Sunset Songs and Thistle Themes
Warren Howell
SUNSET SONGS
AND
THISTLE THEMES
WARREN HOWELL
Sunset Songs and Thistle Themes,
Summer skies and laughing streams,
Winter woods and evergreens,
Autumn's flaming days between;
Life!—I wonder what it means?
SUNSET SONGS AND
THISTLE THEMES

BY
WARREN HOWELL

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Lovingly inscribed to one
M. S. C., with earnest gratitude
and devoted love.

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THE AUTHOR

I was born at Bay Shore, Long Island, New York, in the year 1902. On my mother's side I am a direct descendant of the old Whitman family; being, incidentally, a distant cousin of the illustrious "Walt," of which I am justifiably proud.

I was educated at the Bay Shore Schools, including some knowledge of music by a competent instructor and organist. I seem to possess, though I suppose I should be the last to say it, a natural aptitude for music and versifying; and the English and rhetoric classes, while a student at school, were responsible for the most delightful and exquisite hours of my whole career. Aside from these classes, however, I regarded my school life as a trial and, always, a tedious ordeal. From the beginning I seemed utterly destitute of any mathematical sense and when graduation was imminent, behold, my old incubus arose with smoking nostrils and crushed me completely.

Since leaving school I have acted in the capacity of employee for various institutions in my native town, such as the Weekly Newspapers, in which latter case I served as correspondent and reporter for a time on the countyseat publication, "The County Review."

Poetry, albeit, has always been my "ruling passion," so to speak, and it is in this that I trust to eke out a livelihood, an end which has centered practically all of my studies and time.
THE AUTHOR

I am twenty-one; and, as we can forgive youth anything, I trust this honest first attempt in the wake of those difficult and elusive Muses will not cause me to appear utterly incorrigible.

W. H.
SUNSET SONGS
AND
THISTLE THEMES
SUNSET SONGS AND THISTLE THEMES

THREE THOUGHTS

There is a dream I cannot dream
Or even calmly contemplate,
Oh, hateful little Autumn stream,
The leaves are falling late—
—late!

I know that I am something more
Than waves that break along the shore,
Than mist that lies upon the hills
When Spring is gone and Autumn chills
Infest the field and moor.

As I have lived, so shall I lie down at last,
Weary and willing to pass,
Like some tired shadow on the grass,
Into the bosom of the Past!

THOUGHTS OF EMPTY AIR

Oh, do not forget me,
That I could not bear,
Yet how can your cherish
Hope that soon will perish
Thoughts of empty air?
I am sowing thoughts tonight
Upon a fertile plain,
And when the harvest moon is white
I'll gather in the grain.

The little hand that guided me shall lead me on
Unto those vales of peace I sought so long,
The haughty heart that chided me, when I am gone
Shall long for me, as even now I long.

I know there is a grave ahead
Whose walls are dank and cold,
My hope will be a catafalque,
My aspirations—mould!

Fair Day has swooned; approaches fondly Night
Hoping to hold in her devoted arms,
Kissing empurpled lips, but all her charms
Avail not. Slender shafts of livid light
Slowly withdraw in copper shot with white,
Beyond a supine bay whose distance warms
Even the darkening heaven. Vague alarms
Scatter the silent gulls into swift flight.
Now wink the stars o'er sea and sombre land,
The moon, a solitary traveler, looks down
Between the trees and steeples; seems to stand
Inquisitive of mortals in the town,
Revealing lovers on the shining sand;
Night gives to men what cannot be her own.

Death

Who art Thou, fearful Conqueror of Men,
Before Whose awful presence Emperors quail,
Who hov'rest near when Autumn roses ail,
And ere the snows of Winter come again
Doth garner up much harvest to Thy den;
The happy Child who laughed and then grew pale
Unto his grave is borne with moan and wail;
Thou marked him with Thy skinny finger when
Last even he fell ill at play. Chide
We may; our Pride sleeps with us in our grave,
The poor, the rich lie equal side by side;
The Child rests with the Poet and the Slave,
All sleep together with their puppet Pride,
God calls unto Himself the life He gave.

THE NIGHT SONG

We danced and sang, our laughter rang
Upon a moonlit sea,
The songs we sung, when hearts were young
Come back again to me.

Though Youth be gone, and the merry throng
That danced beneath the trees;
Where are they now? Yes, gone, but how?
Across the distant seas.
The air again is filled as when  
The woodwinds played and sighed;  
The moonlight sleeps, the willow weeps,  
And frets the pool beside.

I gaze therein, and look again;  
Am I that dancer gay,  
Who, dancing, ran to pipes of Pan  
Upon that happy day?

I startled cry, "Can this be I?  
So wrinkled, aye, so old!"  
Then search again, but search in vain  
To find the path of gold.

Remains no song—its cadence gone,  
Broken the lute forever!  
A reed that's bent, a life that's spent,  
Youth sped returneth never!

THE DEAD PRIEST

Return unto my breast,  
O little Priest of Love,  
Return unto the Temple of my Heart!  
Bring back peace and rest,  
The hush that I love best;  
And never, never more from me depart!

The censer swings but slow—  
O hasten to come home!  
The guttering tapers smoulder out—expire;  
The altar-lamps are low,  
Make the organ blow,  
Return unto the Courts of my Desire!
My cry is answered not,
My Priest has forget!
"Return, return, have mercy on my lot!"
But Fast will not return,
A cold, empty urn,
Ashes white where once red coals burnt hot!

NIGHT THOUGHTS

Last night, my Spirit cold and shrunken
Looked in the glass a visage sunken
Sallowish, sick, with hectic cheek,
Bathed in yellow candle streak,
Disheveled hair, tawny throat,
Ghoulish, protuberant eyes that gloat;
Animal, sensual, ugliness supreme,
The countenance unwashed, unkempt, unclean.

I looked and looked and looked in vain,
I glared into the glass again!
Then shrank away, my black Soul burning,
My blood congealed, thick, churning:
What Spectre that a-leering there,
Grinning, frowning, Phantom, Air?
My candle guttered, fluttered, spluttered,
Somewhere an eerie voice uttered:
"Thyself it is reflected there!"

Myself! tremendous, o'erwhelming thought,
Terrible, terrific, am I distraught?
Myself! God! What awful guise!
Who peeps behind those glassy eyes,
Who looks without? Does he despise?
Who can, who could, who would surmise
Myself?
Listen to the music of the rain,
To its prancing and its dancing on the pane!
It is falling, falling, falling,
With a violence appalling,
Beating rhyme and time enthralling
To the wind’s insatiate bawling.
Listen to the rain!

Listen to the music of the wind,
As it tears along the eaves and shakes the blind.
It is crashing, lashing, slashing
Through the branches where its dashing
Cleaves the limbs with wicked gashing
Sprinkling life where rain is splashing!
Listen to the wind!

Listen to the music of your soul,
As she sickens ere she quickens for the goal,
Ah, she's dying, dying, dying,
You may beat your breast denying,
But you cannot still her crying,
Wind and rain alone replying.
Listen to your soul!

Yesterday came and faded away,
But ere her western skies grew grey,
Ere she had grown old and was on the wane,
I knew too well she had lived in vain!

Her lamps departed and thick night came on,
Yet I felt 'twas well she had gone,
For oh, the loneliness of my breast!
I was glad for the night and her kindly rest!
This day arrived in molten bars
Vomited up from heaven's belly of stars;
Night's gross darkness from her pathway fled,
But ere she lived, I knew she was dead!

Now she is gone, and drowned in dew
The roses that bent to let her through,
While down my cheeks stream hot tears of sorrow,
"Oh, God of the Soul, where is Tomorrow?"

Methinks she is dead like the thoughts in my brain,
Her bright feathers wet from Yesterday's rain;
She cannot fly forth from the East where she's sleeping,
Her plumage is wet, her bright pinions seeping From tears of the heart, and the soul's endless weeping!

I have drowned her, O Christ, in the gall of my heart,
My dispirited self has torn her apart,
I bathed her, I steeped her in red blood of sorrow, I have mangled, despoiled—I have killed my Tomorrow!

REQUIESCAT

Thou art not gone from me,
Thou art asleep,
There is no death for thee,
Why do I weep?

In every sunny place
Where winds are low
I see thy lovely face,
I cannot know
That thou art gone away
Beyond the hill,
Oh, let me think and pray
Beside me still!

Beside me all the way,
Though it be steep,
Thou art not dead today,
Thou art asleep!

TWILIGHT

Through painted, radiant windows comes
The faint, dusky light of Twilight drums
Beating into the dusty organ loft,
Whence trembling melody, warm and soft
Sends forth its cheery, glinting ray;
And, methinks, were I cold clay,
I still should tremble and respond
To that grand, o’erwhelming, glorious sound!

'Tis suddenly changed, a whispering hint
Of sparkling waters, fountains’ glint
In a trembling, Springtime, rain-washed sun.
Now, like choirs of angels singing,
Again like twilight vespers ringing
Across sombre, Sabbath, Autumn fields.
Suddenly o’erwhelmed Imagination yields
To burly blasts and thundering sound
Of trumpet-horn and battleground.

A sudden crash, the organ ceases,
Leaving numbed senses to confound
Whether silver pipes have finished their lays
Or whether eternal melody plays
Sweet tunes the trembling heart to hear
To well and dim the eye with a tear.
INSIGNIFICANCE

I love this daring scheme of things,
Man is so frugal and so thin!
I love the whir of fragile wings
That fan the greying coals of sin
Into a tiny spark.

Who would the Pagan mind eschew?
Does not the mist sleep in the hollow,
Azure skies smile quite as blue,
Shallow pools remain as shallow,
Ocean depths as deep?

Choose we or not to walk with God,
The path but not the plan is ours!
To pass where simple daisies nod
In peace, or taint our transient hours
With sullied, futile sin.

THE KISS

Kiss me! 'tis little enough—a farewell token,
And though no vain or idle word be spoken,
Such hallowed silence is more dear than eloquence—
Our soul's repartee.

Bless me! 'tis enough—a blessing from your heart;
For though the years may drift us seas apart
The densest gloom of Death could not dismiss—
Your lovely memory.
Kill me! your hands wet with my blood of life
Will obviate further parting. The fatal knife
You thrust into my heart and breast will be—
A last kiss from thee!

SPILT WINE

Comes a time when I am lonely, when the dark
trees intervene,
Intercepting light from heaven, painting shadows
on the green,
Red and golden flames the sunset, while a path
of molten fire
Leads from this, my little harbor, to the City of
Desire.

There, with domes of alabaster, spires of silver,
shining light
Floats the mystic, misty empire of a moonbeam
island white;
Lifting towers thin and lofty, phantom minarets
like spars,
Pale, majestic, dizzy steeples pricking heaven
and the stars.

Fades the city into darkness like a cloak that
covers me,
Glows the West in crimson glory like to wine spilt
in the sea;
It is something to be able, it is much, O God,
to me
To press wine from Fancy’s vineyard and to
spill it in the sea!
THISTLE THEMES

DREAMS

So all my dreams have come to this,
And this is nothing but a dream,
(And dreams you say are vain)
Then press my lips in one sweet kiss,
And let me dream again!

For nothing matters in a dream,
And castles fade away,
Fairy ships ride on a stream
That won't be there by day!

And I am made of dream-stuff, too,
Oh, sweetest thought sublime!
And in my dreaming have found you,
And dreaming spin this rhyme!

Oh, let me dream forever more,
Nor ever wake to find
Myself upon a lonely shore,
My darling left behind!

For dreaming is my only bliss,
Waking brings me pain,
Oh, crush my lips in one deep kiss,
And I'll not wake again!

FOR A SMALL BOY ON HIS BIRTHDAY

Thy thirteenth birthday, little boy!
I wish thee joy, I wish thee joy,
For I can remember, if I will,
A little boy only thirteen still
Sleeping alone on a windy hill!
But there! I did not mean to cry,
This is not the time for tear or sigh;
I won't remember, I'll be brave,
And yet, that lonely far-off grave!
I cannot, son, dismiss it quite,
I wander there most every night
In dreams, you know, when stars are bright.
It haunts me, dearest, that is why,
Forgive me, darling, if I cry.
Your fair, blue eyes are so like his,
Although perhaps you're taller,
He had a fair face, dear, like yours—
His features, they were smaller;
But something in your way and style,
Something in your roughish smile,
I can't but wonder and surmise
Perhaps he peeps out of your eyes!
Perhaps your soul and his are one,
Perhaps, indeed, you are my son!
Come here and kiss me, little boy,
I wish thee joy, I wish thee joy!

MOONLIGHT

Behold, her presence everywhere, above a mottled world,
Like to a shrouded maiden's corpse through mist and ether hurled;
Her fleshless finger points towards men, whose hopes grow wan and thin,
The worm awaits where shadowed gates swing wide to let them in.

Perceive, a dreary, dingy world basked in her ghoulish stare,
THISTLE THEMES

Take warning to thy heart tonight, dread death rides on her hair;
Her face is on the moor and vale—she sleeps on the wild sea’s breast,
But on the tombs which seal men’s dooms me-thinks there sleeps she best!

LILACS

Dear old-fashioned things, I love them,
Deep of purple as the sea,
With old-fashioned skies above them,
An old-fashioned lilac tree!

Dear old-fashioned things, God gave them,
Just to thrill me as they do,
Fraught with fancies, let me save them,
They will wither, not so you!

Why, today I see as plainly,
Just as plain as eye can see,
Though sometimes I seek you vainly,
Wondering where your soul can be.

Where the lilacs, dear, are blooming,
Glistening in the moonlit dew,
Where the soft night-winds are crooning,
There I find you blooming too!

Lost in beauty and in fragrance,
Lost, but never lost to me,
There the mind disports in vagrancy,
You brought lilacs once to me!
Dear old-fashioned things, I love them,
Deep of purple as the sea,
With old-fashioned skies above them,
I bring lilacs, dear, to thee!

IN MEMORIAM

I am still a-longing for one across the sea,
Where no mists are falling, where no shadows be.

I am still recalling the soul gone on before,
Whose fair beauty will not hold me ever more.

I am still replying to a voice I cannot hear,
Though sometimes it seems to me so far and yet so near!

On the beach I seek him when the day grows grey,
Is his spirit hov’ring o’er the sullen bay?

Lo, tonight the sun sank, and the weird, white sea gulls cried,
In my soul of fancy, methought him by my side!

Though his grave be mossy, the red leaves brown and dead,
Nightly, in my dreaming, he stands beside my bed.

See! the stars are shining where Night’s dark phantoms be,
And the shadows rising upon a moonlit sea!

Come to me, my darling, I love thee more and more,
Do you see me standing upon this barren shore?
I am still alonging for one across the sea,
Where no mists are falling, do you ever think of me?

RENDEZVOUS

My aching heart would bid thee rise,
And turn thy face to leaden skies
Where wild birds soar 'neath sullen clouds,
And all the earth grim Autumn shrouds.

My aching soul would bid thee smile,
And Autumn's havoc works defile:
Though leaves descend of burnished gold
Upon thy face where earth lies cold!

My aching heart would bid thee stand
With mine upon this barren land;
And watch the gore from Summer's side—
Summer dead and crucified!

Until you come from distant sea,
Or shore or sky, where'er you be,
No light shall in my soul be cast,
No ray of hope until the last!

But rather 'twill be Winter's seat,
A cave where all the winds shall meet—
A cheerless sepulchre—a tomb
Where dwells my spirit in the gloom!

'Twill thus remain until the day
When bonds that hold shall break away;
My spirit then shall loose the bars,
And seek for thee among the stars!
The Priest with solemn, God-like air
Crossed himself and breathed his prayer:

"Heavenly Father, God of men,
Lord, I seek Thee once again;
In despair I raise my voice,
In humility, my hands,
Yet, I cannot but rejoice,
Thou wilt answer my demands;

"Or heed them not, better still,
If perchance I ask Thee ill,
Thou Whose mind is greater than
The frugal, puny brain of man!

"Now, I raise my heart in praise—
Grant to me Thy countenance,
While this, the theme of endless lays,
This, the proof in evidence:
'God, dear Shepherd, art Thou there?
Thy silence answers every prayer!'"

While thus the Priest did pray and sing
The grumbling multitude would sting
His heart with noisome uttering,
Which mutterings bode of violence,
"The Priest's a fool; he prays for silence!"

WINTER DUSK

No sound is heard across the moor,
The snow lies fast and close and sure,
On crag and crest and mountain breast,
Sloping hills and sky and sea
A frozen, lifeless effigy.
Day is gone, the leaden light
A moment lingers on the sight,
A faltering, lonely altering,
Then crouching darkness occupies
The slopes where barren birches rise.

Death-like silence covers all,
Light grows wan and faint and small,
Shadowy woods of robes and hoods,
In silent masks stand grim and tall
Like mummies resting on a wall.

Now the old accustomed chill
Doth take to motion and distil
A blind and homeless winter wind,
Flaying, floundering, whistling shrill,
A sightless rider out to kill.

OH, SOMBRE DAYS

Oh, sombre days of mist and shadows calling;
Oh, sombre ways where yellow leaves are falling;
Oh, sombre thoughts crowding dreary avenues of Mind,
Whirling adown like dead leaves blown by a wintry wind
When days of snow are before us and nights are cold and blind!

Oh, sombre heart beating within my breast,
Soon, just we two, 'neath sombre skies shall rest!
Happy, if our Fate, instil some heart to mourn,
Hapless, if forgot, better to have been unborn!
Glorious! if some sombre thought of me may find
A welcome rest and room in some tranquil Autumn mind!
A MESSAGE FROM THE NIGHT

Tonight, when passing down the street,  
Methought I heard the sound of feet,  
Veiled was the horned moon's limpid light,  
I paused, turned, there was but night.

I sighed, and walking on once more,  
With bosom pained and heart full sore,  
Heard what I had heard before,  
The sound of feet upon the street.

I stopped and faced full quick about,  
I looked and every star was out;  
A million eyes looked on me there,  
I knew not whither to repair.

I walked with footsteps following me,  
Some form I knew I could not see;  
I saw a white path on the bay,  
A star shoot in the Milky Way.

And then from all the vast above,  
There came a message of great Love;  
And from the stars swung o'er the sea,  
There came this sweet philosophy.

Despairing man, thou art a part  
Of this great plan—know what thou art!  
Thou art as great, lo, greater far  
Than any twinkling, burning star!

More wonderful than land or sea,  
And yet, thou wouldst despairing be!  
Though ill in body, steeped in sin,  
Such cannot touch the man within:
The man within shall rise and shout,
And glorify the man without;
More endless, thou, than seas that run,
More brilliant than the noonday sun!

When such a truth at last we know,
Why sink we into sodden woe?
Look up for guidance in the strife,
Thou hast achieved eternal life!

The moon herself shrinks from thy face,
She is afraid of thy strange grace;
The very waters purl to please,
And ye are infinitely more than these!

More strength hast thou than wind or sea,
When they are gone, ye still shall be;
O, man of grief, here is the wreath,
Thou conquerest even death!

O, man of God, raise up thy face;
All things to thee are commonplace;
All things to thee have lost their grace;
All things to thee that were are space!

Then go in peace—give thanks and sing,
Thy life is always at the Spring;
And let this thought thy soul imbue,
Thou art of God and God of you!

O, fellowmen, O, brothers mine,
So great a part of the Divine,
O, creatures of such power and worth,
Reveal the mystery of your birth!
And when the sun sinks down to rest,
And thou art by grim thoughts obsessed,
Arise, and let the dark be gone,
Thy life is always at the dawn!

I WAIL NOT THE COMING YEARS

I wail not the coming years,
Or because I am old;
I have drunk of the goblet of tears,
I have had some moments of gold.

I have drunk deep of the Passion Cup,
That fiery goblet which burns men up,
That awful draught whose nectar has made
New lives to enter a new decade,
You too will drink; be not afraid.

I have burned out;
So will you,
And when you do
Old age will hover all about!

I wail not the coming years,
Or because I am old;
Though time withers and winter sears,
My youth was as hot as my age is cold!

Dead youth is like a long lost chum,
De mortuis nil nisi bonum.

AN APPEAL TO REASON

Oh! why repine if on my face
You see the shadows of my race—
Because I'm poor have I no place?
Because my fathers did not stand
With yours upon this broad, fair land,
And share their glories of command?

Because they dwelt in lonely rife,
And little knew but want and strife,
Fair maid, have I no right to life?

Oh! take me to your breast again,
As if there were no blot or stain,—
Why add to misery Pride's foolish pain?

For summer skies turn autumn grey,
And he who sneers and scorns today
Will be tomorrow but poor clay!

I gave you, dearest, all I have,—
Oh! let me be your serf and slave,
Nor save your kisses for my grave!

Now! while I tremble for your sigh,
While you have me standing nigh,
Kiss me, dearest, and reply!

Don't wait until the leaves grow sear,
And then, with many a wail and tear,
Waste heart-warm words on a cold, marble bier!

TEARS

Dear one, doubt not that I
Love you still;
That in my heart
I hear your thrilling voice—see your dear eyes
Aflame with passion and youthful hope.
What matter how long you have been sleeping,
Slumbering deep 'neath dark, tall trees;
I merely live on in agony
Trusting to join thee in higher places
Later on!

No tears have I shed for thee,
No, for tears are as balm or dew
Dripping in crystal drops from a warm and
fragrant heaven
Upon a parched and thirsting world.
And such sweet balm
This soul of mine could not know!
Tears would quench the flame
That burns up chaff
Kindling memories of thee!

TO A LOVED ONE

Midst all the terrestrial world's confusion,
As round she spins in endless space,
All that seems and is delusion,
Midst all the terrors of the chase,
With murderous Death pursuing Life,
Who bleeds and dies within the grove,
One glance in your dear eyes melts the strife
Into a perfect song of Love!

YOU ARE MINE

You are mine, whate'er betide,
My love is violets at thy side,
Daisy fields at thy behest;
Thy hair is white, but blest
By love-warm lips that press it oft,
White like roses, fragrant, soft;
Thy lips to me are honeyed still,
Crushed to mine—how they thrill!

A BIRTHDAY THOUGHT

The caravan moves slowly on,
Nor pauses by the way,
And there are ships that do not rest
At anchor or at quay.
The sleepless voyagers pass on
With heavy hearts and tears,
Milestones mark the roads anew,
But who shall mark them years?

TO YOU, DEAREST

Nearest and dearest, best beloved,
Believe! my love is true!
Dearest darlingest, most adored,
Mate of my soul, my spirit too!

Fairest and purest, nearest divine,
Doubt not! I love thee still!
Hope may forsake—you still are mine,
My only joy Time cannot kill!

Ah, no! the grave did not intervene,
E’en Death who rode himself between
Could not serve our love to part,
Two bodies, aye,—but a single heart!
None ever lived to love in vain,
No thirsty flower but felt better for rain,
Roses wither, but bloom again
To scent with fragrance the dreary plain,
No heart has beat but was better for pain!

Bless'd are they who mourn and weep,
Who through the night sad vigils keep;
For those whose hopes no ills destroy
Immune from suffering, know no joy!

Nearest and dearest, best beloved,
Hope and faith till all is done,
Life and Death—both are one—
Death is only Life begun!

WRITTEN OF MYSELF FOR WANT OF A BETTER SUBJECT

"I loafe and invite my soul."
—Walt Whitman.

By Way of Prologue

I am the favorite child of my soul;
My countenance is lit with the lightnings of hell,
With the soft lamps of heaven;
And my heart is ever wrung between those two provinces.

I am my own best friend;
I am my own worst enemy;
I am the lyre on whose broad strings
My faint heart makes melodies.
I am my own redeemer;
I am my own salvation:
Wondrous me!
Likewise my own destruction,
My own damnation.
At the same time, I am as nothing,
Even so, all men are nothing;
What they say is nothing;
What they do is nothing;
What they think is, likewise, nothing,
It is something to be so good a nothing!

In so being, because of heaven-given humility.
I am everything;
I am Life and Death and Hereafter:
Both heaven and hell:
As suits my fancy.
You fear me,
You have need,
I fear myself!
You love me,
It is well,
I am worth your love,
I am you anyway—the only medium whence your love will return to you!

THE FOOL'S REPARTEE

"You are a fool," they said to him,
"Your head is empty as can be,
Your lamp is burning very dim,
You are a fool," they said to him,
"A fool you are," they said again.
The fool replied with pleasant grin,
"How can fools make fool of me? Hear, fools, my foolish repartee!"
"I know that I am nothing at all,
And just because I am so small,
I have some right to my conceit,
Which makes my nothingness complete!"

THE QUEST

I said, I will become acquainted with myself,
Much have I missed in this glamorous friendship
long neglected,
Much of daring, color, courtship and advice,
Much of misery, happiness, evil and despair,
I will woo and know this God and Devil within
me,
I will cherish both, I said.

For long I strove, but 'twas hard my entity to
forsake,
I had known it long, 'twas too dear to me, my
spirit craved its sweetness;
But, alas, I had bitten too deeply—my tooth re-

I cast me into darkness,
Blackness, as of pitch and night combined, bereft
of moon and stars,
Then saw I light,
I thought such light was I moving disconsolately
in the shadows,
I called upon it, wooed it, singed my wings upon it,
But never would it yield one atom of that light
for which I sought!
At length it moved away and died in sad
obscurity,
My plan, I felt, had failed
Dismally!
I cursed myself for folly,
Folly rebuked me, saying, "Fool, to know thyself
is not to try and steep thyself within thyself,
Or make thy breast a sullied glass aping thy re-
fections,
Or seek thy blood—thy grapes are not of vine-
yards' mould;
Nor hide thyself within thyself, so losing self
beyond self's own recalling.
And then accost thyself—'twere madness,
When, by chance, unhappy self wanderest sadly
past thy chosen lair,
Saying, "If thou art I, thou a traitor art, wanton
and imposter,
For I have hid myself—how then art thou the
seed?
I am the kernel that shall grow steadfast
Until the blossoming flower shall uplift its full-
blown soul to heaven,
I am that soul, that plant, that kernel,
Thou art a wretch and lowly vagrant! Go thief,
Take hither thy uncouth form from my dis-
favored sight!"
"No," said my Folly, "such would avail thee but
misery everlasting,
Go, if thou must know, ask the cool and winding
stream,
Who, indeed, thou art,
The stream that windest downward through the
night.
And wait until her currents backward turn,
Bide patiently till then, then thou shalt know!"
ALL HAIL, WINTER

All hail, Winter—thou ghost!
Thou whited spectre of evil doing—
Masking thy dim features in misty clouds of cold,
O, thou, mad spirit—thy heart is steel and cold,
Thou cruel, unfeeling one!
The white, bellying clouds of Summer’s soft heaven—
Are they lost?
What hast thou done with Summer’s sun—
The young and radiant sun of June?
Where now the slender August moon?
All hail—cold phantom—destroyer of men,
When shall we see Summer’s blue heaven again?
—When, when?

THE VIOLET

Where the grass is high and wet,
There you find the violet,
Nodding in the fragrant air,
You can’t pass and leave it there.

Something in its tiny grace,
Some charm revealed in its petalled face
Makes you feel a sort of power,
So you stoop and pluck the flower.

Such a fragile, delicate flower,
Wet from the dewdrop’s silent shower,
Smelling of the fresh, damp sod,
Makes you think of Love and God.

Take it and be glad today,
Life and youth are yours, be gay,
Or stoop and place it there for keeping
Where your poor dead love is sleeping.
The winter night foreboding lies upon the hills and silent streams,
A frozen rain will fall ere long, as cold as icy death it seems.

Sometimes, looking adown long vistas of trees before me,
I see, through the mist, a boyish figure coming towards me;
And I, full glad, rush gaily forth to meet him,
To clasp his tiny hands in mine, to kiss, to greet him.
But ere my anxious feet have passed the threshold o'er,
The familiar form is gone,—a drizzly mist—no more.

The lonely trail winds on and on into the deepening dusk,
My heart is empty as a tomb, an empty room, a husk,
A shell within a shell 'neath mournful, murky seas,
I call, my cry returns, a leaden echo through the trees.

And I am all alone, a withered, wretched man,
The watch-fires have burnt low, the hearth is grey and wan,
A wild wind shakes the house and rattles on the panes,
And rumbles down the chimney,—no drizzle now, it rains!
The Water-Spout
(A Thought Idyll)

Strange, is it not, the little memories that cling,
Knitting their beings to the kindred soul,
Like ivy on a jutted wing
Of some old manse or crumbling tower
Hugging haggard stones that Time and Age devour?

Thus to the Mind the filmy outline of some dear, dim ghost
Awakes the dormant, drowsy, dozing host
Of strange thought-things, humming-birds, bats and beetles,
A forgotten, feverish nest of stifling, stinging nettles;
Blue mist in the mountains before the Summer shower,
The eglantine and purple wasp, the Deadly Nightshade flower,
The woods and lanes my boyhood knew and cherished,
A million faces, climes and places, that otherwise have perished!

They perish not because a spark of livid coal upon the grate,
Rekindles, in a moment, warmth of love or burning hate
Of some stagnant, old, forgotten wrong
Of favors unacknowledged, gone.

But dearest to my heart tonight
My mother's pump of frozen, hoar-frost white,
A small boy with an ugly, wooden pitcher,
The wintry morn of skies and hills forlorn,
Frosty fields and woods for weary miles about,
The gurgling, rushing sound, the liquid shout
Of sprightly, sparkling water dancing from the spout!

**LIFE**

Oh, it's lonesome for the lonely, and bad enough for us all,
It's a hard, rough road for laboring men, its benefits are small,
It's a heavy load for us to bear, and it's fretted down with a world of care,
From beggar and tramp and gypsy camp, to the halls of the Lord High Mayor.

Conceit and Pride at arms refuting, breed Contempt to our confuting,
We bicker and stumble, curse and grumble, our voices raised in hot disputing;
Ah, listen to me, how much better 'twould be, in calm or stormy weather
To take our stands, join hearts and hands, and bear the brunt together!

**REQUEST**

Give me the suffering heart of Man,
I shall not whimper or complain,
Let him laugh and sing who can,
He sings the best, who sings through pain!

Give me deep knowledge of Life unbounded,
I shall not mind the pain and smart,
For hate is only love confounded,
And God but a gentle, loving heart!
Give me a collar of iron or brass,
A coat of tatters, a bed of straw,
I shall not shudder in the crass,
Nor find in anything a flaw.

Give me the meekness known to kine,
Grovelling beside the deep-rutted road,
Stumbling on without repine,
Stretching their necks to the heavy load.

Oh, mould my will, like theirs, to serve,
I shall not travel far alone,
The road has many a bend and curve,
But nought of happiness here is known.

I ask not anything but breath,
A friendly smile, a willing hand,
Strength in Life; courage in Death,
A frame and heart to understand.

Give these to me and Grief and Sin
Shall flee like shadows from my breast;
And hasten! Life is growing thin,
The tomb will swallow up the rest!

THE HOUR SONG

Upon my parapet stand I,
Wondering and wondering as hours go by,
Whence the moments and whither they fly!

I hear the rushing Mountain Stream,
The laughing, elfin waters gleam,
Dancing in the solar beam.
Far beneath me winding down,
Through woods and hills into the Town
Of snuggling shops and houses brown.

The shadows lengthen as I gaze,
Evening's lurid beacons blaze
In a wind-swept West and die in haze.

Now I turn my eyes away,
Watching singing elm-boughs sway,
The misty outline of the bay.

'Tis time that I forsake my seat,
And yet I loiter, for 'tis sweet,
Though late and cold and far from meet.

The clammy air, the musty room,
The steep, dark stairway in the gloom,
Serve such allurements as the tomb.

I'd rather sit beneath the sky,
Count the stars and wonder why,
List to Time's echoes ring and die.

Awhile and I no more shall climb
My parapet, so why divine
This mystery, or worry Time?

I shall not mind though Times goes on,
For I shall soon have further gone,
And learnt the answer of my song!

We are but shadows after all,
Candles gleaming faint and small,
Burnt out before we burn at all!
Upon my parapet stand I,
Wondering and wondering, as hours go by,
Whence the moments and whither they fly!

FAILURES

Of all sad failures among men,
He fails the most who has not been
The vilest harlot of them all,
A willing churl too low to fall!
Ah, purblind heart too proud to ail,
He fails, indeed, who fails to fail!

TARNISH

I cherish the last faint light that dwells
Upon decaying thoughts of men;
Lend me your lamp ere mine dispels
Itself into a mouldering gloom that swells
Oblivion, whose bursting walls
Surround my kingdom ere it falls!

AND IN CONCLUSION, REMEMBER—

We do not long to find,
We find to long,
And so before we end our little song,
I trust that we may well employ,
The will and talent to enjoy.
The time is short, too short for simpering jests,
"Alas, there are no birds in last year's nests!"
I DREAMED

I dreamed that I was in your arms last night,
It seemed that you were pressing close to me,
I thrilled and laughed for joy and ecstasy,
And mingled tears of pure delight.

I felt your hot breath on my quiv’ring cheek,
I drank the fragrance of your flesh and hair,
And Passion held me free from thought or care,
That I should wake again to seek.

I crushed your warm lips long in one deep kiss,
I saw the fire and danger in your eyes,
Two gleaming tapers burning earthly ties,
Till nought remained but love and bliss.

I saw the purple morning through the trees,
The shaking, flaming lantern of the Dawn,
I turned to caress you, you were gone,
I heard you whispering in the breeze.

I dreamed that I was in your arms last night,
It seemed that you were pressing close to me,
I thrilled and laughed for joy and ecstasy,
And mingled tears of pure delight.

THE LAST PARTING

Bring me no roses, darling, when I’m dead,
No myrtle from the woodland fresh and fair,
Nor violets, dearest, from the mossy stair
Of jagged, ancient rocks that upward led
To a grassy, gentle eminence where bloomed red
The sweet and honeyed clover. Lazy bees
Held buzzing rendezvous beneath the trees.
Nay, bring me fragrant memories instead.
You need not kiss my blackened lips farewell,
I shall not know that you are bending near;
But if the heart has anything to tell,
And if you feel you need my answer, dear,
In that last hour, press my cold and clammy hand,
My frozen heart will warm and understand!

THE END