse a woman
   As the people do.

Though he wind about her
   Those dear arms were holden in mine.
He shall only reach the outer
   Precinct of the shrine;

For, when pale stars shimmer
   In the vault of violet,
As far gleams of memory glimmer
   He will not forget.

Travellers Tales *

They tell of perils who come over seas,
Of the strange habit of the Portuguese,
Of idols many limbed, of gilded cars,
Of the great lustre of the Southern stars;
Till, one by one, the listeners grow intent,
And even the serving man, who came and went,
Stops short, and finds a pretext to draw nigher.
Then, in the language of his great-grandsire,
The sailor tells the tale for which they thirst,
The ancient tale brought back perhaps at first
By Captain Theseus in his argosy,
Nursed under every sky, on every sea,
Salt with all winds, and scorched with every sun,
Tattered and patched in many an age agone.
The sailor's eye grows bluer as he speaks,
And the crisp beard upon his copper cheeks
Glints in the fickle light like Indian gold.
The clock has ceased to tick. The tale is told—
Whereat the inland men did hugely gape
With wonderment. Then while the dainty ape
Chatters assent and stretches a cool paw
In indiscriminate friendship, the macaw
That saw the landing of Pissaro, screams
In shrill corroboration—as it seems.
They tell strange stories who come over seas,
Those tanned sea-captains, of gigantic trees,
Of pagan temples, mighty monuments,
Of curious speech and fair habiliments;
And sometimes they will tell, when nights are long,
Of wine in foreign lands and foreign song.

Song of Stars  *

Many the children of men;
Swollen women I love.
Bite, white teeth of the frost;
Toil of the husbandmen lost;
Perish the children of men.
Praise of ease and a quiet lot;
Praise of anise and bergamot;
Praise of the note of the dove;
Many the children of men.

Pale let the worn hands wring,
Worn with labour and prayer;
The harvesters' heap is aflare.
I sing the corpse lying naked and robbed
On the plain's torn bosom; I sing
The cell grown cold where the faint heart throbbed.
Joy of gathering; apples blush;
Air serene of the standing corn.
Women are swollen; men are born.

Bind me about in death
With a garland of twisted wheat.
Sound *

Fumes of dead feasts and half sped dreams retold,
Recall all instruments of subtle mould;
Rude Balalaika; Harp, with voice of gold,
    With heavy limbs and harp-strings gilt;
The Oboe, half afraid for guilt;
Pan’s clustered phials, stored with all the notes,
The myriad cries of all his woodland throats,
The mellow wondering the night-fowl hoots,
    And creeping morning’s rapture trills,
    That fall in bars of lewd quadrilles;
Bring cruel Bells that scream with lips of jade;
Bring wooden Bells that bark and make afraid;
And Dulcimers that tinkle to their grade;
Zombomba’s monophonous hum;
That laughter of the copper Drum;
The Tambour, with its laugh less comatose;
Bring, song-birds’ tutors, tiny Zuffolos;
Hail, wierdness of the comic mask of those
    Whose fingers crawl on hollow Flutes;
Come, courteous Viol, that dilutes
A moment’s joy into a life of pain,
Crime into song, its poisonous balm, like rain,
Drips from its wailing in the sufferer’s brain;
Come shrieking Siren; pitiless Gong;
Unnatural Woman, lead the song;
Come all fierce instruments, the Bugle blare;
Come, whistling of the fretted Steeple, where
The wind grows frightened in the iron stair.

    O, lust of sound, be quenched. Beat! Blow!
    — Insult the tiresome Piano.

The Lovers’ Manual *

Followeth here somewhat concerning Love,
The aims, the course, the treacheries thereof,
Its storms of comfort and its fearful calms,
In certain sundry episodes or psalms.

CLARA: How ’tis dark
      Not a spark
Of star in all the sky! But stars’ vibration
      Is abroad.

46
Does that God,
Think you, for homage to a true vocation,
Succour us?

HUBERT:
Cupid thus
To Psyche’s chamber came in adoration.

CLARA:
Sir, let be
Even he,
To hide me from your bluntness, doubles blindness.
Where did you
Learn to woo?
To know the art to ravish with unkindness?
You are Amor,
And the glamour
Of your presence lights the garden’s blindness.

So we pass
Down the grass,
And step upon the pathway with precision;
Glide with ease
Through the trees
And bushes, quaintly scattered for collision;
Not a root
Strikes my foot,
Nor tendril flicks my forehead with derision.

Do you smell
Asphodel?
Now we are near where all that wealth of moss is.
Mint and thyme
Scent in chime;
This is the spot where th’other pathway crosses;
Here the hops’
Straggling tops
And matted tufts the gusty weather tosses.

Now is betrayed
That blithe arcade,
Our heads above, which shelters and incloses;
While as your breath,
The words it saith,
Loosen the petals of the sister roses;
And these fall
Over all
My hair, my face, the ruin of the posies.
HUBERT: If I found you, If I love you, If above you And around you I should set a wall and bound you; Did I scatter In your bosom Snows of blossom, Would you batter All my love's walls down, and shatter All the vases Of devotion? Spill the portion Of your praises? Crave the drug that blinds and crazes?

The Lover's Manual says: The fatal word Of love is clearly spoke and clearly heard, At noon, in open air, that wealth of light May add confusion, and expose to sight The tingling of the ear, the twitching hand; That, speech for speech, the lovers understand Each other. And it claims this violence, Lest "Love, I love" be light, a vain pretence. Further it holds that none but those of rare And upright sensibility should dare Utter love's name, or venture love's profession. A milder rule ensues upon confession: The book says: Deepest darkness now is fit For those that cleave to love and follow it; Let pass the day in courtesies and thought; When thickest is night's cloak, the Lovers ought To walk in a garden, straitly close; when each, For honour, being in darkness, will hold speech Discreet and tender, bold and delicate, Then love will sing upon their lips elate.

HUBERT: All the heaven Is a leaven Of soft darkness, with a shimmer; For a pleasant Autumn crescent Struggles through the clouds to glimmer; Weaker, dimmer, Strive the stars... Look! the seven Nenuphars!
If I hold you,  
   Even enfold you,  
As I could not, were it lighter,  
   Near of distant,  
Inconsistent  
Seems the light; your neck is whiter,  
   Your face brighter,  
   Seen by day  
   Yet behold you—  
   Not a ray!  
Shape of sweetness  
Whose completeness  
Claims the night of deepest shadow,  
   Clara, thoughtfull,  
   How your footfall  
Must make desolate and sad; oh,  
    Sad the meadow,  
    For the state,  
    And the sweetness  
    Of your gait  
If one beckoned  
Love the fecund  
(Love has many phases, faces)  
    He would hover  
    And discover  
All his light and winsome graces.  
One embraces  
Love a lord,  
And a second  
Love a sword.

CLARA:  
   My very tender lord,  
I had no thought but you this happy day  
    All lilac grey,  
Deep-bunched forgetmenots to heavenward.  
And all the blessed earth  
Light, and quaint shapeliness, and green of hope.  
    No thing did grope  
For form, but all was bold in a new birth.  
    You were the laurel bush,  
    Steadfast and starred and glorious and calm;  
    And every balm,
Of nuptial flower, the pipe of every thrush.
   For, Lord, whichever way
I looked, naught saw I save your goodly face,
   In every place,
Just as my heart's eyes saw it yesterday.
   Oblivion take the words
I dare to utter; which I blush to hear.
   How you are dear
To me, I ought to leave to songs of birds.

The *Lovers' Manual* says: The courteous maiden
Finds, in a while, her breast so deeply laden
With longing of strange scope, that she may need
An angel's tongue to speak her heart indeed.
Then pour, white throat, (it says) thy lover's praise;
Thy song shall fill the void of many days.
The writer then, with gravity enough,
Propounds a theory in his guide to Love;
Which runs, verbatim: Say the lovers be
Given to song and suchlike fantasy;
And say the maid have just that dole precise
Of wit required to stew a mess of rice;
Comes Love, a pretty monkey, and imbroils
Their several wits in so fantastic toils,
The lover scoops in vain an empty heart,
And seeming empty words his lips depart;
While a gay parrot mutters saws of love,
Like one grown gorgeous in a monkish grove.
This is an instance cited to make gay
(The Manual adds)—but let Love have his way.

HUBERT: Leave we the garden,
The breezes are fresh;
Cupid will pardon
The finical flesh.

Here it is warm.
I will fasten the shutters;
(Already the storm
In its uprising mutters).

Fire set to fuel
With judgment and care;
So we the cruel
Crude candle-light spare.
Give me your rings
If they hinder your playing;
Memory clings
Of the things you were saying.

Tenderness lingers
In each little band,
Warmth of your fingers,
And touch of your hand.

THE PIANO.
'Tis evening in the long-deserted park.
(So long agone!) So shapely are the yews.
So blithe the fountain dances in the dark
Deepseeming vase; lest else the pool accuse
The heaven of faint stars coming, and abuse
The secret of the sky. Are they not sad
Those slim, poor spectres, dancing as they use
In dreams to dance, patched, powdered, satin clad,
Offering, for memory of the love they had,
White hand to white? (Oh, the drooping lace!
The languor of their eyes!) While as the glad
Bright fountain marks the measure of their pace.

HUBERT:

Oh, ever gracious minuet!
How many phrases of sweet music seem
To take for theme
Fear or regret.

Love in the telling is so sweet,
Perhaps it is, for that an end must come,
Heart waxeth dumb,
Feareth to beat,

To waste one pulse of its content.
But what a hope to live, the world effaced,
Serene and chaste,
And tent by tent.

Twin rivers creeping to the sea,
Twain lovers living with a sword between,
Seen or unseen,
If such could be.
My Clara, best of all things pure,
Clearest and brightest of all womankind,
Most brave and kind,
Most staunch and sure.

The Lovers' Manual holds for perfect truth
Unsullied, that there never loved a youth
A maiden in this world, but at some season
Assumes her, in the face of heart's best reason,
Some goddess, or the daughter of a god.
In dreams he sees her moon-clad, weaponed, shod
With scooped-out pearls for patterns, gems for eyes,
A canopy, wide-spreading as the skies,
Of white rock crystal round about her head,
And quotes from sages he has never read
To the like purpose. But the book meanwhile,
Does not impute it to the youth for guile,
Or the base practice of mean flattery;
For it assures that, on the contrary,
Of such a matter no one ever heard
The educated lover utter word.
But all men who have thought it talk thereover
When they have passed the state of well-bred lover.
The Manual says that several edicts blame
Blasphemous fancies, in the Emperor's name.

So, late, when no one was about
Did restless Hubert steal without,
Securely buttoned to the throat,
In a thick winter overcoat;
And all the night the garden plot
He glided through and halted not,
Smoked cigarette on cigarette,
Though grass and paths and boughs were wet;
For pretty Clare had gone to bed,
He gravely feared, uncomforted.
As dawn withdrew the topmost veil,
He saw not, but he knew a pale
White shape pursued him silently,
And very well what 'twas knew he.

CLARA:

What didst thou mean,
My ever tender lord,
About a sword
To stand between,
On edge toward
Thy breast, and one to mine?
I am all pale.
Mark if my eyepits burn;
Mark if I yearn,
And breast assail,
Lest I discern
A vain, a mocking tale.

Thy words within—
Tell me, and let love die;
Tell me, am I
A shape of sin,
Of infamy
To thee, what didst thou mean?

HUBERT:
Cover thy breast,
And knot thy hair anew,
Return to rest.

Thy pretty feet,
Thy kirtle, with the dew
Are soiled and wet.

CLARA:
Tell me; make haste,
My lord, my fear is such . . .
Enfold me, touch
An aching waist,
And know how much
For this delay I waste.

HUBERT:
Hark, how the birds,
Muttering, wake to love;
Even so my words
Of yesterday
Were but a preface of
A glad to-day.

CLARA:
But tell me, heart;
I have not long to live
If you deceive
Me; make me smart,
Or even give
Me death, my lord who art.

HUBERT:
Then hear my oath,
In very perfect faith;
Then hear my troth:
I love, I love
Thee, body, soul and wraith;
I love, I love...

An arid footnote in the Manual says:
(The writer filled with sudden scornfulness)
Man is a prattling animal, in sum;
We owns we were rejoiced to find this dumb Lover, (a mute man mentioned in the text)
Whose jerking, garrulous gesturing so vexed The maid, in marriage brought to silence, as For the first time he knew what dumbness was. The Lovers' Manual, in another place, Touches on wordiness with wider grace: Remember, (says a neatly written page) Remember, lover, that your words engage You each to somewhat, many though they be; Nothing is keen like woman's memory. If you should offer sweets of paradise, You must give bonbons for a compromise; By "praise" she understands a flask of scent; Crown her with stars, she holds that pearls were meant; Keep a thought, therefore, ever on your lip... Here is, alas! a lapsus in the scrip.

SQUIRREL
Hubert and Clara, hand in hand.
To-day the squirrels understand.

TITS
O Hubert,
O Hubert,
Your pace is serene.
O Clara,
O Clara,
The air of a queen.
O Hubert,
O Hubert,
Your heart is aflame.
O Clara,
O Clara,
Your heart is the same.
AN APPLE

Ho!
Summer done,
I cannot now
Hang for ever
In the sun.
I should never
Become more red. . . .

So
If they stop
Beneath my bough
For a mission
I will drop
With Precision
On Hubert's head.

TWO
SPARROWS

See a dapple
Coated apple
Falls at Clara's feet.
What a nimble
Pretty symbol!
Will she find it sweet?

A BEE

Drum! Drum!
Here come
Those silly lovers,
Choosing flowers
Without taste,
All to waste.

Break a petal
For my mettle?
Not mine!
Petal, painted sign
Of the tavern,
Of the cavern
Full of wine.
Honey! Honey
For my money,
For mine!

If he has brought you, Lovers, breast to breast,
(The Lovers' Manual says) you know the rest
Without his aid. If ever you hear tell
Of the unnamed, that he wrote ill or well
His treatise; if you hear he never loved
Unpublished and Uncollected Early Poems

Who wrote of love so glibly, seem unmoved
And answer slightly: So-so? Did he not?
As unconcerned, or should you chance hear aught
How he bred new-fledged passion every month
"The theme he harps upon, but ever shunneth"
Say: Bah! the wag! or some such, as you know
To baulk the inquisitive. He asks you show
This courtesy to him, for a return
For anything perchance, he helped you learn.
He goes report to one will ask him how
He did you, and how you flourish now.
So, Lords and Dames, he leaves you. As ye fare
The road, if it be cumbered, have a care,
Remember courage smooths and patience mends.
With these grave words the Lovers' Manual ends.

The Holy Name of Jesus *

Jesus, O memory most sweet,
True heart's contentment dost thou meet:
Than sweetest honey O more sweet,
Thy very sweetest self to greet.

There is no sweeter song to sing,
No sound more wholly ravishing,
Heart hath not known a gentler thing,
Than Jesus the eternal king.

O Jesus, refuge of the meek,
How tender art thou to the weak,
How kind art thou to those who seek,
But what to those who hear thee speak!

No tongue is capable to tell,
Nor letters to declare the spell;
But he who knoweth, knoweth well
What tis in thy delight to dwell.

Jesus, be all our joy, O lord,
Who art to be our sure reward:
Suffer our glory dwell in thee,
To all the ages verily.

Amen.
Jesus, Angelic Gem  *

Jesus, angelic gem indeed,
O song upon the ear most sweet,
Upon the lip rare honey meet,
And in the heart celestial mead.

They hunger more who taste of thee,
Who drink thee thirst exceedingly,
They know not where thy wish to be
If not with thee, if not with thee.

Jesus, o sweetest and most kind!
Hope of my soul; my cheeks are lined
With tears to find thee, twice refined,
I wail from my most secret mind.

O lord, remain, with us, remain;
Ignite in us a flaming vane;
Inflame the pulses of the brain
Fulfill the world with sweet again.

Flower, Jesus, of the virgin dame,
Praise to thee; honour to thy name
Jesus, the virgin’s mother’s flower,
Honour be thine and praise thy dower.

O Admirable Jesus  *

O admirable Jesus, lo!
Victory crowns thy noble brow!
Unutterable sweetness! oh,
Wholly desirable art thou!

When thou art in our hearts a space
Truth, shining, fills the dwelling place;
The glory of the world grows base,
Love glows therein and burns apace.

Jesus, heart’s sweetness and desire,
Live water, intellectual fire,
O joy than all rejoicing higher,
Desire surpassing all desire.
To Jesus let the earth return
His love let all the earth discern
To Jesus let me greatly yearn
And in their seeking inly burn.

Jesus, our voices cry to thee,
Thee, Jesus, all our acts express,
Thee do our hearts desire and bless,
Both now and in eternity.

Amen.

The Flowers in Eden *

Eden garden was very fair,
When sin came not thereby.
For never any cloud did fare
Across the iridescent air
Or blotch the happy sky.

The land was filled with green grass
Spread so exceeding bright
That wings and petals seemed to pass
As in a living looking glass
A vision less than sight.

The animals were rough and gay,
And called each other Brother.
Each, in his simple, bestial way,
Gave half his time to meat and play,
And gave to sleep the other.

When the tiger wished to sleep,
(His nose against his breast)
The wakeful hare loved but to creep
Anear and, with a sudden leap,
Disturb the tiger's rest.

The birds went zigzag, in and out,
On flower-coloured plats.
Never any had a doubt,
But heartily they walked about
With pards and other cats.
The fish in Eden rivers were
A very pleasant brood.
The little fishes did not stir
When the great pike thought fit to err,
For manna was his food.

Eden flowers were living wings,
When sin came not thereby.
Their light and tender flutterings
Made Eden blooms the gentlest things
Which did in Eden fly.

In that clear hour of drowsing day
They speckled all the dome.
The animals forsook their play,
And everyone was used to say:
Hush! the flowers fly home.

The dandy-coated honey bee
Came by and hummed his prayer:
And for the suppliant's honey fee
The flowers opened prettily
And laid their pockets bare.

Somewhat they kept, in certain cells,
For moths and butterflies
To feed on timorously; —else
How could they keep their downy fells,
And wings like angels’ eyes?

O Eden, in the parting time!
The spring or autumn come,
The flowers craved another clime;
Fearing heat or dusty rime,
They clustered, all and some

In some sweet plot of broad extent,
A busy fluttering horde.
The iris heralds came and went;
All their speech was piercing scent
Valorously outpoured.

The lily spread a flag anon,
The crocus pealed a cry;
And every star we see upon
The field had gorgeous raiment on:
Fantastic, striped and pie.
Like a strong host of butterflies
Their flight made heaven dark.
In very melancholy wise
Each beast looked up with solemn eyes
That dwelt in Eden park.

There was no light in all the land
Through all a lonely hour.
The grass, by light no longer fanned,
Was hard for beasts to understand,
And tasted harsh and sour.

Another part of Eden plot
By contrary was glad;
Where all the animals forgot
Their beds of thyme and bergamot,
So great delight they had

To see the pretty petals stoop
Upon their empty field,
In many a several-coloured group,
In posy tuft and garland loop,
The grass thereby concealed.

Eden, Eden, a field of sin;
A half way house of hell;
Every creature did straight begin
To have no longer peace therein,
When this sad state outfell.

This heaven was a burning sword
Which moved and rested not;
Manoeuvred by a shining lord,
Rising unto the very sward
Of Eden's desert plot.

The wildered beasts ran out and forth
Before the glittering brand;
And, as it chanced, to east or north,
They ran to ends of all the earth,
And peopled every land.

The scorched and harried birds betook
Them out in bitter fear;
In hope to find another nook,
Beside another bubbly brook,
Like that made Eden dear.
For terror of the fire that ran,
The fish could not but flee;
Therefore straightway each fish began
Swiftly to swim as fishes can
Towards the distant sea.

Ah, more for these than other things,
Alack the flowers' lot.
Ah, breathing sweets no longer wings,
Ah, vain their tender flutterings,
The light air answered not.

Ah, sin that should have thus undone
So timorous a stock.
That any beast might tread and stun
The pretty petals every one
Were chained to naked rock.

So varied form and colour came,
From flag to jessamine:
For some are streaked for simple shame,
Some wear the memory of the flame,
And some are flecked with sin.

Some, for their heavenly hope, are blue,
Some picture forth the sun.
Wet, wind and warmth and soils imbue
The cells of some with every hue,
And some the daylight shun.

So much they think of their first state,
That whoso marks their eyes,
Whoso has love to peep and wait,
Discerns in each a little gate
Of ancient paradise.

Etienne Rozenwaltoff *

Things are quieting down again; a little lull
Lies abroad, and daily life grows usual and dull.
Britisher turns to his beer again, and relaxes his fists,
Saying: England's not the place for anarchists.
They're all right in the main, they love a bit of fuss:
Know that they're well off, don't want to nitro us.
Where’d they go for shelter if we turned em out?
See? — So, after all, there’s nought to worry about.
Only shows the simple soul doesn’t know the rules;
 Doesn’t think, or thinks himself type of all men—fools.
What’s the use of knowledge then of these pretty toys?
Things—if they will go off, I let em, and love the noise.
Why the trouble to know the habits of nitroglycerin,
Then to go and explain to the public exactly what you mean?
Lovely mixture a biscuit tin, with a fuse and twisted nails;
Something artful packed between; — and the finder tells no tales.

Talk to myself as I sometimes talk, at dinner-time,
Over my food, to a lad who says he lives to rhyme;
Loves all men, he says, all living longing souls;
Germans for his choice, and next to them the Poles.
What do I do it for: — play with explosive stuff?
Something like this, says I: I’ve hungered and hoped enough[,]
Hungered and hoped what for? — hungered and hoped for what?
Only a striking phrase—tommy atrocious rot!
Stood in tail, with the rest, for forty years, to learn
What it was that I wanted; now I’ve reached my turn.
Found it’s neither life nor love we live for, but fun.
Fun it is we want. As yet we haven’t begun.
Went up a street, and passed by a money-lender’s kitchen;
Snuffled a stink of stew; and it set my fingers itchin’;
Seemed they were packing a sardine box with jelly and nails.

Tongue there was betwixt the barrier rails.
Window’s probably always open; — account of the heat—,
Mostly too, I should think, an odour of something to eat.
Grudge him his food? Not I, Etienne Rozenwaltoff.
Envious? not at all—why then? Why it’s the fault of
Waiting so long in the tail. I smell him and then I am nerved
Hearing the plaintive announcement; Madam, dinner is served.
See poor Etienne Rozenwaltoff adding his mite,
Sardine box to the banker’s feast some fortunate night.
See the dresser and tables dance, and the copper saucepans fly.
Smell the smell of the damned in hell—and the bang! the
stricken cry!

Overhead, in the rooms upstairs, the ladies, pale and numb,
Talking trash, when they hear the crash, and think it’s Kingdom
come.

Great big mirror blunders down with a crockery-laden run;
Pictures fall from the trembling wall; — but as yet we have not
begun.

Marbles jump from their wooden stump, lie on their broken noses;
Looks so queer when a chandelier sits in a bowl of roses.
Then we go to our own Soho and wait for the special edition[*]
Unpublished and Uncollected Early Poems

Did it well, and the papers sell; — that's Rozenwaltoff's position.

Never a word, no one has heard, but the "club" puts up its shutters.

Comrades they, pray for the day, when blood shall run in the gutters.

‘Struth! I'm talking rot again; as I said before,
Let me have my bit of fun, and I want no more.
That's the gospel of anarchy. No! I shall never stop;
Not, at least, till the Polish beast stands on the gallows drop.
Study the papers? Yes, carefully every day;
Read the reports, and what Dewar has got to say.
Technical evidence is often worth a mint.
Certainly; — not too proud to take a useful hint.
Like to be Dewar, and be always in a laboratory.
Shouldn’t be quite like him, wasted my wisdom in oratory.
Party? What do you take me for? they're all alike to me.
Waste my time in a slough of slime, and slight the gallows-tree!
Why don't I go for a bigger business? Well perhaps one day...
— Haven’t begun, but I get my fun in just a quiet way.
People sneer that my masterstokes are singularly mild:
Spoil my trick to loosen a brick; to maim a girl or child.
Maim a kid or kill him outright—why what’s the odds?
Only serve their bastards as they have served their gods.
Women? what’s that? and what is the fuss of a few of em gone to bits?
One of em hurled me into the world; if you like, with my twisted wits.

She didn’t know what it means to throw a packet of nitrojam:
Threw to earth, when she gave me birth, a bomb, did my sainted dam.

What are the rest, at the very best? Painted and powdered and curled,
Vain to the quick; (and they make me sick) sworn to the ill of the world.

Ill of the world! just that and none other, is my game too.
Why don’t I love em then, for the sake of the game? — I do.
Used to meet a fine young fellow, sharp at a regular hour,
Going to rehearsals, always wearing the same sort of flower.
White carnation, I think it was, stuck in his buttonhole;
Smart young chap for a great mishap, placed under my control[.]
Somehow couldn’t bear the boy—never did me a wrong—
Couldn’t stand his mourning band—thought of it all day long.
Thought I’d chuck him a pound of luck down on the stage one night;
See the scamper and then decamp, lost in the wholesale flight.
Hate? — on the contrary, rather liked him I can’t deny;
Only I felt I should like to spoil him, I don't know why.
Smell! I've the stench of a kind of Frenchman, just on my mother's side;
German and Jew, if my name speak true, a bit of a Pole beside.
All very well, a German shell or a can of glycerin—
Rope will be slack, or I'll go back to the sharp-toothed guillotine.
All very well, with your Gallic smell; and you may have come from Posen:
Utterly rotten and ill-begotten, the details badly chosen.
Work the fill of your Polish will; or, if you prefer to, preach;
Steadfast hope of a hempen rope is ever within your reach.
Stupid mistake, our friend, you make, with your theory of terror;
Good on the stage, in the Middle Age, but in modern life an error.
Mediaevally speaking, yes! the blow of an unseen hand
Struck more awe than the thing you saw, and thought you could understand.
Red from your crime, you count the time till you see the special edition[.]
Rat that you are! you're very far from being the Inquisition.
You'd been swished by the Vehmgericht, torn up by the rotten roots.
Executions of Rosicrucians? — you couldn't have blacked their boots.
Look at you, brute, with your shoddy suit; and jiber-jawed, cock-eyed:
What you declare to the outer air, is earnest of what's inside.
You haven't a spot that doesn't rot; your father and mother drank;
With every disease, from brain to knees, your great-grandfather sank;
Isn't a cell of your cerebellum doesn't house its worm;
Think of your liver, it sends a shiver: but it knows its term.
Mongrel! why, your monstrous eye-brows aren't even a pair;
That on the right obscures your sight, the other touches your hair.
Fact of it is: if you plot till your eyes drop out of their sockets;
Go with a bomb in each hand, and a brace in each of your pockets;
Nobody minds you much, the world can soon adjust
Things to accommodate its human lice and lust.
Dog, if he's got an awful lot of exceedingly active ticks,
Doesn't mind one who has not begun to exhibit his queerest tricks.
Come of the French by an outlaw wench, with a name that was never before
Hung to a face in a Christian race, or cast up on a civilised shore;
Tell us, who are you, after all, if it's not too much? —
Neither a Greek nor Portuguese, and you're neither Dane nor Dutch;
Spain won't own you, Italy, Germany know you not;
Pole? — not you, and you're not a Jew, nor a Hottentot.
Let's agree you're nothing but simply human;
Only this is true: you were born of woman.
Waste your days with care, they're probably pretty few.
What's the most, O no-land's-man! that you hope to do?
Fancy not much in any case, for you're not real stuff;
Your's is the kind get left behind with the chaff and bluff.
Fancy you can't have had a meal since the Sack of Rome;
Fancy you've lived in many lands, and have found no home.
That sort of training doesn't beget the bone and thew
Fit for revenge on even the banker's Irish stew.
Strike! your best is a pitiful, listless, wristless thrust.
All our business with you is to tread you into dust.
Mix your machines, and let em off as you can—till the muck rebels,
Turns on the master and packs him down to the Deepest of all the hells.

Imitated from Du Bellay. Ruins of Rome*

As the sown field in verdure doth abound,
From verdure leaping many an emerald pipe.
From pipe the flowering ear with bristles crowned,
The yellowing ear to grain the warmth makes ripe.

And as, the season come, the rustic reaps
The rolling waves of blondest hair, and leaves
The yellow corn in many careful heaps
On the spoiled field, and binds them into sheaves.

Little by little thus the Empire grew,
Till it was ravished by the Goth's rough hand,
Leaving but fragmentary bone and thew;
Which all go plundering, as the gleaners stand,

Following step by step to snatch the prey
The reaper may neglect behind his way.
Westhome *

When green confusion grows upon the land,
When winds are friends, and birds and waters sing,
A greater change the flower-trumpets ring
Than hither time and yon on either hand.
But golden trumpets—call them angel shalms:
As, when I saw that coppice stark and bald
Shot with its film of ghostly emerald,
I bowed my knee to God's benignant palms,
That, Father, I had tholed my Winter day.
And that was Night. The Day dawns. Feel! The West
Is scented (Was Columbus in his quest
More cheered;) with essence of the Sun alway.
Quick West, flower-piled, green-copper ancientry!
Dross-burning censer dripping unto God!
When falls the blossom spent upon the sod,
God's incense, happy soul of mine, go free!

Battledore *

I

No breath of wind, within, without;
No stirring twig, no insect hum;
The very beehives dumb;
Till shrill and sharp, with shriek and shout,
The laughing sisters come.

Swarth, heavy-tressed runs Alison,
Not corn than Blanche more debonair,
They fill the voiceless air,
Scarcely a scant scarf bound upon
Their joyous, rebel hair.

"Here, sister, here." "No, here i' the shade."
"Look, sister, gather up your skirt;
It trails upon the dirt."
"Ah, malapert, now you have made
My hand bleed; I am hurt."
"Sweet Alison, your hose is rent."
"Sweet Blanche, but look you, do you this:
Loosen your girdle, sis,
And draw your gown through." Indolent
Blanche laughs at her excess.

Their heart-shaped bats, bent, bound and strung
With ravelled bow-cord, light and stout
To drive the ball about,
Winged plaything from the soutar wrung
With supplicating pout.

Drum! Drum! How it spins! How straight it flies!
How blue 'tis! Bluer than the sky!
"Sister, you strike awry."
Hither and thither, hands and eyes,
And never feet more spry.

The chatelaine creeps forth a space,
Down the strait stair, with looks askance
For peeping eyes. "Constance!"
The girls cry out, "come, take a place."
Her eyes fixed, as in trance;

Thoughts flocking of Provençal fields,
Of her own youth, grown nigh and nigher,
Gathering her fine attire,
The weary Lady Constance yields
Unto a great desire.

Truth, she is little apt, although
She strive, and make a brave array
Of skill; the breathless day
Catches her throat for to and fro,
This way and that way. "Nay...."

One hand clasped on her face, and one
Against her waist, the frightened twain
Of girls, seeing her pain,
Shriek, cry: "Swift! Water!" Alison
Wrings at her hands in vain.
Unpublished and Uncollected Early Poems

"A little sickness, child; 'til naught;
'Tis well. Dear Christ! if't be a wight,
Moris shall he be hight;
If't be a lass, Ysold. For aught
I joy, 't may be this night."

Battledore

II

The sheltered garden sleeps among the tall
Black poplars which grow round it, next the wall.
The wall is very high, green grown on red.
All is within, white convent, chapel, all.

Slight supper past, the evening office said,
Gardening tools locked up, the poultry fed,
Little is done but lazy chaplets told,
Weeds plucked, and garden calvaries visited.

Some pace and stitch; some read in little, old,
Worn heavily bound missals, which they hold
With both red hands, where lawns are foiled with flowers,
Lily and Ladybell and Marygold.

This is the least unhushed of evening hours,
When blessed peace best wears its dearest dowers:
Quietly grouped are nuns and novices;
Two tiny ladies play with battledores.

Drunk with the blows, unsteady with the whizz
Of whirling flight, the shuttlecock seems, is

Alive and fluttering at each new shock.
Sisters are drawing close by twos and threes.

Asthmatic mother, as the shuttlecock
Flies straight at her, allows herself to knock
It onward with her leaf fan, muttering,
Half as excuse: 'Tis nearly nine o'clock.
Unpublished and Uncollected Early Poems

What better warrant for a foolish thing:
With swift inventiveness the sisters bring
Whatever light thing strikes; old copybooks
Fulfil the purpose well. Such fluttering

Within the convent walls the sober rooks
Who live among the poplar branches—Sooks!—
Had seldom seen. Now all the place prevails
With cries and laughter to its furthest nooks.

The novices and nuns catch up their tails,
Better to bustle, darting till their veils
Float back and tangle in the merry fuss,
Till sombre weeds swell out like lusty sails....

Peace, croaks the mother, Peace, the angelus!

The Forge

A long and narrow shop, magenta black
Mottled with rose; ten fires along one wall.
Faint day comes through the skylight overhead
Smoke-grimed to orange, when it comes at all.
The blast shut off for breakfast, fires are slack.

The buzzing neighbouring engine quieted,
You hear the mates talking from berth to berth;
The silence is complete. The seldom noises
Reverberate as, quaintly, under earth
The graves repeat the sayings of the dead.

Contrasted with the metals, human voices
Sound hoarse and soft, as out of hollowed wood.
Their beverage made: of boiling water, stained
With tea and sugar, they prepare their food:
"Tiger," to envy, even where there choice is;

Here and now, truly, not to be disdained.
Hear in what manner it is perfected;
How old world 'tis. The anvil polished bright
With leather skirt, two hearty chunks of bread,
Protecting ivory bacon, purple veined,
Are set thereon with caution; and the wight
Who owns the morsel, passes over it
A piece of red-hot iron till 'tis brown.
It cleans the tongue to hear it fizzle and spit,
If two hours' work vouchsafe no appetite.

This done, the smith has only to sit down
To eat his greasy "tiger," and drink off
His sweet, strong tea. This, being yet too hot,
Hangs in the rust-red water of the trough
To cool. The smith is sleeping, with a frown

Upon his shapeless features. This is not
The ballad wag they tell of: at his best
Maimed in his poor hands, wry, with crooked back,
Great-armed, bow-legged, and narrow in the chest.
It bends a man to make no matter what.

A rumour stirs, a hum, the blast comes back;
Shadows on wall and roof start forth and die.
Rattle of tongs, slosh, fume; unlovely night
Grown Chinese hell, to seeming, suddenly,
Where strange gods heap the fire and trim the rack.

Half shapes of light leap higher than man's height
Out from the blackness and as soon subside,
Flame-flesh-shapes, sweat-swamped clinging cotton swathed,
In violent action, following the guide
Of the smith's gesture bidding where to smite.

The smitten steel complains, all bruised and scathed,
From thud to bark, from bark to metal scream;
Through ordeal of the fire and scaling trough,
To wake it from its long-embowelled dream,
To uses brought, flame-licked and torture-bathed.

This the arena wherein stubborn stuff
With man locks strength; where elements dispute
The mastery, where breath and fire bear blaze,

Where sullen water aids, to quell the brute
Earth into shape, to make it meek enough.

And this day is the type of many days.
Ducks and Doves *

Reverend mother is surpassing fat.  
Cap never foiled a redder bristling face.  
All heavenly supplants all earthly grace  
In her; but sanctity makes light of that.  
(Familiars say the mother fills her place.)  
A single-minded autocrat.

Of all her house is she the first about.  
Stricter than any keeps the hour she sets  
Sternly for rising; loves to rouse her pets,  
The ducks, with her own voice, and lets them out;  
Warning them not to root the violets  
Up, and not to speak so loud.

The ducks esteem the doves of little worth.  
Some of them even study how to vex  
Those lower creatures, stab their tender necks  
With hard bills slyly, tread them to the earth;  
Fear the two gulls, devil of either sex,  
Giving them an ample berth.

Fie Beauty, coward, spiteful. Lo! the day  
For happy ducks and doves draws slowly in.  
Reverend mother brings her violin  
Into the poultry plot. Sober and gay  
Strikes on the viol nestling in her chin:  
"Nymphs and shepherds, come away."

March, darlings all, by such a mother led.  
Garrulous, waddling, the procession keeps  
Its even ranks. In broken phrases weeps  
The violin, among the trees that shed  
Brown leaves in blessing. Every song-bird sleeps.  
'Tis time good ducks were all abed.
The Wheel *

I.

Oak, elm and ash; these
Are the three greatest trees.

The curious arts of man reveal
No braver engine than the wheel.

Shrunk and strong enough,
Durable and tough,

Must each part be, fitly to sustain
Part, and each must be of different grain.

Slowly, and many winters film on film
And tortuous fibre tangling, grows the elm.

Its texture many qualities combines;
The strength of ash persists in crooked lines.

The ash makes music when its branches stir,
Because its leaf is like a dulcimer.

Strong and elastic for the slender spoke,
In strength for weight no wood surpasses oak.

(Iron, required to answer the same ends,
Would fail; for iron either breaks or bends.)

So far the stock is made, until,
Each other member in its place,
The centre of the finished wheel,

New-bored, receives the axle case.

So long as it be dry it lasts like stone.
The oak of all the trees is soonest known.

Its leaves, which have a sinuous bordure,
Make chaplets for their heads when men endure.

Its fruit is bitter and sweet: the stubborn brood
Of swine are fond of acorns for their food.
Elm, ash and oak. These
Are the three greatest trees.

II.

The wheelwright takes the chosen block
Of elm, chopped rudely, less or more,
Into the likeness of a stock.

First, through its woolly stubborn core,
(It cuts more cleanly being wet)
He makes a temporary bore.

Jammed on a mandril, it is set
In the lathe, and turned on either side.
The work is little skilled as yet.

A craftier hand must now be plied
To mark and sink the mortices,
Radial and narrowing inside.

So the spokes’ heels drive home with ease,
And tightly hold, to make the wheel
The perfect whole it surely is.

So far the stock is made, until,
Each other member in its place,
The centre of the finished wheel,

New-bored, receives the axle case.

III.

Spokes are made of seasoned oak.
Oak, that is, kept for a year
Free to air, secure from rain,
So it may be shrunk, austere,
Ere it come to bear a yoke.

Till the stubborn length of wood,
Bone hard, tough, and straight of grain,
Food of copylathe be grown,
Shapeliness and shape to attain,
Fit for perfect neighbourhood.
Unto that all know the means
Whereby the clean thing is done
Wheels and cutting steel achieve,
(Life not giving everyone
Knowledge of what turning means)

Hear tell; give some stanzas' leave:
Swift volition of the stuff
To be cut; the cutter still.
Simple principle enough
For the simplest to receive.

Given store of motive force,
Wit can clothe the brute with skill,
Set complexity therein,
Until almost what you will
Follows as a thing of course.

The ingenious copylathe
Is a kind of twin machine,
One part dummy, blithe the other.
In the dummy smoothe and clean
Turns the model, which doth scathe

Dummy tool in form of wheel,
Slowly, while its frenzied brother,
Shell-shaped-toothed, in circular
Saw style, making dusty smother,
Hum as though it liked its meal,
Cuts the model's counterpart
With a long and spiral scar.
Brief, in the result, the one
Like to one, as star to star,
Perfectly in every part,
Let the explanation cease,
Though the theme be not to shun;
Those who can will understand
How 'tis simple when 'tis done.
Let not others spoil their peace.

Spoke's perfection almost reached,
Head is turned to size by hand.
Spokes adjusted, wheel is speeched.
IV.

The felloe - as to say, the wooden rim
Which seems the wheel's essential - is composed
Of six ash parts, all jointed, jammed and closed
Together, and upon each other limb.

The form of these, marked out, is roughly sawn
With bandsaw on a table, and then shaped
To smoothness on a lathe disc, cut and scraped,
To just circumference by stages drawn.

The holes bored out, both to receive the spokes,
And rowell, (pegs which bind them one to one)
A wheel is fashioned, strong enough to run
To the press, a brute which knows a way to coax

Rough parts to know their fellows. Fastened prone,
Steam or hydraulic driven clamps distress
The wheel's circumference, and force and press
Tenant to socket, though it creak and moan.

Small other rites need not be writ or read
There be, mere finishing, which done, the glad
Victim, by labourer or prentice lad
Is trundled gaily to the shoeing shed.

V.

A mere pentroof, above a yard
Within three boundaries of a square;
The fourth side open to the air,
And all the weather choose to bear.

A furnace, like a baker's, barred
With balanced door; a shallow well
Hid by a platform; short to tell
Is all its simple apparel.

The silly carcases of wheels
Lean sheepishly against the wall,
One against one, in easy call
For ordeal of completing thrall.

The black, shut furnace yet conceals
The tire, a-heating for a girth
For one wheel, to achieve its birth,  
And round it into something worth.

The wheel lies prone upon its face  
Upon the platform, fixed thereto  
With nut and collar on a screw  
By rough-bored axle-hole thrust through.

Great heat and brightness flood the place.  
The smiths have dragged and set the tire  
About the felloes, slack with fire,  
Shrunken it will grip and bind them nigher.

A blow or so with wooden sledge  
To shape it somewhat. Through the smoke  
The careful workmen blink and choke,  
Loiter to deal another stroke.

The felloe fires; but at its edge  
Already water pours to quench:  
The sinking slab reveals the trench,  
And smoke gives place to sulphur stench.

The shed is filled with moan as hell is;  
The hot iron, growing cool again,  
Straitens and makes the wheel complain,  
And all its members crack and strain.

Spokes driven home to stock and felloes,  
Oak into elm and ash; these tough  
Trees make the good wheel stout enough  
To run on smooth roads or on rough.

VI.

O wheels!  
O they which bear and run and halt,  
Their axle being faultless, without fault,  
Stouter by wear, unto the last stretched point  
Of stuff's endurance, be they limb and joint  
Taut and uncrannied, lest they nurse the wet.  
(The same which festereth and doth beget

Crawling and writhing rot.) O wheels!  
Fashion the perfect symbol which conceals:  
How stout stock hangs to axle, asking not  
Why good direction stirs not from the spot
Where better wisdom placed it to revolve;  
Fine though the question be and quaint to solve.

Freedom and safety, safe betwixt  
Linchpin and axle-shoulder straitly fixed.  
What purpose have ye, wheels, therefrom released?  
"Being a captive, saw I," wrote the priest  
Ezekiel, certain vision, which he writ  
Into a book, that men might wot of it;

Where purposes are full, "because  
The spirit of the living creature was  
Within the wheels," from fixed and steadfast heart,  
Thoughts radiant, pitiless, unyielding, start  
To end of act, where feet and hands, by dint  
Of strife, are one with face, and set like flint.

Run, wheels, and mock the loadstone earth.  
Ask, wheels, in vain, what engine has been worth  
To man your cunning fashion, run nor swerve;  
A double rectitude lies in your curve;  
Your power is power of power till reckoning reels;  
Yours is the spirit of the creature, wheels!

Variations on One Subject  *

I.

The face of the god  
In his shrine  
Is wrought  
Into a likeness half divine.

His dull  
Gold face  
Is strange with a peculiar grace:  
Tender, but not pitiful.

II.

I was a sullen Scant-of-grace;  
Five coats my skin looked through;  
One passed the place  
I lay in; turned, and threw  
The image of the king.
"Thanks,
"Broidered shanks,
"For bare Largess!
"No stress
"Shall bring
"To bargain even a shred of beggar's soul
"With thy obole."

III.

The gods
    Being wise,
    Handle in disguise,
Seeing the odds.
Their task to leave sufficient traces,
    Moving unaware;
For thickest covering of their faces,
    Pity is the mask they wear.

IV.

I was going to be burnt
    For my crimes.
Ay! my withered vines were earned
    Many times.
"Lead ye"....(here he named my name),
    "Haply to obtain a grace
    "To his soul, to the market place,
"Where let living flame
"Swaddle and invest him,"
Spake the judge. I blessed him.

V.

Who pray for pity, in the thought
    Discern the face
Of the god
As if the same were rudely wrought
    Of stone by some long vanished race.
"Think a little of what you ask;
"What the counting of your throes is;
"Throw away that ugly mask,
"Which your praying interposes."
Thus the tender god replies
With the arrows of his eyes.

VI.

Once a holy man
Set himself betwixt
Quaking bird and staring snake.
Straight the pied one fixed
Tooth in heel. Death gan
Have him, who gan speak:
"Sooth thy spirit, ruffled one.
"Lift the scale upon thine eye,
"Seeing thou art not undone.
"Lift thy wing; fly
"Forth, but first thy feathers preen,
"So thy trouble be not seen,
"When thou art by
"Who waits for thee, the patient one."
One stood between
Upon whose face
Shone a calm, a signal grace;
Not dim his eye, nor quick his breath.
Saith he whose hour was next to death:
"Whence I perceive, sir, thou art not a man."
This history was declared at Jetavan.

VII.

Are there not those
Who, asking pity of the gods,
Know no repose
And say: "Those same are pitiless;"
(So they be.)
"We, weak, can still this fault redress.
"This is the apple of Dan Adam's tree:
"Let us be gods!"-?

Lord of the ever tender sea,
Whence, stooping, men lift pearls to make men glad,
These are the mad.
Couplets Written by the Lady Su Ouii
B.C. 250  *

When you received
the Emperor's command
To quell the distant boundary,
Sorely I grieved:
against the bridge, your hand
(Farewell!!) released,
(o wretched quandary!)

Restraining grief,
and hiding my affliction,
I left
you with this word:
"For long belief,
take love, and my affection:
"Bereft,
I wait." Who, having heard,

Would have believed
that since you went, no line,
No thing
from you doth reach me?
Alone, bereaved:
remember, whilst I pine,
The Spring
doth freeze and bleach me.

Stair-foot, the green is rank and all unmown;
Our bed with dust and webs is overgrown.

To speak of our farewell, my soul (ah me!)
With dread doth start; and then
I quake; my mind revolves what I would be
To greet my lord again.

And now to creep
moon of the sea
is my deep desire;
And then the cloud
the mountain brow
  doth touch, a wing of fire.

Giddy with height,
  the light, bright, white
clouds see my husband's face.
Tardy or soon
  the deep sea moon
shineth on every place.

By stone
  and sward
  along
  the mount-
  ain pass,
  (such fate dividing!)
I moan
  my lord
  so long
  unfound
  (alas!)
  absent abiding.

You left, and when
  we said goodbye, the bamboo leaves were green.
Ah, who would then
  have thought the soft
Almond trees had flowered so oft
  Before we met again?

On the South Coast of Cornwall  *

There lives a land beside the western sea
The sea-salt makes not barren, for its hills
Laugh even in winter time; the bubbly rills
Dance down their grades, and fill with melody
The fishers' hearts; for these, where'er they be,
Sing out salt choruses; the land-breeze fills
Their sweetened lungs with wine which it distils
From emerald fat field and gorse gold lea.
Like a thrown net leans out the ample bay.
The fishers' huddled cabins crowd and wedge,
Greedy, against the rugged treacherous edge
Of the great liquid mine renewed alway.
The fishers have no thought but of the strong
Sea, whence their food, their crisp hair, and their song.

Saint Ives, Cornwall *

The rock is all a piled and burrowed town,
As though the sea had wrought its balanced shelves
And crannies, wherein men may hide themselves,
Like lobsters in dark nooks, and lie them down.
The slimy-booted rockman, in his brown
Hard vest, glides slipperily as the elves
He hunts; not loutishly like him who delves;
The man of prey thus different from the clown.
'Twas he who built this fortress. Is its shape
His overcraft towards the fish, to ape
The rock the fishes fear not? Glideth he
Lest peeping fish should mark him from the sea?
And when he speaketh, is't with wave-tuned breath
Lest the shy fish should hear him, what he saith?

Leda and the Swan *

The heavy air hangs faint
And tangled; so no bird complaint
Athwart it; songs of beetles swoon
Upon the heavy afternoon.

Leda, for greed of shade,
And eager faltering through the glade
Of stammering, pleading feet lets fall
The fetter of her purple pall;

And, folding her bright hair
Within the twin frail fillet, bare
Lays all the treasure of her neck,
Adorned with one blue jewel fleck
Hung to a tender cord,
The circling crease, which doth afford
Steadfast, exact similitude:
The ring of Venus and her brood.

The gleaming grass lies prone:
The yews seem bronze, the poplars stone.
The very flowers at Leda's feet
Distil a desolating heat.

Refreshing shade is not.
The darkness of the mossy plot
The willows shelter, doth oppress
The air with added heaviness.

All palpitant and dazed,
Across the lawn doth Leda haste,
To where the dreaming water lies;
Therein to cool her mirrored eyes.

A bubbly fount makes wet
The low contiguous parapet;
Recumbent in a wealth of green,
Against the same doth Leda lean.

The fountain's splash beyond,
In stiller reaches of the pond,
Where weakest ripples spend their strength,
Despairing to attain its length,

The awful heaven burn
Repeated in the hollows; yearn
With ruddier purpose, to unfold
The swelling destiny they hold.

And, in a certain place,
Suspended on the water's face,
The doubled swans sit motionless,
For ease against the summer stress.

Yet, lo, why stoop their crests
Contritely to their fluttering breasts,
Which hurrying wavelets break upon?
Hush, Leda, whence this goodly swan,
This new majestic third,
Unmated, as becomes a bird
So proud imperious? (For so fair
A fowl were matchless anywhere.)

Incomparable down
Of breast, and red-billed royal frown,
And gradual wings outspread to fold,
And back most lustrous to behold,

Are but the little part
Of his enticement, which doth start
From jocund curl of every plume,
A stalwart song, a cool perfume.

The Swan:

Though grasses deep
Contrive to keep
Whole for memory, and cherish
The print thy form
Leave deep and warm,
Leda, lady, grasses perish.

Essay the pool,
O beautiful
Leda, for a softer cushion;
Glorious float
About thy throat,
Pillow fair, thy hair's profusion.

Thine arm let deck
My willing neck,
Naught let trouble or afear thee;
So on the tide
Against his side
Haughtily thy swan shall bear thee

Into a nook
Of gorgeous look,
Gay with strange and varied shadow,
Whereof the floor
Is even more
Flowered than the Elysian meadow.
With which the swan floats near;
And bidding Leda not to fear
Adventure with him, by the beck
Of his keen eyes and writhing neck,

Enticeth till her breast
Beyond the parapet doth rest
Until a timid hand leans out
And folds his downy breast about.

Over the margin slips
The lithe blithe line of Leda’s hips;
And straightway hence the swan doth speed,
Exultant for his rapturous deed,

The glory of their course:
Whence his quick gesture and his force
Excite the like in Leda’s limbs,
Who, like a sturdy swimmer, swims

Beside her feathered lord,
And swift assistance doth afford.
Athwart where pendant vines above
Curtain a shallow water grove,

The swan and Leda break
Triumphant from the spreading lake;
And pause beneath acacias’ shade,
Which drops perfume, a sheer cascade.

Till sudden lightnings split
The burning sky, and empty it;
And raucously as eagles cry
An eagle screamed across the sky.

Song of the Scots College, Rome. *

From the land of purple heather,
From the dear and distant North,
Scotland casts our lot together;
Bonnie Scotland sends us forth
To the City by the Tiber,
To the shade of Peter’s dome,
To bear the bright tradition back
Of everlasting Rome.

85
Unpublished and Uncollected Early Poems

Chorus

Here's a hand and faith behind it,
Here's my love till death shall part;
Give me yours and I shall bind it
With the dearest in my heart.

So land and kin forsaking
For Scotland's faith grown cold,
For her valiant spirit aching
With the wound they wrought of old:
In faith and heart united all
In happy exile one,
That Scotland's wrong be righted
So that Scotland's work be done.

Chorus

We foot the fervent traces
Of those that went before,
Adorned with gifts and graces
From our Alma Mater's store;
To sing the Careful Mother
For a tribute to her worth,
For to find so good another
We might journey all the earth.

Chorus

For aye the gaps supplying
She drafts her sturdy bands,
To keep her colours flying
In the best of bonnie lands:
The men she taught to cherish
All she knows or ever knew;
The hope that cannot perish
Romans all and Scotsmen true.

Chorus

The rowan-tree stands all alone,
Though it has foliage in excess.
I, friendless and alone, roam on.
And are there then no other men?
But of my father's kindred—never one!
O all you farers through the city,
Why is not one of you my kin?
I am the man without a brother.
Oh, why? O one of you, have pity!

The rowan-tree stands all alone,
Though drooping with its weight of leaves.
But loveless I go desolate.
And are there then no other men?
None of my kindred, of my father's line.
O all you farers through the city,
Why is not one of you my kin?
I am the man without a brother,
Oh, why? O one of you, have pity.

Taken from the Shi-King 1100 B.C.

The peach-tree looks most maidenly
In blossoms numberless to tell.
The new-wed bride comes to the feast;
She rules both board and kitchen well.

The peach-tree looks most maidenly
Bending with peaches numberless.
The careful bride is at the feast;
She knows the larder and the press.

The peach-tree looks most maidenly
With pretty leaves put forth anew.
The watchful bride is at the feast;
She knows her servants through and through.

A Phial *

This precious bubble of the antique world,
As light as lifted foam, as frail as breath,
Endured when empires died a desperate death,
When heaven on earth, when tower on tower was hurled.

Hues of a beetle's temporary wing
Have grown on this in centuries of slime;
Dials have told a rosary of time
For every nuance of this feeble thing.
Were it devised at first for costly balm,
The distillation of a summer’s fee,
To sweeten some "Ah sweet, I dote on thee,"
And over all there lies a common calm....

No more, no more the heavy branches drip
Another fragrance to the tangled moss,
Translucent insects flamed and hummed across;
The sleep they soothed is grown eternal sleep.

It mocks indeed, it is not wholly dumb,
The insect’s fiery wing; and, listening well
Against the margin of this tell-tale shell,
There wakes the memory of a distant hum.

Drowse on, drowse on until I come again;
Or sleep, or sleep for ever, evermore;
We are like men who halt upon a shore,
Whose thoughts go forward and whose feet remain.

Saint Gregory the Great, *
Apostle of England,
On the Thirteenth Centenary of His Death,
March 12, 1904

Where epochs touch a giant figure stands.
White soul and ardent heart; a man among
Men great in thought and deed; whose suasive tongue
Strengthened the instruments of his commands.

And while his thoughts on others’ lips, in hands
Not his his strength, taught, guided, counselled, wrung
The crooked straight, he meekly trained the young
To bear his faith to undiscovered lands.

God gave him plenitude of power and sense;
Fulfilled his soul with loveliness and light;
That Christ through him might rule from sea to sea.

Great charge was his, and great the recompense.
Great upon earth, he is greater in His sight
Whose work made great the name of Gregory.
Christmas 1904  *

Dear Mother of the blessed One;
O gate of their return
Who look to heaven, whence the Sun
Shone forth, O star that dost upon the waste of waters burn!

Thy fainting people, else undone,
Through thee aspire to rise
To Him thou bearest, Source and Son,
Thy Holy Child; while nature wonders from a million eyes.

O Mother-maid inviolate,
Today and evermore
Sin-soiled and weary children wait
On thee, their hope, O sacred gate; O ever open door!

Via Vita Veritas  *

We watch the bud in spring, inclining ear
To hear the young leaf lisping in the sheath;
We count the shimmering moments, underneath
The shadow of the summer's fluttering gear;
Our labour care, lest blight or blast should sear
Or shake our fragrant, petal-precious wreath;
Till the hour come in which we would bequeath
The leaf that hangs the last, of all most dear.

O Life, when there is nought betwixt Thy cross
And client, save Thy blood and deathly sweat,
Then sink the good, the ills; the gain, the loss;
Occasion or excuse to joy or grieve;
Fall all the leaves of life without regret;
O Way, O Truth, it is enough to live.
The Emperor and the Bird  *

Too sore upon a human frame: too great
This heavy priesthood, royalty, immense
Fatigue, the office of the exalted Bonze:
Lonely, endeavourless, terrific state,
From inattentive eyes too closely screened,
In sombre courts of adamant and bronze,
Time polished and from age to age patined,
And quaking service all his recompense.

His sparrow, in the broad air, where he plays,
Delighted, in much light, with many a shrill
Contention, summoned, drops, a parachute:
By gardens and by devious covered ways
Sweeps silent, to the sacred hall addressed,
A satin flesh mailed mamelukes salute,
Wheels steadily to the Presence, preens his breast,
Waits gaily, back and forth, the sovereign will.