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The Wild Knight and Other Poems

By

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Contents

BY THE BABE UNBORN	5
THE WORLD'S LOVER	6
THE SKELETON.....	7
A CHORD OF COLOUR	8
THE HAPPY MAN	9
THE UNPARDONABLE SIN	10
A NOVELTY	11
ULTIMATE.....	12
THE DONKEY.....	13
THE BEATIFIC VISION.....	14
THE HOPE OF THE STREETS.....	15
ECCLESIASTES.....	16
THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN.....	17
THE FISH.....	18
GOLD LEAVES	19
THOU SHALT NOT KILL	20
A CERTAIN EVENING	21
A MAN AND HIS IMAGE	22
THE MARINER.....	24
THE TRIUMPH OF MAN	25
CYCLOPEAN	26
JOSEPH	27
MODERN ELFLAND.....	28
ETERNITIES	29
A CHRISTMAS CAROL	30
ALONE	31
KING'S CROSS STATION.....	32
THE HUMAN TREE.....	33
TO THEM THAT MOURN	34
THE OUTLAW	35
BEHIND.....	36
THE END OF FEAR.....	37
THE HOLY OF HOLIES.....	38
THE MIRROR OF MADMEN	39
E.C.B.	40
THE DESECRATERS	41
AN ALLIANCE	42
THE ANCIENT OF DAYS.....	43
THE LAST MASQUERADE	44
THE EARTH'S SHAME.....	45
VANITY	46
THE LAMP POST	47
THE PESSIMIST	48
A FAIRY TALE	49
A PORTRAIT	50
FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM.....	51
TO A CERTAIN NATION.....	52

THE PRAISE OF DUST	53
THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON	54
'VULGARISED'	57
THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS.....	58
AT NIGHT	60
THE WOOD-CUTTER	61
ART COLOURS	62
THE TWO WOMEN	63
THE WILD KNIGHT	64
THE WILD KNIGHT	65
REDFEATHER.	66
GOOD NEWS	81

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

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

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

BY THE BABE UNBORN

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE WORLD'S LOVER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE SKELETON

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

A CHORD OF COLOUR

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

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

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

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

THE HAPPY MAN

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

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

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

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

I do not cry, beloved, neither curse. Silence and strength, these two at least are good. He gave me sun and stars and ought He could, But not a woman's love; for that is hers.

He sealed her heart from sage and questioner-- Yea, with seven seals, as he has sealed the grave. And if she give it to a drunken slave, The Day of Judgment shall not challenge her.

Only this much: if one, deserving well, Touching your thin young hands and making suit, Feel not himself a crawling thing, a brute, Buried and bricked in a forgotten hell;

Prophet and poet be he over sod, Prince among angels in the highest place, God help me, I will smite him on the face, Before the glory of the face of God.

A NOVELTY

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

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

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

ULTIMATE

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

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

THE DONKEY

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

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

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

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

THE BEATIFIC VISION

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

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

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

THE HOPE OF THE STREETS

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

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

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

ECCLESIASTES

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

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

THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN

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

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

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

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

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

THE FISH

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

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

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

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

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

GOLD LEAVES

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

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

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

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

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

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

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

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

A CERTAIN EVENING

That night the whole world mingled, The souls were babes at play, And
angel danced with devil. And God cried, 'Holiday!'

The sea had climbed the mountain peaks, And shouted to the stars To
come to play: and down they came Splashing in happy wars.

The pine grew apples for a whim, The cart-horse built a nest; The oxen
flew, the flowers sang, The sun rose in the west.

And 'neath the load of many worlds, The lowest life God made Lifted his
huge and heavy limbs And into heaven strayed.

To where the highest life God made Before His presence stands; But God
himself cried, 'Holiday!' And she gave me both her hands.

A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

All day the nations climb and crawl and pray In one long pilgrimage to one white shrine, Where sleeps a saint whose pardon, like his peace, Is wide as death, as common, as divine.

His statue in an aureole fills the shrine, The reckless nightingale, the roaming fawn, Share the broad blessing of his lifted hands, Under the canopy, above the lawn.

But one strange night, a night of gale and flood, A sound came louder than the wild wind's tone; The grave-gates shook and opened: and one stood Blue in the moonlight, rotten to the bone.

Then on the statue, graven with holy smiles, There came another smile-- tremendous--one Of an Egyptian god. 'Why should you rise? 'Do I not guard your secret from the sun?

The nations come; they kneel among the flowers Sprung from your blood, blossoms of May and June, Which do not poison them--is it not strange? Speak!' And the dead man shuddered in the moon.

Shall I not cry the truth?'--the dead man cowered-- Is it not sad, with life so tame and cold, What earth should fade into the sun's white fires With the best jest in all its tales untold?

'If I should cry that in this shrine lie hid Stories that Satan from his mouth would spew; Wild tales that men in hell tell hoarsely--speak! Saint and Deliverer! Should I slander you?'

Slowly the cowering corpse reared up its head, 'Nay, I am vile ... but when for all to see, You stand there, pure and painless--death of life! Let the stars fall--I say you slander me!

'You make me perfect, public, colourless; You make my virtues sit at ease-- you lie! For mine were never easy--lost or saved, I had a soul--I was. And where am I?

Where is my good? the little real hoard, The secret tears, the sudden chivalries; The tragic love, the futile triumph--where? Thief, dog, and son of devils--where are these?

I will lift up my head: in leprous loves Lost, and the soul's dishonourable
scars-- By God I was a better man than This That stands and slanders me
to all the stars.

'Come down!' And with an awful cry, the corse Sprang on the sacred tomb
of many tales, And stone and bone, locked in a loathsome strife, Swayed to
the singing of the nightingales.

Then one was thrown: and where the statue stood Under the canopy, above
the lawn, The corse stood; grey and lean, with lifted hands Raised in
tremendous welcome to the dawn.

'Now let all nations climb and crawl and pray; Though I be basest of my old
red clan, They shall not scale, with cries or sacrifice, The stature of the
spirit of a man.'

THE MARINER

The violet scent is sacred Like dreams of angels bright; The hawthorn
smells of passion Told in a moonless night.

But the smell is in my nostrils, Through blossoms red or gold, Of my own
green flower unfading, A bitter smell and bold.

The lily smells of pardon, The rose of mirth; but mine Smells shrewd of
death and honour, And the doom of Adam's line.

The heavy scent of wine-shops Floats as I pass them by, But never a cup I
quaff from, And never a house have I.

Till dropped down forty fathoms, I lie eternally; And drink from God's own
goblet The green wine of the sea.

THE TRIUMPH OF MAN

I plod and peer amid mean sounds and shapes, I hunt for dusty gain and dreary praise, And slowly pass the dismal grinning days, Monkeying each other like a line of apes.

What care? There was one hour amid all these When I had stripped off like a tawdry glove My starriest hopes and wants, for very love Of time and desolate eternities.

Yea, for one great hour's triumph, not in me Nor any hope of mine did I rejoice, But in a meadow game of girls and boys Some sunset in the centuries to be.

CYCLOPEAN

A mountainous and mystic brute No rein can curb, no arrow shoot, Upon
whose domed deformed back I sweep the planets scorching track.

Old is the elf, and wise, men say, His hair grows green as ours grows grey;
He mocks the stars with myriad hands. High as that swinging forest stands.

But though in pigmy wanderings dull I scour the deserts of his skull, I never
find the face, eyes, teeth. Lowering or laughing underneath.

I met my foe in an empty dell, His face in the sun was naked hell. I thought,
'One silent, bloody blow. No priest would curse, no crowd would know.'

Then covered: a daisy, half concealed, Watched for the fame of that poor
field; And in that flower and suddenly Earth opened its one eye on me.

JOSEPH

If the stars fell; night's nameless dreams Of bliss and blasphemy came true,
If skies were green and snow were gold, And you loved me as I love you;

O long light hands and curled brown hair, And eyes where sits a naked soul;
Dare I even then draw near and burn My fingers in the aureole?

Yes, in the one wise foolish hour God gives this strange strength to a man.
He can demand, though not deserve, Where ask he cannot, seize he can.

But once the blood's wild wedding o'er, Were not dread his, half dark desire,
To see the Christ-child in the cot, The Virgin Mary by the fire?

MODERN ELFLAND

I Cut a staff in a churchyard copse, I clad myself in ragged things, I set a feather in my cap That fell out of an angel's wings.

I filled my wallet with white stones, I took three foxgloves in my hand, I slung my shoes across my back, And so I went to fairyland.

But Lo, within that ancient place Science had reared her iron crown, And the great cloud of steam went up That telleth where she takes a town.

But cowed with smoke and starred with lamps That strange land's light was still its own; The word that witched the woods and hills Spoke in the iron and the stone.

Not Nature's hand had ever curved That mute unearthly porter's spine. Like sleeping dragon's sudden eyes The signals leered along the line.

The chimneys thronging crooked or straight Were fingers signalling the sky; The dog that strayed across the street Seemed four-legged by monstrosity.

'In vain,' I cried, 'though you too touch The new time's desecrating hand, Through all the noises of a town I hear the heart of fairyland.'

I read the name above a door, Then through my spirit pealed and passed: 'This is the town of thine own home, And thou hast looked on it at last.'

ETERNITIES

I cannot count the pebbles in the brook. Well hath He spoken: 'Swear not by thy head, Thou knowest not the hairs,' though He, we read, Writes that wild number in his own strange book.

I cannot count the sands or search the seas, Death cometh, and I leave so much untrod. Grant my immortal aureole, O my God, And I will name the leaves upon the trees.

In heaven I shall stand on gold and glass, Still brooding earth's arithmetic to spell; Or see the fading of the fires of hell Ere I have thanked my God for all the grass.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap, His hair was like a light. (O weary,
weary were the world, But here is all aright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast, His hair was like a star. (O stern and
cunning are the kings, But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart, His hair was like a fire. (O weary,
weary is the world, But here the world's desire.)

The Christ-child stood at Mary's knee, His hair was like a crown, And all
the flowers looked up at him. And all the stars looked down.

ALONE

Blessings there are of cradle and of clan, Blessings that fall of priests' and
princes' hands; But never blessing full of lives and lands, Broad as the
blessing of a lonely man.

Though that old king fell from his primal throne, And ate among the cattle,
yet this pride Had found him in the deepest grass, and cried An 'Ecce
Homo' with the trumpets blown.

And no mad tyrant, with almighty ban, Who in strong madness dreams
himself divine, But hears through fumes of flattery and of wine The
thunder of this blessing name him man.

Let all earth rot past saints' and seraphs' plea, Yet shall a Voice cry
through its last lost war, 'This is the world, this red wreck of a star, That a
man blessed beneath an alder-tree.'

KING'S CROSS STATION

This circled cosmos whereof man is god Has suns and stars of green and gold and red, And cloudlands of great smoke, that range o'er range Far floating, hide its iron heavens o'erhead.

God! shall we ever honour what we are, And see one moment ere the age expire, The vision of man shouting and erect, Whirled by the shrieking steeds of flood and fire?

Or must Fate act the same grey farce again, And wait, till one, amid Time's wrecks and scars, Speaks to a ruin here, 'What poet-race Shot such cyclopean arches at the stars?'

THE HUMAN TREE

Many have Earth's lovers been, Tried in seas and wars, I ween; Yet the mightiest have I seen: Yea, the best saw I. One that in a field alone Stood up stiller than a stone Lest a moth should fly.

Birds had nested in his hair, On his shoon were mosses rare. Insect empires flourished there, Worms in ancient wars; But his eyes burn like a glass, Hearing a great sea of grass Roar towards the stars.

From, them to the human tree Rose a cry continually, 'Thou art still, our Father, we Fain would have thee nod. Make the skies as blood below thee, Though thou slay us, we shall know thee. Answer us, O God!

'Show thine ancient flame and thunder, Split the stillness once asunder, Lest we whisper, lest we wonder Art thou there at all?' But I saw him there alone, Standing stiller than a stone Lest a moth should fall.

TO THEM THAT MOURN

(W.E.G., May 1898)

Lift up your heads: in life, in death, God knoweth his head was high. Quit
we the coward's broken breath Who watched a strong man die.

If we must say, 'No more his peer Cometh; the flag is furled.' Stand not too
near him, lest he hear That slander on the world.

The good green earth he loved and trod Is still, with many a scar, Writ in
the chronicles of God, A giant-bearing star.

He fell: but Britain's banner swings Above his sunken crown. Black death
shall have his toll of kings Before that cross goes down.

Once more shall move with mighty things His house of ancient tale, Where
kings whose hands were kissed of kings Went in: and came out pale.

O young ones of a darker day, In art's wan colours clad, Whose very love
and hate are grey-- Whose very sin is sad.

Pass on: one agony long-drawn Was merrier than your mirth, When hand-
in-hand came death and dawn, And spring was on the earth.

THE OUTLAW

Priest, is any song-bird stricken? Is one leaf less on the tree? Is this wine
less red and royal That the hangman waits for me?

He upon your cross that hangeth, It is writ of priestly pen, On the night
they built his gibbet, Drank red wine among his men.

Quaff, like a brave man, as he did, Wine and death as heaven pours-- This
is my fate: O ye rulers, O ye pontiffs, what is yours?

To wait trembling, lest yon loathly Gallows-shape whereon I die, In strange
temples yet unbuilt, Blaze upon an altar high.

BEHIND

I saw an old man like a child, His blue eyes bright, his white hair wild, Who turned for ever, and might not stop, Round and round like an urchin's top.

'Fool,' I cried, 'while you spin round, 'Others grow wise, are praised, are crowned.' Ever the same round road he trod, 'This is better: I seek for God.'

'We see the whole world, left and right, Yet at the blind back hides from sight The unseen Master that drives us forth To East and West, to South and North.

'Over my shoulder for eighty years I have looked for the gleam of the sphere of spheres.' 'In all your turning, what have you found?' 'At least, I know why the world goes round.'

THE END OF FEAR

Though the whole heaven be one-eyed with the moon, Though the dead
landscape seem a thing possessed, Yet I go singing through that land
oppressed As one that singeth through the flowers of June.

No more, with forest-fingers crawling free O'er dark flint wall that seems a
wall of eyes, Shall evil break my soul with mysteries Of some world-poison
maddening bush and tree.

No more shall leering ghosts of pimp and king With bloody secrets veiled
before me stand. Last night I held all evil in my hand Closed: and behold it
was a little thing.

I broke the infernal gates and looked on him Who fronts the strong
creation with a curse; Even the god of a lost universe, Smiling above his
hideous cherubim.

And pierced far down in his soul's crypt unriven The last black crooked
sympathy and shame, And hailed him with that ringing rainbow name
Erased upon the oldest book in heaven.

Like emptied idiot masks, sin's loves and wars Stare at me now: for in the
night I broke The bubble of a great world's jest, and woke Laughing with
laughter such as shakes the stars.

THE HOLY OF HOLIES

'Elder father, though thine eyes Shine with hoary mysteries, Canst thou tell
what in the heart Of a cowslip blossom lies?

'Smaller than all lives that be, Secret as the deepest sea, Stands a little
house of seeds, Like an elfin's granary,

'Speller of the stones and weeds, Skilled in Nature's crafts and creeds, Tell
me what is in the heart Of the smallest of the seeds.'

'God Almighty, and with Him Cherubim and Seraphim, Filling all eternity--
Adonai Elohim.'

THE MIRROR OF MADMEN

I dreamed a dream of heaven, white as frost, The splendid stillness of a living host; Vast choirs of upturned faces, line o'er line. Then my blood froze; for every face was mine.

Spirits with sunset plumage throng and pass, Glassed darkly in the sea of gold and glass. But still on every side, in every spot, I saw a million selves, who saw me not.

I fled to quiet wastes, where on a stone, Perchance, I found a saint, who sat alone; I came behind: he turned with slow, sweet grace, And faced me with my happy, hateful face.

I cowered like one that in a tower doth bide, Shut in by mirrors upon every side; Then I saw, islanded in skies alone And silent, one that sat upon a throne.

His robe was bordered with rich rose and gold, Green, purple, silver out of sunsets old; But o'er his face a great cloud edged with fire, Because it covereth the world's desire.

But as I gazed, a silent worshipper, Methought the cloud began to faintly stir; Then I fell flat, and screamed with grovelling head, 'If thou hast any lightning, strike me dead!

'But spare a brow where the clean sunlight fell, The crown of a new sin that sickens hell. Let me not look aloft and see mine own Feature and form upon the Judgment-throne.'

Then my dream snapped: and with a heart that leapt I saw across the tavern where I slept, The sight of all my life most full of grace, A gin-damned drunkard's wan half-witted face.

E.C.B.

Before the grass grew over me, I knew one good man through and through,
And knew a soul and body joined Are stronger than the heavens are blue.

A wisdom worthy of thy joy, O great heart, read I as I ran; Now, though
men smite me on the face, I cannot curse the face of man.

I loved the man I saw yestreen Hanged with his babe's blood on his palms.
I loved the man I saw to-day Who knocked not when he came with alms.

Hush!--for thy sake I even faced The knowledge that is worse than hell;
And loved the man I saw but now Hanging head downwards in the well.

THE DESECRATERS

Witness all: that unrepenting, Feathers flying, music high, I go down to
death unshaken By your mean philosophy.

For your wages, take my body, That at least to you I leave; Set the sulky
plumes upon it, Bid the grinning mummers grieve.

Stand in silence: steep your raiment In the night that hath no star; Don
the mortal dress of devils, Blacker than their spirits are.

Since ye may not, of your mercy, Ere I lie on such a hearse, Hurl me to the
living jackals God hath built for sepulchres.

AN ALLIANCE

This is the weird of a world-old folk, That not till the last link breaks, Not till the night is blackest, The blood of Hengist wakes. When the sun is black in heaven, The moon as blood above, And the earth is full of hatred, This people tells its love.

In change, eclipse, and peril, Under the whole world's scorn, By blood and death and darkness The Saxon peace is sworn; That all our fruit be gathered, And all our race take hands, And the sea be a Saxon river That runs through Saxon lands.

Lo! not in vain we bore him; Behold it! not in vain, Four centuries' dooms of torture Choked in the throat of Spain, Ere priest or tyrant triumph-- We know how well--we know-- Bone of that bone can whiten, Blood of that blood can flow.

Deep grows the hate of kindred, Its roots take hold on hell; No peace or praise can heal it, But a stranger heals it well. Seas shall be red as sunsets, And kings' bones float as foam, And heaven be dark with vultures, The night our son comes home.

THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

A child sits in a sunny place, Too happy for a smile, And plays through one long holiday With balls to roll and pile; A painted wind-mill by his side Runs like a merry tune, But the sails are the four great winds of heaven, And the balls are the sun and moon.

A staring doll's-house shows to him Green floors and starry rafter, And many-coloured graven dolls Live for his lonely laughter. The dolls have crowns and aureoles, Helmets and horns and wings. For they are the saints and seraphim, The prophets and the kings.

THE LAST MASQUERADE

A wan new garment of young green Touched, as you turned your soft
brown hair And in me surged the strangest prayer Ever in lover's heart
hath been.

That I who saw your youth's bright page, A rainbow change from robe to
robe, Might see you on this earthly globe, Crowned with the silver crown of
age.

Your dear hair powdered in strange guise, Your dear face touched with
colours pale: And gazing through the mask and veil The mirth of your
immortal eyes.

THE EARTH'S SHAME

Name not his deed: in shuddering and in haste We dragged him darkly o'er
the windy fell: That night there was a gibbet in the waste, And a new sin
in hell.

Be his deed hid from commonwealths and kings, By all men born be one
true tale forgot; But three things, braver than all earthly things, Faced
him and feared him not.

Above his head and sunken secret face Nested the sparrow's young and
dropped not dead. From the red blood and slime of that lost place Grew
daisies white, not red.

And from high heaven looking upon him, Slowly upon the face of God did
come A smile the cherubim and seraphim Hid all their faces from.

VANITY

A wan sky greener than the lawn, A wan lawn paler than the sky. She gave
a flower into my hand, And all the hours of eve went by.

Who knows what round the corner waits To smite? If shipwreck, snare, or
slur Shall leave me with a head to lift, Worthy of him that spoke with her.

A wan sky greener than the lawn, A wan lawn paler than the sky. She gave
a flower into my hand, And all the days of life went by.

Live ill or well, this thing is mine, From all I guard it, ill or well. One tawdry,
tattered, faded flower To show the jealous kings in hell.

THE LAMP POST

Laugh your best, O blazoned forests, Me ye shall not shift or shame
With your beauty: here among you Man hath set his spear of flame.

Lamp to lamp we send the signal, For our lord goes forth to war;
Since a voice, ere stars were builded, Bade him colonise a star.

Laugh ye, cruel as the morning, Deck your heads with fruit and flower,
Though our souls be sick with pity, Yet our hands are hard with power.

We have read your evil stories, We have heard the tiny yell
Through the voiceless conflagration Of your green and shining hell.

And when men, with fires and shouting, Break your old tyrannic pales;
And where ruled a single spider Laugh and weep a million tales.

This shall be your best of boasting: That some poet, poor of spine. Full and
sated with our wisdom, Full and fiery with our wine,

Shall steal out and make a treaty With the grasses and the showers, Rail
against the grey town-mother, Fawn upon the scornful flowers;

Rest his head among the roses, Where a quiet song-bird sounds, And no
sword made sharp for traitors, Hack him into meat for hounds.

THE PESSIMIST

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go-- I know your hoary question, the riddle that all men know. You have weighed the stars in a balance, and grasped the skies in a span: Take, if you must have answer, the word of a common man.

Deep in my life lies buried one love unhealed, unshriven, One hunger still shall haunt me--yea, in the streets of heaven; This is the burden, babbler, this is the curse shall cling, This is the thing I bring you; this is the pleasant thing.

'Gainst you and all your sages, no joy of mine shall strive, This one dead self shall shatter the men you call alive. My grief I send to smite you, no pleasure, no belief, Lord of the battered grievance, what do you know of grief?

I only know the praises to heaven that one man gave, That he came on earth for an instant, to stand beside a grave, The peace of a field of battle, where flowers are born of blood. I only know one evil that makes the whole world good.

Beneath this single sorrow the globe of moon and sphere Turns to a single jewel, so bright and brittle and dear That I dread lest God should drop it, to be dashed into stars below.

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go.

A FAIRY TALE

All things grew upwards, foul and fair: The great trees fought and beat the air
With monstrous wings that would have flown; But the old earth clung to
her own, Holding them back from heavenly wars, Though every flower
sprang at the stars.

But he broke free: while all things ceased, Some hour increasing, he
increased. The town beneath him seemed a map, Above the church he
cocked his cap, Above the cross his feather flew Above the birds and still he
grew.

The trees turned grass; the clouds were riven; His feet were mountains lost
in heaven; Through strange new skies he rose alone, The earth fell from him
like a stone, And his own limbs beneath him far Seemed tapering down to
touch a star.

He reared his head, shaggy and grim, Staring among the cherubim; The
seven celestial floors he rent, One crystal dome still o'er him bent: Above his
head, more clear than hope, All heaven was a microscope.

A PORTRAIT

Fair faces crowd on Christmas night Like seven suns a-row, But all beyond
is the wolfish wind And the crafty feet of the snow.

But through the rout one figure goes With quick and quiet tread; Her robe
is plain, her form is frail-- Wait if she turn her head.

I say no word of line or hue, But if that face you see, Your soul shall know
the smile of faith's Awful frivolity.

Know that in this grotesque old masque Too loud we cannot sing, Or dance
too wild, or speak too wide To praise a hidden thing.

That though the jest be old as night, Still shaketh sun and sphere An
everlasting laughter Too loud for us to hear.

FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM

The sun was black with judgment, and the moon Blood: but between I
saw a man stand, saying, 'To me at least The grass is green.

'There was no star that I forgot to fear With love and wonder. The birds
have loved me'; but no answer came-- Only the thunder.

Once more the man stood, saying, 'A cottage door, Wherethrough I
gazed That instant as I turned--yea, I am vile; Yet my eyes blazed.

'For I had weighed the mountains in a balance, And the skies in a
scale, I come to sell the stars--old lamps for new-- Old stars for sale.'

Then a calm voice fell all the thunder through, A tone less rough: 'Thou
hast begun to love one of my works Almost enough.'

TO A CERTAIN NATION

We will not let thee be, for thou art ours. We thank thee still, though thou forget these things, For that hour's sake when thou didst wake all powers With a great cry that God was sick of kings.

Leave thee there grovelling at their rusted greaves, These hulking cowards on a painted stage, Who, with imperial pomp and laurel leaves, Show their Marengo--one man in a cage.

These, for whom stands no type or title given In all the squalid tales of gore and pelf; Though cowed by crashing thunders from all heaven. Cain never said, 'My brother slew himself.'

Tear you the truth out of your drivelling spy, The maniac whom you set to swing death's scythe. Nay; torture not the torturer--let him lie: What need of racks to teach a worm to writhe?

Bear with us, O our sister, not in pride, Nor any scorn we see thee spoiled of knaves, But only shame to hear, where Danton died, Thy foul dead kings all laughing in their graves.

Thou hast a right to rule thyself; to be The thing thou wilt; to grin, to fawn, to creep: To crown these clumsy liars; ay, and we Who knew thee once, we have a right to weep.

THE PRAISE OF DUST

'What of vile dust?' the preacher said. Methought the whole world woke,
The dead stone lived beneath my foot, And my whole body spoke.

'You, that play tyrant to the dust, And stamp its wrinkled face, This patient
star that flings you not Far into homeless space.

'Come down out of your dusty shrine The living dust to see, The flowers
that at your sermon's end Stand blazing silently.

'Rich white and blood-red blossom; stones, Lichens like fire encrust; A
gleam of blue, a glare of gold, The vision of the dust.

'Pass them all by: till, as you come Where, at a city's edge, Under a tree--I
know it well-- Under a lattice ledge,

'The sunshine falls on one brown head. You, too, O cold of clay, Eater of
stones, may haply hear The trumpets of that day

'When God to all his paladins By his own splendour swore To make a fairer
face than heaven, Of dust and nothing more.'

THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

Five kings rule o'er the Amorite, Mighty as fear and old as night; Swathed with unguent and gold and jewel, Waxed they merry and fat and cruel. Zedek of Salem, a terror and glory, Whose face was hid while his robes were gory; And Hoham of Hebron, whose loathly face is Heavy and dark o'er the ruin of races; And Piram of Jarmuth, drunk with strange wine, Who dreamed he had fashioned all stars that shine; And Debir of Eglon wild, without pity, Who raged like a plague in the midst of his city; And Japhia of Lachish, a fire that flameth, Who did in the daylight what no man nameth.

These five kings said one to another, 'King unto king o'er the world is brother, Seeing that now, for a sign and a wonder, A red eclipse and a tongue of thunder, A shape and a finger of desolation, Is come against us a kingless nation. Gibeon hath failed us: it were not good That a man remember where Gibeon stood.' Then Gibeon sent to our captain, crying, 'Son of Nun, let a shaft be flying, For unclean birds are gathering greedily; Slack not thy hand, but come thou speedily. Yea, we are lost save thou maintain'st us, For the kings of the mountains are gathered against us.'

Then to our people spake the Deliverer, 'Gibeon is high, yet a host may shiver her; Gibeon hath sent to me crying for pity, For the lords of the cities encompass the city With chariot and banner and bowman and lancer, And I swear by the living God I will answer. Gird you, O Israel, quiver and javelin, Shield and sword for the road we travel in; Verily, as I have promised, pay I Life unto Gibeon, death unto Ai.'

Sudden and still as a bolt shot right Up on the city we went by night. Never a bird of the air could say, 'This was the children of Israel's way.'

Only the hosts sprang up from sleeping, Saw from the heights a dark stream sweeping; Sprang up straight as a great shout stung them, And heard the Deliverer's war-cry among them, Heard under cupola, turret, and steeple The awful cry of the kingless people.

Started the weak of them, shouted the strong of them, Crashed we a thunderbolt into the throng of them, Blindly with heads bent, and shields forced before us, We heard the dense roar of the strife closing o'er us. And drunk with the crash of the song that it sung them, We drove the great spear-blade in God's name among them.

Redder and redder the sword-flash fell. Our eyes and our nostrils were hotter than hell; Till full all the crest of the spear-surge shocking us, Hoham of Hebron cried out mocking us, 'Nay, what need of the war-sword's plying, Out of the desert the dust comes flying. A little red dust, if the wind be blowing-- Who shall reckon of its coming or going?' Back the Deliverer spake as a clarion, 'Mock at thy slaves, thou eater of carrion! Laughest thou at us, in thy kingly clowning, We, that laughed upon Ramases frowning. We that stood up proud, unpardoned, When his face was dark and his heart was hardened? Pharaoh we knew and his steeds, not faster Than the word of the Lord in thine ear, O master.

Sheer through the turban his wantons wove him, Clean to the skull the Deliverer clove him; And the two hosts reeled at the sign appalling, As the great king fell like a great house falling.

Loudly we shouted, and living and dying. Bore them all backward with strength and strong crying; And Caleb struck Zedek hard at the throat, And Japhia of Lachish Zebulon smote. The war-swords and axes were clashing and groaning, The fallen were fighting and foaming and moaning; The war-spears were breaking, the war-horns were braying, Ere the hands of the slayers were sated with slaying. And deep in the grasses grown gory and sodden, The treaders of all men were trampled and trodden; And over them, routed and reeled like cattle, High over the turn of the tide of the battle, High over noises that deafen and cover us, Rang the Deliverer's voice out over us.

'Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon, Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon! Shout thou, people, a cry like thunder, For the kings of the earth are broken asunder. Now we have said as the thunder says it, Something is stronger than strength and slays it. Now we have written for all time later, Five kings are great, yet a law is greater. Stare, O sun! in thine own great glory, This is the turn of the whole world's story. Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon, Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!

'Smite! amid spear-blades blazing and breaking. More than we know of is rising and making. Stab with the javelin, crash with the car! Cry! for we know not the thing that we are. Stand, O sun! that in horrible patience Smiled on the smoke and the slaughter of nations. Thou shalt grow sad for a little crying, Thou shalt be darkened for one man's dying-- Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon, Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!

After the battle was broken and spent Up to the hill the Deliverer went, Flung up his arms to the storm-clouds flying, And cried unto Israel, mightily

crying, 'Come up, O warriors! come up, O brothers! Tribesmen and herdsmen, maidens and mothers; The bondman's son and the bondman's daughter, The hewer of wood and the drawer of water, He that carries and he that brings, And set your foot on the neck of kings.'

This is the story of Gibeon fight-- Where we smote the lords of the Amorite; Where the banners of princes with slaughter were sodden. And the beards of seers in the rank grass trodden; Where the trees were wrecked by the wreck of cars, And the reek of the red field blotted the stars; Where the dead heads dropped from the swords that sever, Because His mercy endureth for ever.

'VULGARISED'

All round they murmur, 'O profane, Keep thy heart's secret hid as gold';
But I, by God, would sooner be Some knight in shattering wars of old,

In brown outlandish arms to ride, And shout my love to every star With
lungs to make a poor maid's name Deafen the iron ears of war.

Here, where these subtle cowards crowd, To stand and so to speak of love,
That the four corners of the world Should hear it and take heed thereof.

That to this shrine obscure there be One witness before all men given, As
naked as the hanging Christ, As shameless as the sun in heaven.

These whimperers--have they spared to us One dripping woe, one reeking
sin? These thieves that shatter their own graves To prove the soul is dead
within.

They talk; by God, is it not time Some of Love's chosen broke the girth, And
told the good all men have known Since the first morning of the earth?

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

A bird flew out at the break of day From the nest where it had curled, And ere the eve the bird had set Fear on the kings of the world.

The first tree it lit upon Was green with leaves unshed; The second tree it lit upon Was red with apples red;

The third tree it lit upon Was barren and was brown, Save for a dead man nailed thereon On a hill above a town.

That right the kings of the earth were gay And filled the cup and can; Last night the kings of the earth were chill For dread of a naked man.

'If he speak two more words,' they said, 'The slave is more than the free; If he speak three more words,' they said, 'The stars are under the sea.'

Said the King of the East to the King of the West, I wot his frown was set, 'Lo; let us slay him and make him as dung, It is well that the world forget.'

Said the King of the West to the King of the East, I wot his smile was dread, 'Nay, let us slay him and make him a god, It is well that our god be dead.'

They set the young man on a hill, They nailed him to a rod; And there in darkness and in blood They made themselves a god.

And the mightiest word was left unsaid, And the world had never a mark, And the strongest man of the sons of men Went dumb into the dark.

Then hymns and harps of praise they brought, Incense and gold and myrrh, And they thronged above the seraphim, The poor dead carpenter.

'Thou art the prince of all,' they sang, 'Ocean and earth and air.' Then the bird flew on to the cruel cross, And hid in the dead man's hair.

'Thou art the sun of the world,' they cried, 'Speak if our prayers be heard.' And the brown bird stirred in the dead man's hair, And it seemed that the dead man stirred.

Then a shriek went up like the world's last cry From all nations under

heaven, And a master fell before a slave And begged to be forgiven.

They cowered, for dread in his wakened eyes The ancient wrath to see; And
the bird flew out of the dead Christ's hair, And lit on a lemon-tree.

AT NIGHT

How many million stars there be, That only God hath numberéd; But this
one only chosen for me In time before her face was fled. Shall not one mortal
man alive Hold up his head?

THE WOOD-CUTTER

We came behind him by the wall, My brethren drew their brands, And they
had strength to strike him down-- And I to bind his hands.

Only once, to a lantern gleam, He turned his face from the wall, And it was
as the accusing angel's face On the day when the stars shall fall.

I grasped the axe with shaking hands, I stared at the grass I trod; For I
feared to see the whole bare heavens Filled with the face of God.

I struck: the serpentine slow blood In four arms soaked the moss-- Before
me, by the living Christ, The blood ran in a cross.

Therefore I toil in forests here And pile the wood in stacks, And take no fee
from the shivering folk Till I have cleansed the axe.

But for a curse God cleared my sight, And where each tree doth grow I see
a life with awful eyes, And I must lay it low.

ART COLOURS

On must we go: we search dead leaves, We chase the sunset's saddest
flames, The nameless hues that o'er and o'er In lawless wedding lost their
names.

God of the daybreak! Better be Black savages; and grin to gird Our limbs in
gaudy rags of red, The laughing-stock of brute and bird;

And feel again the fierce old feast, Blue for seven heavens that had
sufficed, A gold like shining hoards, a red Like roses from the blood of
Christ.

THE TWO WOMEN

Lo! very fair is she who knows the ways Of joy: in pleasure's mocking
wisdom old, The eyes that might be cold to flattery, kind; The hair that
might be grey with knowledge, gold.

But thou art more than these things, O my queen, For thou art clad in
ancient wars and tears. And looking forth, framed in the crown of thorns, I
saw the youngest face in all the spheres.

THE WILD KNIGHT

The wasting thistle whitens on my crest, The barren grasses blow upon my spear, A green, pale pennon: blazon of wild faith And love of fruitless things: yea, of my love, Among the golden loves of all the knights, Alone: most hopeless, sweet, and blasphemous, The love of God: I hear the crumbling creeds Like cliffs washed down by water, change, and pass; I hear a noise of words, age after age, A new cold wind that blows across the plains, And all the shrines stand empty; and to me All these are nothing: priests and schools may doubt Who never have believed; but I have loved. Ah friends, I know it passing well, the love Wherewith I love; it shall not bring to me Return or hire or any pleasant thing-- Ay, I have tried it: Ay, I know its roots. Earthquake and plague have burst on it in vain And rolled back shattered-- Babbling neophytes! Blind, startled fools--think you I know it not? Think you to teach me? Know I not His ways? Strange-visaged blunders, mystic cruelties. All! all! I know Him, for I love Him. Go!

So, with the wan waste grasses on my spear, I ride for ever, seeking after God. My hair grows whiter than my thistle plume, And all my limbs are loose; but in my eyes The star of an unconquerable praise: For in my soul one hope for ever sings, That at the next white corner of a road My eyes may look on Him.... Hush--I shall know The place when it is found: a twisted path Under a twisted pear-tree--this I saw In the first dream I had ere I was born, Wherein He spoke.... But the grey clouds come down In hail upon the icy plains: I ride, Burning for ever in consuming fire.

THE WILD KNIGHT

A dark manor-house shuttered and unlighted, outlined against a pale sunset: in front a large, but neglected, garden. To the right, in the foreground, the porch of a chapel, with coloured windows lighted. Hymns within.

Above the porch a grotesque carved bracket, supporting a lantern. Astride of it sits CAPTAIN REDFEATHER, a flagon in his hand.

REDFEATHER.

I have drunk to all I know of, To every leaf on the tree, To the highest bird of the heavens, To the lowest fish of the sea. What toast, what toast remaineth, Drunk down in the same good wine, By the tippler's cup in the tavern, And the priest's cup at the shrine?

[A Priest comes out, stick in hand, and looks right and left.]

VOICES WITHIN.

The brawler ...

PRIEST.

He has vanished

REDFEATHER.

To the stars.

[The Priest looks up.]

PRIEST [angrily].

What would you there, sir?

REDFEATHER.

Give you all a toast.

[Lifts his flagon. More priests come out.]

I see my life behind me: bad enough-- Drink, duels, madness, beggary, and pride, The life of the unfit: yet ere I drop On Nature's rubbish heap, I weigh it all, And give you all a toast--

[Reels to his feet and stands.]

The health of God!

[They all recoil from him.]

Let's give the Devil of the Heavens His due! He that made grass so green,
and wine so red, Is not so black as you have painted him.

[Drinks.]

PRIEST.

Blaspheming profligate!

REDFEATHER [hurls the flagon among them.]

How! ye dumb dogs, I named your King--let me have one great shout,
Flutter the seraphim like startled birds; Make God recall the good days of
His youth Ere saints had saddened Him: when He came back Conqueror of
Chaos in a six days' war, With all the sons of God shouting for joy ...

PRIEST.

And you--what is your right, and who are you, To praise God?

REDFEATHER.

A lost soul. In earth or heaven What has a better right?

PRIEST.

Go, pagan, go! Drink, dice, and dance: take no more thought than
blind Beasts of the field....

REDFEATHER.

Or ... lilies of the field, To quote a pagan sage. I go my way.

PRIEST [solemnly].

And when Death comes....

REDFEATHER.

He shall not find me dead.

[Puts on his plumed hat. The priests go out.]

REDFEATHER.

These frozen fools....

[The Lady Olive comes out of the chapel. He sees her.]

Oh, they were right enough. Where shall I hide my carrion from the sun?

[Buries his face. His hat drops to the ground.]

OLIVE [looking up.]

Captain, are you from church? I saw you not.

REDFEATHER.

No, I am here.

[Lays his hand on a gargoyle.]

I, too, am a grotesque, And dance with all the devils on the roof.

OLIVE [with a strange smile.]

For Satan, also, I have often prayed.

REDFEATHER [roughly].

Satan may worry women if he will, For he was but an angel ere he fell, But I-
-before I fell--I was a man.

OLIVE.

He too, my Master, was a man: too strong To fear a strong man's sins: 'tis
written He Descended into hell.

REDFEATHER.

Write, then, that I

[Leaps to the ground before her.]

Descended into heaven.... You are ill?

OLIVE.

No, well....

REDFEATHER.

You speak the truth--you are the Truth-- Lady, say once again then, 'I am well.'

OLIVE.

I--ah! God give me grace--I am nigh dead.

REDFEATHER [quietly.]

Lord Orm?

OLIVE.

Yes--yes.

REDFEATHER.

Is in your father's house-- Having the title-deeds--would drive you forth. Homeless, and with your father sick to death, Into this winter, save on a condition Named....

OLIVE.

And unnameable. Even so; Lord Orm-- Ah! do you know him?

REDFEATHER.

Ay, I saw him once. The sun shone on his face, that smiled and smiled, A sight not wholesome to the eyes of man.

OLIVE.

Captain, I tell you God once fell asleep. And in that hour the world went as it would; Dogs brought forth cats, and poison grew in grapes, And Orm was

born....

REDFEATHER.

Why, curse him! can he not Be kicked or paid?

OLIVE [feverishly].

Hush! He is just behind There in the house--see how the great house glares, Glares like an ogre's mask--the whole dead house Possessed with bestial meaning....

[Screams]

Ah! the face! The whole great grinning house--his face! his face! His face!

REDFEATHER [in a voice of thunder, pointing away from the house].

Look there--look there!

OLIVE.

What is it? What?

REDFEATHER.

I think it was a bird.

OLIVE.

What thought you, truly?

REDFEATHER.

I think a mighty thought is drawing near.

[Enter THE WILD KNIGHT.]

THE WILD KNIGHT.

That house....

[Points.]

OLIVE.

Ah Christ! [Shudders.] I had forgotten it.

THE WILD KNIGHT [still pointing].

That house! the house at last, the house of God, Wherein God makes an evening feast for me. The house at last: I know the twisted path Under the twisted pear-tree: this I saw In the first dream I had ere I was born. It is the house of God. He welcomes me.

[Strides forward.]

REDFEATHER.

That house. God's blood!

OLIVE [hysterically].

Is not this hell's own wit?

THE WILD KNIGHT.

God grows impatient, and His wine is poured, His bread is broken.

[Rushes forward.]

REDFEATHER [leaps between].

Stand away, great fool, There is a devil there!

THE WILD KNIGHT [draws his sword, and waves it as he rushes].

God's house!--God's house!

REDFEATHER [plucks out his own sword].

Better my hand than his.

[The blades clash.]

God alone knows What That within might do to you, poor fool, I can
but kill you.

[They fight. OLIVE tries to part them.]

REDFEATHER.

Olive, stand away!

OLIVE.

I will not stand away!

[Steps between the swords.]

Stranger, a word, Yes--you are right--God is within that house.

REDFEATHER.

Olive!

OLIVE.

But He is all too beautiful For us who only know of stars and flowers. The
thing within is all too pure and fair,

[Shudders.]

Too awful in its ancient innocence, For men to look upon it and not die;
Ourselves would fade into those still white fires Of peace and mercy.

[Struggles with her voice.]

There ... enough ... the law-- No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

REDFEATHER [sticking his sword in the ground].

You are the bravest lady in the world.

THE WILD KNIGHT [dazed].

May I not go within?

REDFEATHER.

Keep you the law-- No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

THE WILD KNIGHT [sadly].

Then I will go and lay me in the flowers, For He may haply, as in ancient time, Walk in the garden in the cool of day.

[He goes out.]

[OLIVE reels. REDFEATHER catches her.]

You are the strongest woman upon earth. The weakest woman than the strongest man Is stronger in her hour: this is the law. When the hour passes--then may we be strong.

OLIVE [wildly.]

The House ... the Face.

REDFEATHER [fiercely].

I love you. Look at me!

OLIVE [turns her face to him.]

I hear six birds sing in that little tree, Say, is the old earth laughing at my fears? I think I love you also....

REDFEATHER.

What I am You know. But I will never curse a man, Even in a mirror.

OLIVE [smiling at him].

And the Devil's dance?

REDFEATHER.

The Devil plotted since the world was young With alchemies of fire and witches' oils And magic. But he never made a man.

OLIVE.

No; not a man.

REDFEATHER.

Not even my Lord Orm. Look at the house now--

[She starts and looks.]

Honest brick and tiles.

OLIVE.

You have a strange strength in this hour.

REDFEATHER.

This hour I see with mortal eye as in one flash
The whole divine democracy of things,
And dare the stars to scorn a scavenge-heap. Olive, I
tell you every soul is great. Weave we green crowns--how noble and how
high; Fling we white flowers--how radiant and how pure
Is he, whoe'er he be, who next shall cross
This scrap of grass....

[Enter LORD ORM.]

OLIVE [screams].

Ah!

REDFEATHER [pointing to the chapel].

Olive, go and pray for a man soon to die. Good-day, my Lord.

[She goes in.]

LORD ORM.

Good-day.

REDFEATHER.

I am a friend to Lady Olive.

LORD ORM.

Sir, you are fortunate.

REDFEATHER.

Most fortunate In finding, sword on thigh and ready, one Who is a villain and a gentleman.

LORD ORM [picks up the flagon].

Empty, I see.

REDFEATHER.

Oh sir, you never drink. You dread to lose yourself before the stars--
Do you not dread to sleep?

LORD ORM [violently].

What would you here?

REDFEATHER.

Receive from you the title-deeds you hold.

LORD ORM.

You entertain me.

REDFEATHER.

With a bout at foils?

LORD ORM.

I will not fight.

REDFEATHER.

I know you better, then. I have seen men grow mangier than the
beasts, Eat bread with blood upon their fingers, grin While women burned:

but one last law they served. When I say 'Coward,' is the law awake?

LORD ORM.

Hear me, then, too: I have seen robbers rule, And thieves go clad in gold--
age after age-- Because, though sordid, ragged, rude, and mean, They saw,
like gods, no law above their heads. But when they fell--then for this cause
they fell, This last mean cobweb of the fairy tales Of good and ill: that they
must stand and fight When a man bade, though they had chose to stand
And fight not. I am stronger than the world.

[Folds his arms.]

REDFEATHER [lifts his hand].

If in your body be the blood of man,

[Strikes him.]

Now let it rush to the face-- God! Have you sunk Lower than anger?

LORD ORM.

How I triumph now.

REDFEATHER [stamps wildly].

Damned, whimpering dog! vile, snivelling, sick poltroon! Are you alive?

LORD ORM.

Evil, be thou my good; Let the sun blacken and the moon be blood: I
have said the words.

REDFEATHER [studying him].

And if I struck you dead, You would turn to daisies!

LORD ORM.

And you do not strike.

REDFEATHER [dreamily].

Indeed, poor soul, such magic would be kind And full of pity as a fairy-tale:
One touch of this bright wand [Lifts his sword] and down would drop The
dark abortive blunder that is you. And you would change, forgiven, into
flowers.

LORD ORM.

And yet--and yet you do not strike me dead. I do not draw: the sword is in
your hand-- Drive the blade through me where I stand.

REDFEATHER.

Lord Orm, You asked the Lady Olive (I can speak As to a toad to you,
my lord)--you asked Olive to be your paramour: and she--

LORD ORM.

Refused.

REDFEATHER.

And yet her father was at stake, And she is soft and kind. Now look at me,
Ragged and ruined, soaked in bestial sins: My lord, I too have my virginity--
Turn the thing round, my lord, and topside down, You cannot spell it. Be
the fact enough, I use no sword upon a swordless man.

LORD ORM.

For her?

REDFEATHER.

I too have my virginity.

LORD ORM.

Now look on me: I am the lord of earth, For I have broken the last bond of
man. I stand erect, crowned with the stars--and why? Because I stand a
coward--because you Have mercy--on a coward. Do I win?

REDFEATHER.

Though there you stand with moving mouth and eyes, I think, my lord, you are not possible-- God keep you from my dreams.

[Goes out.]

LORD ORM.

Alone and free. Since first in flowery meads a child I ran, My one long thirst--to be alone and free. Free of all laws, creeds, codes, and common tests, Shameless, anarchic, infinite. Why, then, I might have done in that dark liberty-- If I should say 'a good deed,' men would laugh, But here are none to laugh. The godless world Be thanked there is no God to spy on me, Catch me and crown me with a vulgar crown For what I do: if I should once believe The horror of that ancient Eavesdropper Behind the starry arras of the skies, I should--well, well, enough of menaces-- should not do the thing I come to do. What do I come to do? Let me but try To spell it to my soul. Suppose a man Perfectly free and utterly alone, Free of all love of law, equally free Of all the love of mutiny it breeds, Free of the love of heaven, and also free Of all the love of hell it drives us to; Not merely void of rules, unconscious of them; So strong that naught alive could do him hurt, So wise that he knew all things, and so great That none knew what he was or what he did-- A lawless giant.

[A pause: then in a low voice.]

Would he not be good? Hate is the weakness of a thwarted thing, Pride is the weakness of a thing unpraised. But he, this man.... He would be like a child Girt with the tomes of some vast library, Who reads romance after romance, and smiles When every tale ends well: impersonal As God he grows--melted in suns and stars; So would this boundless man, whom none could spy, Taunt him with virtue, censure him with vice, Rejoice in all men's joys; with golden pen Write all the live romances of the earth To a triumphant close.... Alone and free-- In this grey, cool, clean garden, washed with winds, What do I come to do among the grass, The daisies, and the dews? An awful thing, To prove I am that man. That while these saints Taunt me with trembling, dare me to revenge, I breathe an upper air of ancient good And strong eternal laughter; send my sun And rain upon the evil and the just, Turn my left cheek unto the smiter. He That told me, sword in hand, that I had fallen Lower than anger, knew not I had risen Higher than pride.... Enough, the deeds are mine.

[Takes out the title-deeds.]

I come to write the end of a romance. A good romance: the characters--Lord Orm. Type of the starvéd heart and storéd brain, Who strives to hate and cannot; fronting him-- Redfeather, rake in process of reform, At root a poet: I have hopes of him: He can love virtue, for he still loves vice. He is not all burnt out. He beats me there (How I beat him in owning it!); in love He is still young, and has the joy of shame. And for the Lady Olive--who shall speak? A man may weigh the courage of a man, But if there be a bottomless abyss It is a woman's valour: such as I Can only bow the knee and hide the face (Thank God there is no God to spy on me And bring his curséd crowns). No, there is none: The old incurable hunger of the world Surges in wolfish wars, age after age. There was no God before me: none sees where, Between the brute-womb and the deaf, dead grave, Unhoping, unrecorded, unrepaid, I make with smoke, fire, and burnt-offering This sacrifice to Chaos. [Lights the papers.] None behold Me write in fire the end of the romance. Burn! I am God, and crown myself with stars. Upon creation day: before was night And chaos of a blind and cruel world. I am the first God; I will trample hell, Fight, conquer, make the story of the stars, Like this poor story, end like a romance:

[The paper burns.]

Before was brainless night: but I am God In this black world I rend. Let there be light!

[The paper blazes up, illuminating the garden.]

I, God ...

THE WILD KNIGHT [rushes forward].

God's Light! God's Voice; yes, it is He Walking in Eden in the cool of the day!

LORD ORM [screams].

Tricked! Caught! Damned screeching rat in a hole!

[Stabs him again and again with his sword; stamps on his face.]

THE WILD KNIGHT [faintly].

Earth grows too beautiful around me: shapes And colours fearfully wax fair and clear, For I have heard, as thro' a door ajar, Scraps of the huge soliloquy

of God That moveth as a mask the lips of man, If man be very silent: they were right, No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

[Dies.]

LORD ORM [staggers back laughing].

Saved, saved, my secret.

REDFEATHER [rushing in, sword in hand].

The drawn sword at last! Guard, son of hell!

[They fight. ORM falls. OLIVE comes in.]

He too can die. Keep back! Olive, keep back from him! I did not fear Him living, and he fell before my sword; But dead I fear him. All is ended now; A man's whole life tied in a bundle there, And no good deed. I fear him. Come away.

GOOD NEWS

Between a meadow and a cloud that sped In rain and twilight, in desire
and fear. I heard a secret--hearken in your ear, 'Behold the daisy has a
ring of red.'

That hour, with half of blessing, half of ban, A great voice went through
heaven, and earth and hell, Crying, 'We are tricked, my great ones, is it
well? Now is the secret stolen by a man.'

Then waxed I like the wind because of this, And ran, like gospel and
apocalypse, From door to door, with new anarchic lips, Crying the very
blasphemy of bliss.

In the last wreck of Nature, dark and dread, Shall in eclipse's hideous
hieroglyph, One wild form reel on the last rocking cliff, And shout, 'The
daisy has a ring of red.'