

WHITNEY
HELEN HAY

HERBS AND APPLES

Helen Whitney
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Herbs and Apples:

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Helen Hay Whitney

Herbs and Apples

I give you this, the bitter and the sweet.
It holds my heart, can you not hear it beat?
So poor a gift to put within your hand—
Apples and Herbs!—but you will understand.

TO NEIGHBOR LIFE

Neighbor Life, I love you well,
Have you any goods to sell?
Let me buy or let me borrow
Joy, to tide me o'er the morrow;
I will give you in exchange
Baskets full of thoughts that range,
Bright utensils of my brain;
Coins of feeling you shall gain.
All I ask in equal measure
Is your store of joy and pleasure.
Neighbor Life, I love you well,
Have you any joy to sell?

THE UNBURIED

In the wood the dead trees stand,
Dead and living, hand to hand,
Being Winter, who can tell
Which is sick and which is well?
Standing upright, day by day
Sullenly their hearts decay
Till a wise wind lays them low,
Prostrate, empty, then we know.

So thro' forests of the street,
Men stand dead upon their feet,
Corpses without epitaph;
God withholds his wind of wrath,
So we greet them, and they smile,
Dead and doomed a weary while,
Only sometimes thro' their eyes
We can see the worm that plies.

UP A LITTLE ROAD

Up a little road with the morning in my arms,
Drenched with dew and tipsy with the madness of the May,
Leafy fingers on my face, I stop not for your charms!
Love is waiting round the turn, to be my Love to-day.

Shouting as I ride on the springing ringing sod,
Ah! my pony knows the goal to which his course is laid,
Gallop'g thro' dawn he knows he bears a little god
Bacchus-mad with happiness who burns to meet his maid.

ON CEDAR STREET, NEW YORK

I, whose totem was a tree
In the days when earth was new,
Joyous leafy ancestry
Known of twilight and of dew,
Now within this iron wall
Slave of tasks that irk the soul,
To my parents send one call—
That they give me of their dole.

Thro' the roar of alien sound
Grimy noise of work-a-day,
Secretly a voice, half drowned,
Whispers thro' the evening's grey,
"Child, we know the path you tread,
Ghost and manes, we are true;
Cedar spirits, long since dead,
Calm and sweet abide with you."

CHE SARÀ SARÀ

Deep as the permanent earth is deep,
Fierce as its central fire,
Man is his own conclusion,
Woman her great desire.

THE DEAD WANTON

She was so light, so frail a thing,
She had no wisdom but her face,
Which caught men's fancy like the Spring
Yet held them but a moment's space.

She is the youngest of the dead,
And so the great lean round her feet;
They strive to learn from her fair head
Why far-forgotten life was sweet.

For now she knows what Plato knows,
And lapped in languor she agrees
With Kant, and as her soft hair blows,
Smiling, she flouts Demosthenes.

LEAVEN

Others furnish bread and meat,
Busy hucksters on the street,
They will give you what you need,
All the facts your life to feed.

Mine are not these wares of earth,
I can give my love but mirth;
Let, oh let this part be mine,
I would be your salt and wine.

QUAERITUR

What if to-day, when I have made so sure
That love is utterly and wholly mine,
What if I found that faith should not endure
And all my trust in you I should resign;

That when I send my thoughts like homing birds
To your dear heart they find no resting place,
But all misunderstood, far, foreign words,
They die away like strangers at your face.

Love, make me certain, make the circuit true,
And when I wonder, give the faith I seek
Perfectly trusting, let me end in you
Heart against heart, and cheek upon your cheek.

LOVE LAND

Where is El Dorado?
Where is bright Cathay?
These are lands where we should go
To live and love to-day.

Miles of glistening beaches
Over all the sun,
Tropic, spicy-laden breeze
To lull when day is done.

Gypsy lass and lover
With the tides we'd rove;
We be natives of no land
Save the land of love.

BY THE WESTERN GATE

You and you only!—By the Western gate
That fronts the falling sun I shade my face
And watch for you. As one who's lost the race
Tries to demand no further gift from Fate
Lest he be hurled more low, so I, who wait
And want you, ask no pity of your grace
On my defeat, I only long to trace
My lost heart; come to me, my need is great.

I see the young men with their crystal eyes,
They stand about my door, their hearts, I know
Are breaking in the poppies that they bring.
I cannot love them for I am not wise;
Ah, come, or else forever let me go,
I grow so tired with waiting in the Spring.

FOR MUSIC

The Indian Summer and Love have fled,
Oh, red, red lips like a crimson rose,
Oh, slender hands with the tips of red,
You are lost in the land of Nobody-knows.

The sweet breeze blows but it comes not back,
The water flows in a silver stream,
But never returns on its moon-white track,
They are gone, past recall, like a lovely dream.

Ah, crimson lips like a tilted flower,
Where sweetest honey awaits the bee;
Come back, come back for a single hour,
Dear Love, my Summer, come back to me.

THE LITTLE GHOST

The little one who loved the sun
Who only lived for play,
Ah, why was she the one condemned
To dark and dreams for aye!

The perfect perfume of her life
Was as a rose's breath,
And now she treads eternally
The gusty walks of Death.

MADONNA EVE

From what far spicery derives your hair
The sweet faint fragrance that enslaves my sense?
What subtle love trick taught you to be fair
With overt lure and covert reticence?

Madonna Eve, you bear upon your breast
A hungry emerald like the desiring sea,
But warm upon your heart lie pearls of rest
What man could exorcise such witchery?

A CONVERSATION

"Laddy, leave your pedant's task,
Rove the world with me.
Fields and towns and pretty lands
Together we would see.
There be workers everywhere,
You would not be missed.
Come, ah come, and take for yours
The mouth you never kissed!"

"Lady, I am fain for play,
So I may not go.
Only those who hate to toil
The true enjoyment know;
But could you love a larrikin
Whose task he'd so resign?"
"Yes!—I'd love a larrikin
If only he were mine."

BE BRAVE

Be brave about yourselves, you little ones,
If in the crazy warp and woof you gleam
With the insistence of determined suns,
Shine, being true and modest in your dream.

If to the peace of nature you respond
Draw from her breast your milk, nor weep the high
Duties for lack of which you now despond,
Made for historic planets thro' the sky.

Knowing yourself a gay and careless weed,
Be you courageous in your light despair;
Sure that you fill a space of unknown need,
Idle and green in the bright coat you wear.

Strive to the uttermost to find your worth,
Jester or Gypsy, Body, Brain or Soul,
Filling with perfect cheer your place on earth,
So shall the tapestry of Time be whole.

FORFEITURE

So I have lost you. When the utter ache
Shall fade at length to mere despondency
What will the answer to this problem be?
They say that nothing dies, that all we stake
Brings some unknown return; what then shall make
An adequate exchange for love, to see
Your hand held out in friendship?—as for me
The episode is ended, for life's sake.

You want me still for that small joy I gave,
But now it ends for you. I am not brave
To love you seared; I have no happy days
To brood upon at dusk, and so I claim,
As all the wager that good fortune pays,
Complete obliteration of your name.

THE SEARCH

I tire of the struggle, the search for the ultimate I,
There hangs the chalice of sapphire, the infinite sky,
Why thro' the space of despair should my spirit be hurled
Seeking for truth, when beneath lies this pearl of a world?

Seers may direct us thro' pain to discover the soul,
Comforting joy may not give us the absolute whole,
But if the seers should be wrong, may the truth not be ours
Thanking dear Life for its light and its beautiful hours?

DUST

Motes of the city dust, could this thing be
That midst your myriad particles for me
Might come one atom out of Ispahan,
One spiced far memory of caravan.

Indrawn upon my breath I'd know an urge
To dissipate monotony, and purge
The spirit of its spleen; one with the man
Who takes the sun blue air of Ispahan.

NATURE'S CHILD

I had a friend whose soul was very fair,
His word was wisdom and his strength was sure;
His courage in the ills he had to bear
Made others strong and able to endure.
I asked no love, no tribute of the sense
For his companionship was recompense.

I thought I was beloved, but did not care,
He smiled on me as he on others smiled,
But one grey day a chill was in the air
And then to prove that I was Nature's child,
He spoke—"I do not love you very much—"
And all my friendship shattered at the touch.

VERITATIS

Seated among the shards of Potiphar
I pondered. Shall we still strive on? forsooth
There is no better, that is good as Best,
There is no truer that is true as Truth.

THE PEACOCK

She was more beautiful than tropic night,
Luring, compelling as the smile of Fate;
Like a poor wastrel, I for her delight
Squandered my soul and gained her idle hate.
Peacock and paroquet!—at last I know
The sorriest songsters make the bravest show.

ANTICIPATION

The joy is in the making. While we sow
Our dream is wonderful with flowers, we name
The purlieus of our garden and the aim
Is worth the effort, yet we cannot know
The garden will be just a garden, so
The dream is heaven. This way mothers frame
The child's high dedication to its fame,
Repaid for all reality may show.

God knows this, so He lets us have the best,
The vast anticipation, rugged man
Joys in the struggle, triumphs over throes,
Vanquished a thousand times he still finds zest
In hope and all his pleasure in a plan
To be fulfilled at length in Heaven?—who knows.

THE WAYFARER

Half way to happiness,
The whole way back again,
Stumbling up the stubborn hill
From the luring lane.

Little sunset House of Hearts
Standing all alone,
I could come and sweep the leaves
From your stepping stone.

I, and he, could light your fires
Laughing at the rain
But O it's far to Happiness,
A short way back again.

RENUNCIATION

Not what I ask, but what I do not ask,
O my Beloved, proves my love for you.
And love can set to love no harder task
Than wistful silence, reticence to sue.

I lock my lips, I force a wise content
With all my being wailing for a sign.
Ah, if men knew what woman's smiling meant
When fierce and hard the heart cries out "He's mine."

Mothers of men are we, we barren ones
Who say "Be happy, dear, and play your part."
What matter how we yearn, you are our sons
Whose every footfall breaks a woman's heart.

ARABESQUE

Gold fish, rose and red
As lady Lillith's hair,
Mauve and blue as curling smoke
And water-sapphires there.

At the fountain's brim
I built a little dream,
As a goldsmith cunningly
I made it flash and gleam.

I wrought a maiden shape,
I colored it with love,
Scarlet mouth and breast of pearl
And eyes of turtle dove.

Thro' hours of moony dark,
I woo'd her for my bride
But ah! I could not build her soul,
So with the dawn she died.

THE ARCHITECTS

How shall we build it curiously well,
Our house to live and love in?—Shall it be
Only significant to you and me,
Or shall it be a palace where may dwell
Those whom our spirits notice? May we tell
An architect to loose his fancy free
To toss up towers in soaring ecstasy
With Doric dignity or temple bell?
Or shall we build it with our hands, alone,
Working together over wood and stone
To learn an art we never knew, and strive,
Patient, to raise with faith and trust and love,
Fashioned so cunningly it must survive,
A secret cottage in a silent grove?

AMBUSH

Crafty Chieftain, where you lie
You can see the clouds drift by,
Waiting in the dusky fern
For your enemy's return.

Does the beauty of that place
Never tell you of my face,
I, you left, to plot and plan
For the ending of a man?—

You had better sought my aid,
I have met him unafraid,
We have wandered all alone
Underneath a yellow moon.

We have found the end of strife
Is the waking up to life—
Therefore you, who forced my vow,
Take my all of wisdom now.

Love has taught me but one truth—
Love is merry, love is youth,
We be children, he and I.
Where is your sagacity?

THE SCALES

I wonder if the store of joy
And love is limited,
And if because my heart is glad
Some other heart has bled.

Believing this, a balance just
Of recompense, I pray
That my beloved gained the joy
I did not have to-day.

THE OLD TRAGEDY

Did I allure you?—I only meant to love you,
I only meant to be so dear you could not let me go.
I held you close against my heart, bending down above you,
As mothers brood above their babes, I loved you, loved you
so.

'T was passion that moved you, called to you and caught you;
You never felt my tenderness full launched on your desire.
You never knew the friendship and sympathy I brought you.
Ah, Mary pity women when their veins are filled with fire.

And so I have lost you, I who never won you;
You thought me but a siren by your crafty arts beguiled.
I hate myself and scorn you for the honor I have done you.
I leave you, bitter woman, and I came to you a child.

TABOO

Now am I sacred, for that holy thing,
Your touch, has made me as a god; to-day
I am magnificent, I am a king
To whom my fellow men must cringe and pray.

Such is taboo; but when to-morrow comes
I may look once upon the sun and you;
Then, thro' the dawn, with wailing and sad drums
I pay the utter price.—Such is taboo!

THE RIVALS

Seated in my ingle nook
With Duty by my side,
How I strove to see her charms
And take her for my bride!

"Sweet," I said, "I love you so"—
And suddenly I heard
The laughing call of Beauty's voice
And all my soul was stirred.

Once again she cried my name
And gone was every doubt,
For who could stay at Duty's side
When Beauty calls without?

ALONE

I only wanted room to be alone.
I saw the days like little silver moons
Cool and restrained shine forth; there were no noons
To make me glad with glory, to atone.
I dreamed of solitude. When one has known
Ardent and eager verity, the tunes
Of semi-truths are sweet, as subtle runes
Attest the bud more dear than flower full blown.

To be alone, to watch the dusk and weep
For beauty's face that is so veiled, to know
How exquisite the earth breaths come and go,
To feel my life a silent, empty room
Where lovely thoughts might take new shape and bloom,—
This is the dream that is more dear than sleep.

BENEATH THE MASK

I said that men were cowards,
I thought that men were brave,
I said that women gained no faith
For all the love they gave.

Beneath a mask of scorning
I wore a heart of trust,
But laughed in all my lovers' eyes
And vowed their vows were dust.

Time showed my words were true ones,
My thoughts have proved no test,
But still beneath my mask, I say
I know my dreams were best.

THOTH

Hewn from basalt, black as sin,
Blind eyes staring, hands on knees,—
This is Thoth, who shall survive
All your fair divinities.

Mars and Venus, piping Pan,
White Diana, Cupid sweet,—
All their beauty, all their pride,
Lie like ashes round his feet.

Vast and calm and ultimate
Ere this orb dissolves in space
Life's last glimpse to man shall be
Thoth, with his impassive face.

LITTLE DANCER

O little dancer, slim as a new moon,
A candle flame blown by the wind—how soon
Will all this be forgotten! Do you care
The pagan poppies dying in your hair;
Do you despair to think that even as they
Your lovely life will tarnish in a day?
How can we keep you, butterfly!—O must
Such lovely grace resolve itself in dust?
We must believe that some day when you lie
Hid from the lights, beneath the open sky
The trees will bend more perfectly above you,
The flowers dance gayer for they'll know and love you,
And we will mind a little less the cold,
Remembering your grace when we are old.

SIC ITUR AD ASTRA

If it be educational to breast
Salt lipped the wave that is the woe of Earth,
Who could be called a fool? There is no rest
From sorrow in this island of re-birth.

And yet, ringed 'round with shadow as we are,
In the penumbra we may all discern
Glowing and gay the promise of a star
For the adventurer with faith to yearn.

THE JUDGES

Watch me, eyes of the wind and rain,
See if I come to the dusk with stain,
Search me, eyes of the soaring sun,
See what mischief my hands have done.

If there be beauty of word or deed,
If there be truth or a scorn of greed,
Give me the peace of your dark, sweet hours,
Let me be still as your moon and flowers.

If there be harm to a heart that trusts,
If there be pander to sordid lusts,
Curse and condemn me to wide-eyed pain,
Judge, and pay me, eyes of the rain.

THE SPRING PLANTING

"What shall we plant for our Summer, my boy,—
Seeds of enchantment and seedlings of joy?

Brave little cuttings of laughter and light?

Then shall our Summer be flowery and bright."

"Nay!—You are wrong in your planting," said he,

"Have we not grass and the weeds and a tree?

Why should we water and weary away

For sake of a flower that lives but a day!"

So she made gardens which he would not dig,

Tended her apricot, apple and fig.

Then, when one morning he chanced to appear,

Sadly he noticed—"No trespassing here."

AN IMPRESSIONIST PICTURE

"How do you do," I said; the yellow coat
She wore was like a golden serpent's skin.
I took her white gloved hand, my voice grew thin
As tho' her hand were tight about my throat.
The air was green with heat, a flaccid note
I did not fail to see, for heat might win
My cause; her weary soul looked from within
And saw the white sails flapping on my boat.

"Coolness and rest" my eyes were whispering,
In Isles where morn grows never afternoon,
Where Passion buds forever with the Spring,
Nor wanes with shifting tides of sea and moon,
But—"How are you?" she said, and that was all,
And tho' she smiled, she passed beyond recall.

SUCH HELP FOR SINGING

Such help I have for singing!
The little winds a-stir
Touch gently on the lispings leaves
Like dainty dulcimer.

The sights and scents of April—
What dreams, what themes they bring—
While gaunt crows cry their gasconade
Down all the ways of Spring.

Such happy help for singing!
And round, below, above
The air is thrilling with my joy
Of love, love, love.

TEMPUS EDAX RERUM

Upon the silence of my unconcern
The little noise that was your name falls dead.
I can remember how your mouth was red,
In the lost years, but tho' the senses yearn
For some unguessed desire, they never turn
To that vitality, your face!—We sped
So swiftly thro' our burning hour. We said
Drink deep, 't will never end; too late we learn
That lovely passion's face so soon is grey,
That notes too often pressed upon grow dumb,
That after the high climax crowns a day
The dusk seems long and empty. We who come
To taste again Life's feast, why must it be
We meet such ghosts to chill our revelry?

THE COWARD

Wishful of many honors,
He was too lame to climb,
And so he sat to wait for Death,
Forgetting to be brave.

He never saw the windfalls,
From off the trees of Time,
Drop down in mellow chance to him
The while he digged his grave.

THE LOST ROMANY

The Romany has gone, he has taken all my kisses,
I knew I could not keep him, so I laughed and let him go.
I do not know the road where his freedom and his bliss is,
So take my sober spinning where no gypsy winds can blow.

I will find my life serene, I will wed a pleasant lover,
I may think no more of perfume and the lingering in the lane;
I will rear me sturdy children, and my soul I will discover,
For I will not love a Romany in all this world again.

COMPENSATION

If one grew blind thro' gazing
Wide-eyed upon the sun,
What matter when such memoried light
Would last till life were done.

If one should die of loving,
Divinely wild, and brave,
What matter with such dreams to dream
Within the quiet grave.

UNTAMED

Ah, we weary so with kisses,
Weary so with your caresses,
As the hooded hawk returning
To its tinkling bells and jesses,
So we flutter to the prison
Of your arms, in meek surrender,
And we grieve when you are angry,
And we smile when you are tender,
But our souls, untamed, are soaring
Where no blandishments can teach them,
Free our hearts, and free our spirits,
Where your hands can never reach them.

TO PERVANCHE

If you were mine—(for all the little flowers
That see you, weary of their innocence)—
If prayers that have been pale with penitence
Grew purple with our passion, all the hours
From sun to sun would be unique with bliss,
Little red mouth that is not mine to kiss!

You are not mine and you will never be,
And so I am magnanimous, I give
My love and you to Time, and you shall live
Bride of his avid passion. I will see
The moon of all this lure and beauty set,
And I will turn from you and quite forget.

THE BELLE

She spread her atlas petticoat
So rare, so fine to see.
Her bonnet was of Tuscan straw,
Her shawl was Turkey red.
She peacocked gay before men's eyes,
This lady of degree,
On slippered tiny feet, and ah!
She wished that she were dead.

At every ball, at every rout
She was the toast of town;
But no one knew who called her cold
What cruel wound had she.
The laughing gallant that she loved
Had scorned her high renown,
And now another bore his babe,
And held it on her knee.

RELEASE

How may we be released from memories?
One dreads each green renewal of the grain,
Reviving ancient life. If but the brain
Might be made clean of last year's withered lies,
Blown like brown leaves across the April skies
In hateful resurrection, and retain
Only the springs of promise, fine and sane,
And a kind, leading hand to make us wise.

If with the running sap a royal birth
Each year might be accomplished, strong and free
With the sweet prescience of virginity,
Then were we true inheritors of earth,
And the large lonely stars no more should see
The age worn phoenix-lives that make our dearth.

THE THIEF

Did you see the rascal with the rain-grey eyes?
He robbed me of my happiness before I knew its worth.
He stole into my garden and took it by surprise,
When midnight hid his wicked ways upon the sleeping earth.

How shall I arrest him, for he took away my Spring,
Took away my April 'neath his cloak of steaming rain.
Tho' he left his Summer and a choir of birds that sing,
Nothing will content me for I want my Spring again.

I WILL WRITE LETTERS TO THE GRASS

I will write letters to my friend the grass,
I will sing all my songs to lilac flowers
Gather the spices in the airs that pass,
And wrap my heart close shrouded in the hours.

I dread man's huge impertinence; he creeps
Thro' the inviolate silences of Spring
Like a marauder, waking that which sleeps
To gather strength for lyric blossoming.

I will write all my letters to the grass.
The world shall be resolved into a cry
Faint as a little voice that cries Alas!
And I will laugh alone beneath the sky.

ONLY THIS

We need demand no further gift from Heaven,
We might dispense with documents and creeds,
If but this one great grace to us were given—
The strength to follow where our reason leads.

THE SURVIVOR

Beauty will crumble with tasking,
Love rarely lasts for a year,
Virtue is sold for the asking,
Bravery fades before fear.

Youth never lives till the morrow,
One thing of all is alive,
Joy cannot quench it, or sorrow,
Folly alone shall survive.

Folly, from cradle to burning,
Toys for the great and the small,
None shall escape her by learning—
Folly has rattles for all!

MEGAERA

Always to suffer so, to want and weep
With woe that groweth every day more deep;
To don the green robe of tormented scorn,
And ever curse the hour that love was born!
Furies, my Sisters! have you no surcease
For me to whom no death shall bring release?

They name me Jealous One. They hate my name,
The ages hold me high to endless shame;
How, if I suffer so, does no one care
And pity, for the wrath that I must bear?
Gods! let me go, your service wrecks and sears,
The vase must break that holds so many tears.

THE SONG OF MOKAI

He's dead, I watched him die.
He cast a spell on my mate,
They loved, and the moon whirled 'round the sky,
They mocked at my rage and hate.

Blood red from the burning sea
The sun rose, and I knew!
My soul whined wild little songs to me,
I did what I had to do.

I have taken the bone of his thigh,
I have fashioned it into a horn;
And I sing my soul's song, shrill and high,
And curse the day he was born.

TO THE GYPSY MAN

Is there no room in your gypsy heart
Where a woman's love might lie
Warm and sheltered, your prize and song,
As you wander beneath the sky?

No, for you say, "I'll carry no weight,
I must be free, be free;
I'll carry no love in my gypsy heart
To make a drag for me."

Little you know, then, love is the cloak
That shelters you from the storm;
Love makes the shoes for your gypsy feet,
Love is your coat so warm.

Though you take no purse and you take no staff
You cannot escape the load
Of a woman's longing and woman's love
That follows you down the road.

THERE IS NO DANGER IN DISDAIN

There is no danger in disdain,
No grief in perfidy;
The meek they are who taste of pain
And matchless misery.

The hearts who give, and giving, die,
Could they but learn the way
To take, and laugh and then deny,
They still might live their day.

THE PLAYMATE

Brown boy running on a wide wet beach,
Free as the water and the wind are free;
Eyes of an odalisque and skin of a peach,
O for such a playmate to play with me!—

Drenched with the sunshine of the long brave hours,
How we would tumble in the white wild spray;
Then, drowsy children, fall asleep like the flowers,
And wake keen and merry to a new clean day.

AFTERWARDS

You know how I came to you,
World beaten, tossed aside;
Ready for death at a hangman's hand,
Stript of all hope or pride.

Leaning, you gathered me up
Close to your great sweet heart,
Lulled me and told me to be a man,
Taught me your wonderful art.

Now I am very wise,
Proud with your love's true vow;
Glorious with power,—I am more than a man,
What will you do with me now!

THE OLD MAID

Ah, Heaven! How soon my body will be old!
I powder and I perfume and I tire
With the long wasting of my one desire.
I choose fair colors, furs, and antique gold
To draw men's eyes and hands, and yet how cold,
How careless are their eyes. I see the fire
Flame from my neighbor, and I can aspire
To only friendship. I have tried the bold,
The luring attitude, the timid mien,
The boyish, wise, or simple, all in vain.
I know the women laugh at me, but oh,
How can I let my dreamed perfection go?
I am a woman, I must have a man
Only to ratify my nature's plan.

MADNESS?

They say I'm mad because I stare
And look as tho' they were not there,
Because I only speak when aught
Occurs to me by way of thought.

Instead of serving Fashion's creeds,
I cut my coat to fit my needs.
I laugh at grief and only weep
When noisy life disturbs my sleep.

My dreams are delicate and wild;
Was ever wise man so beguiled?—
Mad, am I mad!—then pray that you
May some day hope for madness too!

THE SCHOLAR

From what sweet masters have I fathomed doubt,
What love and laughter taught me to be blind;
How patient did they point the letters out
Latin and Greek to my bewildered mind.

Now I am very wise, I know the 'a'
The little 'a' of doubt's first faint distress
Then, letter perfect, I recall the way
Thro' all the alphabet of bitterness.

WISDOM'S SECRET

Coerced by Furies who persuaded me
That life was imminent with idleness,
Their jibes made mad, their lashes aided me
To grasp the accident of bitterness.

Come storm! I cried, come passion and despair,
For calm inhibits growth!—I called on fire
To sear my comfortable days, and wear
The nights to wastes of torment and desire.

Then pausing breathless, in a little wood
I met with Wisdom laughing in the sun;
She said, "Lie still, for idleness is good,
And grow in peace as I myself have done."

CAGED

Once I had wings—I had no heart to fly,
They put me in a cage, I did not die.
They tamed me, taught me tricks and bade me sing;
I waited, bore it patiently; one thing
I knew, that some day it might be
The cage would open and I should be free.
I waited endlessly,—at last the day!
Faint with delight I thought to fly away,
Ah, but the mockery of that open door!—
My wings were powerless, I could fly no more.

THE WIFE SPEAKS

Not all those women you have loved and left,
O my Beloved, can stir my jealousy;
Not the light loves which you forgot for me,
For my heart's fingers made by life most deft
Have mended all the rents their arrows cleft
And from their old enchantments set you free.
But one is my despair, and only she,
The one who loved you, hopeless and bereft.

How can I give as much, who hold your heart
As she, unloved who gave with scorn of gain?
So do the angels; at her name I smart
And feel a sordid bargainer who gives
For fair exchange; I cannot heal the pain,
I am defeated by her while she lives.

THE ALTAR

Some take comfort from a star,
Thro' the slow grey surge of Time,
Some take joy from ruddy war,
Lust of conflict, heat of crime.

In these days of codes and creeds,
Gods may wander newly born,
Every day for each man's needs
Bringing blessings thro' the morn.

I will take a happy word,
Open heart and hand for play,
And a song which none have heard
For my altar of the day.