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1896 The Blue 1896

Calendar
January

Whither dost Thou trudge,
    Poverello?
Dost Thine own earth grudge
    Place and pillow?

Hath Thy mouth not bread,
    Poverello?
Is the wine not red,
    Corn not yellow?

Wallet, staff, and shell,
    Poverello;
Is the journey well,
    Pilgrim fellow?

Whence Thy wounded feet,
    Poverello?
Is Thine earth not sweet,
    Sky not mellow?

February

Mary and her child proceeding
    Into Egypt through the waste.
(Good Saint Joseph humbly leading,
    Without loitering or haste.)

Whenas they had crossed the border
    Of the country which they fled,
For the dread of pagan murder,
    This is part of what they said:

First the Boy in childish wonder
    Asks the Mother what she thinks
Of the tiger resting yonder.
    That, my Child, is called the Sphinx.

Mother, may I ask the creature
    Whence her aspect sweet and mild,
Whence her goodly, human feature?
    Mary answered: Hush, my Child.
Mother, may I climb the mountain,
    May I scale its jagged side,
Grace its summit like a fountain?
    Mary, pensive, thus replied:

Tis a sign of ancient learning,
    Or a tomb of former kings;
When Thou comest to discerning,
    Teach me this and other things.

Mother, have we lost direction?
    Be of courage, do not fear;
Do not yield to thy affliction.
    Is our destination near?

Ah, the tree its limbs resemble!
    Tis its shape afflicts me most.
Gentle Mother, do not tremble;
    See, tis but a finger-post.

March

Claia. Mertilla
Corbilus: A Ferryman

Claia. Ho! ferryman, a ferry,
    To overcome the tide.
The freight is light and merry,
    And oh, the world is wide!

Mertilla. Claia, didst aye see any
    So pensive in his course?
Come—give us for our penny
    Enlivening discourse.

Corbilus. Ah, nymphs, I traversed lately
    So delicate a fare!
Venerable and stately,
    And so exceeding fair.

I ply the river Jordan
    My ferry business, where
Is never stone to ford on,
    And many passers fare.
The sinking sun marked seven,  
When broke upon my eye  
As twere the Queen of Heaven  
Emmantled with the sky.

And in her hands she carried  
A Babe of feeble girth,  
As if a light had tarried  
To dawn, the Sun of earth.

And by her side a father  
Looked kindly in his hood  
Drawn closely down; or rather  
As twere a prophet, stood.

And with the party humbly  
There walked a snow-white ass;  
And, by his whinnying, dumbly  
He begged me let them pass.

So call me fond and stupid,  
But judge of my surprise  
Who thought He had been Cupid  
To find the Boy had eyes.

And she had eyes of mercy,  
Which is a melting hue,  
Hence those that look on hers see  
The bluest heavenly blue.

Then let me still be pensive;  
(But here we reach the shore)  
For I am apprehensive,  
Who may not see them more.

Claia. So thank you for your story,  
Good boatman Corbilus;  
If we behold their glory,  
It will be well with us.

April  *

Joyful table; and thereon  
Cakes and fruits of every sort;  
For the Infant holds a court,  
With the help of cousin John.
Mulberries there be, and pears;
   Pompous grapes and pomegrenades
   Full of rubies laid in grades;
All the apple-woman's wares.

Cakes abundant be and buns;
   Cakes of mace and marzipan;
   Saffron cake and cakes of bran;
Gingerbreads and sallylunns.

Cousin John comes offering peaches
   Filled with velvet honey,
   Tasting, oh, of plots so sunny,
Which alone the wild bee reaches.

Jamie leading John his brother,
   Were the Fishers first to come;
   Whence the Child for joy was dumb;
For so much they loved each other.

Simon Peter came alone,
   Being bold and somewhat rude,
   (For as much as he withstanded
Simon earned the name of Stone.)

Then came Andrew, Mark and Luke:
   Frisking Mark and Luke the stolid;
Andrew grave, judicious, solid,
Bearing tablets, style and book.

All the guests were fair and sightly,
   Serious as grown-up men;
   Mild, like lambkins in a pen;
All but one behaved politely.

Only Judas smeared his lips,
   Made his mouth in dreadful shapes,
   Snatched the peaches, tore the grapes,
Fed the parrot with the pips.

Kind Saint Anne and sweet Saint Mary
   Sat a little way apart.
   While she talked Saint Mary's heart,
Ah, her watchful heart was wary!
May

The Good Shepherd

Radiant and piping shrill,
Thou, a child Apollo,
Choosest out the track at will;
Lambs and lambkins follow.

Careful Shepherd, lead Thy sheep
To pasture and to shade;
Thou dost neither faint nor sleep,
Whom nothing makes afraid.

Shape and string the stubborn bow
Wing the well cut arrow;
Teach the husbandman to know
Use of share and harrow.

Sit, Apollo-like, afoot
Of the tree of knowledge;
To the chorals tune thy flute
Of the angel college.

The Song

The Priest made preparation
To slay the holocaust,
For fiery immolation;
Ah, lambs! the pain it cost!

So feeble on the altar,
The pitable beast;
His hand was like to falter;
The Shepherd was the Priest.

The victim said: See, Father,
How weak and poor I am.
And so the Priest said: Rather
Myself will be the lamb.

By this the sky was riven.
The Victim-priest became
A fire; and leaped to heaven,
A flame and winged with flame.
The Sheep:

Tell us, Shepherd, is it true
That Thou wilt die for us?

The Shepherd:

Ay! to build a house for you,
The sequel shall be thus.

June *

The True Vine

Another quells,
Another reins the leopards.
My portent tells
My story to the shepherds
Beside the wells.

My face is tan.
My hair, my hair is golden.
None brighter than
My eyes were e'er beholden
By eyes of man.

I am the vine.
The cup is chiselled garnet
For garnet wine.
I am the vine incarnate.
The grape is mine.

With crown of bright
Green leaf and tender clusters
My head is dight;
Even as the starry musters
Adorn the night.

I am the vine:
The stock, the grape, the dresser;
In deed and sign,
The purple-footed presser
Of purple wine.
July

To Saint Christopher

Ho! hast thou shoulders, Giant?
Thy limbs are strong enough?
Thy knees are staunch and pliant?
And are thy sinews tough?

Ah! Child, Thou need'st a zephyr,
Said Giant Christopher;
I use to lift a heifer;
And to compel the bear.

Then, Giant, lift thy burden;
Be not indifferent;
Albeit thy only guerdon
Must be accomplishment.

Breath deeply, whilst I heave Thee,
Lay hold my stubborn locks;
I count not Child, to leave Thee
Deep fallen on the rocks.

Then on, My Giant feathly,
But first take staff in hand;
Have care to wade discreetly,
And bring Me safe to strand.

Oft had the Giant wandered,
But for a Light that gleamed;
Whereof he deeply pondered,
Supposing that he dreamed.

All night I stride defiant
Across a span of stream,
Quoth Christopher the Giant;
I labour in a dream.

What strange thing doth betide me?
For all my members quake;
My bones are faint inside me;
My sinews knot and ache;
My wits are all astounded;
   My face is hoar with salt;
I walk in deeps unsounded...
   When straight the Light cried: Halt!

Thou'rt weary. Dost thou wonder,
   O Giant? Thou hast borne
The Father of the thunder
   Himself, from morn to morn.

August

What time the Child did travel,
   'To Pharaoh's land addressed,
When only roofless gravel
   Was all His place of rest,

He found a deputation
   Of beasts upon His path,
Who made a fair oration,
   And offered spoil and math.

The eagle was the speaker;
   (Who is the king of birds)
He spake for dumb and weaker,
   And these were all his words:

I have a perilous eyrie
   Where Thou may'st well repose.
Myself will never weary,
   But watch, and slay Thy foes.

A pair of storks invite Thee
   To share their lowland rest.
Their house may well delight Thee:
   Tis a capacious nest.

And softer than a billow
   Of down the thistles shed,
The eider-duck a pillow
   Provideth for Thy head.

A silly sheep conceiveth
   To offer Thee a coat.
The spider saith she weaveth
Exceeding neat by rote.

A board of lentils showeth
A rosy cockatoo;
The ears of corn he knoweth
Are neither lean nor few.

A basket filled with honey
The tribute of the bees;
Golder than Caesar's money...
I praise the gift of these.

A brace of kids relinquish
The moiety of their milk.
I can no more distinguish
The gifts of wool and silk.

The Bambino:

Lord eagle, tis My pleasure
Thou tell both bird and beast
I take and I will treasure
The gifts, unto the least.

I hold a strait commission
Which doth not yet allow,
In matter of condition
That I assume them now.

But in My house of plenty,
Where all repletion is,
Larder and press were scanty
If it were not for these.

September

The Morning Stars:

Praise Him whose humble birth
Vouchsafeth peace on earth.
The Sons of God:

Praise Him whose piercing word
Leaps from his lips a sword.

Whose eye, exceeding bright,
Shameth the crysolite.

Whose roseleaf lips inform
The trumpet of the storm.

Through the mysterious deep
Leadeth ourselves like sheep.

Who from the fodder crib
Maimeth Sennacherib.

Who in or east or west
Findeth no place of rest.

Who holdeth west and east
Fast in his giant fist.

Who is more perfect than
Is any other man.

Who maketh His abode
Earth, which He made as God.

October

A jewel of the painter's art:
With little flames made gay,
A silk screen sundereth apart
The country and the day.

Before the which that Carmelite,
The grown, ecstatic John,
Beareth the Infant clothed with light
And clad in mellow lawn.

Saint, who was born and grew and aged,
To whom did ne'er belong
A groat of worldly good, who caged
The Indies in a song.
Reverend Child, Thy ward beside,  
John writeth in a book;  
And at his next hand, near allied,  
Thy cousin of the brook.

Such company in scope so small  
Hold and behold Thee, Sun!  
One light is the desire of all,  
And John is every one.

Another bears that round, rich name,  
Thine eye may light upon;  
Child, in a corner, next the frame,  
The poorest, poorest John.

November

Holy Mary:

The beauty of the world, the fame of men,  
And all things excellent soe’r that be,  
The swarming glories of the pompous pen,  
Are all too frail ephemeral for Thee.

When Thou hast culled the singers’ liberal fee,  
When Bernards halt and Jacopones tire,  
When island nightingales beyond the sea  
Swell Thy renown, the great earth’s greatest choir;

When the staunch flames of their melodious fire  
Fantastic leap to heaven and beget  
The aching torment of a world’s desire,  
To fall before Thy feet in worship; yet

Still to my ardent heart their fire is snow.  
My heart knows more than all the poets know.
December *

Psyche yields her heart to the Jesus Child.
From the German of the Angel of Silesia.

My little Jesus Child, I come
With childlike step to Thee;
My heart in Thine would leave its sum
Of pain, and so be free.
Child, my heart is at Thy feet;
Make it sweet,
Like Thy little heart to beat.

Withered it is, and strength hath none,
All shrivelled with the frost;
The divine sap Thou giv'st alone
Can bid it not be lost.
Take, O Jesus Child, my heart;
Give it part
In the must of Thy sweet heart.

And ever it doth sigh and groan
Lest haply Thou should'st lose it;
Thou, who hast made of it Thine own,
From all the world did'st choose it.
Take my heart, o Child, Thou pure;
Make it sure
In Thy little heart, Thou pure.

It longs, it longs most inwardly,
To live in Thee again,
And to Thy heart eternally
A staunch heart to remain.
Take it, Jesus Child, to Thee;
Let it be
Always, little Heart, with Thee.