

IF I KNEW WHAT POETS KNOW

If I knew what poets know,
I would find a theme
Sweeter than the placid flow
Of the fairest dream:
I would sing of love that lives
On the errors it forgives;
And the world would better grow
If I knew what poets know.

IKE WALTON'S PRAYER

I CRAVE, dear Lord,
No boundless hoard
Of gold and gear,
Nor jewels fine,
Nor lands, nor kine,
Nor treasure-heaps of anything.—
Let but a little hut be mine
Where at the hearthstone I may hear
The cricket sing,
And have the shine
Of one glad woman's eyes to make,
For my poor sake,
Our simple home a place divine;—
Just the wee cot—the cricket's chirr—
Love, and the smiling face of her.

I pray not for
Great riches, nor

IKE WALTON'S PRAYER

For vast estates and castle-halls,—
Give me to hear the bare footfalls
 Of children o'er
 An oaken floor
New-rinsed with sunshine, or bespread
With but the tiny coverlet
And pillow for the baby's head;
And, pray Thou, may
The door stand open and the day
 Send ever in a gentle breeze,
 With fragrance from the locust-trees,
 And drowsy moan of doves, and blur
Of robin-chirps, and drone of bees,
 With after-hushes of the stir
Of intermingling sounds, and then
 The goodwife and the smile of her
Filling the silences again—
 The cricket's call
 And the wee cot,
Dear Lord of all,
 Deny me not!

IKE WALTON'S PRAYER

I pray not that
Men tremble at
 My power of place
 And lordly sway,—
I only pray for simple grace
To look my neighbor in the face
 Full honestly from day to day—
Yield me his horny palm to hold,
 And I'll not pray
 For gold;—
The tanned face, garlanded with mirth,
It hath the kingliest smile on earth;
The swart brow, diamonded with sweat,
Hath never need of coronet.
 And so I reach,
 Dear Lord, to Thee,
 And do beseech
 Thou givest me
The wee cot, and the cricket's chirr,
Love, and the glad sweet face of her!

A ROUGH SKETCH

I CAUGHT, for a second, across the crowd—
Just for a second, and barely that—
A face, pox-pitted and evil-browed,
Hid in the shade of a slouch-rim'd hat—
With small gray eyes, of a look as keen
As the long, sharp nose that grew between.

And I said: 'Tis a sketch of Nature's own,
Drawn i' the dark o' the moon, I swear,
On a tatter of Fate that the winds have blown
Hither and thither and everywhere—
With its keen little sinister eyes of gray,
And nose like the beak of a bird of prey!

OUR KIND OF A MAN

I

THE kind of a man for you and me!
He faces the world unflinchingly,
And smites, as long as the wrong resists,
With a knuckled faith and force like fists:
He lives the life he is preaching of,
And loves where most is the need of love;
His voice is clear to the deaf man's ears,
And his face sublime through the blind man's tears;
The light shines out where the clouds were dim,
And the widow's prayer goes up for him;
The latch is clicked at the hovel door
And the sick man sees the sun once more,
And out o'er the barren fields he sees
Springing blossoms and waving trees,
Feeling as only the dying may,
That God's own servant has come that way,
Smoothing the path as it still winds on
Through the golden gate where his loved have gone.

OUR KIND OF A MAN

II

The kind of a man for me and you!
However little of worth we do
He credits full, and abides in trust
That time will teach us how more is just.
He walks abroad, and he meets all kinds
Of querulous and uneasy minds,
And, sympathizing, he shares the pain
Of the doubts that rack us, heart and brain;
And, knowing this, as we grasp his hand,
We are surely coming to understand!
He looks on sin with pitying eyes—
E'en as the Lord, since Paradise,—
Else, should we read, Though our sins should glow
As scarlet, they shall be white as snow?—
And, feeling still, with a grief half glad,
That the bad are as good as the good are bad,
He strikes straight out for the Right—and he
Is the kind of a man for you and me!

THE HARPEP

LIKE a drift of faded blossoms
Caught in a slanting rain,
His fingers glimpsed down the strings of his harp
In a tremulous refrain:

Patter and tinkle, and drip and drip!
Ah! but the chords were rainy sweet!
And I closed my eyes and I bit my lip,
As he played there in the street.

Patter, and drip, and tinkle!
And there was the little bed
In the corner of the garret,
And the rafters overhead!

And there was the little window—
Tinkle, and drip, and drip!—
The rain above, and a mother's love,
And God's companionship!

OLD AUNT MARY'S

WASN'T it pleasant, O brother mine,
In those old days of the lost sunshine
Of youth—when the Saturday's chores were through,
And the "Sunday's wood" in the kitchen, too,
And we went visiting, "me and you,"
Out to Old Aunt Mary's?

It all comes back so clear to-day!
Though I am as bald as you are gray—
Out by the barn-lot, and down the lane,
We patter along in the dust again,
As light as the tips of the drops of the rain,
Out to Old Aunt Mary's!

We cross the pasture, and through the wood
Where the old gray snag of the poplar stood,
Where the hammering "red-heads" hopped awry,
And the buzzard "raised" in the "clearing" sky
And lolled and circled, as we went by
Out to Old Aunt Mary's.

OLD AUNT MARY'S

And then in the dust of the road again;
And the teams we met, and the countrymen;
And the long highway, with sunshine spread
As thick as butter on country bread,
Our cares behind, and our hearts ahead
Out to Old Aunt Mary's.

Why, I see her now in the open door,
Where the little gourds grew up the sides and o'er
The clapboard roof!—And her face—ah, me!
Wasn't it good for a boy to see—
And wasn't it good for a boy to be
Out to Old Aunt Mary's?

The jelly—the jam and the marmalade,
And the cherry and quince "preserves" she made!
And the sweet-sour pickles of peach and pear,
With cinnamon in 'em, and all things rare!—
And the more we ate was the more to spare,
Out to Old Aunt Mary's!

OLD AUNT MARY'S

And the old spring-house in the cool green gloom
Of the willow-trees,—and the cooler room
Where the swinging-shelves and the crocks were kept—
Where the cream in a golden languor slept
While the waters gurgled and laughed and wept—
 Out to Old Aunt Mary's.

And O my brother, so far away,
This is to tell you she waits *to-day*
To welcome us:—Aunt Mary fell
Asleep this morning, whispering—“Tell
The boys to come!” And all is well
 Out to Old Aunt Mary's.

ILLILEO

ILLILEO, the moonlight seemed lost across the vales—
The stars but strewed the azure as an armor's scattered
 scales;
The airs of night were quiet as the breath of silken sails,
And all your words were sweeter than the notes of
 nightingales.

Illileo Legardi, in the garden there alone,
With your figure carved of fervor, as the Psyche carved
 of stone,
There came to me no murmur of the fountain's under-
 tone
So mystically, musically mellow as your own.
You whispered low, Illileo—so low the leaves were
 mute,
And the echoes faltered breathless in your voice's vain
 pursuit;
And there died the distant dalliance of the serenader's
 lute:
And I held you in my bosom as the husk may hold the
 fruit.

ILLILEO

Illileo, I listened. I believed you. In my bliss,
What were all the worlds above me since I found you
thus in this?—

Let them reeling reach to win me—even Heaven I would
miss,
Grasping earthward!—I would cling here, though I
clung by just a kiss.

And blossoms should grow odorless—and lilies all
aghast—

And I said the stars should slacken in their paces
through the vast,

Ere yet my loyalty should fail enduring to the last.—
So vowed I. It is written. It is changeless as the past.

Illileo Legardi, in the shade your palace throws
Like a cowl about the singer at your gilded porticos,
A moan goes with the music that may vex the high
repose

Of a heart that fades and crumbles as the crimson of a
rose.

THE KING

THEY rode right out of the morning sun—

A glimmering, glittering cavalcade
Of knights and ladies and every one
In princely sheen arrayed;
And the king of them all, O he rode ahead,
With a helmet of gold, and a plume of red
That spurted about in the breeze and bled
In the bloom of the everglade.

And they rode high over the dewy lawn,
With brave, glad banners of every hue
That rolled in ripples, as they rode on
In splendor, two and two;

And the tinkling links of the golden reins
Of the steeds they rode rang such refrains
As the castanets in a dream of Spain's
Intensest gold and blue.

And they rode and rode; and the steeds they neighed
And pranced, and the sun on their glossy hides
Flickered and lightened and glanced and played -
Like the moon on rippling tides;

THE KING

And their manes were silken, and thick and strong,
And their tails were flossy, and fetlock-long,
And jostled in time to the teeming throng,
And their knightly song besides.

Clank of scabbard and jingle of spur,
And the fluttering sash of the queen went wild
In the wind, and the proud king glanced at her
As one at a wilful child,—
And as knight and lady away they flew,
And the banners flapped, and the falcon, too,
And the lances flashed and the bugle blew,
He kissed his hand and smiled.—

And then, like a slanting sunlit shower,
The pageant glittered across the plain,
And the turf spun back, and the wildweed flower
Was only a crimson stain.
And a dreamer's eyes they are downward cast,
As he blends these words with the wailing blast:
"It is the King of the Year rides past!"
And Autumn is here again.

A BRIDE

"O I AM weary!" she sighed, as her billowy
Hair she unloosed in a torrent of gold
That rippled and fell o'er a figure as willowy,
Graceful and fair as a goddess of old:
Over her jewels she flung herself drearly,
Crumpled the laces that snowed on her breast,
Crushed with her fingers the lily that wearily
Clung in her hair like a dove in its nest.
—And naught but her shadowy form in the mirror
To kneel in dumb agony down and weep near her!

"Weary?"—of what? Could we fathom the mystery?—
Lift up the lashes weighed down by her tears
And wash with their dews one white face from her history,
Set like a gem in the red rust of years?
Nothing will rest her—unless he who died of her
Strayed from his grave, and, in place of the groom,
Tipping her face, kneeling there by the side of her,
Drained the old kiss to the dregs of his doom.
—And naught but that shadowy form in the mirror
To kneel in dumb agony down and weep near her!

THE DEAD LOVER

TIME is so long when a man is dead!

Some one sews; and the room is made
Very clean; and the light is shed
Soft through the window-shade.

Yesterday I thought: "I know

Just how the bells will sound, and how
The friends will talk, and the sermon go,
And the hearse-horse bow and bow!"

This is to-day; and I have no thing

To think of—nothing whatever to do
But to hear the throb of the pulse of a wing
That wants to fly back to you.

A SONG

THERE is ever a song somewhere, my dear;

There is ever a something sings always:
There's the song of the lark when the skies are clear,
And the song of the thrush when the skies are gray.
The sunshine showers across the grain,
And the bluebird trills in the orchard tree;
And in and out, when the eaves dip rain,
The swallows are twittering ceaselessly.

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear,

Be the skies above or dark or fair,
There is ever a song that our hearts may hear—
There is ever a song somewhere, my dear—
There is ever a song somewhere!

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear,

In the midnight black, or the mid-day blue:
The robin pipes when the sun is here,
And the cricket chirrup the whole night through.

A SONG

The buds may blow, and the fruit may grow,
And the autumn leaves drop crisp and sear;
But whether the sun, or the rain, or the snow,
There is ever a song somewhere, my dear.

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear,
Be the skies above or dark or fair,
There is ever a song that our hearts may hear—
There is ever a song somewhere, my dear—
There is ever a song somewhere!

WHEN BESSIE DIED

*"If from your own the dimpled hands had slipped,
And ne'er would nestle in your palm again;
If the white feet into the grave had tripped—"*

WHEN Bessie died—
We braided the brown hair, and tied
It just as her own little hands
Had fastened back the silken strands
A thousand times—the crimson bit
Of ribbon woven into it
That she had worn with childish pride—
Smoothed down the dainty bow—and cried—
When Bessie died.

When Bessie died—
We drew the nursery blinds aside,
And, as the morning in the room
Burst like a primrose into bloom,

WHEN BESSIE DIED

Her pet canary's cage we hung
Where she might hear him when he sung—
And yet not any note he tried,
Though she lay listening folded-eyed.

When Bessie died—
We writhed in prayer unsatisfied:
We begged of God, and He did smile
In silence on us all the while;
And we did see Him, through our tears,
Enfolding that fair form of hers,
She laughing back against His love
The kisses we had nothing of—
And death to us He still denied,
When Bessie died—

When Bessie died.

THE SHOWER

THE landscape, like the awed face of a child,
Grew curiously blurred; a hush of death
Fell on the fields, and in the darkened wild
The zephyr held its breath.

No wavering glamour-work of light and shade
Dappled the shivering surface of the brook;
The frightened ripples in their ambushade
Of willows thrilled and shook.

The sullen day grew darker, and anon
Dim flashes of pent anger lit the sky;
With rumbling wheels of wrath came rolling on
The storm's artillery.

The cloud above put on its blackest frown,
And then, as with a vengeful cry of pain,
The lightning snatched it, ripped and flung it down
In ravelled shreds of rain:

While I, transfigured by some wondrous art,
Bowed with the thirsty lilies to the sod,
My empty soul brimmed over, and my heart
Drenched with the love of God.

A LIFE-LESSON

THERE! little girl; don't cry!

They have broken your doll, I know;
And your tea-set blue,
And your play-house, too,
Are things of the long ago;
But childish troubles will soon pass by.—
There! little girl; don't cry!

There! little girl; don't cry!

They have broken your slate, I know;
And the glad, wild ways
Of your school-girl days
Are things of the long ago;
But life and love will soon come by.—
There! little girl; don't cry!

There! little girl; don't cry!

They have broken your heart, I know;
And the rainbow gleams
Of your youthful dreams
Are things of the long ago;
But heaven holds all for which you sigh.—
There! little girl; don't cry!

A SCRAWL

I WANT to sing something—but this is all—

I try and I try, but the rhymes are dull
As though they were damp, and the echoes fall
Limp and unlovable.

Words will not say what I yearn to say—

They will not walk as I want them to,
But they stumble and fall in the path of the way
Of my telling my love for you.

Simply take what the scrawl is worth—

Knowing I love you as sun the sod
On the ripening side of the great round earth
That swings in the smile of God.

AWAY

I CANNOT say, and I will not say
That he is dead.—He is just away!

With a cheery smile, and a wave of the hand,
He has wandered into an unknown land,

And left us dreaming how very fair
It needs must be, since he lingers there.

And you—O you, who the wildest yearn
For the old-time step and the glad return,—

Think of him faring on, as dear
In the love of There as the love of Here;

And loyal still, as he gave the blows
Of his warrior-strength to his country's foes.—

AWAY

Mild and gentle, as he was brave,—
When the sweetest love of his life he gave

To simple things:—Where the violets grew
Blue as the eyes they were likened to,

The touches of his hands have strayed
As reverently as his lips have prayed:

When the little brown thrush that harshly chirred
Was dear to him as the mocking-bird;

And he pitied as much as a man in pain
A writhing honey-bee wet with rain.—

Think of him still as the same, I say:
He is not dead—he is just away!

WHO BIDES HIS TIME

Who bides his time, and day by day
Faces defeat full patiently,
And lifts a mirthful roundelay,
However poor his fortunes be,—
He will not fail in any qualm
Of poverty—the paltry dime
It will grow golden in his palm,
Who bides his time.

Who bides his time—he tastes the sweet
Of honey in the saltiest tear;
And though he fares with slowest feet,
Joy runs to meet him, drawing near;
The birds are heralds of his cause;
And, like a never-ending rhyme,
The roadsides bloom in his applause,
Who bides his time.

WHO BIDES HIS TIME

Who bides his time, and fevers not
In the hot race that none achieves,
Shall wear cool-wreathen laurel, wrought
With crimson berries in the leaves;
And he shall reign a goodly king,
And sway his hand o'er every clime,
With peace writ on his signet-ring,
Who bides his time.

FROM THE HEADBOARD OF A GRAVE IN
PARAGUAY

A TROTH, and a grief, and a blessing,
Disguised them and came this way,—
And one was a promise, and one was a doubt,
And one was a rainy day.

And they met betimes with this maiden,—
And the promise it spake and lied,
And the doubt it gibbered and hugged itself,
And the rainy day—she died.

LAUGHTER HOLDING BOTH HIS SIDES

Ay, thou varlet! Laugh away!
All the world's a holiday!
Laugh away, and roar and shout
Till thy hoarse tongue lolleth out!
Bloat thy cheeks, and bulge thine eyes
Unto bursting; pelt thy thighs
With thy swollen palms, and roar
As thou never hast before!
Lustier! wilt thou! peal on peal!
Stiflest? Squat and grind thy heel—
Wrestle with thy loins, and then
Wheeze thee whiles, and whoop again!

FAME

I

ONCE, in a dream, I saw a man,
With haggard face and tangled hair,
And eyes that nursed as wild a care
As gaunt Starvation ever can;
And in his hand he held a wand
Whose magic touch gave life and thought
Unto a form his fancy wrought
And robed with coloring so grand,
It seemed the reflex of some child
Of Heaven, fair and undefiled—
A face of purity and love—
To woo him into worlds above:
And as I gazed with dazzled eyes,
A gleaming smile lit up his lips
As his bright soul from its eclipse
Went flashing into Paradise.

FAME

Then tardy Fame came through the door
And found a picture—nothing more.

II

And once I saw a man, alone,
In abject poverty, with hand
Uplifted o'er a block of stone
That took a shape at his command
And smiled upon him, fair and good—
A perfect work of womanhood,
Save that the eyes might never weep,
Nor weary hands be crossed in sleep,
Nor hair that fell from crown to wrist,
Be brushed away, caressed and kissed.
And as in awe I gazed on her,
I saw the sculptor's chisel fall—
I saw him sink, without a moan,
Sink lifeless at the feet of stone,
And lie there like a worshipper.
Fame crossed the threshold of the hall,
And found a statue—that was all.

FAME

III

And once I saw a man who drew
A gloom about him like a cloak,
And wandered aimlessly. The few
Who spoke of him at all, but spoke
Disparagingly of a mind
The Fates had faultily designed:
Too indolent for modern times—
Too fanciful, and full of whims—
For, talking to himself in rhymes,
And scrawling never-heard-of hymns,
The idle life to which he clung
Was worthless as the songs he sung!
I saw him, in my vision, filled
With rapture o'er a spray of bloom
The wind threw in his lonely room;
And of the sweet perfume it spilled
He drank to drunkenness, and flung
His long hair back, and laughed and sung
And clapped his hands as children do
At fairy tales they listen to,

FAME

While from his flying quill there dripped
Such music on his manuscript
That he who listens to the words
May close his eyes and dream the birds
Are twittering on every hand
A language he can understand.
He journeyed on through life, unknown,
Without one friend to call his own;
He tired. No kindly hand to press
The cooling touch of tenderness
Upon his burning brow, nor lift
To his parched lips God's freest gift—
No sympathetic sob or sigh
Of trembling lips—no sorrowing eye
Looked out through tears to see him die.
And Fame her greenest laurels brought
To crown a head that heeded not.

And this is Fame! A thing, indeed,
That only comes when least the need:
The wisest minds of every age
The book of life from page to page

FAME

Have searched in vain; each lesson conned
Will promise it the page beyond—
Until the last, when dusk of night
Falls over it, and reason's light
Is smothered by that unknown friend
Who signs his *nom de plume*, The End.

THE RIPEST PEACH

THE ripest peach is highest on the tree—
And so her love, beyond the reach of me,
Is dearest in my sight. Sweet breezes bow
Her heart down to me where I worship now!

She looms aloft where every eye may see
The ripest peach is highest on the tree.
Such fruitage as her love I know, alas!
I may not reach here from the orchard grass.

I drink the sunshine showered past her lips
As roses drain the dewdrop as it drips.
The ripest peach is highest on the tree,
And so mine eyes gaze upward eagerly.

Why—why do I not turn away in wrath
And pluck some heart here hanging in my path?—
Love's lower boughs bend with them—but, ah me!
The ripest peach is highest on the tree!

A FRUIT-PIECE

THE afternoon of summer folds
Its warm arms round the marigolds,

And, with its gleaming fingers, pets
The watered pinks and violets

That from the casement vases spill,
Over the cottage window-sill,

Their fragrance down the garden walks
Where droop the dry-mouthed hollyhocks.

How vividly the sunshine scrawls
The grape-vine shadows on the walls!

How like a truant swings the breeze
In high boughs of the apple-trees!

The slender "free-stone" lifts aloof,
Full languidly above the roof,

A FRUIT-PIECE

A hoard of fruitage, stamped with gold
And precious mintings manifold.

High up, through curled green leaves, a pear
Hangs hot with ripeness here and there.

Beneath the sagging trellisings,
In lush, lack-lustre clusterings,

Great torpid grapes, all fattened through
With moon and sunshine, shade and dew,

Until their swollen girths express
But forms of limp deliciousness—

Drugged to an indolence divine
With heaven's own sacramental wine.

