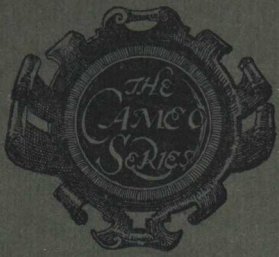
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After Benozzo Gozzoli.

"And oh!" the King Balthazzar said,
As he gazed into the sky.—*Page 70.*

Retrospect

AND OTHER POEMS.

by

A MARY F. ROBINSON

(Madame James Darmesteter.)

CAMEO SERIES

FISHER UNWIN PATERNOSTER SQ.
LONDON E.C. MDCCCXCIII

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Lyrics.

Retrospect.

HERE beside my Paris fire, I sit alone and ponder
All my life of long ago that lies so far asunder;
"Here, how came I thence?" I say, and greater grows the wonder
As I recall the farms and fields and placid hamlets yonder.

. . . See, the meadow-sweet is white against the watercourses,
Marshy lands are kingcup-gay and bright with streams and sources,
Dew-bespangled shines the hill where half-abloom the gorse is;
And all the northern fallows steam beneath the ploughing horses.

There's the red-brick-chimneyed house, the ivied haunt of swallows,
All its garden up and down and full of hills and hollows ;
Past the lawn, the sunken fence whose brink the laurel follows,
And then the knee-deep pasture where the herd for ever wallows !

So they've clipped the lilac bush ; a thousand thousand pities !
'Twas the blue old-fashioned sort that never grows in cities.
There we little children played and chaunted aimless ditties,
While oft the old grandsire looked at us and smiled his Nunc Dimittis !

Green, O green with ancient peace, and full of sap and sunny,
Lusty fields of Warwickshire, O land of milk and honey,
Might I live to pluck again a spike of agrimony,
A silver tormentilla leaf or ladysmock upon ye !

Patience, for I keep at heart your pure and
perfect seeming,
can see you wide awake as clearly as in
dreaming,
Softer, with an inner light, and dearer, to my
deeming,
Than when beside your brooks at noon I
watched the sallows gleaming !

The Frozen River.

THE silver-powdered willows of the Quai,
Rise frosty-clear against the roseate skies,
The winter sunlight mellows ere it dies
And lingers where the frozen river lies.

Between the hurrying wharves, a sheet of grey
It sleeps beneath the parapet of stone :
A sudden desolation, empty, lone
And silent with a silence of its own.

All round the city vast and loud and gay !
. . . If one should weary of the press and din
And venture here—beware ! the crust is thin ;
One step—and lo, the Abyss would draw him in.

Athwart the happiest lives of every day
Beside the Lovers' Walk, the household mart,
Think ye there lies no silent road apart?
No mute and frozen Chasm of the heart?

Fair Ghosts.

WHEN the extreme of autumn whirls the
oak-leaf from the forest,
Till from the withered ling,
The hardiest birds take wing ;—
Courage, Heart ! there surges through this
winter thou abhorrest,
The Vision of the spring !

When the oncoming years dispel the magic of
our morning
Till all the Past is shed
With petals falling red :
Lost illusions, hope defeated, passion turned
to scorning,
Eternal friendship dead ;

Ah, in how many an hour of twilight,—Soft!
they wake and flutter,
And hover round us yet,
The ghosts of our regret:
Long lost altered faces, names we never hear
or utter
And nevermore forget!

Rock, O tormented forest, all thy branches
torn and hoary!
In vain the tempest stings.
The skies I watch are Spring's,
Lovelier still and haloed with the soft poetic
glory,
Of all remembered things!

Foreign Spring.

THE charlock and the hemlock flowers
Have hung their laces o'er the green ;
The buttercups are bright and sheen
As though the Spring were ours.

But through the poplar-rank there shines
The white interminable way ;
And down the hill the budding vines
Go softly gloved in grey.

Amid a purer loftier sky
The foreign sun burns far and bright :
. . . O mistier fields ! O tenderer light !
I pause awhile and sigh.

Souvenir.

EVEN as a garden full of branch and blooth
Seen in a looking-glass and so more fair
With boughs suspended in a magic air
More spacious and more radiant than the truth ;

So I remember thee, my happy Youth,
And smile to look upon the days that were,
As they had never told of doubt or care,
As I had never wept for grief or ruth.

So, were our spirits destined to endure,—
So, were the After-life a promise sure
And not the mocking mirage of our dearth !

Through all eternity might Heaven appear
The still, the vast, the radiant souvenir
Of one unchanging moment known on Earth.

Spring and Autumn.

GOD in His heart made Autumn for the young ;
That they might learn to accept the approach of age
In golden woods and starry saxifrage
And valleys all with azure mists o'erhung.

For over Death a radiant veil He flung,
That thus the inevitable heritage
Might come revealed in beauty, and assuage
The dread with which the heart of youth is wrung.

And for the consolation of the old
He made the delicate, swift, tumultuous Spring ;
That every year they might again behold

The image of their youth in everything
And bless the fruit-trees flowering in the cold
Whose harvest is not for their gathering.

The Vision.

SOMETIMES when I sit musing all alone
The sick diversity of human things,
Into my soul, I know not how, there springs
The Vision of a world unlike our own.

O stable Zion, perfect, endless, One,
Why hauntest thou a soul that hath no wings?
I look on thee as men on mirage-springs,
Knowing the desert bears but sand and stone.

Yet, as a passing mirror in the street
Flashes a glimpse of gardens out of range
Through some poor sick-room open to the heat;

So in our world of doubt, and death, and change,
The vision of Eternity is sweet,
The vision of Eternity is strange!

The Gospel according to St. Peter.

TO-MORROW or in twenty centuries
The sudden falling open of a lid
On some grey tomb beside the Pyramid
May bring the First Evangel to our eyes.

That day, who knows with what aghast surprise
Our priests shall touch the very deeds He did,
And learn the truth so many ages hid,
And find, perchance, the Christ did never rise.

What then? shall all our faith be accounted vain?
Nothing be left of all our nights of prayer?
Nothing of all the scruples, all the tears
Of endless generations' endless years?
Take heart! Be sure the fruits of these remain.
Hark to the Inner Witness: Christ is there!

Veritatem Dilexi.

(*In Memoriam—Ernest Renan.*)

TRUTH is an Idol," spake the Christian sage.
"Thou shalt not worship Truth divorced from Love.
Truth is but God's reflection: Look above!"
So Pascal wrote, and still we muse the page.

"Truth is divine," said Plato, "but on high
She dwells, and few may be her ministers,
For Truth is sad and lonely and diverse:
Heal thou the weakling with a generous lie!"

But thou in Truth delightedst! Thou of soul
As subtle-shimmering as the rainbow mist,
And still in all her service didst persist.
For no One truth thou lovedst, but the Whole.

Le Roc-du-Chère.

HIGH on the heathery hill-brow o'er the lake,
White as a temple gleams the tomb afar.
Shine on, shine on even as a guiding star,
And let our souls be nobler for thy sake!

He whom we leave amid the rocks and winds
Tower'd in our midst, a conscience to us all.
We looked at him and fought, and dared not fall,
But faced the truth in front with honest minds.

O passionate and loyal Spirit of Life
That spake so true and firm thro' doubt and pain.
O large and grand and simple soul of Taine,
Be to us still our standard in the strife;

Pure as the welling waters of thy wave,
And mighty as the mountains of thy rest.
Indomitable as yonder eagled crest,
And lowly as these grasses round thy grave.

Vishtaspa.

I.

FOR thirty years Vishtaspa reigned alone,
No King above him in the empty skies,
No Lord of all earth's fallen sovereignties
To mock the mighty tedium of his throne.

To him the secrets of the stars were known
Who was above all sages great and wise ;
Yet as the years dragged on without surprise
He wearied of this world that was his own.

Earth is too narrow for the dreaming Soul.
Ay, tho' she hold it all from pole to pole
Her least desire is wider than the whole.

Therefore who knows the limit of his power
Disdains the trivial baubles of an hour,
And plunges where the seas of silence roll.

II.

"Life is a dream," Vishtaspa said, "wherein
The dreamer lives alone, the rest is vain.
My dream shall end, for I would sleep again."
He went his palace-terraces to win :

—"Farewell," he said, "glitter and glare and din ;
Farewell ! I cast me to the quiet plain."
But as he would have leapt, a voice spoke plain :
"Mortal, thy Master saith : thou shalt not sin."

Lo, at his side, unguessed, Zoroaster trod.
—O sudden peace of heart, O deep delight
Of souls outgrown religion's earlier rite,
Yet spent and thirsting for the springs of God,
When the undreamed-of Prophet deigns appear !

Vishtaspa reigned in rapture many a year.

Zeno.

HE whom the Greeks call Zeno Cypriote—
Ger-Baäl ben Manasseh, Lord of Truth—
Twixt Citium and Athens, in his youth
Trading in Tyrian purple, plied his boat.

Still in the Porch and Grove the Athenians quote
The lean Phœnician merchant, swart, uncouth,
Who stopped to read beside the copyist's booth,
And left his cargo twenty years afloat!

He was the first who said to Man: "Renounce.
Follow thy soul: thou hast no other claim;
And yield to Fate as lambs to the Eagle's pounce.

"Do right. Fear nothing, deeming all the same."
Yet not for that we heap his tomb with crowns.
But, Duty, he was first to breathe thy name!

Philo Judæus.

THAT the inspired and fiery souls of Seers
Poets and heroes should renew the Truth—
I hold the thing no marvel ; for in sooth
By these our Race hath grown thro' all its years.

But he who hath not drunk of human tears,
Who, fired by no prophetic love or ruth,
Spends over parchment scrolls a pallid youth,
Untouched, unneighboured by our pangs and fears,

How should he frame the spirit's world anew ?
Answer me, Philo, meek and studious Jew,
Who winged the Six Archangels of the Mage ;

And, all unconscious of the marvel done,
Whispered his loftiest secret to St. John,
And left in East and West another age.

Irenæus contra Gnosticos.

GOD, who art good, since Thou createst Life,
  Curse me these Syrian prophets of Despair
  Who gaze upon Thy stars nor count them fair !
Or bid me build the stake and whet the knife.

Carpocrates and Marcion, sons of strife,
  With all their brood of evil, perish there !
  Till Hell be drunk with spells and the unseen air
Babble of magic like a village wife !

But we be free to dwell in peace and grace,
We, who are made in the Image of Thy Face ;
  Nor hear them tempt the child and teach the lad

How, from a gulf of Sin, in poisoned fumes
The Soul of Man exhales, expires, consumes,
  And mocks the God above him blind and mad !

Taking Possession.

WHEN, in the wastes of old, the Arabian Sheikh
Beheld a sudden peace amid the sands,
With springing waters and green pasture lands,
Fringed with the waving palm and cactus-spike,

Think ye he stayed to fashion fence or dyke?
Nay! for he called into his hollowed hands
Till all his hounds towards him trooped in bands—
Sheep-dog and wolf-dog, fawning, cur and tyke—

And bayed with deep, full voices on the calm.
Then he: "So far as the last echoes die
The land is mine, pasture and spring and palm!"

So men who watch afar the Hope Divine
Rally a pack of sectaries and cry:
"Behold the Land of Promise: ours, not thine!"

The Present Age.

WE stand upon a bridge between two stars.
And one is half engulféd in the Abyss ;
While unarisen still the other is,
Hidden behind the Orient's cloudy bars.

We tread indeed a perilous path by night !
Yet we who walk in darkness unaghast
Prepare the future and redeem the past,
That after us the Morning-star be bright.

Liberty.

LIBERTY, fiery Goddess, dangerous Saint,
God knows I worship thee no less than they
Who fain would set thee in the common way
To battle at their sides without restraint,

Redoubtable Amazon! Who, never faint,
Climbest the barricades at break of day,
With tangled locks and blood-besmirched array,
Thy torch low-smoking through the carnage taint!

But I would set thee in a golden shrine
Above the enraptured eyes of dreaming men,
Where thou shouldst reign immutable, divine,
A hope to all generations and a sign;
Slow-guiding to the stars, through quag and fen,
The scions of thine aye-unvanquished line!

The Disguised Princess.

(*France*, 1893.)

IMMORTAL Princess, thou whose sovereign eyes
Have sent so many a paladin afar
To win thy favours in the feats of war,
I am thy lover, I, who recognise
Thy royal beauty through a vile disguise ;
And still I worship thee, O Dream, O Star !
But say, what fell enchantment bids thee mar
Thy splendour thus in tatters, beggar-wise ?

O my enchanted Princess, still divine
However mocked with foul and coarse array,
Thou art as noble as the generous day,
And none, not even thyself, can do thee wrong ;
Yet show to all men's eyes, as still to mine,
Thou art the Elect of Heaven, a Queen and strong !

Soldiers Passing.

ALONG the planetree-dappled pearly street,
Full flooded with the gay Parisian light,
I watch the people gather, left and right,
Far off I hear the clarion shrilling sweet ;

Nearer and nearer comes the tramp of feet ;
And, while the soldiers still are out of sight,
Over the crowd the wave of one delight
Breaks, and transfigures all the dusty heat.

So I have seen the western Alps turn rose
When the reflection of the rising sun
Irradiates all their peaks and woods and snows.

Even so this various nation blends in one
When down the street the sacred banner goes,
And every Frenchman feels himself its son !

A French Lily.

SWEET Iphigenia-soul of every day,
Fair vine so trellised to the parent-stay
Thou hast no single force, no separate will,
But leaning grow'st, and, flowering, leanest still;
In that walled garden where thou dwell'st alone
Thou art the whitest blossom ever known!

Less full and ample than our English rose
Whose generous freshness floods the garden close,
And less confiding to the gatherer's hand
Than their forget-me-not o' the Fatherland,
Yet, O French Lily, pure and grown apart,
Ah, none the less I wear thee next my heart!

Song.

THE flocks that bruise the mountain grass
  Send out beneath their feet
Such thymy fragrance as they pass
  That all the vale is sweet.

Sometimes a stranger breathes your name,
  O friend of years ago!
And in my heart there leaps to flame
  A long-remembered woe.

The Widow.

SHE hath no children, and no heart
  In all our hurrying anxious life ;
She sits beyond our ken apart,
  Unmoved, unconscious of our strife ;
Shipwrecked beyond these coasts of ours,
On some sad island full of flowers
Where nothing moves but memory ;
Where no one lives but only he ;
  And all we others barely seem
  The phantom figures of a dream
One dreams and says, "It cannot be!"

If sometimes when we talk with her,
  Her absent eyes light up awhile,
And her set lips consent to stir
  In the beginning of a smile,

It is not of our world nor us
But some remembrance tremulous,
Some sweet "Ten years ago to-day!"
Or haply if a sudden ray
  Set all her window in a glow
  She thinks: "'Twill make the roses blow
I planted at his feet to-day."

His tomb is all her garden-plot,
  And rain or sunshine finds her there.
She plants her blue forget-me-not
  With hands but half unclasped from prayer;
Her loving mercies overbrim
O'er all the tombs that neighbour him;
On each she sets some dewy-pearled
White pink or fernlet fresh-uncurled;
  She plucks the withering violets;
  And here if anywhere forgets
The emptiness of all the world.

Here, where she used to sob for hours,
  Her deep fidelity unchanged
Hath found a calm that is not ours,
  A peace exalted and estranged.

Here in the long light summer weather
She brings the books they chose together
And reads the verse he liked the most ;
And here, as softly as a ghost,
  Comes gliding through the winter gloom
  To say her prayer beside the tomb
Of him she loves and never lost.

Song.

THOU sentest them an Angel, Lord,
  Since they were precious in Thine eyes,
An Angel with a flaming sword
  To drive them out of Paradise.

For thus they kept the dream of bliss,
  The hope in something out of sight,
Nor ever knew how sad it is
  To weary of our best delight.

The Barrier.

LAST night I dreamed I stood once more
  Beneath our garden wall.
I saw the willows bending grey,
  The poplar springing tall.

O paths where oft I plucked the rose,
  O steeple in the sky,
O Common swelling darkly green,
  How glad at heart was I !

My hand I raised to lift the latch,
  But lo, the gate was gone !
And all around, ay, all around
  There ran a wall of stone. . . .

O years when oft we plucked the rose,
  When oft we laughed and cried !
Thou hast no gate, O Youth, our Youth,
  When once we stand outside !

Selva Oscura.

IN a wood
  Far away,
Thrushes brood,
  Ravens prey,
Eagles circle overhead,
Through the boughs a bird drops dead.

Wild and high,
  The angry wind
Wanders by
  And cannot find
Any limit to the wood
Full of cries and solitude.

The Children's Angel.

THE streets are dark at Clermont in Auvern.
—O steep and tortuous lava-streets, how plain
With eyes that dream in daylight I discern
Your narrow skies and gabled roofs again !

See, through the splendours of the summer heat
We climb the hill from Notre Dame du Port,
A mountain at the end of every street,
And every mountain crowned with tower or fort.

Until, on the upmost ridges of the town,
We turn into the narrowest street of all,
And watch, at either end, the way slope down
As steep and sudden as a waterfall !

'Twas there, above a booth of huckster's ware,
Our Angel spread her broad and golden wings
And smiled with painted eyes and burnished hair
Above a motley herd of trivial things ;

A fair Church-angel desecrate ! We turned
To barter for a price the lovely head,
The wide blue listening eyes, the brow that yearned,
The slim round neck and lips of palest red.

But when we clasped our treasure in our hold—
Less perfect, like all treasure, being attained—
Behold, below the radiant eyes, behold
All round the mouth, the wood showed blunt and stained !

"True !" quoth the Vendor, "yet if words or blows
Were ought avail, or children less a pest,
Those lips would bloom as freshly as a rose ! . . .
The children never cared to kiss the rest.

"But every day, all weathers, wet or fine,
Since first I hung your Angel at the door,
Each blesséd morning, on the stroke of nine,
And every week-day evening after four,

"The children from the school-house troop in bands,
Rush down the street their helter-skelter run,
Snatch at our Angel with their chubby hands,
And laugh and leap to kiss it one by one.

"Fifty at least, the rascals! If I played
My dog-lash on their backs, who cared? Not they!
Impudent, blithe, delighted, unafraid,
They laughed their rippling laugh and rushed away."

The Merchant paused. We looked each in the face
The other, bade our fancy one farewell:
"Nay, keep your Angel in its olden place,"
We cried, "good friend; it is not yours to sell.

"What, did you think us basest of the earth?
That we, grown old, and heartsick with the truth,
Should rob the little children of their mirth,
And take the children's Angel from their youth."

A Controversy.

LET us no more dispute of Heaven and Hell!
How should we know what none hath ever seen?
We'll watch instead the same sweet miracle
That every April works in wood and green. . . .
The apples in our orchard are a bower
Of budding bright-green leaf and pearly flower,
No two alike of all the myriad blossom!
Some faintly-flushing as a maiden's bosom,
Some pursed in hardy pinkness, some as pale
As stars that glitter o'er the twilit vale.

If sometimes from His balcony on high,
The Lord of all the stars, with musing eye,
Look down upon this orchard of our world,
Methinks he marks as blossom dewy-pearled
Sprung from the branches of the self-same tree,
Our varying faiths—and all the creeds there
be!—
Indifferently radiant, chiefly dear
For that ripe harvest of the later year
Which promises a winter-wealth of mead
To fill the goblet up and brim the bowl:—
His wine of generous thought and ample deed
Sprung from the perfect blossom of the soul.

Serena.

(In the forests of Paraguay there grows a plant which the peasants call Serena, quite unnoticeable, and yet of a perfume so attractive that those who have plucked the flower by accident are said henceforth to roam the woods incessantly in quest of another blossom.)

IN Paraguayan forest there's a flower
The shepherds call Serena.
(Of all that blooms on herb or tree
Serena is the flower for me !)
The white magnolia on her brazen tower,
The lemon-fresh verbena
And roses where their purple clusters shower
Are nothing to Serena !

For where the wild liana shrouds the forest
In darkness, under cover,
Serena grows, so pure and small
You never notice her at all.
No herborist, no botanist, no florist,
Hath cared to con thee over
Thou little lonely blossom that abhorrest
The gazes of thy lover !

No singer ever set thee in his sonnet,
My virginal Serena!
(O sacred flower that none may choose,
Or, having gathered thee, refuse.)
And never yet—I stake my faith upon it!—
Corinna or Celimena
Hath worn thy waxen image in her bonnet,
O pale and pure Serena!

But here and there, methinks, a weary shepherd
In quest of dewy blossom
Stoops down to pluck the grass in flower
Beneath a white acacia-bower,
To cool some ancient scar of ape or leopard,
Some bite of snake or possum;
And lo! he starts and smiles, the happy shepherd,
Serena in his bosom!

And through his veins there steals a subtle wonder,
A magic melancholy,
(So faint a sense, it cannot be
A hope or yet a memory)

But something haunts the bough he slumbers
under
That makes it rare and holy,
And lo! the shadows are a thing to ponder,
And every herb the Moly! . . .

Or else (who knows?) some lithe and amber
maiden
Who steals to meet her lover
Goes singing with an idle art
To ease the gladness at her heart,
Along the sombre paths and cypress-shaden
Deep glades the roses cover,
And fills her arms with garlands heavy laden
The dewdrops sprinkle over.

But, in the crown she binds, her slender fingers
Have set the undreamed-of flower;
And from that moment she forgets
Her lover and her carcanets;
Nor any more she sings among the singers,
But wanders hour on hour
Deep in the wood and deeper, where there
lingers
The secret and the power! . . .

Now He and She shall wander at the leading
Of one enchanted vision ;
Recall the thing they have not seen,
Remember what hath never been,
And seek in vain the flower they plucked unheeding ;
And pass, with mild derision,
The roses where the herds of Heaven are feeding,
Or lily-beds Elysian.

O undiscovered blossom slight and wan, set
Deep in the forest-closes,
Be mine, who ever, as thou knowst,
The least apparent loved the most :
Low music at the first faint-breathing onset,
The summer when it closes,
The silvery moonrise better than the sunset,
And Thee than autumn roses !

The Sibyl.

BEHOLD, the old earth is young again !
The blackthorn whitens in the rain,
The flowers come baffling wind and hail,
The gay, wild nightingale
Cries out his heart in wood and vale.
(*And in my heart there rises too*
A dim free longing
For some delight I never knew !)

O Spring, thou art a subtle thing,
Wiser than we, thou Sibyl, Spring !
Thy tresses blown across our face
In Life's mid-race
Remind us of some holier place—
(*And unawares the dullest find*
A new religion
That all their doubts have left behind !

Ephphatha.

FOR miles beyond the orange river
The olive orchards gleam and shiver,
And at the river's brink, as pale,
The ranks of moonlit rushes quiver.

And somewhere in a hidden vale,
The unseen and secret nightingale
Her olden woe doth still deliver,
Though all the orchards know the tale.

O magic of the South, whenever
Your sweet dissolving breezes sever
About my heart the bonds of mail,
I, too, would sing, and sing for ever !

The Sonnet.

(*To M. Gaston Paris.*)

SONNET, be not rebellious in my hands
That ply the spindle oftener than the lute :
Without our woman's singing thou wert mute,
O sonnet, born of us in sunnier lands !

Think, how the singing-women trooped in bands
To seek the greenwood, dancing to the flute !
Hast thou forgot the refrain dissolute ?
The circling dance, the chant, the ivied wands ?

Sonnet, a thousand years ago to-day
Thou wast indeed the wild instinctive song
That women chaunted for the Feast of May !

But now, O solemn mirror of the mind,
Now it is I am weak, and thou art strong,
Keep me a coign of clearness and be kind !

The Bookworm.

THE whole day long I sit and read
Of days when men were men indeed
And women knightlier far :
I fight with Joan of Arc ; I fall
With Talbot ; from my castle-wall
I watch the guiding star. . . .

But when at last the twilight falls
And hangs about the book-lined walls
And creeps across the page,
Then the enchantment goes, and I
Close up my volumes with a sigh
To greet a narrower age.

Home through the pearly dusk I go
And watch the London lamplight glow
Far off in wavering lines :
A pale grey world with primrose gleams,
And in the West a cloud that seems
My distant Appenines.

O Life ! so full of truths to teach,
Of secrets I shall never reach,
    O world of Here and Now ;
Forgive, forgive me, if a voice,
A ghost, a memory be my choice
    And more to me than Thou !

New Year's Eve.

THE traveller who after long delay
Turns gladly, ah, how gladly! home again,
Sees deadlier than it is the deadly main,
And ambushed with a direr chance the way.

And ever, as he nears the homing day,
A thousand feverish terrors rack his brain:
He sees his dear ones pallid, as in pain,
He starts at night with dreams he dare not say.

So when at last he stands within the garth,
And lifts the latch, and sees them well and strong,
Clustered in radiant welcome round the hearth;

He turns half-faint to find his fear so wrong.
As I, Old Year, who dreaded thee so long
To find thee spent in love and smiles and song!

Oriental Jealousy.

(*To Doctor Sheikh Mohammed, of Teheran.*)

LAST night, upon the garden wall,
Two nightingales sang side by side,
And while I could not sleep at all
The anguish of my heart they cried.
The secret of my heart they sang,
And trilled and shouted in the gloom,
Till when the garden echoes rang,
I shuddered in my darkling room.

"O rose and oleander boughs!
(They lilted) Trails of flowering bay!
O maidens treasured in a house,
As fragrant and as frail as they.
Trees of the sacred garden close
That reach your branches o'er the wall!
Profane and desecrated rose,
Whose petals on the highway fall!

"How should ye know the pang, the goad,
That stabs the Gardener's heart in twain,
When half across the common road
He sees the boughs he pruned in vain,
The flowers he reared for him, the fruits
No stranger's eye should look upon ! . . .

"Tear up, O Gardener, branch and roots,
The flower's a mock, the perfume's gone!"

A Word in Counsel.

CHILDREN, be not abuséd : Love is sweet!
Leave honours and ambition to the old,
Nor let your youth be laden o'er with gold
Before ye know how loud the heart can beat.

Children, no stair is steep to happy feet!
Wrapt in one mantle, if the hearth be cold,
Each all the closer in the other's hold,
Ye have so many secrets to repeat!

Children, be not deceivéd : Love is dire!
And Love illicit a consuming fire
That burns the soul to ruin, the heart to ash.

Ay, rather than confront the nameless life
Of the unbelov'd, unloving, erring wife,
Pray for the Russian tortures of the lash!

Song.

A HEART as deep as the sea,
A heart as vast as the sky,
Thou shouldest have given to me,
O Spirit, since I must die!

For how shall I feel and attain
The joy and the fear and the strife,
The hope of the world and the pain
In the few short years of a life?

Ballads and Legends.

The Death of the Count of Armaniac.

THERE'S nothing in the world so dear
To a true knight," he cried,
" As his own sister's honour !
Now God be on our side ! "

The walls of Alexandria
That stand so broad and high,
The walls of Alexandria
They answered to the cry.

And thrice, his trumpets blaring,
He rides around those walls ;
" Come forth, ye knights of Lombardy,
Ye craven knights ! " he calls.

Armaniac, O Armaniac,
Why rode ye forth at noon ?
Was there no hour at even,
No morning cool and boon ?

The swords of Alexandria
He kept them all at bay,

But oh, the summer sun at noon
  It strikes more deep than they.
  * * * *

Oh for a drink of water!
  Oh for a moment's space
To loose the iron helm and let
  The wind blow on his face!

He turned his eyes from left to right,
  And at his hand there stood
The shivering white poplars
  That fringed a little wood.

And as he reeled along the grass,
  Behold, as chill as ice
The water ran beneath his foot,
  And he thought it Paradise.

"Armaniac! O Armaniac!"
  His distant knights rang out;
And "Armaniac" there answered them
  The mountains round about.

Armaniac, O Armaniac,
  The day is lost and won:
Your hosts fight ill without a chief,
  And the foe is three to one.
  * * * *

At dusk there rides a Lombard squire,
  With his train, into the copse,
And when they reach the water-side
  The horse whinnies and stops.

For dead beside the white water
  A fallen knight they find;
His helmet lies upon the grass,
  His locks stir in the wind.

"Now speak a word, my prisoners!
  What great captain is he
Who died away from battle
  Alone and piteously?"

Woe! and woe for Armaniac,
  And woe for all of us,
And for his sister's honour, woe
  That he be fallen thus!

For "where's the Count of Armaniac?"
  The Lombard women sing;
"He died at Alexandria
  Of the water of a spring!"

Thy name is made a mock, my Lord,
  Thy vengeance still to pay,
And we must pine in Lombardy
  For many and many a day!

Rosamunda.

(From the Piedmontese.)

AH, love me, Rosamunda,
Now love me or I die!"
—"Alas, how shall I love thee?
A wedded wife am I."

"And wilt thou, Rosamunda,
We put the man away?"—
—"Alas, how shall we do it?—"
"To-day or any day!

"Within thy mother's garden
An asp is in the vine:
Go, bray it in a mortar
And put it in his wine."

* * * *

"Ho, wife! Ho, Rosamunda!
Where art thou, low or high?
For I am home from hunting,
And sore athirst am I."

"The wine is in the goblet,
The wine is in the cup,
Go, take it from the cupboard
And lift the cover up."

"Ho, wife! Ho, Rosamunda!
Come hither, come and see!
The good red wine is troubled . . .
How came this thing to be?"

"The sea-wind yester-even
Hath troubled it, I think."
—"Come hither, Rosamunda,
Come hither, come and drink!"

—"Alas, how shall I drink it
When I am not athirst?"
—"Come hither, Rosamunda,
Come here and drink the first!"

—"Alas, how shall I drink it
That never drank of wine?"
—"Thou'lt drink it, Rosamunda,
By this drawn sword of mine!"

—"I drink it to my lover!
I drink it and I die!
My lover is the King o' France—
A dead woman am I."

Captain Gold and French Janet.

THE first letter our Captain wrote
To the Lord of Mantua :
" Did you ever see French Janet
(He wrote) on any day ? "

" Did ye ever see French Janet,
That was so blithe and coy ?
The little serving-lass I stole
From the mountains of Savoy.

" Last week I lost French Janet :
Hunt for her up and down ;
And send her back to me, my Lord,
From the four walls o' the town."

For thirty days and thirty nights
There came no news to us.
Suddenly old grew Captain Gold,
And his voice grew tremulous.

O Mantua's a bonny town,
  And she's long been our ally;
But help came none from Mantua-town.
  Dim grew our Captain's eye.

"O send me Janet home again!"
  Our Captain wrote anew;
"A lass is but a paltry thing,
  And yet my heart's in two!

"Ha' ye searched through every convent-close,
  And sought in every den?
Mistress o' man, or bride of Christ,
  I'll have her back again!"

O Mantua's a bonny town,
  And she's long been our ally;
But help came none from Mantua-town,
  And sick at heart am I.

For thirty days and thirty nights
  No news came to the camp;
And the life waned old in Captain Gold,
  As the oil wanes in a lamp.

The third moon swelled towards the full
  When the third letter he wrote :
"What will ye take for Janet ?
  Red gold to fill your moat ?

"Red wine to fill your fountains full ?
  Red blood to wash your streets ?
Ah, send me Janet home, my Lord,
  Or ye'll no die in your sheets !"

O Love, that makes strong towers to sway,
  And captains' hearts to fall !
I feared they might have heard his sobs
  Right out to Mantua-wall.

For thirteen days and thirteen nights
  No messenger came back ;
And when the morning rose again,
  Our tents were hung with black.

The dead bell rang through all the camp ;
  But we rung it low and dim,
Lest the Lombard hounds in Mantua
  Should know the end of him.

Sir Eldric.

SIR ELDRIC rode by field and fen
To reach the haunts of heathen men.

About the dusk he came unto
A wood of birchen gray,
And on the other side he knew
The heathen country lay.

"'Tis but a night," he sang, "to ride,
And Christ shall reach the other side."

The moon came peering through the trees,
And found him undismayed;
For still he sang his litanies,
And as he rode he prayed.

He looked as young and pure and glad
As ever looked Sir Galahad.

About the middle of the night
He came upon the brink
Of running waters clear and white,
And lighted there to drink.

And as he knelt a hidden foe
Crept from behind and smote him so.

He turned ; he felt his heart's blood run ;
  He sought his enemy :
"And shall I leave my deeds undone,
  And die for such as thee ?"

And since a Knight was either man,
They wrestled till the dawn began.

Then in the dim and rustling place,
  Amid the thyme and dew,
Sir Eldric dealt the stroke of grace,
  And sank a-dying too,

And thought upon that other's plight
Who was not sure of Heaven to-night.

He dipped his fingers in his breast ;
  He sought in vain to rise ;
He leaned across his foe at rest,
  And murmured, "I baptize !"

When lo ! the sun broke overhead :
There, at his side, *Himself* lay dead !

The Mower.

THEY were three bonny mowers
  Were mowing half the day ;
They were three bonny lasses
  A-making of the hay.

"Who'll go and fetch the basket ?"
  "Not I." "Nor I." "Nor I."
They had no time for falling out
  Ere Nancibel came by.

"What's in your basket, Nancibel ?"
  "There's cakes and currant wine,
There's venison and good cider, lads ;
  Come quickly, come and dine."

They were two bonny mowers
  Fell to among the best ;
The youngest sits a-fasting,
  His head upon his breast.

"What ails ye, bonny mower,
  You sit so mournfully?"
"Alas! what ails me, Nancibel?
  'Tis all the love of thee."

"Now laugh and quaff, my bonny lad,
  And think no more o' me.
My lover is a finer man
  Than any twain o' ye.

"He's bought for me a kirtle,
  He's bought for me a coat,
Of three-and-thirty colours,
  Wi' tassels at the throat.

"And twenty Maids of Honour
  They stitched at it a year,
And sewed in all their needlework
  The kisses of my dear!"

The Three Kings.

THREE kings went riding from the East,
Through fine weather and wet ;
"And whither shall we ride," they said,
"Where we have not ridden yet ?"

"And whither shall we ride," they said,
"To find the hidden thing
That turns the course of all our stars
And all our auguring ?"

They were the Wise Men of the East,
And none so wise as they ;
"Alas !" the King of Persia cried,
"And must ye ride away ?

"Yet since ye go a-riding, sirs,
I pray ye, ride for me ;
And carry me my golden gifts
To the King o' Galilee.

"Go riding into Palestine,
  A long ride and a fair!"
"'Tis well!" the Mages answered him,
  "As well as anywhere!"

They rode by day, they rode by night,
  The stars came out on high—
"And oh!" the King Balthazzar said,
  As he gazed into the sky,

"We ride by day, we ride by night,
  To a king in Galilee,
We leave a king in Persia,
  And kings no less are we.

"Yet often in the deep blue night,
  When stars burn far and dim,
I wish I knew a greater King
  To fall and worship him.

"A King who should not care to reign,
  But wonderful and fair;
A king—a king that were a Star
  Aloft in miles of air!"

"A star is good," said Melchior,
  "A high, unworldly thing;

But I would choose a soul alive
  To be my Lord and King.

"Not Herod, nay, nor Cyrus, nay,
  Not any king at all;
For I would choose a sinless child
  Laid in a manger-stall."

"'Tis well," the black King Caspar cried,
  "For mighty men are ye;
But no such humble King were meet
  For my simplicity.

"A star is small and very far,
  A babe's a simple thing;
The very Son of God Himself
  Shall be my Lord and King!"

The King Balthazzar sighed and smiled;
  "A good youth!" Melchior cried;
And young and old, without a word,
  Along the hills they ride.

Till lo! among the western skies
  There grows a shining thing—
"The star! Behold the star," they shout;
  "Behold Balthazzar's King!"

And lo! within the western skies
  The star begins to flit;
The three kings spur their horses on
  And follow after it.

And when they reach the King's Castle
  They cry, "Behold the place!"
But, like a shining bird, the star
  Flits on in heaven apace.

Oh they rode on and on they rode,
  Till they reached a lonely wold,
Where shepherds keep their flocks by night,
  And the night was chill and cold.

Oh they rode on and on they rode,
  Till they reach a little town,
And there the star in heaven stands still
  Above a stable brown.

The town is hardly a village street,
  The stable's old and poor,
But there the star in heaven stands still
  Above the stable door.

And through the open door, the straw
  And the tired beasts they see;

And the Babe, laid in a manger,
  That sleepeth peacefully.

"All hail, the King of Melchior!"
  The three wise men begin;
King Melchior swings from off his horse,
  And he would have entered in.

But why do the horses whinny and neigh?
  And what thing fills the night
With angels in a wheeling spire,
  And streams of heavenly light?

King Melchior kneels upon the grass
  And falls a-praying there;
Balthazzar lets the bridle drop
  And gazes in the air.

But Caspar gives a happy shout
  And hastens to the stall,
"Now hail!" he cries, "thou Son of God,
  And Saviour of us all!"

The Slumber of King Solomon.

THE house is all of sandal-wood
And boughs of Lebanon,
The chamber is of beaten gold
Where sleeps King Solomon.

With thirty horsemen to the left
And thirty to the right,
Upon their mighty horses set
To guard him from the night.

They watch as silent as the moon,
Drawn sword and gathered rein ;
They will not stir till Solomon
Shall rise and move again.

And whiter than their white armour,
Brighter than spear or sword,
Four Angels guard the dreaming King,
Four Angels of the Lord.

Four Angels at the four corners,
  And burning over head
The Glory of God, the great Glory
  That never shall be said.

Sleep well, sleep well, King Solomon,
  For He that guardeth thee,
He neither slumbers, nay, nor sleeps,
  Through all eternity.

Sleep well, sleep well, King Solomon,
  Lapped soft in silk and nard ;
For Raphaël, Uriel, Mikhaël,
  And Gabriel are thy guard.

With thirty horsemen to the left
  And thirty to the right,
Sleep well, sleep well, King Solomon,
  Sleep through the eternal night.

The Death of Prester John.

(*Yasht xxii.*)

WHEN Prester John was like to die, he called his priests, and said:
"O Mages, seers and sorcerers, sayers of holy sooth,
Where is the soul of a faithful man after the body is dead—
Where is the soul of the man who is dead? Answer, and speak the truth!"

The priests stood round the couch in rows beside the dying king.
"Will no one speak?" said Prester John, "ye who have time and breath?
Is there not one of all my priests will answer me this thing:
Where is the soul of a faithful man on the first night after death?

Then up and spake the eldest seer (and he was white as rime,
Bent as a sea-blown apple stem, solemn as night at sea) :
"Between thy death and mine," he said, "is but a little time,
And what I speak, O King, I speak no less for thee than me.

"Know, on the first night after death, the Soul kneels on the bier,
Among the lights about the head, lighter and brighter than they,
And sings the Lauds of God all night, in a sweet voice and a clear,
And sings the Lauds of God all night until the dawn of day.

"But when the morning drives away the third night after death,
A wind comes rushing from the South—a wind of youth and mirth,
Sweet with the scent of roses and the honey of the heath,
The sweetest-scented wind, O King, that ever blew on earth !

"And when the Soul shall wake from prayer,
a wonder shall he see:
For he shall start and breathe the wind
whose sweetness cannot cloy—
And down the middle of the breeze a Maiden
moveth free,
And all the joy o' the living Earth is nothing
to his joy!

"For she shall take his hands in hers, and
'Welcome!' shall she say,
'I am thy Conscience! Look at me! Thou
art my Master, thou!
For I was fair, but thou hast made me fairer
than the day,
And I was bright; but turn, O Soul, and
gaze upon me now!'

"And they shall walk together, turning each
to look on each,
Through rings on rings of Paradise divinely
calm and bright,
Through the Eden of Good Thought and
through the Eden of Good Speech,
Through the Eden of Good Works until
the realms of Endless Light.

"Behold the Saints, in ranks of bliss, stand up
on either hand,
And press to greet them amorously:
'Whence camest thou, and when?
Tell us how fares the world of strife—the
loving, sorrowing land?
Art thou content with Heaven, O Soul, after
the life of men?'

"But One shall speak: 'Peace to the Soul
that enters into rest!
Question him not who, weary from the
dolorous pass, and sore,
Enters eternal bliss at last! The will of God
is best.
Question him not, question him not, if he
would live once more!'"

The Widower of Haiderabad.

AT morning when I wake, no more
  I hear her in the twilit hour,
Who beats the clay upon the floor,
  Or grinds the sorghum into flour.

And when at sunset I return,
  I half forget the silent child,
Still brightening up her brazen urn,
  Who never raised her head or smiled.

But when the night draws on, I fear!
  . . . She stands before me, pale as ash,
And still the trembling voice I hear
  That bleats beneath my mother's lash.

And I remember how she died—
  And it is I that tremble now;
For I behold the Suicide
  Hanged to the flowering mango-bough.

. . . My mother wears upon her breast
  A silver image of the dead.
The best of all we have the best
  We offer her with bended head.

We scatter water on her grave,
  We burn the sacred lamps for her ;
For her the fumes of incense wave
  And fill the house with smells of myrrh.

* * * *

. . . The day we bore her to the tomb
  We paused again and yet again
To scatter down the sandy coomb
  Our mustard seed in ample rain.

For so we knew that in the night,
  When up the self-same path she goes,
All round her in the dreamy light
  The spiritual garden blows.

She laughs to see the unhoped-for cloud
  Of waving, swaying, golden flowers,
And gathering up her trailing shroud
  She flits amid the stems for hours.

So every night she shall delay,
  And fill her arms with faëry bloom,
Until the dawning of the day
  Recall her spirit to the tomb.

So we may sleep in safety here. . . .
  But yet, through all the sunless hours,
I feel her drifting slowly near
  Amid the withering mustard flowers.

O God ! to them that call on Thee
  Give life, give riches, make them strong
Or make them holy—but to me
  Let not Thy midnight be so long !

The Deer and the Prophet.

A HUNTSMAN, enemy of those
Who praise the prophet Mahomet,
Far in the forest laid his net,
And laid it deep in tangled brier-rose
And tufts of daffodil and thyme and violet.

One early morning, pink and gray
As early mornings are in May
A fallow deer went forth to take the air;
And wandering down the forest glades that way
She fell into the snare.

Alas, poor soul, 'twas all in vain
She sought to venture back again,
Or bounded forth with hurrying feet,
Or plucked with horn and hoof the net;

Too well the mazy toils were set
Around her russet ankles neat.
All hope being gone, she bowed her innocent head
And wept. "O Heaven, that is most just," she said,
"In thy mysterious ends I acquiesce ;
Yet of thy mercy deign to bless
The little ones I left at home :
Twin fawns, still dreaming on their sheltered bracken-bed
When I went forth to roam,
And wandered careless where the net was spread.

"And yet, O Heaven, how shall they live,
Poor yeanlings, if their mother die ?
Their only nourishment am I ;
They have no other food beside the milk I give,
And save my breast no warmth at night,
While still the frost lies crisp and white,
As lie it will until the roses blow."
And here she fetched so deep a sigh
That her petition could no further go.

Now as she hushed, the huntsman strode in
sight
Who every morning went that way
To see if Heaven had led the hoped-for prey
Into his nets by night.
And when he saw the fallow deer,
He stood and laughed aloud and clear,
And laid his hand upon her neck
Of russet with a snowy fleck,
And forth his hunting-knife he drew :
"Aha!" he cried, "my pretty dame,
Into my nets full easily you came ;
But forth again, my maiden, spring not you!"
And as he laughed, he would have slit
The throat that saw no help from it.
But lo! a trembling took the air,
A rustling of the leaves about the snare ;
And Some one, dusk and slim,
There, sudden, stayed his hand and smiled at
him.

Now, never was there huntsman yet
Who, when his tangled snare was set
And in the snare the comely game,
Endured the loosening of the net.

Our huntsman turned an angry face aflame,
And none the lesser was his wroth
To see none other, by my troth,
Than Mahomet himself, the immortal Mahomet,
Who stood beside the net.
"Ha, old Imposter!" he began—
But "Peace," the prophet said, "my man;
For while we argue, you and I,
The hungry fawns are like to die.
Nay, let the mother go. Within an hour, I say,
She shall return for thee to spare or slay;
Or, if she be not here,
Then I will stand your slave in surety for the deer."
The huntsman turned and stared a while.
"For sure, the fool is void of guile!
Well, he shall be my slave i' sooth,
And work as in his idle youth
He never worked, the rogue!" Our huntsman laughed for glee,
And bent and loosed the tangles joyfully;
And forth the creature bounded, wild and free.

But when she reached the bracken-bed,
Where still the young ones lay abed
Below the hawthorn branches thick—
" Awake," she cried, " my fawns, and milk me
quick ;
For I have left within the net
The very prophet Mahomet ! "

" Ah ! " cried the little fawns, and heard
(But understood not half a word).
" Quick, quick, our little mother, quick away,
And come back all the quicklier ! " cried the
fawns,
And called a last good-bye ;
And sat a little sad, they knew not why,
And watched their mother bounding, white
and gray,
Dim in the distance o'er the dewy lawns
And wide, unfriendly forests all in flower.
And so the deer returned within an hour.

" Now," said the prophet, smiling, " kill,
Or take the ransom, as you will."

But on his knees the huntsman fell,
And cried aloud : "A miracle !
Nay, by my nets and hunting-knife,
I will not take the creature's life ;
And, for a slave, until I die,
Thou hast no trustier slave than I ! "

No creature is so hard beset,
But lo ! the undreamed-of Angel yet
May interpose his power, and change the end.
And no one is so poor a friend,
Or so diminished to the dust,
But may be worthy of a Heavenly trust.