

## Note

My thanks are due to the Editors of the *Outlook* and the *Speaker* for the kind permission they have given me to reprint a considerable number of the following poems. They have been selected and arranged rather with a view to unity of spirit than to unity of time or value; many of them being juvenile.

*Another tattered rhymster in the ring,  
With but the old plea to the sneering schools,  
That on him too, some secret night in spring  
Came the old frenzy of a hundred fools*

*To make some thing: the old want dark and deep,  
The thirst of men, the hunger of the stars,  
Since first it tinged even the Eternal's sleep,  
With monstrous dreams of trees and towns and mars.*

*When all He made for the first time He saw,  
Scattering stars as misers shake their pelf.  
Then in the last strange wrath broke His own law,  
And made a graven image of Himself.*

## By the Babe Unborn

If trees were tall and grasses short,  
As in some crazy tale,  
If here and there a sea were blue  
Beyond the breaking pale,

If a fixed fire hung in the air  
To warm me one day through,  
If deep green hair grew on great hills,  
I know what I should do.

In dark I lie: dreaming that there  
Are great eyes cold or kind,  
And twisted streets and silent doors,  
And living men behind.

Let storm-clouds come: better an hour,  
And leave to weep and fight,  
Than all the ages I have ruled  
The empires of the night.

I think that if they gave me leave  
Within that world to stand,  
I would be good through all the day  
I spent in fairyland.

They should not hear a word from me  
Of selfishness or scorn,  
If only I could find the door,  
If only I were born.

## The World's Lover

My eyes are full of lonely mirth:  
Reeling with want and worn with scars,  
For pride of every stone on earth,  
I shake my spear at all the stars.

A live bat beats my crest above,  
Lean foxes nose where I have trod,  
And on my naked face the love  
Which is the loneliness of God.

Outlawed: since that great day gone by—  
When before prince and pope and queen  
I stood and spoke a blasphemy—  
'Behold the summer leaves are green.'

They cursed me: what was that to me  
Who in that summer darkness furred,  
With but an owl and snail to see,  
Had blessed and conquered all the world?

They bound me to the scourging-stake,  
They laid their whips of thorn on me;  
I wept to see the green rods break,  
Though blood be beautiful to see.

Beneath the gallows' foot abhorred  
The crowds cry 'Crucify!' and 'Kill!'  
Higher the priests sing, 'Praise the Lord,  
The warlock dies'; and higher still

Shall heaven and earth hear one cry sent  
Even from the hideous gibbet height,  
'Praise to the Lord Omnipotent,  
The vultures have a feast to-night.'

## The Skeleton

Chattering finch and water-fly  
Are not merrier than I;  
Here among the flowers I lie  
Laughing everlastingly.  
No: I may not tell the best;  
Surely, friends, I might have guessed  
Death was but the good King's jest,  
It was hid so carefully.

## A Chord of Colour

My Lady clad herself in grey,  
That caught and clung about her throat;  
Then all the long grey winter day  
On me a living splendour smote;  
And why grey palmers holy are,  
And why grey minsters great in story,  
And grey skies ring the morning star,  
And grey hairs are a crown of glory.

My Lady clad herself in green,  
Like meadows where the wind-waves pass;  
Then round my spirit spread, I ween,  
A splendour of forgotten grass.  
Then all that dropped of stem or sod,  
Hoarded as emeralds might be,  
I bowed to every bush, and trod  
Amid the live grass fearfully.

My Lady clad herself in blue,  
Then on me, like the seer long gone,  
The likeness of a sapphire grew,  
The throne of him that sat thereon.  
Then knew I why the Fashioner  
Splashed reckless blue on sky and sea;  
And ere 'twas good enough for her,  
He tried it on Eternity.

Beneath the gnarled old Knowledge-tree  
Sat, like an owl, the evil sage:  
'The World's a bubble,' solemnly  
He read, and turned a second page.  
'A bubble, then, old crow,' I cried,  
'God keep you in your weary wit!  
'A bubble—have you ever spied  
'The colours I have seen on it?'

## The Happy Man

To teach the grey earth like a child,  
To bid the heavens repent,  
I only ask from Fate the gift  
Of one man well content.

Him will I find: though when in vain  
I search the feast and mart,  
The fading flowers of liberty,  
The painted masks of art.

I only find him at the last,  
On one old hill where nod  
Golgotha's ghastly trinity—  
Three persons and one god.

## The Unpardonable Sin

I do not cry, beloved, neither curse.

Silence and strength, these two at least are good.

He gave me sun and stars and ought He could,  
But not a woman's love; for that is hers.

He sealed her heart from sage and questioner—

Yea, with seven seals, as he has sealed the grave.

And if she give it to a drunken slave,  
The Day of Judgment shall not challenge her.

Only this much: if one, deserving well,

Touching your thin young hands and making suit,

Feel not himself a crawling thing, a brute,  
Buried and bricked in a forgotten hell;

Prophet and poet be he over sod,

Prince among angels in the highest place,

God help me, I will smite him on the face,  
Before the glory of the face of God.

## A Novelty

Why should I care for the Ages  
Because they are old and grey?  
To me, like sudden laughter,  
The stars are fresh and gay;  
The world is a daring fancy,  
And finished yesterday.

Why should I bow to the Ages  
Because they were drear and dry?  
Slow trees and ripening meadows  
For me go roaring by,  
A living charge, a struggle  
To escalate the sky.

The eternal suns and systems,  
Solid and silent all,  
To me are stars of an instant,  
Only the fires that fall  
From God's good rocket, rising  
On this night of carnival.



## Ultimate

The vision of a haloed host  
That weep around an empty throne;  
And, aureoles dark and angels dead,  
Man with his own life stands alone.

'I am,' he says his bankrupt creed:  
'I am,' and is again a clod:  
The sparrow starts, the grasses stir,  
For he has said the name of God.

## The Donkey

When fishes flew and forests walked  
And figs grew upon thorn,  
Some moment when the moon was blood  
Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry  
And ears like errant wings,  
The devil's walking parody  
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,  
Of ancient crooked will;  
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,  
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;  
One far fierce hour and sweet:  
There was a shout about my ears,  
And palms before my feet.

## The Beatific Vision

Through what fierce incarnations, furled  
In fire and darkness, did I go,  
Ere I was worthy in the world  
To see a dandelion grow?

Well, if in any woes or wars  
I bought my naked right to be,  
Grew worthy of the grass, nor gave  
The wren, my brother, shame for me.

But what shall God not ask of him  
In the last time when all is told,  
Who saw her stand beside the hearth,  
The firelight garbing her in gold?

## The Hope of the Streets

The still sweet meadows shimmered: and I stood  
And cursed them, bloom of hedge and bird of tree,  
And bright and high beyond the hunch-backed wood  
The thunder and the splendour of the sea.

Give back the Babylon where I was born,  
The lips that gape give back, the hands that grope,  
And noise and blood and suffocating scorn  
An eddy of fierce faces—and a hope

That 'mid those myriad heads one head find place,  
With brown hair curled like breakers of the sea,  
And two eyes set so strangely in the face  
That all things else are nothing suddenly.

## Ecclesiastes

There is one sin: to call a green leaf grey,  
Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.  
There is one blasphemy: for death to pray,  
For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

There is one creed: 'neath no world-terror's wing  
Apples forget to grow on apple-trees.  
There is one thing is needful—everything—  
The rest is vanity of vanities.

## The Song of the Children

The World is ours till sunset,  
Holly and fire and snow;  
And the name of our dead brother  
Who loved us long ago.

The grown folk mighty and cunning,  
They write his name in gold;  
But we can tell a little  
Of the million tales he told.

He taught them laws and watchwords,  
To preach and struggle and pray;  
But he taught us deep in the hayfield  
The games that the angels play.

Had he stayed here for ever,  
Their world would be wise as ours—  
And the king be cutting capers,  
And the priest be picking flowers.

But the dark day came: they gathered:  
On their faces we could see  
They had taken and slain our brother,  
And hanged him on a tree.

## The Fish

Dark the sea was: but I saw him,  
One great head with goggle eyes,  
Like a diabolic cherub  
Flying in those fallen skies.

I have heard the hoarse deniers,  
I have known the wordy wars;  
I have seen a man, by shouting,  
Seek to orphan all the stars.

I have seen a fool half-fashioned  
Borrow from the heavens a tongue,  
So to curse them more at leisure—  
—And I trod him not as dung.

For I saw that finny goblin  
Hidden in the abyss untrod;  
And I knew there can be laughter  
On the secret face of God.

Blow the trumpets, crown the sages,  
Bring the age by reason fed!  
(He that sitteth in the heavens,  
'He shall laugh'—the prophet said.)

## Gold Leaves

Lo! I am come to autumn,  
When all the leaves are gold;  
Grey hairs and golden leaves cry out  
The year and I are old.

In youth I sought the prince of men,  
Captain in cosmic wars,  
Our Titan, even the weeds would show  
Defiant, to the stars.

But now a great thing in the street  
Seems any human nod,  
Where shift in strange democracy  
The million masks of God.

In youth I sought the golden flower  
Hidden in wood or wold,  
But I am come to autumn,  
When all the leaves are gold.



## Thou Shalt Not Kill

I had grown weary of him; of his breath  
And hands and features I was sick to death.  
Each day I heard the same dull voice and tread;  
I did not hate him: but I wished him dead.  
And he must with his blank face fill my life—  
Then my brain blackened; and I snatched a knife.

But ere I struck, my soul's grey deserts through  
A voice cried, 'Know at least what thing you do.  
This is a common man: knowest thou, O soul,  
What this thing is? somewhere where seasons roll  
There is some living thing for whom this man  
Is as seven heavens girt into a span,  
For some one soul you take the world away—  
Now know you well your deed and purpose. Slay!'

Then I cast down the knife upon the ground  
And saw that mean man for one moment crowned.  
I turned and laughed: for there was no one by—  
The man that I had sought to slay was I.

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