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POETRY  
CHAP-BOOKS



Twenty and After

*by*

NATHANIEL A. BENSON

OF THIS edition of *Twenty and After*, by Nathaniel A. Benson, two hundred and fifty copies have been printed. This Chap-book is a production of The Ryerson Press, Toronto, Canada.

*Twenty and After* won the Jardine Memorial Prize for English for 1926.

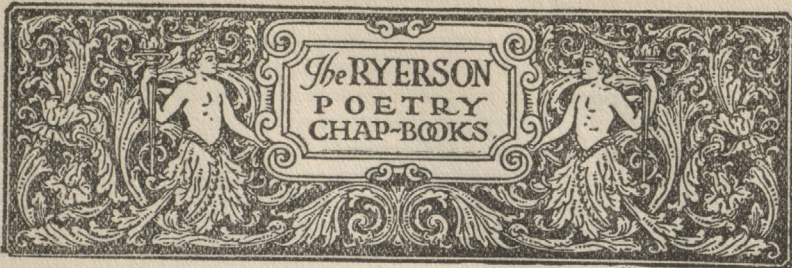
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# Twenty and After

*By Nathaniel A. Benson*

"Who ever has loved knows all that  
life contains of sorrow and of joy."

—*Georges Sand*



## TWENTY AND AFTER

I WRITE of one beloved upon her day,  
 September day that dowered sightless earth  
 With stronger light than summer suns provide,  
 For one's the world, and when his course is done  
 'Tis doomsday. Man's the earth, and hence this life  
 The troubled orbit wherein strangely rolls  
 He that is less than sand, yet universe—  
 Thus being man, I am the All and say  
 Creation donned but nineteen years ago  
 A greater brilliance than sky-watchers' eyes  
 Discern round Saturn in his molten ring  
 Of wondrous and terrific girdle-fire. . . .

You are the beauty that was made by God,  
 Unfashioned from a human impulse brief  
 Of parentage, or yet by misty chance,  
 Or any force one atom less or lower  
 Than high Divinity. 'Tis not conceit  
 Attributes unto God the forming fair

*One*

Of what gave splendour deep and ecstasy,  
 More rich for brevity, unto my waiting heart,  
 For not until I parted every tress  
 Of your soft-falling hair with kisses slow  
 And gently sealed your eyelids fast in sleep  
 With reverent lips, did each awakened sense  
 Own God was glory and His rarest gift  
 Transcendent love, made manifest in you.  
 That God is love man saith, then swift denies  
 The holiness and sanctity set strong,  
 High-altared in the heart—but sacrilege  
 Is sooner punished than a paltering sin,  
 For woe more endless than the night of hell  
 Becomes the bread of life, the penance-food  
 Slow-eaten on the ashes of remorse  
 That pave the icy temple of the soul,  
 While swathed in futile sackcloth there attends  
 Voiceless Repentance at the grievous feast.—  
 Woe, woe, untold as waters of the sea  
 Be his who dares withhold his Godhead's due!  
 Of such am I, and all the chastisement  
 I undergo with each lead-heavy hour  
 Is more than merited and thrice-deserved,  
 And as succeeding Tophet-depths I gain,  
 The scarlet last Gehenna ending all,  
 Unblest by any cooling ray of light,  
 Is to behold one worship newly there  
 With faith devout and joy that once were mine.  
 So be it, for 'tis comfort sore to know,  
 As some true flagellant that scars his flesh,  
 My sorrow is proportioned to my sin,  
 Since Justice holds life-telling balance forth  
 With unforgiving arm of marble strength,  
 And in her scales, wrought golden out of time,  
 My faults amassed exactly level rest  
 With retributions of like altitude.

The mysteries of earth I contemplate  
 With clearer gaze than when most joyous-eyed  
 I termed them each inconsequent and small,  
 For when one girds himself with envied robes  
 Of happiness, and mounts the throne of joy,  
 He drops as alms to the ill-fortunate  
 Sore, crouching swarm of pain-torn suppliants  
 Thin pity and weak sympathy both born

Of ignorance, and reared in safety far  
From suffering and anguish of his own;  
Then, taught of sorrow parented by joy,  
One learns to know the searing miseries  
Outwearing other breasts, to which he lends,  
Not useless unguents and barren balms,  
But understanding of a kindred heart.  
Thus situate I shall in plenty give  
To all whom chance may lead across my way  
No swift advice, nor solace readily  
Poured on a wound my bosom never knew,  
But healing drawn from native ancient scars.  
Then if dark tides should distant move your peace,  
If all the flame of life should prove your soul,  
I beg you come, and half the sinking weight  
Shall best be borne upon a weakness turned  
To strength in bearing burdens long before,  
And you shall find upon my breast a sleep  
That's only gained in unlapsed silences  
With sentinel and guardian who has stilled  
The clamours that destroyed his quietude;  
For who should better know the touch to quell  
Your grief than one who gave you pain before,  
Eased that awhile, and brought a second woe  
That doomed forever future peace with him?  
I was a creature love had never tamed,  
I roved uncertain in my wilderness,  
The willing captive of a gentle hand  
Who, tasting timidly of joy from you,  
Slowly partook and dimly realized  
That he before had fared but scant and ill  
On roots of solitude and sweetless fruits  
Of youth. With slow-believing eagerness  
I closer came and found I truly fed  
On all that love and loveliness had stored  
For one who never knew such precious food  
Grew elsewhere than in fond and fleeting dreams,  
In fair imaginings, in faery woods  
That guard the first Ideal. With rapture wild  
I drew more near unto the proffered gift  
To taste ambrosia of a rich delight  
That gods have never known, nor mortal men  
Found blossoming in any fields of earth.  
A joy too great, a light that blinds the eye,  
As looking on the vision-burning sun,

Made all my sense doubt long that this could be,  
That magic portals opened at my touch,  
That beauty whose beholding charms the sight,  
That glory whose existence is its own  
Denial of being should be showered on me.  
I felt that rosebuds softly whispering  
Of pure delights unborn caressed mine ear,  
I heard a Song immortal, infinite,  
Unmeant for mortal hearing, swelling low,  
I saw a vision as of Paphian foam,  
Of goddesses in triple wonder met  
On fairer mountain far than Ida was,  
When that rash youth surrendered to the flame  
The peace within his heart, his country's weal,  
For less, far less than I at once attained.  
The face that launched a thousand triremes' strength  
And drew the furied Achive power to Troy,  
Shaking Olympus and its shining host,  
Is framed with centuries of adoration deep,  
But all these are more scant enshrinement than  
My moment's blinding rapture that has set  
One form untarnished, o'er the clouding breath  
Of even compare. Wonder, standing dumb,  
Proclaimed her unapproached and thrice as fair  
As Helen or white-armed Nausicaa.

The gods of Greece were beauty, but our God  
Is truth when firmly templed in the mind;  
His truth being proven thus despite my doubt,  
I knelt to thank Him for such pledge of power,  
Even as Jairus, when the maid restored  
Spake words no fonder than were those I heard.  
'Tis thus that miracles renew a faith  
Time-weakened, half-existent, though it longs  
With passion to believe again the Strength  
Accomplishing what lies beyond our hands.  
And who was I to doubt diviner gifts  
Than those the prophets tell for evermore?  
I stood unworthy, asking who was I  
That I should find so soon my full desire.  
Amazement passed, I questioned truth no more  
And gained the blissful and serene content  
That folds the furthest wishes unexpressed  
When these meet gratifying past their flight.

O thus we were, so dear, so fondly close  
That even He who gave did much intrude  
A sacred presence in a world of two  
Where only love supremely held her sway  
And hurried time so swiftly in his march  
That day passed day and night succeeded night  
Without their passage printing slightest tread.  
We walked enchanted gardens in the dawn,  
We watched the stars' gold blossoming at eve,  
We heard faint faery pipes play down the lawn,  
Knew glories that the sense scarce dares believe.  
O, this was ecstasy, and heaven fell  
To low estate, since visions never formed  
A realm more perfect than we ruled alone  
With dreams come true to hush reality.

In bonds of verse my feeling must remain,  
To choose for narrow line a careful word  
When all my soul so changed by Feeling's wand  
With passion uncontrollable and wild  
As Shelley's spirit pleading to the wind,—  
When this held force, if one brief instant freed,  
Would loose a torrent fiercer than the flow  
Of rapid rivers in their springtide strength,  
And ardour thus unbound from reason's chain  
Could tell no more the radiance we knew  
Than torches tossing thin gold hair in night  
Replace the Gleam that clothes the world with day.

Can one not represent more clearly life  
In pointing sadly, solemnly to man?  
Cannot one sink and find in simplest things  
A poignance more appealing than a tear,  
Or not restore a flower's May-month scent  
With one pressed petal of its fulness fled?  
One lock of hair, when mused on tenderly  
Through silver veils of unreluctant tears,  
Ransoms from year-clad death or death in life  
The Whole, the flawless Being and the Flame  
Of which we hold one single wistful spark;  
And so evoked with pipes of memory,  
The dryad-form long-buried in the shades  
Comes light as ever, softly treading near  
With soundless step in ancient well-known way

Across the years, and down the dim-arched past  
With individual remembered grace.

The simple things, the small sad jewels we knew  
Are magic opals that renew awhile  
The hallowed lands of life, the sacred groves,  
The morris-circles where a vanished dance  
Long, long ago was traced in fragrant woods  
Now riven by the tempest-strokes of time.—  
What is this life, beloved? Collection made  
Of smooth white pearls of sorrow, and of red  
Faint-glowing rubies that betoken joy;  
We gather these and thread them solemnly  
Upon the hidden cord of years' fixed length.  
We drop them slowly, one by one, and hear  
The clear small sound their little falling makes,  
And when we've done, God sees completed there  
The necklace that is life, and fits the clasp  
Of death to join old age with infancy.

I fain would speak—I spoke (but missed the path  
As I have done in life)—of simple things,  
Brief memories, faint fingering of the heart  
By sad fragilities that haunt the mind.  
Dear, we have been so closely welded one,  
Have unmistakably heard the mystic Voice  
That prompts the acts upon this darkened stage.  
Recall you how we saw strange joy new-born  
In morning, how in eve found secrecy  
So still that twilight breezes stealing forth  
Moved not a leaf unseen by us and known  
With fraught significance within our world?  
We sensed a mercy in the falling snow,  
Especial anger in the thunderstorm,  
Knew rich magnificence and courage gained  
From sunsets' gold, and felt each star was set  
More strongly steadfast than the fading orb  
That Keats invoked one silent night at sea.  
We heard the long blue waves in summer roll  
With even voice upon the lonely shore,  
And in the quiet forests dwelt with peace  
In that sufficiency which silence drew  
As some soft azure cloak about our hearts.  
We had not need of words, for stillness was  
The song of love, and words had all been said,



Three perfect words the lips mould haltingly  
And breathe with furtive whisper to an ear  
Warm as the rose and petalled to receive  
The pledge that bears a treasure all away  
To render it again an hundredfold  
More rich than value's highest reckoning.

These words I spoke and called them ancient, worn  
In utterance, but echoed soft by you  
With tenderness no other speech may tell  
Nor sophistries deny, nor future voice  
May ever know again, they held a power  
That thundered from dread Sinai with the law,  
A triumph never won by conqueror,  
A light outshining sun and moon and star,  
A music dulcet lute shall never give,  
A peace that poppied warmth may not unfold,  
The glory maddening-sweet a mother gains  
To feel her first-born nursing at her breast.  
'Twas these that I possessed, for glad my arms  
Clasped, not the void I dreamed might yet be filled,  
But promise kept that life had always made  
And left neglected long. 'Twas also these  
You found your own, for I heard murmurings  
That I was first and should be last with you.  
Dear, love that's first is most unlike this earth,  
It comes of innocence which never loved,  
Deep from a fruitful and untended soil  
That had no sign one distant magic May  
Would draw a warmth-awakened perfect bud  
From seed that angels sowed in childhood's sleep.  
And this was ours, the stainless joy that wells  
From vestal chanting in white temples' peace  
Where silence as a censer balms the air.  
So long we knelt in tranquil sanctity,  
Saw sunrise gild the marble altar-stone,  
And sunset warm the pillars' white to rose;  
Then in the night Idalian Venus came  
In quivering beauty with her limbs unveiled;  
Voluptuously her half-revealed form  
Swayed madly from the passioned shadows' place  
And swift soft hands touched fire to our brows. . . .

'Tis well to speak of goddesses and gods  
And so from weak mortality remove

Its weakness, yet my wisdom strongly doubts  
An unshut Eye is watching every deed,  
Each wild sweet act our impulsed hands perform,  
For even the deeds which in the doing seem  
Most consecrate to heaven ever are  
But instant passions sweeping reason down  
To nothingness, while wisdom fettered fast  
In golden cords of joyance helpless lies,  
Raising one strengthless whisper all-annulled  
Beneath the thunder of Cybele's car.  
Would that we had, not eager lips beguiled  
By Dead Sea fruit, by Sodom-apples' hue  
That snare the sight, and to the fired touch  
More consummation are than the clasp of prayer.  
Would that we had, not eyes that only see  
Light whose imagining makes faint the sense,  
But vision that sees an even in the dawn,  
That knows the white and gently-floating cloud  
As fell harbinger of earth-smiting storm.  
Would that our ears, unlulled by haunting lute  
And pleasant-timbrel sounds, might truly hear  
Olympian thunder rolling overhead.  
Yet constant hope throbs slowly in our hearts  
That we may win an immortality,  
To think deliberate as do the gods  
And act such noble thought in form of man.

Man's never god when god-like deeds await  
Slow to be done in way most circumspect,  
He then is man with abject meanness tossed  
Upon the storm-lashed sea of circumstance.  
Man only wears the shape of god when come  
Sad brother-mortals begging comfort bare,  
Asking advice, and when advice is given  
'Tis disobeyed in balance with its worth.  
Go, tell the wretch to plunge himself headlong  
To glowing pits of hell, to writhing pain,  
And slow he goes to find the path to heaven;  
Tell him more calmly with judicious mien  
That blastment boils beneath his present tread,  
That black abysses wait his instant step,  
That reasoned care must dominate his way,  
And swift he hurls himself into the gulf.  
"Sad fool," says one, to see the broken form,  
"His fate lies much removed from road of mine."

And ere the minute sixty seconds knows  
Lie counselor and victim side by side.

O would that I, the saddest of mankind,  
Made pausing thus when reason owned a price,  
Or thought one fleeting trace of all I write,  
But as Hippomenes when love had won  
Him fairer guerdon than the goddess' self,  
I knew not how to guard love's precious prize. . . .  
Lament, lament for all that might have been  
Makes up the burden of our mortal song,  
And, substitute for hymns of victory,  
We drone low dirge for joys we might have known.  
We smile, unknowing of the transience  
That pleasure wears, a swift-dissolving robe.

"O, what is life?" the poet cried and fled—  
And making bold I offer answer thus:  
A maiden in the meadow walked at dawn,  
Song on her lips and blithely-hearted she  
Espied twin roses nodding to the light,  
The first she plucked and in her bosom pressed,  
The other left to drink the morning air.  
The beauty at her breast found there so sweet  
A couch for slumber, that it slept to death,  
And in a rain of faded petals fell  
About her feet. Long stared the saddened maid  
And marvelled that so rich a fragrance breathed  
Once from the little things upon the earth.  
Said she: "Its sister-bud was twice as fair,  
And yet I chose to pluck the lesser bloom."  
On tired foot she backward turned to find  
The meadow once again, the timeless flower;  
Through morningtide, through sultry golden noon  
And afternoon she searched till twilight came,  
But never found the place. Then in the night  
Beneath the myrtle and its mourning boughs  
She laid her down upon the chilly grass  
Where fell the petals, but the wind had borne  
Even these afar, save only one that lay  
Sad in the moonlight's pale and weeping beam.  
The midnight came and with it wilding storm—  
Then all were not, the maid, the gathered joy  
And that which never knew sweet gathering.  
For after childhood, youth, brief love, and age,

Sleep man, his pleasure and his joys unknown,  
And when doom's whirlwind strikes the smiling plain,  
The falling sheaves are blown within the grange  
Of the eternal Winnower. 'Tis then  
The thickest sheaf with all its stalks unbound  
Yields but the poorest and most withered grain.  
And that which drooped upon the field of life  
Stands upright and erect, presenting God  
With ripened fulness guessed alone by Him.  
I think that He believes, as few surmise,  
There are not Good or Evil, roads opposed  
For taking, but that quarried mortal stone  
Bears scar and beauty, patterns intricate  
Limned ere the hewing in the hidden earth.  
The good are strong, the evil are but weak,  
The first are Fortune's nurslings, and the last  
Are foster-children of grim Destiny,  
Born with sore travail in the caravan  
Of chance, and cast upon the thorny way  
To strive for thin subsistence, for the crust  
Of bitter sorrowing, gaunt-visaged wraiths  
Warning the safer souls in hours of doubt  
That virtue is the door of happiness.

Have done, have done with pale philosophy!  
For when the morning's trump with joyous call  
Awakens youth to action, to the race  
That must be finished with the setting sun,  
Who waits to hear the mentor's mumbled word?  
There are no gulfs, no walls however high  
Which may not be o'erleapt by youthful feet,  
And serpents in the dust with tactile tongue  
Must miss the lightning pace of passioned limbs—  
So reasons youth. Then let the chafing cord  
Fall swift to speed him on his leaguered course.  
Peril is high adventure, and the breath  
Of danger on the cheek's a quickening flame  
That lights the way in every Orcian vale.  
Then up the stony slope, the tortured path,  
For on the heights shall shine the splendid sun!

'Twas thus we ran with limbs magnificent  
So evenly in matched and rapid grace  
That all the winds were panting at our side  
In vain endeavour to surpass our gait.

We drank the golden air as if there flashed  
A sparkling instant goblet to our lips,  
While from all earth and sky we seemed to draw  
A courage still-renewed and ever strong.  
We raced to joy immortal—'tis the crown  
That effort wears when once the goal is gained.

A gleaming apple on the sand was rolled  
And swift we stopped to make the wonder ours,  
Then swifter ran to catch the moment lost,  
Unhampered by the weight of treasure won.  
The goddess tossed a second in the path,  
We garnered that and speedily ran on.  
I passed my joy to you, and, laughing low,  
Beheld your smile on clasping double trove.  
The course turned steep, but resolute we ran,  
I strode upon the wind, and felt it blow  
Revivifying coolness through my veins.  
I shouted loud in most triumphant strength,  
Then suddenly—you cried—and swift the cry  
You stifled. I turned quick to know its cause—  
“A pebble in the path—a paltry thing—  
No matter—on!” you panted low and kept  
Your strength for sterner trial that lay ahead.  
I raced, yet wondered at your sudden call  
And then—more sharp you cried aloud again.  
What could it be? I never guessed the pain  
Of weakness not my own, and then I thought  
A phantom poniard entered in my breast—  
I thought—and then I knew.

We ceased to run,  
I saw upon your cheek the pallid hue  
Of weariness, a brave and dying light  
Slow-conquered, yet unyielding in your eyes.  
Your paling lips were dry and parted wide  
To drink the chill and unsustaining air,  
While at your side a trembling hand was pressed  
As though to bind within the torture there.  
Your fingers curved as though you would tear forth  
The leaping flame that strength could not subdue.  
The race forgotten as though never run,  
I fondly sought your pain and pleading strove  
To feel, to know, create a pang allied.  
We had shared joy, and agony's red cup

Should not be yours alone. With eager hands  
I grasped for it, and found the lees were drained.  
I hurled the bitter thing in furied grief  
To fragments on the icy jagged stones  
That lay beneath and pierced our aching limbs.  
I raised my eyes—but no! Should I believe?  
I did not know the wilderness around;

A grey grim bourne where we had never been,  
Where cruel cold pinnacles of chilling white  
Rose tortured in the ever-thickening mist,  
While trembled in the parch-dry livid grass  
Pale blooms with ashen cups, and asphodels.  
And to their bladed brims each one was filled,  
Not rich with honey, but with crimson blood.  
Portentously there struck upon mine ear  
The faint low booming of a distant sea  
Surging in tempest of unsated wrath.  
Black trees enmassed in horror hugely stood,  
Their trunks an ebon gleam, brown leaves like hands  
Gigantic, terrible, and swaying slow  
In some ghost-wind malign, but all unfelt,  
Save by gaunt boughs that shuddered in the fog.  
A weird vile Presence seemed to curse the place  
With all the stinking splendour of his spell.  
Great grisly forms stole forth from depths unseen,  
Barbed heels, half-visible upon the stones  
Passed sharply scraping, yet unswervingly,  
And pale battalions slowly groped  
With sightless shining eyes and leprous limbs,  
Glinting and moaning, hundreds hideous.  
I shrieked, and loud you echoed all my cry—  
Then screaming fury burst above our heads,  
And flaming levin-lashes clove the mist  
To burn the reddest scars on trembling earth;  
The dull low chanting of the damned arose  
From pits Cimmerian—I clutched your hand.  
We ran, we ran in frenzy out of hell  
Unmindful of the seizing thwarted claws  
Thrust forth on every side with nameless sting,  
As through the peopled vast we fled away.

I seemed to race afar for centuries  
Before I fell exhausted to the earth,  
And when the morning broke I was alone,

Alone and lying on the level sand  
Where cold white waters in monotony  
Plashed low and dully. That you were not there  
My senses told, and yet I wondered still.  
I never thought to wake again to life,  
And you? lost, all-unsentient, and dead?  
You that had been so fairer yet than fair  
That all the morning marvelled at your eyes,  
Who solely owned a touch so gently given  
That winds untaught came low in secrecy  
To learn caresses the young leaves would love;  
But earth was here—and sky—and shore—and sea,  
And you were gone who gave earth all her spring.  
Then why not I?—for flowers scent the mould  
When sunlight days are done. Life is but death  
When fire to live is gone, and gone were you.  
I seemed a thing most reasonless in life,  
Of meaning barren and of purpose lost,  
Still-born to lightless life as are the blind;  
My eyes though seeing naught, had naught to see  
And limbs, thoughts, senses, once so dazzling-swift  
Were stiffened boughs in silent winter-night  
Without the snowy cloak of death to hide.

I lay still motionless upon the earth,  
Motion demanding reason knew of none;  
I only was, without one cause to be  
In mystic Nod. I thought of conquerors  
In triumph crashing down the centuries  
To ruin: proud Ptolemys and Persian kings,  
The joyous strength of Greece, young Macedon  
Beneath old Ammon's son, west-rising Rome  
Whose bannered eagles made majestic flight  
From Tamesis to Oxus, came the Man  
Who spake of Paradise at God's right hand. . . .  
Slow I remembered. . . . I had fallen too,  
Yet not in purity as snow to earth,  
But hurled like Lucifer from highest heaven.  
By warm Euphrates and the Tigris' stream  
I once had gone accompanied. I left  
The god-like state, and mortal, thus I lay  
In living sad interment on the sand  
Beside the palest and most sombre sea.

Long-widowed Memory has bitter power  
With keening wail that stirs the shrouded dead  
And creeps within the cold and earth-stopt ear,  
For 'neath the weeds that sobbing mourner wears  
The quick and still join frightened, friendless hands.  
Within my heart I heard the plaintive moan,  
Obeyed and tried my most unsteady limbs  
That senilely responded, tottering,  
Weak matter subjugate to forming will.  
Would these same limbs that once outpaced the wind  
Endure the journey destiny ordained?  
For 'tis a long and never-measured way  
That winds and leads to Eden once again,  
Through pallid plains and many numbing wastes  
Which lie within the kingdom of remorse,  
Through arid steppes and deserts limitless,  
The country of unhorizoned Regret,  
Through ranges mountainous of grim Reproach  
Stabbing cold clouds of damned and withered dreams.  
Long æons seemed to pass with trials untold  
In backward march to my remembered spring.  
I flung me spent and bleeding, half-alive,  
Upborne by Desperation and Despair  
Through the fierce final leagues until I reached  
The mighty portal, and the flaming sword  
One moment ceased to swing. I lay within.

In all its glory Eden shone again,  
Unending summer, flowers infinite  
Of beauty, scent, and hue. Soft mossy ways  
Caressed my feet, and breezes lingering,  
Upraised my hair, while velvet-leaved boughs  
Brushed faint my passage down the verdant aisles.  
Unfading amber lilies bathed the sense  
With odours earthly roses never gave,  
Light emerald brooks streamed swift with joy intense  
While sunlight sparkled on each laughing wave;  
Jonquils and daisies nodded from the grass  
That wore the colour of immortal June,  
Rose-winged figures lightly floated past  
With flower-petals on their samite strewn.  
The boughs in leaf eternal arching high  
Gave perfect coverture, while foliage  
Hid pleasant dells, and ferns like tapestries  
Made setting rich for every joyous tree. . . .



And now mine eye remarked within the heart  
Of all the happy woodland round about  
One slim black cypress needling to the sky  
And, drawn inevitably as wind to leaf,  
I neared the quiet space where mystic gloom  
Stirred strangely forth from all the cypress' boughs.  
I saw beneath, half-sensing ere I saw,  
A narrow mound that rose above the sward,  
And there, beside that pitiful small hill,  
Grass-clad, and silent in its sacred peace,  
I slowly knelt and watered with my tears  
The place where angels laid in tenderness  
The loveliness and beauty that were you.

## DIRGE FOR POESY

**E**ARTH wakes no more,  
The Spirit's hymn is dead  
Save o'er one grave  
Where youth's first fire breathes red.  
Earth wakes no more,  
Her magic songs are still,  
No spring wind drives  
Sweet buds o'er plain and hill.

Youth's ecstasy  
Finds never god-like voice,  
No thousand hearts  
Awake and loud rejoice.  
The breast feels not  
A crimson-bursting glow,  
As winter noons  
With sun athwart the snow.

The silver cords  
Of the high lyre are loose,  
For sweetest songs  
Earth knows no gloried use.  
The swelling strains  
That rapture voiced for men  
Are quiet, spent  
And shall not sound again.

The harmony  
Of wind on forest-strings  
Strikes all unheard  
And folds great golden wings.  
The surging sea  
Stirs wonder forth no more—  
Now falls the wave  
Unanswered on the shore.

## APOLOGUE

**T**HERE are a thousand lovely lips to kiss  
And must I choose but one,  
Losing an heritage of gathered bliss  
When youth's brief day is done?

It is not joy to pass by field and flower  
And take one full-blown rose,  
Whose heart of red will deepen with an hour  
As he who gathers knows.

It is not well to drain one golden glass  
In passion's eager haste;  
The after-years bear goblets one must pass  
Of lost yet sweeter taste.

It is not fair to dream one only dream.  
That falls to sward from sky;  
The truth awakening must bring would seem:  
All guarded beauties lie.

It is not life to love one only love  
In ardour sweet and wild,  
Since Love, the king, lies dead upon his throne,  
Sorrow, his single child.



## THERMOMANIA

**T**HEY'RE sleeping in the Ward to-night  
Full five in a single bed,  
With fifty steaming toes in sight,  
With faces stewed and red  
Buried in grimy pillows tight  
In many a hovelly shed.

They're snoring in the Ward to-night  
In fat, warm kinsmen's ears  
Where beards of sleepers twine and fight  
And dry a drunkard's tears,  
And down in the Ward to-night, to-night  
The thick air never clears.

I too am hot, but I'm a ghost  
From coldest realms of dread  
To them. What really cools me most  
Is thought of faces red  
Where in the Ward they writhe and roast  
Five in a single bed.



## REVELATION

THE WEBS of silver poets weave  
Within their secret silent dreams  
Love not the noon, and light of noontide leave  
For palest far moon-beams.

The words of poets are not speech  
That graces all the common way,  
For measured beauty of one word can teach  
More than all volumes may.

The thoughts of poets rise like wings  
Of white birds wheeling in the sun,  
Cleave the bright sky, commune with hidden things  
In mystic silence won.

The hearts of poets are as birds  
Forth-venturing to seek the spring,  
But as first ardour fills their faery woods  
They find a bitter thing.

The loves of poets lend the skies  
A stainless and more sacred light—  
But when the glory, when the wonder dies  
There's nothing but the night.

## NIGHT-PIECE TO GILDA

WHEREVER rests her golden head  
A magic there is softly shed  
In peace across the purple night  
With steadfast beams of beauty's light.

With music there shall silence be  
Clothèd by lutes of mystery,  
And there the enchanted dark will lie  
Wrapt in a cloak of violet sky.

As on a couch of starlit roses  
In sleep her golden head reposes,  
While great archangels guard and bless  
That very bower of loveliness,

And as she sleeps my fancy dares  
Steal near to touch the gown she wears,  
Of innocence and beauty spun  
Of love and faith and truth made one.

Most wondrously twin veils of rose  
Two little lakes of heaven close  
Near fairies dancing bright and bold  
In sheaves of interweaving gold.

While floats the shallop of her dreams  
With silver sails on secret streams  
My thoughts in holiness are led  
Wherever rests her golden head.

## THE RETURNING

I WALKED an half-forgotten way again  
Where came two quiet lovers seen by none.  
These passed me, an unheeding happy twain  
Whom I shall follow always, being one.

The April stars were shining as before  
And spring lay warm and sweet upon the air;  
But springs shall come so tenderly no more  
As when the loves at twenty wandered there.

The small rose windows with an ancient light  
Most slowly led me onward. Three long years  
Fell like a cloak. Old ardours brimmed the night—  
But suddenly came truth and time and tears.

An empty hearth is dark with silent embers,  
One has forgotten and one still remembers.



## QUEEN STREET

A GREAT green holy Candle dripped to earth  
These most misshapen grim grotesqueries  
And willed that time should bear in bitter birth  
This highway rich with sad monstrosities:

Harlots most venerable, cinders of the flame  
Stalking in furtive spent futility  
The phallic swarthy foes who fired their fame  
To piteousness all archangels flee.

These are the enigmatic jests of heaven,  
Burning and sobbing down red arches seven  
And crushing dry vermilion grapes again,

These suplicants who dance at death's drab portal  
Mock and deny desire of life immortal,  
Consoling brutes that may not rise with men.

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