

Poems of Paul Verlaine

Paul Verlaine

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POEMS OF PAUL VERLAINE

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[Illustration: "Portrait of Paul Verlaine"]

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Fetes Galantes

[Illustration: "Clair De Lune"]

CLAIR DE LUNE.

Your soul is as a moonlit landscape fair,
Peopled with maskers delicate and dim,
That play on lutes and dance and have an air
Of being sad in their fantastic trim.

The while they celebrate in minor strain

Triumphant love, effective enterprise,
They have an air of knowing all is vain,--
And through the quiet moonlight their songs rise,

The melancholy moonlight, sweet and lone,
That makes to dream the birds upon the tree,
And in their polished basins of white stone
The fountains tall to sob with ecstasy.

SUR L'HERBE.

"The abbe rambles."--"You, marquis,
Have put your wig on all awry."--
"This wine of Cyprus kindles me
Less, my Camargo, than your eye!"

"My passion"--"Do, mi, sol, la, si."--
"Abbe, your villany lies bare."--
"Mesdames, I climb up yonder tree
And fetch a star down, I declare."

"Let each kiss his own lady, then
The others."--"Would that I were, too,
A lap-dog!"--"Softly, gentlemen!"--
"Do, mi."--"The moon!"--"Hey, how d'ye do?"

L' ALLEE.

Powdered and rouged as in the sheepcotes' day,
Fragile 'mid her enormous ribbon bows,
Along the shaded alley, where green grows
The moss on the old seats, she wends her way
With mincing graces and affected airs,
Such as more oft a petted parrot wears.
Her long gown with the train is blue; the fan
She spreads between her jewelled fingers slim
Is merry with a love-scene, of so dim
Suggestion, her eyes smile the while they scan.
Blonde; dainty nose; plump, cherry lips, divine
With pride unconscious.--Subtler, certainly,
Than is the mouche there set to underline
The rather foolish brightness of the eye.

A LA PROMENADE.

The milky sky, the hazy, slender trees,
Seem smiling on the light costumes we wear,--
Our gauzy floating veils that have an air
Of wings, our satins fluttering in the breeze.

And in the marble bowl the ripples gleam,
And through the lindens of the avenue
The sifted golden sun comes to us blue
And dying, like the sunshine of a dream.

Exquisite triflers and deceivers rare,

Tender of heart, but little tied by vows,
Deliciously we dally 'neath the boughs,
And playfully the lovers plague the fair.

Receiving, should they overstep a point,
A buffet from a hand absurdly small,
At which upon a gallant knee they fall
To kiss the little finger's littlest joint.

And as this is a shocking liberty,
A frigid glance rewards the daring swain,--
Not quite o'erbalancing with its disdain
The red mouth's reassuring clemency.

LE FAUNE.

An ancient terra-cotta Faun,
A laughing note in 'mid the green,
Grins at us from the central lawn,
With secret and sarcastic mien.

It is that he foresees, perchance,
A bad end to the moments dear
That with gay music and light dance
Have led us, pensive pilgrims, here.

MANDOLINE.

The courtly serenaders,
The beauteous listeners,
Sit idling 'neath the branches
A balmy zephyr stirs.

It's Tircis and Aminta,
Clitandre,--ever there!--
Damis, of melting sonnets
To many a frosty fair.

Their trailing flowery dresses,
Their fine beflowered coats,
Their elegance and lightness,
And shadows blue,--all floats

And mingles,--circling, wreathing,
In moonlight opaline,
While through the zephyr's harping
Tinkles the mandoline.

L'AMOUR PAR TERRE

The wind the other night blew down the Love
That in the dimmest corner of the park
So subtly used to smile, bending his arc,
And sight of whom did us so deeply move

One day! The other night's wind blew him down!

The marble dust whirls in the morning breeze.
Oh, sad to view, o'erblotted by the trees,
There on the base, the name of great renown!

Oh, sad to view the empty pedestal!
And melancholy fancies come and go
Across my dream, whereon a day of woe
Foreshadowed is--I know what will befall!

Oh, sad!--And you are saddened also, Sweet,
Are not you, by this scene? although your eye
Pursues the gold and purple butterfly
That flutters o'er the wreck strewn at our feet.

[Illustration: "En Sourdine"]

EN SOURDINE

Tranquil in the twilight dense
By the spreading branches made,
Let us breathe the influence
Of the silence and the shade.

Let your heart melt into mine,
And your soul reach out to me,
'Mid the languors of the pine
And the sighing arbuté-tree.

Close your eyes, your hands let be
Folded on your slumbering heart,
From whose hold all treachery
Drive forever, and all art.

Let us with the hour accord!
Let us let the gentle wind,
Rippling in the sunburnt sward,
Bring us to a patient mind!

And when Night across the air
Shall her solemn shadow fling,
Touching voice of our despair,
Long the nightingale shall sing.

COLLOQUE SENTIMENTAL

In the deserted park, silent and vast,
Erewhile two shadowy glimmering figures passed.

Their lips were colorless, and dead their eyes;
Their words were scarce more audible than sighs.

In the deserted park, silent and vast,
Two spectres conjured up the buried past.

"Our ancient ecstasy, do you recall?"
"Why, pray, should I remember it at all?"

"Does still your heart at mention of me glow?
Do still you see my soul in slumber?" "No!"

"Ah, blessed, blissful days when our lips met!
You loved me so!" "Quite likely,--I forget."

"How sweet was hope, the sky how blue and fair!"
"The sky grew black, the hope became despair."

Thus walked they 'mid the frozen weeds, these dead,
And Night alone o'erheard the things they said.

La Bonne Chanson

SINCE SHADE RELENTS

Since shade relents, since 'tis indeed the day,
Since hope I long had deemed forever flown,
Wings back to me that call on her and pray,
Since so much joy consents to be my own,--

The dark designs all I relinquish here,
And all the evil dreams. Ah, done am I
Above all with the narrowed lips, the sneer,
The heartless wit that laughed where one should sigh.

Away, clenched fist and bosom's angry swell,
That knave and fool at every turn abound.
Away, hard unforgivingness! Farewell,
Oblivion in a hated brewage found!

For I mean, now a Being of the Morn
Has shed across my night excelling rays
Of love at once immortal and newborn,--
By favor of her smile, her glance, her grace,

I mean by you upheld, O gentle hand,
Wherein mine trembles,--led, sweet eyes, by you,
To walk straight, lie the path o'er mossy land
Or barren waste that rocks and pebbles strew.

Yes, calm I mean to walk through life, and straight,
Patient of all, unanxious of the goal,
Void of all envy, violence, or hate
It shall be duty done with cheerful soul.

And as I may, to lighten the long way,
Go singing airs ingenuous and brave,
She'll listen to me graciously, I say,--
And, verily, no other heaven I crave.

[Illustration: "Avant Que Tu T'en Ailles."]

BEFORE YOUR LIGHT QUITE FAIL

Before your light quite fail,
Already paling star,
 (The quail
Sings in the thyme afar!)

Turn on the poet's eyes
That love makes overrun--
 (See rise
The lark to meet the sun!)

Your glance, that presently
Must drown in the blue morn;
 (What glee
Amid the rustling corn!)

Then flash my message true
Down yonder,--far away!--
 (The dew
Lies sparkling on the hay.)

Across what visions seek
The Dear One slumbering still.
 (Quick, quick!
The sun has reached the hill!)

O'ER THE WOOD'S BROW

O'er the wood's brow,
 Pale, the moon stares;
In every bough
 Wandering airs
Faintly suspire. . . .

O heart's-desire!

Two willow-trees
 Waver and weep,
One in the breeze,
 One in the deep
Glass of the stream. . . .

Dream we our dream!

An infinite
 Resignedness
Rains where the white
 Mists opalesce
In the moon-shower. . . .

Stay, perfect hour!

THE SCENE BEHIND THE CARRIAGE WINDOW-PANES

The scene behind the carriage window-panes
Goes flitting past in furious flight; whole plains

With streams and harvest-fields and trees and blue
Are swallowed by the whirlpool, whereinto
The telegraph's slim pillars topple o'er,
Whose wires look strangely like a music-score.

A smell of smoke and steam, a horrid din
As of a thousand clanking chains that pin
A thousand giants that are whipped and howl,--
And, suddenly, long hoots as of an owl.

What is it all to me? Since in mine eyes
The vision lingers that beatifies,
Since still the soft voice murmurs in mine ear,
And since the Name, so sweet, so high, so dear,
Pure pivot of this madding whirl, prevails
Above the brutal clangor of the rails?

THE ROSY HEARTH, THE LAMPLIGHT'S NARROW BEAM

The rosy hearth, the lamplight's narrow beam,
The meditation that is rather dream,
With looks that lose themselves in cherished looks;
The hour of steaming tea and banished books;
The sweetness of the evening at an end,
The dear fatigue, and right to rest attained,
And worshipped expectation of the night,--
Oh, all these things, in unrelenting flight,
My dream pursues through all the vain delays,
Impatient of the weeks, mad at the days!

IT SHALL BE, THEN, UPON A SUMMER'S DAY

It shall be, then, upon a summer's day:
The sun, my joy's accomplice, bright shall shine,
And add, amid your silk and satin fine,
To your dear radiance still another ray;

The heavens, like a sumptuous canopy,
Shall shake out their blue folds to droop and trail
About our happy brows, that shall be pale
With so much gladness, such expectancy;

And when day closes, soft shall be the air
That in your snowy veils, caressing, plays,
And with soft-smiling eyes the stars shall gaze
Benignantly upon the wedded pair.

Romances sans Paroles

Ariettes Oubliees

Il pleut doucement sur la ville.--ARTHUR RIMBAUD

It weeps in my heart
As it rains on the town.
What is this dull smart
Possessing my heart?

Soft sound of the rain
On the ground and the roofs!
To a heart in pain,
O the song of the rain!

It weeps without cause
In my heart-sick heart.
In her faith, what? no flaws?
This grief has no cause.

'Tis sure the worst woe
To know not wherefore
My heart suffers so
Without joy or woe.

Son joyeux, importun, d'un clavecin sonore.--PETRUS BOREL

The keyboard, over which two slim hands float,
Shines vaguely in the twilight pink and gray,
Whilst with a sound like wings, note after note
Takes flight to form a pensive little lay
That strays, discreet and charming, faint, remote,
About the room where perfumes of Her stray.

What is this sudden quiet cradling me
To that dim ditty's dreamy rise and fall?
What do you want with me, pale melody?
What is it that you want, ghost musical
That fade toward the window waveringly
A little open on the garden small?

[Illustration: "Le Piano Que Baise Une Main Frele"]

Oh, heavy, heavy my despair,
Because, because of One so fair.

My misery knows no allay,
Although my heart has come away.

Although my heart, although my soul,
Have fled the fatal One's control.

My misery knows no allay,
Although my heart has come away.

My heart, the too, too feeling one,
Says to my soul, "Can it be done,

"Can it be done, too feeling heart,

That we from her shall live apart?"

My soul says to my heart, "Know I
What this strange pitfall should imply,

"That we, though far from her, are near,
Yea, present, though in exile here?"

Le rossignol qui du haut d'une branche se regarde
dedans, croit etre tombe dans la riviere. Il est au sommet
d'un chene, et toutefois il a peur de se noyer.

CYRANO DE BERGERAC.

The trees' reflection in the misty stream
Dies off in livid steam;
Whilst up among the actual boughs, forlorn,
The tender wood-doves mourn.

How wan the face, O traveller, this wan
Gray landscape looked upon;
And how forlornly in the high tree-tops
Lamented thy drowned hopes!

Paysages Belges

BRUXELLES

Hills and fences hurry by
Blent in greenish-rosy flight,
And the yellow carriage-light
Blurs all to the half-shut eye.

Slowly turns the gold to red
O'er the humble darkening vales;
Little trees that flatly spread,
Where some feeble birdling wails.

Scarcely sad, so mild and fair
This enfolding Autumn seems;
All my moody languor dreams,
Cradled by the gentle air.

Birds in the Night

I

You were not over-patient with me, dear;
This want of patience one must rightly rate:
You are so young! Youth ever was severe
And variable and inconsiderate!

You had not all the needful kindness, no;
Nor should one be amazed, unhappily:
You're very young, cold sister mine, and so

'Tis natural you should unfeeling be!

Behold me therefore ready to forgive;
Not gay, of course! but doing what I can
To bear up bravely,--deeply though I grieve
To be, through you, the most unhappy man.

II

But you will own that I was in the right
When in my downcast moods I used to say
That your sweet eyes, my hope, once, and delight!
Were come to look like eyes that will betray.

It was an evil lie, you used to swear,
And your glance, which was lying, dear, would flame,--
Poor fire, near out, one stirs to make it flare!--
And in your soft voice you would say, "Je t'aime!"

Alas! that one should clutch at happiness
In sense's, season's, everything's despite!--
But 'twas an hour of gleeful bitterness
When I became convinced that I was right!

III

And wherefore should I lay my heart-wounds bare?
You love me not,--an end there, lady mine;
And as I do not choose that one shall dare
To pity,--I must suffer without sign.

Yes, suffer! For I loved you well, did I,--
But like a loyal soldier will I stand
Till, hurt to death, he staggers off to die,
Still filled with love for an ungrateful land.

O you that were my Beauty and my Own,
Although from you derive all my mischance,
Are not you still my Home, then, you alone,
As young and mad and beautiful as France?

IV

Now I do not intend--what were the gain?--
To dwell with streaming eyes upon the past;
But yet my love which you may think lies slain,
Perhaps is only wide awake at last.

My love, perhaps,--which now is memory!--
Although beneath your blows it cringe and cry
And bleed to will, and must, as I foresee,
Still suffer long and much before it die,--

Judges you justly when it seems aware
Of some not all banal compunction,
And of your memory in its despair
Reproaching you, "Ah, fi! it was ill done!"

V

I see you still. I softly pushed the door--
 As one o'erwhelmed with weariness you lay;
 But O light body love should soon restore,
 You bounded up, tearful at once and gay.

O what embraces, kisses sweet and wild!
 Myself, from brimming eyes I laughed to you
 Those moments, among all, O lovely child,
 Shall be my saddest, but my sweetest, too.

I will remember your smile, your caress,
 Your eyes, so kind that day,--exquisite snare!--
 Yourself, in fine, whom else I might not bless,
 Only as they appeared, not as they were.

VI

I see you still! Dressed in a summer dress,
 Yellow and white, bestrewn with curtain-flowers;
 But you had lost the glistening laughingness
 Of our delirious former loving hours.

The eldest daughter and the little wife
 Spoke plainly in your bearing's least detail,--
 Already 'twas, alas! our altered life
 That stared me from behind your dotted veil.

Forgiven be! And with no little pride
 I treasure up,--and you, no doubt, see why,--
 Remembrance of the lightning to one side
 That used to flash from your indignant eye!

VII

Some moments, I'm the tempest-driven bark
 That runs dismayed mid the hissing spray,
 And seeing not Our Lady through the dark
 Makes ready to be drowned, and kneels to pray.

Some moments, I'm the sinner at his end,
 That knows his doom if he unshriven go,
 And losing hope of any ghostly friend,
 Sees Hell already gape, and feels it glow.

Oh, but! Some moments, I've the spirit stout
 Of early Christians in the lion's care,
 That smile to Jesus witnessing, without
 A nerve's revolt, the turning of a hair!

Aquarelles

GREEN

See, blossoms, branches, fruit, leaves I have brought,

And then my heart that for you only sighs;
With those white hands of yours, oh, tear it not,
But let the poor gift prosper in your eyes.

The dew upon my hair is still undried,--
The morning wind strikes chilly where it fell.
Suffer my weariness here at your side
To dream the hour that shall it quite dispel.

Allow my head, that rings and echoes still
With your last kiss, to lie upon your breast,
Till it recover from the stormy thrill,--
And let me sleep a little, since you rest.

SPLEEN

The roses were so red, so red,
The ivies altogether black.

If you but merely turn your head,
Beloved, all my despairs come back!

The sky was over-sweet and blue,
Too melting green the sea did show.

I always fear,--if you but knew!--
From your dear hand some killing blow.

Weary am I of holly-tree
And shining box and waving grass

Upon the tame unending lea,--
And all and all but you, alas!

STREETS

Let's dance the jig!

Above all else I loved her eyes,
More clear than stars of cloudless skies,
And arch and mischievous and wise.

Let's dance the jig!

So skilfully would she proceed
To make a lover's bare heart bleed,
That it was beautiful indeed!

Let's dance the jig!

But keenlier have I relished
The kisses of her mouth so red
Since to my heart she has been dead.

Let's dance the jig!

The circumstances great and small,--
Words, moments . . . I recall, recall
It is my treasure among all.

Let's dance the jig!

Sagesse

WHAT SAYST THOU, TRAVELLER, OF ALL THOU SAW'ST AFAR?

What sayst thou, traveller, of all thou saw'st afar?
On every tree hangs boredom, ripening to its fall,
Didst gather it, thou smoking yon thy sad cigar,
Black, casting an incongruous shadow on the wall?

Thine eyes are just as dead as ever they have been,
Unchanged is thy grimace, thy dolefulness is one,
Thou mind'st one of the wan moon through the rigging seen,
The wrinkled sea beneath the golden morning sun,

The ancient graveyard with new gravestones every day,--
But, come, regale us with appropriate detail,
Those disillusioned weeping at the fountains, say,
Those new disgusts, just like their brothers, littered stale,

Those women! Say the glare, the identical dismay
Of ugliness and evil, always, in all lands,
And say Love, too,--and Politics, moreover, say,
With ink-dishonored blood upon their shameless hands.

And then, above all else, neglect not to recite
Thy proper feats, thou dragging thy simplicity
Wherever people love, wherever people fight,
In such a sad and foolish kind, in verity!

Has that dull innocence been punished as it should?
What say'st thou? Man is hard,--but woman? And thy tears,
Who has been drinking? And into what ear so good
Dost pour thy woes for it to pour in other ears?

Ah, others! ah, thyself! Gulled with such curious ease,
That used to dream (Doth not the soul with laughter fill?)
One knows not what poetic, delicate decease,--
Thou sort of angel with the paralytic will!

But now what are thy plans, thine aims? Art thou of might?
Or has long shedding tears disqualified thy heart?
The tree is scarcely hardy, judging it at sight,
And by thy looks no topping conqueror thou art.

So awkward, too! With the additional offence
Of being now a sort of dazed idyllic bard
That poses in a window, contemplating thence
The silly noon-day sky with an impressed regard.

So totally the same in this extreme decay!
But in thy place a being with some sense, pardy,

Would wish at least to lead the dance, since he must pay
The fiddlers,--at some risk of flutt'ring passers-by!

Canst not, by rummaging within thy consciousness,
Find some bright vice to bare, as 't were a flashing sword?
Some gay, audacious vice, which wield with dexterousness,
And make to shine, and shoot red lightnings Heavenward!

Hast one, or more? If more, the better! And plunge in,
And bravely lay about thee, indiscriminate,
And wear that face of indolence that masks the grin
Of hate at once full-feasted and insatiate.

Not well to be a dupe in this good universe,
Where there is nothing to allure in happiness
Save in it wriggle aught of shameful and perverse,--
And not to be a dupe, one must be merciless!

--Ah, human wisdom, ah, new things have claimed mine eyes,
And of that past--of weary recollection!--
Thy voice described, for still more sinister advice,
All I remember is the evil I have done.

In all the curious movements of my sad career,
Of others and myself, the chequered road I trod,
Of my accounted sorrows, good and evil cheer,
I nothing have retained except the grace of God!

If I am punished, 'tis most fit I should be so;
Played to its end is mortal man's and woman's role,--
But steadfastly I hope I too one day shall know
The peace and pardon promised every Christian soul.

Well not to be a dupe in this world of a day,
But not to be one in the world that hath no end,
That which it doth behoove the soul to be and stay
Is merciful, not merciless,--deluded friend.

THE FALSE FAIR DAYS

The false fair days have flamed the livelong day,
And still they flicker in the brazen West.
Cast down thine eyes, poor soul, shut out the unblest:
A deadliest temptation. Come away.

All day they flashed in flakes of fire, that lay
The vintage low upon the hill's green breast,
The harvest low,--and o'er that faithfullest,
The blue sky ever beckoning, shed dismay.

Oh, clasp thy hands, grow pale, and turn again!
If all the future savoured of the past?
If the old insanity were on its way?

Those memories, must each anew be slain?
One fierce assault, the best, no doubt, the last!
Go pray against the gathering storm, go pray!

GIVE EAR UNTO THE GENTLE LAY

Give ear unto the gentle lay
That's only sad that it may please;
It is discreet, and light it is:
A whiff of wind o'er buds in May.

The voice was known to you (and dear?),
But it is muffled latterly
As is a widow,--still, as she
It doth its sorrow proudly bear,

And through the sweeping mourning veil
That in the gusts of Autumn blows,
Unto the heart that wonders, shows
Truth like a star now flash, now fail.

It says,--the voice you knew again!--
That kindness, goodness is our life,
And that of envy, hatred, strife,
When death is come, shall naught remain.

It says how glorious to be
Like children, without more delay,
The tender gladness it doth say
Of peace not bought with victory.

Accept the voice,--ah, hear the whole
Of its persistent, artless strain:
Naught so can soothe a soul's own pain,
As making glad another soul!

It pines in bonds but for a day,
The soul that without murmur bears. . . .
How unperplexed, how free it fares!
Oh, listen to the gentle lay!

I'VE SEEN AGAIN THE ONE CHILD: VERILY

I've seen again the One child: verily,
I felt the last wound open in my breast,
The last, whose perfect torture doth attest
That on some happy day I too shall die!

Good icy arrow, piercing thoroughly!
Most timely came it from their dreams to wrest
The sluggish scruples laid too long to rest,--
And all my Christian blood hymned fervently.

I still hear, still I see! O worshipped rule
Of God! I know at last how comfortful
To hear and see! I see, I hear alway!

O innocence, O hope! Lowly and mild,
How I shall love you, sweet hands of my child,
Whose task shall be to close our eyes one day!

"SON, THOU MUST LOVE ME! SEE--" MY SAVIOUR SAID

"Son, thou must love me! See--" my Saviour said,
"My heart that glows and bleeds, my wounded side,
My hurt feet that the Magdalene, wet-eyed,
Clasps kneeling, and my tortured arms outspread

"To bear thy sins. Look on the cross, stained red!
The nails, the sponge, that, all, thy soul shall guide
To love on earth where flesh thrones in its pride,
My Body and Blood alone, thy Wine and Bread.

"Have I not loved thee even unto death,
O brother mine, son in the Holy Ghost?
Have I not suffered, as was writ I must,

"And with thine agony sobbed out my breath?
Hath not thy nightly sweat bedewed my brow,
O lamentable friend that seek'st me now?"

[Illustration: "Mon Dieu M'a Dit."]

HOPE SHINES--AS IN A STABLE A WISP OF STRAW

Hope shines--as in a stable a wisp of straw.
Fear not the wasp drunk with his crazy flight!
Through some chink always, see, the moted light!
Propped on your hand, you dozed--But let me draw

Cool water from the well for you, at least,
Poor soul! There, drink! Then sleep. See, I remain,
And I will sing a slumberous refrain,
And you shall murmur like a child appeased.

Noon strikes. Approach not, Madam, pray, or call....
He sleeps. Strange how a woman's light footfall
Re-echoes through the brains of grief-worn men!

Noon strikes. I bade them sprinkle in the room.
Sleep on! Hope shines--a pebble in the gloom.
--When shall the Autumn rose re-blossom,--when?

SLEEP, DARKSOME, DEEP

Sleep, darksome, deep,
Doth on me fall:
Vain hopes all, sleep,
Sleep, yearnings all!

Lo, I grow blind!
Lo, right and wrong
Fade to my mind....
O sorry song!

A cradle, I,
 Rocked in a grave:
Speak low, pass by,
 Silence I crave!

[Illustration: Le Ciel et Les Toits.]

THE SKY-BLUE SMILES ABOVE THE ROOF

The sky-blue smiles above the roof
 Its tenderest;
A green tree rears above the roof
 Its waving crest.

The church-bell in the windless sky
 Peaceably rings,
A skylark soaring in the sky
 Endlessly sings.

My God, my God, all life is there,
 Simple and sweet;
The soothing bee-hive murmur there
 Comes from the street!

What have you done, O you that weep
 In the glad sun,--
Say, with your youth, you man that weep,
 What have you done?

IT IS YOU

It is you, it is you, poor better thoughts!
The needful hope, shame for the ancient blots,
Heart's gentleness with mind's severity,
And vigilance, and calm, and constancy,
And all!--But slow as yet, though well awake;
Though sturdy, shy; scarce able yet to break
The spell of stifling night and heavy dreams.
One comes after the other, and each seems
Uncourter, and all fear the moonlight cold.
"Thus, sheep when first they issue from the fold,
Come,--one, then two, then three. The rest delay,
With lowered heads, in stupid, wondering way,
Waiting to do as does the one that leads.
He stops, they stop in turn, and lay their heads
Across his back, simply, not knowing why."*
Your shepherd, O my fair flock, is not I,--
It is a better, better far, who knows
The reasons, He that so long kept you close,
But timely with His own hand set you free.
Him follow,--light His staff. And I shall be,
Beneath his voice still raised to comfort you,
I shall be, I, His faithful dog, and true.

* Dante, Purgatorio.

'TIS THE FEAST OF CORN

'Tis the feast of corn, 'tis the feast of bread,
On the dear scene returned to, witnessed again!
So white is the light o'er the reapers shed
Their shadows fall pink on the level grain.

The stalked gold drops to the whistling flight
Of the scythes, whose lightning dives deep, leaps clear;
The plain, labor-strewn to the confines of sight,
Changes face at each instant, gay and severe.

All pants, all is effort and toil 'neath the sun,
The stolid old sun, tranquil ripener of wheat,
Who works o'er our haste imperturbably on
To swell the green grape yon, turning it sweet.

Work on, faithful sun, for the bread and the wine,
Feed man with the milk of the earth, and bestow
The frank glass wherein unconcern laughs divine,--
Ye harvesters, vintagers, work on, aglow!

For from the flour's fairest, and from the vine's best,
Fruit of man's strength spread to earth's uttermost,
God gathers and reaps, to His purposes blest,
The Flesh and the Blood for the chalice and host!

Jadis et Naguere

Jadis

PROLOGUE

Off, be off, now, graceless pack:
Get you gone, lost children mine:
Your release is earned in fine:
The Chimaera lends her back.

Huddling on her, go, God-spel,
As a dream-horde crowds and cowers
Mid the shadowy curtain-flowers
Round a sick man's haunted bed.

Hold! My hand, unfit before,
Feeble still, but feverless,
And which palpitates no more
Save with a desire to bless,

Blesses you, O little flies
Of my black suns and white nights.
Spread your rustling wings, arise,
Little griefs, little delights,

Hopes, despairs, dreams foul and fair,
All!--renounced since yesterday
By my heart that quests elsewhere....
Ite, aegri somnia!

LANGUEUR

I am the Empire in the last of its decline,
That sees the tall, fair-haired Barbarians pass,--the while
Composing indolent acrostics, in a style
Of gold, with languid sunshine dancing in each line.

The solitary soul is heart-sick with a vile
Ennui. Down yon, they say, War's torches bloody shine.
Alas, to be so faint of will, one must resign
The chance of brave adventure in the splendid file,--

Of death, perchance! Alas, so lagging in desire!
Ah, all is drunk! Bathyllus, hast done laughing, pray?
Ah, all is drunk,--all eaten! Nothing more to say!

Alone, a vapid verse one tosses in the fire;
Alone, a somewhat thievish slave neglecting one;
Alone, a vague disgust of all beneath the sun!

Naguere

[Illustration: "Crepuscule du Soir Mystique."]

PROLOGUE

Glimm'ring twilight things are these,
Visions of the end of night.
Truth, thou lightest them, I wis,
Only with a distant light,

Whitening through the hated shade
In such grudging dim degrees,
One must doubt if they be made
By the moon among the trees,

Or if these uncertain ghosts
Shall take body bye and bye,
And uniting with the hosts
Tented by the azure sky,

Framed by Nature's setting meet,--
Offer up in one accord
From the heart's ecstatic heat,
Incense to the living Lord!

Parallelement

IMPRESSION FAUSSE

Dame mouse patters
Black against the shadow grey;
 Dame mouse patters
 Grey against the black.

 Hear the bed-time bell!
Sleep forthwith, good prisoners;
 Hear the bed-time bell!
 You must go to sleep.

 No disturbing dream!
Think of nothing but your loves:
 No disturbing dream,
 Of the fair ones think!

 Moonlight clear and bright!
Some one of the neighbors snores;
 Moonlight clear and bright--
 He is troublesome.

 Comes a pitchy cloud
Creeping o'er the faded moon;
 Comes a pitchy cloud--
 See the grey dawn creep!

 Dame mouse patters
Pink across an azure ray;
 Dame mouse patters. . . .
 Sluggards, up! 'tis day!

Poemes Saturniens

PROLOGUE

The Sages of old time, well worth our own,
Believed--and it has been disproved by none--
That destinies in Heaven written are,
And every soul depends upon a star.
(Many have mocked, without remembering
That laughter oft is a misguiding thing,
This explanation of night's mystery.)
Now all that born beneath Saturnus be,--
Red planet, to the necromancer dear,--
Inherit, ancient magic-books make clear,
Good share of spleen, good share of wretchedness.
Imagination, wakeful, vigorless,
In them makes the resolves of reason vain.
The blood within them, subtle as a bane,
Burning as lava, scarce, flows ever fraught
With sad ideals that ever come to naught.
Such must Saturnians suffer, such must die,--
If so that death destruction doth imply,--
Their lives being ordered in this dismal sense
By logic of a malign Influence.

Melancholia

NEVERMORE

Remembrance, what wilt thou with me? The year
Declined; in the still air the thrush piped clear,
The languid sunshine did incurious peer
Among the thinned leaves of the forest sere.

We were alone, and pensively we strolled,
With straying locks and fancies, when, behold
Her turn to let her thrilling gaze enfold,
And ask me in her voice of living gold,

Her fresh young voice, "What was thy happiest day?"
I smiled discreetly for all answer, and
Devotedly I kissed her fair white hand.

--Ah, me! The earliest flowers, how sweet are they!
And in how exquisite a whisper slips
The earliest "Yes" from well-beloved lips!

APRES TROIS ANS

When I had pushed the narrow garden-door,
Once more I stood within the green retreat;
Softly the morning sunshine lighted it,
And every flow'r a humid spangle wore.

Nothing is changed. I see it all once more:
The vine-clad arbor with its rustic seat. . . .
The waterjet still splashes silver sweet,
The ancient aspen rustles as of yore.

The roses throb as in a bygone day,
As they were wont, the tall proud lilies sway.
Each bird that lights and twitters is a friend.

I even found the Flora standing yet,
Whose plaster crumbles at the alley's end,
--Slim, 'mid the foolish scent of mignonette.

MON REVE FAMILIER

Oft do I dream this strange and penetrating dream:
An unknown woman, whom I love, who loves me well,
Who does not every time quite change, nor yet quite dwell
The same,--and loves me well, and knows me as I am.

For she knows me! My heart, clear as a crystal beam
To her alone, ceases to be inscrutable
To her alone, and she alone knows to dispel

My grief, cooling my brow with her tears' gentle stream.

Is she of favor dark or fair?--I do not know.
Her name? All I remember is that it doth flow
Softly, as do the names of them we loved and lost.

Her eyes are like the statues',--mild and grave and wide;
And for her voice she has as if it were the ghost
Of other voices,--well-loved voices that have died.

A UNE FEMME

To you these lines for the consoling grace
Of your great eyes wherein a soft dream shines,
For your pure soul, all-kind!--to you these lines
From the black deeps of mine unmatched distress.

'Tis that the hideous dream that doth oppress
My soul, alas! its sad prey ne'er resigns,
But like a pack of wolves down mad inclines
Goes gathering heat upon my reddened trace!

I suffer, oh, I suffer cruelly!
So that the first man's cry at Eden lost
Was but an eclogue surely to my cry!

And that the sorrows, Dear, that may have crossed
Your life, are but as swallows light that fly
--Dear!--in a golden warm September sky.

Paysages Tristes

CHANSON D'AUTOMNE

Leaf-strewing gales
Utter low wails
 Like violins,--
Till on my soul
Their creeping dole
 Stealthily wins....

Days long gone by!
In such hour, I,
 Choking and pale,
Call you to mind,--
Then like the wind
 Weep I and wail.

And, as by wind
Harsh and unkind,
 Driven by grief,
Go I, here, there,
Recking not where,
 Like the dead leaf.

LE ROSSIGNOL

Like to a swarm of birds, with jarring cries
Descend on me my swarming memories;
Light mid the yellow leaves, that shake and sigh,
Of the bowed alder--that is even I!--
Brooding its shadow in the violet
Unprofitable river of Regret.
They settle screaming--Then the evil sound,
By the moist wind's impatient hushing drowned,
Dies by degrees, till nothing more is heard
Save the lone singing of a single bird,
Save the clear voice--O singer, sweetly done!--
Warbling the praises of the Absent One....
And in the silence of a summer night
Sultry and splendid, by a late moon's light
That sad and fallow peers above the hill,
The humid hushing wind that ranges still
Rocks to a whispered sleepsong languidly
The bird lamenting and the shivering tree.

Caprices

IL BACIO

Kiss! Hollyhock in Love's luxuriant close!
Brisk music played on pearly little keys,
In tempo with the witching melodies
Love in the ardent heart repeating goes.

Sonorous, graceful Kiss, hail! Kiss divine!
Unequalled boon, unutterable bliss!
Man, bent o'er thine enthralling chalice, Kiss,
Grows drunken with a rapture only thine!

Thou comfortest as music does, and wine,
And grief dies smothered in thy purple fold.
Let one greater than I, Kiss, and more bold,
Rear thee a classic, monumental line.

Humble Parisian bard, this infantile
Bouquet of rhymes I tender half in fear....
Be gracious, and in guerdon, on the dear
Red lips of One I know, alight and smile!

EPILOGUE

I

The sun, less hot, looks from a sky more clear;
The roses in their sleepy loveliness
Nod to the cradling wind. The atmosphere
Enfolds us with a sister's tenderness.

For once hath Nature left the splendid throne
Of her indifference, and through the mild
Sun-gilded air of Autumn, clement grown,
Descends to man, her proud, revolted child.

She takes, to wipe the tears upon our face,
Her azure mantle sown with many a star;
And her eternal soul, her deathless grace,
Strengthen and calm the weak heart that we are.

The waving of the boughs, the lengthened line
Of the horizon, full of dreamy hues
And scattered songs, all,--sing it, sail, or shine!--
To-day consoles, delivers!--Let us muse.

II

So, then this book is closed. Dear Fancies mine,
That streaked my grey sky with your wings of light,
And passing fanned my burning brow, benign,--
Return, return to your blue Infinite!

Thou, ringing Rhyme, thou, Verse that smooth didst glide,
Ye, throbbing Rhythms, ye, musical Refrains,
And Memories, and Dreams, and ye beside
Fair Figures called to life with anxious pains,

We needs must part. Until the happier day
When Art, our Lord, his thralls shall re-unite,
Companions sweet, Farewell and Wellaway,
Fly home, ye may, to your blue Infinite!

And true it is, we spared not breath or force,
And our good pleasure, like foaming steed
Blind with the madness of his earliest course,
Of rest within the quiet shade hath need.

--For always have we held thee, Poesy,
To be our Goddess, mighty and august,
Our only passion,--Mother calling thee,
And holding Inspiration in mistrust.

III

Ah, Inspiration, splendid, dominant,
Egeria with the lightsome eyes profound,
Sudden Erato, Genius quick to grant,
Old picture Angel of the gilt background,

Muse,--ay, whose voice is powerful indeed,
Since in the first come brain it makes to grow
Thick as some dusty yellow roadside weed,
A gardenful of poems none did sow,--

Dove, Holy Ghost, Delirium, Sacred Fire,
Transporting Passion,--seasonable queen!--
Gabriel and lute, Latona's son and lyre,--
Ah, Inspiration, summoned at sixteen!

What we have need of, we, the Poets True,
That not believe in Gods, and yet revere,
That have no halo, hold no golden clue,
For whom no Beatrix leaves her radiant sphere,

We, that do chisel words like chalices,
And moving verses shape with unmoved mind,
Whom wandering in groups by evening seas,
In musical converse ye scarce shall find,--

What we need is, in midnight hours dim-lit,
Sleep daunted, knowledge earned,--more knowledge still!
Is Faust's brow, of the wood-cuts, sternly knit,
Is stubborn Perseverance, and is Will!

Is Will eternal, holy, absolute,
That grasps--as doth a noble bird of prey
The steaming flanks of the foredoomed brute,--
Its project, and with it,--skyward, away!

What we need, we, is fixedness intense,
Unequalled effort, strife that shall not cease,
Is night, the bitter night of labor, whence
Arises, sun-like, slow, the Master-piece!

Let our Inspired, hearts by an eye-shot tined,
Sway with the birch-tree to all winds that blow,
Poor things! Art knows not the divided mind--
Speak, Milo's Venus, is she stone or no?

We therefore, carve we with the chisel Thought
The pure block of the Beautiful, and gain
From out the marble cold where it was not,
Some starry-chitoned statue without stain,

That one far day, Posterity, new Morn,
Enkindling with a golden-rosy flame
Our Work, new Memnon, shall to ears unborn
Make quiver in the singing air our name!

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