

The Breaking Furrow

Fullerton, Mary E. (1868-1946)

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The Breaking Furrow

**Melbourne
Sydney J. Endacott
1921**

Note

Some of the following verses have been published in various papers and magazines in Melbourne and Sydney, but most of them are here printed for the first time.

M.E.F.

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The Breaking Furrow

Eclipse from a Range.

WHAT is it that covers
My soul from the moon?
The end shall be soon,
For the Dark Power hovers.

Death hangs on the air,
His chill's in my blood,
In my soul his forebode,
His touch on my hair.

In this terrible place
The mists are his rope;
The damp hands they grope
On the damp of my face.

He lets loose his condor,
His bats are on wing;
His owls mustering
In black gulfs yonder.

Heaven's dark, the rocks tremble:
I am standing alone;
Out of sky, earth and stone
The terrors assemble.

There are winged forms that ride;
There are voices around—
Now hushed is all sound;
'Tis like when Christ died.

I am swept, I am falling,
Doom comes on a wind;
They that know I have sinned
Are swooping and calling.

'Tis Vengeance unfurled,
The end shall be soon:
God uncover Thy moon
Ere I die with Thy world.

Behold from the portal
Where God makes His grace;
She gives her fair face,

And I am immortal.

The Ploughman.

I WATCHED him plough his furrow:
He ploughed it deep and well;
He threw the sod to heaven,
His share dipped into hell.

And now the earth cried “spare me!”
Or now she said “strike deep!”
And many a flower gave laughter,
And many a root did weep.

The soil now left his ploughshare
With sighs or gentle song;
Anon it snarled resisting,
Or gnashed the share along.

He tossed it to the sunshine,
To all the streaming storm;
To cool earth's deepest fever,
And lay her sweet and warm.

From east to west he drives it;
Again from west to east;
With steps that never falter
Or pace that is increased.

And now the under's upmost—
The top is now beneath;
The two are mixed and mingled,
And strive with Life and Death.

The sour is sweet, the sweet has
Cast forth a bitter tang;
And curious balms and gentle
Burst where the poisons sprang.

If ill the emanations,
Or sweet the wholesome soil,
The ploughman seems unheeding,
Or heeds alone his toil.

Amid the exhalations
Himself had loosed from earth,
I saw his cryptic features

Where was nor gloom nor mirth.

But in the pale, pale dawnlight,
His eye I could not tell
If 'twere of earth or heaven,
Or untransmuted hell.

“Oh, Ploughman strange, untiring,
What is thy mighty task,
Its meaning and its purpose?”
I humbly dared to ask.

He paused not in his furrow
Of animated sod;
“I plough,” he answered slowly,
“To grow the grapes of God!”

Old Kate.

OLD KATE, she took the orphan in—
Cold hands and broken toes
She put against her withered breast,
Where she had held but woes.

She took the warm food from the pan,
Until the blue lips smiled,
And life came surging back to Kate,
And flowed back to the child.

And since that time, from day to day
She's set three plates of delf:
One for the Shade, one for the child,
And one plate for herself.

Half fooled, she plays at long ago—
The ancient might have been—
She sets a chair beside her own
And holds the child between.

And thus she sits and talks to them;
By Fancy's art beguiled,
Happy that they are hers at last—
The Shadow and the child.

Ministry.

A BLANK wall made beautiful
For those who come
With the exuberant blues
Of my delphinium.

A rough hut made beautiful,
Where quiet folks dwell,
By the delphinium-blue
Eyes of young Annabel.

A man's life made beautiful
By those same eyes,
That are of no land or place
Except of Paradise.

The Charwoman.

HAS she a silent rune,
Scrubbing the winding stairs?
Has she a whispered song
To still her cares?

Toiling alone at dark,
When the world's gone home,
On the long, steep steps
Where the world's feet come.

Lord! how my heart did beat
By the fire escape,
Seeing upon its knees
An uncouth shape.

Then, while she stands aside
With wet, red hands;
I wonder about the lot
Of her who stands.

What is the life she leads—
Who scrubs these floors?
What is it like—the home
Within her doors?

Do children in that place
Wait for her tread,
Weary with winning them
To-morrow's bread?

I saw within her eyes,
As there she stood,
The caste of suffering
And hardihood.

My soul went home with her;
And lo! near me,
Another dogged her steps:
Old Misery.

And every night he goes
Intent to win;
To slip within the door

Where she goes in.

I watched her lift the latch;
The faint light come;
A child's voice piped
The welcome home.

And not that night did Woe
An entrance gain;
So in my soul was stilled
The greater pain.

But now I know what runes—
What desperate prayers—
She breathes upon her knees
Up those long stairs.

The Butterfly.

WAS the spring made for you, or you for the spring?
You beautiful, ardent, ephemeral thing
With the stencil of Nature adorning your wing.

You came like the sunshine, you came like the dew,
The fingers of Light broke the wrappings of you.
Till like a winged jewel you soared in the blue.

You were made for old gardens and days of still glow;
For slopes where the dawning comes chastely and slow;
For sunsets that linger reluctant to go.

Oh, frail as a dewdrop, and sweet as the dawn,
And bright as the noon-tide of spring on the lawn,
And brief as the sunset that is soonest withdrawn.

Such wings as no cunning of Art could design!
Spun out of dull grossness so dainty and fine,
By process so simple, so strange, so divine!

What pains and what skill for the life of a day!
What Form and what Color to vanish away!
Compact of all Beauty and one with the clay.

You belong to the moment as man to the years,
With no time in your hour for his imminent fears,
Who never escapes from his cocoon of tears.

You have learned to be happy and learned to be free,
More joy in your hour than is given to me,
Born heir to the puzzle of what is to be.

Can it be that the reason man's life is amiss
Is because he is doomed to an ultimate bliss,
And must strive yet awhile in the dark chrysalis?

I know not; but not for this exquisite hour
Shall my spirit be flecked by Philosophy's power,
While you in your beauty flit here in my bower.

The spring made for you, or you for the spring,
Or both made for me? I have done questioning,
And am one with you now like the warp of your wing.

The Grain.

ALL day along the hot headlands,
Old Darrant's scythe-blade swung;
A hundred times he wiped his brow,
And thrice his flannel wrung.

His daughter bent her aching back,
Fast flew her thorn-pricked hands
Tying the old man's reaping close
With its own golden bands.

The long swarths cut, the hard task done
She tossed the last sheaf bound;
“Hurrah!”—a ripple ran of Youth—
The grain showered on the ground.

He turned and struck her on the face,
“You'll waste my wheat again!”
Palely she fronted him, and mute—
'Twas HE that spilt the grain.

Coal.

SHE builded her dream
In the core of the fire:
The petulant dream
Of o'erweening desire.

She sat in her splendor,
As those the gods spoil;
A weak parasite
On the bosom of Toil.

In the core of the coal
A vision she saw
That shook her with wonder;
That rived her with awe.

She saw in the flare,
She saw in the glow,
The heart of the earth
Where the brave workers go.

She saw by the torch
In the compassing gloom
The chambers of Labor,
Like cisterns of doom.

She saw the hands knotted,
The lines on each face;
She saw the bent backs
Of that Stygian place.

She saw the sweat dripping;
She felt the hard breath;
The naked throats pulsing;
The vapors of death.

She saw in the fire
The coal ere it came;
Read the story of men
In illumining flame.

And deep in the fire,
In the core of the coal,
She saw in a vision

The Aggregate Soul.

She stretched forth her arms;
Lo! her being unknit,
Sped, touched with that other,
And mingled with it.

The Quarry.

MY feet know a secret quarry
With the litter of ages strewn;
And deep in it, hid in marble,
Lies a Venus yet unhewn.

Storm and flood and the tempest,
Sun and night and the fire,
Have made her and laid her secure
For Beauty, the Heart's Desire.

Nature, that made the marble,
Gives the hand that shall lay it bare;
And him who shall shape the chisel
To fashion the statue fair.

The immortal pen has written
The ultimate epic all;
Artisan, miner and sculptor
Each but awaits his call.

Each for his part made ready,
Unknowing what thing he 'waits;
Till, solemnly, Time uncovers
The glorious aggregates.

Patient, the world awaits it—
That hour on the golden scroll;
When She shall rise from the marble,
A beautiful Shape and Soul.

Urchin.

DO you know what I am,
Who was born in a lane,
Swaddled in want,
And nourished in pain?
My rags are my all,
And my ten fingers true
That try to perform
The task they may do.
Do you know who I am,
Who look like a jest?—
Eternity's child
Along with the best.
In the skin of a churl,
The guise of a waif,
Is the soul of a god,
And I carry it safe.

Uncle Comes Home.

HOME from strange lands
With beautiful names!
He must have his tea now
Ere children make claims.

What a terrible time!
Will he never be done?
His whiskers stick out
When he bites at the bun.

Two platefuls of pork,
Then pudding and pie;
From cheese back to buns!
And no one says “fie!”

So funny he looks—
His beard out and in—
But I love his grey eyes
And the brown of his skin.

When he raises his cup,
His hand gives a twist;
And the blue anchor shows
By the strap on his wrist.

That's something to see
Till the stories begin!
There! his whiskers have stopped
Moving out, moving in.

He has finished at last;
Now for far Labrador,
For Spain and the Alps,
Brazil and Lahore.

Chair scrapes to the hob,
Pipes lit for Lahore!
Legs stretched for the Alps—
Three whiffs . . . and a snore.

Two Old Men.

THEY met at the garden gate
On Christmas Eve,
Late—when the stars shine out
And athiests believe.

And there they met going in:
One had a sack—
He of the genial eye—
Like a hump on his back.

The other, bony of face,
Of eyes sunk deep,
Held a broad shining blade,
Such as they bear who reap.

He of the blade pushed past
Him of the sack;
“Mock not,” he said, “this house,
Thou with thy bag go back.”

“Nay, but,” said the other, “thou
Hast all the year,
I but the one sweet night
To bear my merry cheer!”

Ah, tell me whose will prevailed
There at the gate;
His who served Circumstance,
Or his who served Fate?

The Miracle.

DARK winter again
With the snarl on her lip,
Driving hurt Nature
With insolent whip.

Over my beds
Where blossoms had been,
Cuffing she passed
With step-mother mien.

Sleet in her teeth,
Scold on her tongue;
All things made old,
Nothing left young.

Sudden a flash—
An arrow of Spring:
Breath of her lips,
Whirl of her wing.

Broken the power
Of Winter the shrew;
By that moment of gold,
That instant of blue.

Lo! at my foot
The wonder I saw—
The miracle thing
That filled me with awe!

Forth from the earth
Living it rose,
I saw it come forth—
The bulb's conscious nose.

I thought it winter
By nip and by sting;
She without science
Knew it was spring.

The Scavenger.

A FOUL blue frog is stiffened in the mud,
A sleek green slime is o'er the silted drain;
Something more foul is in the right-of-way—
A stray cur dead . . . shut down the window pane.

The days and nights have soiled the city's ways,
Now blows the dust before a grey north wind;
Along the pavements people pick their way
'Mid dirt and rot, and black banana rind.

Alack! the town is curst! the scavenger
Has heard the call of immemorial times—
Touched by the gods has left his humble task,
And sits at home a-making wild, wild rhymes.

The Clown.

CAP and bells and Columbine—
All the glitter that is mine;
All the plaudits of the town
At the antics of the clown.
Other men may be as men,
Sad and glad and sad again;
Sober in the soul's repose,
Nakedly the heir of woes
That my painted lips grin down
In the camouflage of Clown.

Cap and bells and tinsel-glare
Make a ghastly mask for Care;
I would give them all amain
Just to keep a tryst with pain;
Or to feel the honest grip
Of Life's sober fellowship.
I shall never be Joy's lover
Till the long pretence is over;
I shall never feel a jest
Till 'tis happy in my breast,
Urged not from a weary lip
Trembling underneath the quip.
That can never be, alas!
Till this saw-dust Show shall pass,
I from it and it from me
And my real motley be
Joy and sorrow, pain and mirth,
All the common lot on earth—
This the Heaven I pine after—
Freedom from the bonds of laughter!

The One-Armed Son of the Cobbler.

THE one-armed son of the cobbler—
I met him in the street;
He leered at me in passing,
And skipped upon his feet.

I saw without resentment,
And would again my God;
For Thou in premonition
Had touched him with Thy rod.

Association.

OLD Guido by the garden gate
Is grinding out his ancient tunes,
As he has stood and ground them out
So many Thursday afternoons.

Old Guido, since you last stopped there
For three days have these blinds been drawn,
And all the shafts of light flung back
In baffled glory on the lawn.

She used to sit beside the sill,
For whom you played those melodies,
And draw the curtains half aside,
And rest her book upon her knees.

I used to smile about those tunes—
Those airs that touched her memories so!
Ah! now they surely break my heart;
Oh Guido, take your coin and go!

War Time.

YOUNG JOHN, the postman, day by day,
In sunshine or in rain,
Comes down our road with words of doom
In envelopes of pain.

What cares he as he swings along
At his mechanic part,
How many times his hand lets fall
The knocker on a heart?

He whistles merry scraps of song,
What'er his bag contain—
Of words of death, of words of doom
In envelopes of pain.

The Woman over the Range.

OH, dark and wild,
Her eyes are strange;
She frights me—
The woman over the range!

Her form is straight,
Her form is tall;
She lives on the peak
Where the furies call.

Her hair hangs down,
She moves like Night
In the dark of stars,
In the vague moonlight.

Oh, rich her quiet,
She speaks no word,
But, God! what wonders
Her soul has heard!

Her aspect draws;
Her eyes they lure,
Like gleams that flash
From a far obscure.

Her soul is hid;
It may be hell,
It may be heaven—
I cannot tell.

She has the magic,
The awful grace
Of those that bide
In a haunted place.

Oh, dark and wild,
Oh, rich and strange;
She lures me—
The Women over the range!

And now she beckons!
Or good or harm
I go—I follow

Her desperate charm.

Rebel.

HE took his father's hand
And renounced his father's creed;
With the solemn abrogation
Of the soul new freed.
The father wept and blessed,
A triumph in his sorrow,
Forth from his Yesterday
Speeding his son's To-morrow.

Genius.

ALONG the East, across the West,
She floats in royalty, half disdain,
Yet half in love with mortal men
She stoops to touch a heart again.
The wallet of the gods she bears,
And sudden as the dark day drifts
She reaches out the giver's hand
And drops the largesse of her gifts.
The blind child in the valley hut
Turns smiling, touching in his sleep
The glory that his heart shall hide
Until it bursts in music deep.
The pale wild worker feels and knows,
He bares his forehead to the sun,
In deep humility he cries,
"I am indeed the chosen one!"
The light and laughing idler stands
Arrested in his foolish game,
Like Saul of Tarsus stunned, convinced
At sudden calling of his name.
Again the voice to timid soul
Seems far and faint, but half sincere
Until the rapture of some hour
Brings it in benediction near.
They gaze in passion, cry in pain,
In travail strive and agonize
To lay the beauty shown to them
Before the gaze of common eyes.
For where she touches, fire must burn—
Her gift's a flame, a sword, a power!
It's touch is torture, rapture, balm;
A scourge, a pestilence, a dower.
Along the universal skies
She drops a whisper from her mouth,
She knows no bondages of Time,
No boundaries of North or South.
Her wallet gives its wealth to few,
Her voice is out of common reach,
But through the consecrated lips
Comes echo of her magic speech.

The sick world kindles; Passion leaps,
There comes her message through the man,
She smiles—her wallet in her breast,
Veiled in a high meridian.

The Folk Of Brenan's Lane.

A CHILD is sick down Brenan's Lane,
Where all the houses lean,
And many a roof lets in the rain
The broken slates between.

'Tis Salter's Tom who's fallen ill—
Got something in his bones;
The doctor named a long, long name—
As long as Tommy's groans.

All day a string of neighbors comes,
Sleeves up and hair run wild;
With just a cup of this or that
To tempt the poor sick child.

There's this one comes, and that one comes,
To do this job or that;
Or take the younger children off
From wrangling on the mat.

And not a night of all the month
But some intruding guest
Has made the tired mother go
And take a bit of rest.

Though food is scant and clothing mean,
And the roofs let in the rain,
I who have seen, declare there are
No poor in Brenan's Lane.

The Poet.

FROM a low hut on the low ground
I heard a raw, crude cry
From unaccustomed lungs.
I paused a moment, passing by.

It was the birth-cry of a new child
From the pre-natal world,
Afraid of august Sense,
And of sudden life and light unfurled

By my soul's eye within the hut
I saw a great tear shed,
From the worn mother's eye,
At one more mouth for meagre bread.

Near the low hut on the bleak ground
The peasant father stood
Paused, listening on his hoe
To the new birthling of his brood.

A great sigh like a sweat arose
And hung before his mouth;
Then, bended to his hoe,
Uncouth, he digged the earth uncouth.

On the low landscape moved a cart
On heavy wheels, went slow—
On to the level west,
Where the darkened heavens hung low.

Sudden for me the place was lit
Like Spring in golden hour;
Grey sky and the harsh place
No longer dark and sour.

From the high air came music down
That made my heart upleap;
My pulses melted into dew;
Of unseen wings I heard the sweep.

About me leapt the seeds to leaf,
To bud, to open bloom,
Till in ambrosia I breathed,

And swam dissolved in the illumine.

Again my feet were fixed to earth,
To the dull dead ground;
Lo! the dark hut, and the dark land,
And all the bitter place around.

The bent man plodding at his task,
The woman spent with pain,
The far cart farther gone,
And the wail of the child again.

None saw the miracle but I,
None knew but I that morn,
'Mid his parent's moan and sigh
The World's Desire was born.

Crows.

AT an old water-hole,
Bones lay in the hide
And teeth gibbered up
Of things that had died.

Tortured of thirst,
There came to the mud
A son of the plain,
Who sank where he stood.

Then the crows from afar,
Where the water was good,
Came nearer, for heaven
Had given them food.

The Red-Haired Chimney Sweep.

THE red-haired chimney sweep
Was alternate black and red—
When Nature held him fast,
Or his trade had touched his head.

Young Polly Ann made sport
Of eyes a pale, pale green,
Of freckled face, and nose
Turned up, those eyes between.

The red-haired chimney sweep
Put brush and brush aside,
And donned a khaki coat
Since she would but deride.

Three years he fought afar,
Then back to his own place
Lamed, broken by the shell
That had destroyed his face.

Young Polly Ann beheld
And ran, and kissed, and prest
The beauty of his scars
Unto her tender breast.

Forgotten Are The Dead.

SHE drest from crown to toe,
A sombre shape;
Was laughing, lip and eye,
In all her crepe:
Forgotten are the dead.

His faithful tongue had been
An epitaph;
And now spontaneous rings
His morning laugh:
Forgetful of the dead.

I, clinging to the past,
While Life sweeps by,
Feeling joy come again,
Look back and sigh:
“The dead are soon forgot.”

Vandal.

THE farmer on the river, by the bend,
Has killed the wattles that I loved last Spring!
The thrush, too, loved them, and the quick fantail;
The warbling magpie, and the shy bronzewing.

Their healing effluence on my heart they spilt,
Upon my soul, long arid in her drouth;
Softly the blossoms touched, like virgin kiss,
My weary eyelids and my parched mouth.

And now I see the dying stems exude
The trees' last sap, and I, the heart they healed,
Behold their doom and can do nought to save
The riven magic of September's yield.

The birds are gone, and on the landscape's face
The sun smites down, unmitigably stark,
And in his waggon on the road near by
The farmer bears his load of vandalled bark.

Contented with his pipe, he bumps along,
Unwitting that among those withered sheaves
He bears bird twitters, and the golden dreams
My dry heart gathered under golden eaves.

The Deaf Mute.

YOU, who have found
Gifts of coherency
Out of your opulence
Nought know of me.

Shackles of impotence
Press on my lips;
Laid on mine ears
The aural eclipse.

You that have ears,
You that have speech,
Shutter your spirits,
Each one from each.

I, from my silence,
Speaking no word,
No syllable knowing,
All language have heard.

Out of your silence,
Out of mine own,
Chambers of spirit
My spirit is shown.

Mick.

YOU poor little Mick,
So here you arrive;
Born in the strike
You seem scarce alive!
Your poor little face
So pinched and forlorn,
Creased with the puzzle
Of why you were born.
Your mother has drunk
From a fountain of fears;
That's why your milk
Is tasting of tears.
Ah, no! little Mick,
Her courage is fine;
Her milk has the taste of
Rebellion's good wine.
Smooth your wee brow
And slake your lips' drouth,
Then turn in your sleep
With that tang in your mouth!
The omen is good—
They are born in times stern
Who are marked by the gods
To teach and to learn!
Your mouth is a word,
Your tongue is a pen;
Wee Mick has a message
To-morrow for men.

The Woman Down Yonder.

SHE lights the fire and cooks the meal,
And makes the cabin neat;
She feeds the chickens and the pig,
And the waiting lambs that bleat.

She milks the cow, unstalls the horse,
Then digs till dinner time;
She eats her simple meal alone
While straight the shadows climb.

She brings in water from the well,
And gives the cat the scraps—
The little broken dish of milk—
And watches while it laps.

Then, hoe in hand, she weeds the beet,
Or mounds the waving corn,
Until 'tis time to do again
What she had done that morn.

The sleepy hens are on the perch,
The calf within the shed;
The cat is by the glowing hob,
The little lambs to bed.

The watch-dog dozes on the rug,
The kindling's in the box;
The supper laid upon the board
About the bowl of stocks.

The pot of steaming tea is made,
The simple meal is spread;
She smooths her hair, unrolls her sleeves,
And cuts the home-made bread.

The supper done, the dishes washed,
She takes her book or seam;
But always, sitting by the fire,
She slips to brooding dream.

With half a smile, and half a sigh—
Fire flickering in the gloom—
She takes her little lamp and goes

Into the inner room.

The Problem.

ONCE a king's skull
By a pauper's was placed;
Then were the learned men
By a problem faced.

Which was the pauper's,
And which was the king's?
For the crown had fallen off
With the jewels and things.

And the skulls were alike—
Concavernous bone,
As though on like men
Each one had grown!

So the wise men peered;
They puzzled and pried
Over the two skulls
There, side by side.

Wise men are wise men
As long as plain folk
Don't know too much,
So wisely they spoke.

“This is the king's skull,
And that is the knave's”;
So they buried them both
In suitable graves.

Now the king's skull is lying
Where the grasses grow wild,
And the pauper's is under
Where marble is piled.

The Intruder.

IT entered in from the vastness
When John had locked the doors;
There was ne'er a step in the garden;
There was ne'er a mark on the floors.

No one beheld it enter,
For their eyes were veiled with Life;
John, nor his stout son, Bennie,
Nor Martha, his wedded wife.

His master, a bridegroom happy,
Had frowned to be called away;
But John was a trusted warder,
Who had grown in the service, grey.

“See that you lock the windows;
That all the doors be fast;
Let no one else be trusted,
And loose the red hound last.”

“Tis not for my chest of treasure,
Or aught that is mine, beside;
But she that I leave behind me,
Heart of my heart—my bride.”

So John barred close the windows,
And bolted the doors all fast;
When all was locked securely,
He loosened the red hound last.

It entered there in the daylight,
Heeding nor bolts nor bars,
Asking no light to guide it,
And waiting no dark of stars.

Fearing nor hound nor warder;
Needing no path to guide;
Surely and swift it entered
And found the young man's bride.

Lyric.

ON just such a day as this
When the garden was sweet after rain;
We clung in our virgin kiss,
And stumbled apart again.

And that is the whole of the tale—
One kiss in a garden of flowers;
Were ever two lives so pale,
Or lyric so brief as ours?

Atlas Strives.

I WATCHED a beetle by the path,
Doughty, and strong, and grim,
Shoving a ball of dirt
Ten times the size of him.

He heaved, and pushed, went rushing in,
Sudden he went, or slow;
Tugged, shouldered, butted, bumped,
Now from it, now below.

Flung down upon his back,
He struggled up once more;
Moved on the ball an inch,
Then tumbled as before.

Perchance he knew not why or where;
Perchance his purpose dim;
He strove because some force
Strove strong and stern in him.

Feet out, upon his back,
Dogged at his task again,
The dull ball watching him
As the world watches men.

One thing I learn is courage here,
Tumble is not defeat;
To beetle or to man
Effort itself is sweet.

Outcast.

SHE seems so pensive as she walks
Over the far, far plains;
Infinitely pensive like the West
When newly washed with rains.

I cannot see her eyes, her lips,
Only the wind-blown hair
That used to curl about her neck
And flutter everywhere.

She looks so pensive as she goes—
A dim shape to the West;
A little bent to cover it
That shelters in her breast.

She goes, an exiled, broken thing
(Yet proud with flashing eyes!)
For that which snuggles in her shawl
And on her bosom lies.

Where she shall sleep to-night, God knows!
Somewhere along the path
Of the set sun where she is gone
Out from my bitter wrath.

The plains are infinite, the sky—
Those two within the shawl,
O, I will bring them back again,
As God is over all!

She shall return despite the sin,
Despite what was unfit;
Despite the child; ah, no! ah, no!
Because of love and it!

The sky is Beauty, and the eve
Floods me with mine own guilt;
I am the outcast if my love
Not precious be spilt.

The Widow.

THE little grey woman sat with her seam
In the Autumn afternoon;
And a magpie came to the cottage door,
So she scared it away, "ochone!"

"One is for sorrow"—she missed a stitch,
Then sighed as she sewed her seam,
With half an eye on the flats around,
And half her soul in a dream.

The magpie came with his mate beside
For the worm beyond the chair;
"Two is for mirth," and her quavering laugh
Sent them away in the air.

One worm is no supper for three pied birds,
And each with a greedy eye;
"Three for a wedding"—she pricked her thumb,
And the birds went into the sky.

Then four of them came, and her tears sprang out;
"Ochone! there was never a birth;"
The birds cocked eyes at her weeping there,
And the worm crept into the earth.

The Goose.

MY solemn feet along the grass
That flanks the weedy waterhole
Provoke the township urchin's laugh,
His flying stone has me for goal.

The master, even, has a smile
When I my heirloom dignity
Display along the water's edge;
They are ridiculous to me!

Ingrates, forsooth; who teach and learn,
And still forget my high renown;
I, bright on history's human page,
Whose cackle saved their ancient town!

The Neighbour.

COME out and watch the doctor's funeral.
His wife, they say, has neither moved nor spoke—
Just ten months wed, the baby's coming soon
She sits there dazed among her women folk.

He stayed a lot beside the idiot boy,
Who'd caught the fever playing in the drain.
Things happen strange: our fine young doctor's dead;
The idiot boy is up and well again.

I like to see the wreaths; the plumes look grand;
The folks have turned out well, at any rate. .
Look there along the street, toward the right:
The idiot boy is grinning by the gate.

The Priest.

OVER the heave of the hill,
Where the road climbed East,
I saw him strain to the crest
Riding to bring the priest.

Where the gravel sunk away,
And the steep hill dipped,
He came with a reddened spur
And reins in his hand hard gripped.

Miles more than a score behind;
To the long high East,
His horse dripping sweat, he came
Riding to bring the priest.

Eyes that were eyes of glass
And a cheek all white,
For the road was yet more hard,
And the sky was set for night.

Why should he ride for the priest,
Or man of God at all?
He is redding his spur in vain
For blessing of Peter or Paul.

Halt! rider, on foolish quest;
Go back to the dying child;
I know that she needs no priest
By the gleam when she smiled.

Go back, and give her the cup,
And touch the forehead soft;
Was her life not pure enough
To carry her soul aloft?

“Ay,” said the rider, “ay,
Her life was sweet as myrrh;
I hasten to bring the priest
That his soul be healed by her.”

And he galloped on apace
Under the stars of heaven,
That the soul of a weary saint

By a sinner might be shriven.

Dearness.

DEARNESS, Dearness,
Thy voice is in mine ear,
Thy face always before me;
They talk of far and near—
I only know thy nearness.

Dearness, Dearness,
The warm love's on my mouth;
Thy hand is close in mine;
They talk of north and south—
I only know thy nearness.

Dearness, Dearness,
Thy heart is in my breast;
I have changed souls with thee;
They talk of east and west—
I only know thy nearness.

Flotsam.

FLUNG forth to the wind,
See it flutter and run,
As though like a bird
It has need of the sun.

The indolent hand
Of the young lad behind
Has flung it a waif
To the will of the wind.

Comes a proud, tossing team
From the timber yards by,
With the driver alert,
All muscle and eye.

The colt of the team
Sees the paper whisp run,
His buckles a-flash
In the glare of the sun.

Man-muscles strain hard,
Foot's jammed on the brake
To miss the lamp post
At the curve for life's sake!

But the team is gone mad:
At the bend of the hill,
Flung forth on the curb,
The driver lies still.

The merry whisp spins
To the gutter and drops
Where the grating shows teeth.
The frightened team stops.

A pause and a crowd,
A hush and dismay;
A moment of awe;
Something hurried away.

The load's driven on—
New touch on the reins;
One splash of bright red

On the kerbstone remains.

Etchings.

A-WALKING through a slum,
Where the houses tumbled down,
I saw a little girl,
And a rag was her gown.

She sat upon a door-step,
And her feet were blue and bare;
Her face was grimed with dirt—
For dirt was everywhere.

But she sat a-singing there,
'Twixt nibblings at a crust;
And her eyes were blue, blue,
Seeing nor dirt nor dust.

For her wistful heart was young,
And her sweet soul was pure;
And there, in a doomed world,
Singing, she sat secure.

I wandered into a street,
Where the world ran gay;
I saw a sullen face
Staring out at the day.

Jewelled in her car,
Furred against the cold;
Oh! she was thirty-five,
But old, old, old.

Moody and discontent,
Pallid with unconcern;
Life had not made her feel
Nor let her learn.

From the pavement side
I watched her eyes,
Out of the mask of furs,
And jewels and lies.

She had no inward light,
No song of soul;
Bored, moribund and doomed,

I watched her roll.

From the petrol fumes
And the car's loud hum,
I wandered back again
To the fugitive slum.

I filled my heart once more
From the door-step child,
Of the nibbled crust,
Of the rude song wild.

Oh! her tangled hair
And the life she knew;
Oh! the wistful face
And the eyes blue, blue.

Love.

WHEN Duty with her scroll stood by,
And slighted Conscience ceased to speak;
The mandate of a quiet eye,
The tyranny of a wet cheek
Ordered his walk; he saw no rod
Nor, under the rose-leaves, spear of God.

The Right-Of-Way.

THE tinker's daughter and the butcher's lad
Are met and courting in the right-of-way,
Where all among the scattered cobble-stones
Are stalks of horehound nosing through the clay.

Nature is busy 'neath her pulsing blouse,
And in his bashful eyes; he reds and pales
Before the wonder of her freckled cheek—
The beauty of rough hands and broken nails.

A mangy cur sniffs by, a sparrow skips;
But they are not: this is the lover's hour.
. . . Drayman, turn back, here is no right-of-way,
Those lumb'ring wheels must not profane Love's bower.

Verdict.

I STRETCHED out my hand to an urchin
As I passed through a slum.
She shrank from my gentle intention
Affrighted and dumb.

My Persian, at half of the gesture,
From her rug would arise
To take the caress from my fingers,
Delight in her eyes.

Who's to blame for the shrink of the shoulder,
For the flinch of the eye?
The age, and the system, the people,
And you, sir, and I.

The Selector's Wife.

THE quick compunction cannot serve;
She saw the flash,
Ere he had bent with busy hand
And drooping lash.

She saw him mark for the first time,
With critic eye,
What five years' heavy toil had done
'Neath roof and sky.

And always now so sensitive
Her poor heart is,
That moment will push in between
His kindest kiss.

The moment when he realised
Her girlhood done—
The truth her glass had long revealed
Of beauty gone.

Until some future gracious flash
Shall let each know
That that which drew and holds him yet
Shall never go.

The Garment.

MY face upon the old earth's springtime lap,
I watched a swift-born flower its stem up-push—
A spory wonder singing with the sap,
And all around the uncomprehended Bush.

God's toil was great in its long exercise,
And great was Nature's hot-foot energy
To make this blossom peeping at the skies,
As lifts a nymph, her chin beyond the sea.

Out of the very heart of age this youth!
Heir to the light, and born for it, and doomed
To this same day from far-time days uncouth;
By long dead springs potentially perfumed.

Some unborn bird yet in the speckled walls
That nurse its wings may make a meal of this
When Autumn into seed the flower recalls,
Whose opening bloom my wonder wakes, and bliss.

Another Spring shall quicken once again
Somehow, somehow the old immortal pulse
That lies within earth's long-adventured grain,
Her call the tiny cloisters shall convulse.

And forth shall come to the recurrent tryst,
That blue simplicity the devotee,
Deep in my complex heart hath hailed and kissed
As hem of Thine own garment, Lord of me!

So, brooding here upon my bended arm,
In the lone Bush whose blood is singing sap,
My threefold being tastes the threefold charm,
In turn and turn again on earth's warm lap.

I am not one thing long, but each in turn,
Now rapt, now edified, and now inspired—
A soul, a brain, a heart; all filled to burn
And pique me of the truth so long desired!

One small flower blown for us self-conscious men
Full of our strange and hieroglyphic fate,
Brings us to pore upon ourselves again,

On whom these works of wonder stand and wait!

And yet I question less, and worship more,
With every Spring a humbler devotee,
Reading the revelation o'er and o'er
Of Thee in Thine own garment, Lord of me!

Tides.

WHEN Dan threw down the slip-rails
And led the red roan over,
She saw within his eyes
That he was born a rover.

When he came back in Autumn
Her worn and dusty drover,
She saw within his eyes
That Dan was born a lover!

Faggots.

THERE leapt a red, red flame
With a moan in it;
And when the flame died down
The flame was lit.

The ashes were yesterday,
Inhumanity and sorrow;
A vital breath came by—
The life of tomorrow.

And every faggot's dust
Out from the strife,
Sweetened and shriven,
Sprang into life.

And the moan in the breeze
Changed into a shout;
I saw the new soul
Exultant spring out!

Saw the ashes take form,
And laugh with strange eyes,
Not faggots, but men,
Regenerate, wise.

With torches they ran
Lit out of death,
And kindled the world
With fire that was breath.

Loss.

ROUND old Glen Iris I wandered, seeking a place—
The creek at the spot where the feet that are still used to cross:
“There was gorse to the right, there was gorse to the left:
And a thrumming and drumming and humming of bees in the gorse.”

I found it, the place, and hated the place that I found
Because it had held to the past unheeding who should depart;
I hated the ripple, the bees and the bloom—
Ay! the thrumming and drumming and humming of life in my heart.

Elect.

INTO the marrow of his bones
The elements of earth and heaven
Stern Nature mixt, and in his blood
The awful and the sacred leaven.

Then Fate took hold of him to thwart;
She laid her hands about his throat,
She beat him with her scorpion thongs,
And all the Furies with her smote.

And Circumstance, her henchman, came,
To set for him a thousand snares;
Withhold his wine and meat and bread,
To load him with a freight of cares.

Men came at the behest of Power
And thrust him past the walls of stone;
Then life and men withdrew, and left
Him bound in darkness and alone.

His spirit filtered through those bars,
The attars of his awful soul;
Till in the night the nations saw
His message on its lucid scroll.

His being fired the universe,
Forth from the dark his light was thrown;
Lo! he is everywhere for aye,
Whom they left shackled and alone!

The Drone.

SO a world of hexagons,
With waxen walls and stout,
Came a crowd of angry workers
Who seized and cast me out.

“Go gather, or be starving . . .”
They flung me to the flowers—
I that had gathered nothing,
And loved the lazy hours!

In the world of hexagon
I will not live again,
I know a kinder region—
The human world of men.

The Choice.

SOMETHING there comes and touches me
When gay my draught is lifted up;
That eerie hand upon my arm
The wine spills from my happy cup.

Or when I take my lonesome walks
In love with dim and gentle Night;
It sends me fleeing home again
To household warmth and shuttered light.

When I have trysted with Success,
And held the prize and heard the praise,
Unseen hag lips have made sharp mirth,
Like brambles crackling in the blaze.

I've waked at night, and quaked at noon
I've shivered in the early sun;
Drawn back where nothing was, and seen
A gaunt grey shape where shape was none.

My high hours stand with livid cheek,
My song sinks back within my throat;
And then I feel that cold, cold touch
Close up my music note and note.

And all because when first I lived
And lay within my cradle bed,
I would not take the gentle hand
Of one who crooned to me, and said—

“Come with me to the Magic Land!”
But I was born a scholar's child,
With worldly wisdom clasped about,
And would not be, alas! beguiled.

And so she went, a fair green shape—
A green shape moving to the dawn;
And all my infant days were done,
The gleaming vision all withdrawn.

And then She came, impalpable,
Yet from whose clasp is no escape;
She paces by me to the west,

By darkening paths, a darkening Shape.

Granny Dreams.

GRANNY has had a dream
Of flying hoofs and mane;
And Ronnie underneath,
And never up again.

It would be tempting Fate,
To go to school to-day!
Young lips to withered cheek,
Ronnie has dreams of play.

Granny is past all play,
And past work, too, it seems;
But Grannies still are dear
Who have such useful dreams!

The Blacksmith.

THE blacksmith is dead,
The forge is unlit;
The strong body lies
With the white over it.

The township is sad,
Women talk by the fence;
Counting his virtues
As misers count pence.

Naming his valors,
The men drink their beer;
Eyes over the glasses—
Hostels of fear.

The children at play
Quarrel softly, and glance
At the house by the forge,
Deprecating, askance.

Tomorrow the brooms
Will be busy once more;
Each wife at her labors
Within her own door.

The beer pots on shelf
Arranged in a row;
Each man to his labor
Of plough or of hoe.

The children again
Will squabble at play;
Unchecked by that Shadow
The plumes bore away.

The forge will be lit,
The bellows will ply;
The hammers will ring,
Sparks scatter and fly.

The blacksmith is dead,
His story is writ;
The strong body lies

With the earth over it.

The Bottle-O.

PUT away the bannerettes, and take the big flag down,
There is someone yonder whose son comes not again,
And his heart lies dead as he bumps along the way—
The Bottle-O is coming down the lane.

His and mine they went away, and mine is coming home;
Went away together, where some of them remain,
So, though one of them's returning, fold up the flaunting flag—
The Bottle-O is coming down the lane.

He has hung his dead boy's medal beside the kitchen clock,
And he sits and stares each evening, a-stricken in his brain;
Put aside the happy banners while the cart goes bumping by—
The Bottle-O is coming down the lane.

In a Kentish Lane—1913.

I PASSED a shy child down the lane,
On his mouth the berry stain;
In his eyes a large delight,
Oh, it was a happy sight!

On I strolled, and met a man
A-riding on a caravan;
All amongst his pans he rode,
Sunlight flashing from his load.

Still I went and met a girl
Flirting with a rustic churl;
They were laughing as they went
From sheer love of merriment.

Further on, the song I heard
Of a yellow-throated bird;
Cunningly he looked at me
From a purpled damson tree.

Home I came as glad as they
That I'd met upon the way.
When I'm sad I'll go again
Mooning down a Kentish lane.

The Modern Mood.

UNSEEN, I went to the Unseen—
Not shut in a closet bare;
But, pacing my garden walks,
Washed all my soul with prayer.

For my God I had no name;
For my want, no analysis;
Knew not, nor named a sin,
Though vaguely life seemed amiss.

And there to the quiet withdrawn,
Someone, somehow, somewhere,
Knew what I would, and filled me
With the aftermath of prayer.

Discovery.

WHEELS, wheels, and wheels,
A whistle-scream loud;
The gulp of the driver,
The gasp of the crowd.

Fifty, and spruce,
What weight have these
To Fear scrambling out
From Death on its knees?

Calm and erect,
Schooled biped again,
He strolls to the pavement
And swings to his train.

Chair to the fire,
With plaster on knees,
And paper in hand,
What is it he sees?

“NARROW ESCAPE
OF AN ELDERLY MAN;”
Black runs this headline
For all who may scan.

“Elderly man?”
He is suddenly cold;
Shrunk in his chair,
Grey-headed and old.

Eel and I.

HIS heaven is the shadow in the reeds,
His ethic is securing what he needs;
The green slime is his Exquisite Beyond,
His Book of Revelation is the pond.

I have no heaven where the cool reeds wave,
My ethic is resisting much I crave;
And much I crave is not within this pond;
But in some far and murmured-of Beyond.

So eel, go squirm amid your perfect mud,
You are achieved, and I am but in bud;
My glory is my far-away desire,
Yours a contented gorging in the mire.

Next Door.

THE waves of European conflict surge
Against our shores, the striving millions fight;
But greater far calamity to him—
The rabbit man's grey pony died last night.

About the town, men read the posted names
Of those who strive no more for wrong or right;
And women weep; but what is that to him?—
The rabbit man's grey pony died last night.

The widow in his street is sore bereft,
Her son has fallen, gone her spirit's light;
The European wave has reached her heart—
The parson came and brought the news last night.

At last he finds community of grief;
His home-bound heart can comprehend her plight:
He knows the widow, and he knew her son—
The rabbit man whose pony died last night.

The Rope.

WAS I made for this
By the hands of men?
Ere I do the deed
I will ravel again.
In a busy place
Were my fibres wove
By a wheel that sang
Like the man that drove:
Ay! he sang this song
As he drave the wheel
That weft me tight
For the winding reel:

“For love of man,
For the human good,
I weave the fibres
Of Brotherhood;
For the common cause,
For the human hope,
We bind all men
With the self-same rope.
The cord of union
To make them one—
All who are toiling
Beneath the sun.”

And he wove me well,
And he drew me taut;
For he loved the task
Did the man who wrought!
And after a while
They carried me here
To this terrible place
Of gloom and fear.
They knotted me firm
To a high, strong bar
In this open space
Where the grey walls are.

They bound me there
As friend to friend,

And left me swinging
With noose at end.
And while I swung
In the ghastly place
I saw at a window
A ghastly face.
He looked on me
While I swung in air,
And sudden I knew
Why the man was there.
And sudden there flashed
The reason clear
Why knotted and noosed
I am swinging here.

The man who wove me
With song of hope,
He wove his spirit
Within his rope;
And ere I do
The thing I'm bid,
Because of the passion
Within me hid,
I'll loose the fibres
He deftly wove—
The man who sang
Of the human love!
For the sake of the men
Who sent yon face
To the awful doom
In this awful place—
For the sake of the face
At the window pale,
For the sake of the future
The Weavers hail,
I'll ravel the strands,
I'll thwart the wrong—
The task that Vengeance
Has set Love's song!

Silent.

MY love hath not evoken
One word, one sign;
Surely my heart is broken
At calm of thine!

The quiet grave hath taken
Thy love's sweet cry;
When all the buds awaken,
When sere leaves fly.

Nor pain, nor love of living
Thy silence pierce;
Not all that spring is giving,
Nor winter fierce.

Nor hath my love evoken
One cry, one sign;
Surely my heart is broken
At calm of thine!

Robber and Drone and I.

WE watched a bird plant
In a tall, regal tree
A small parasite
As vital as he.

The tree cried "Save me!"
The bird cried "Beware!"
The parasite chuckled
"This is Nature's affair."

"Ha!" cried the robber;
"Ha!" echoed the drone,
"Nature's example
We follow alone."

I was baffled a moment,
But found answer then:
"The law of the forest
Is warning for men."

Unfit.

THEY found you and brought you in
From the lee of a hedge;
Sour life did your parents bestow,
Your teeth set on edge.

For you were heir to no cot,
No kisses, no songs;
And the voice of your lullaby was
The sigh of your wrongs.

Boy, you were bound to go wrong!
Poor bastard of sin,
A waif from the loins of disease
To sorrow come in.

The nettles were mother and sire,
Till Charity came
To give you the cuff and the bread
That befitted your shame.

And now you have sinned in your turn,
You wretched ingrate—
As Law in his wig has remarked:
“A curse to the State.”

You'll die in a cell, sure enough,
Who was born in a hedge!
Sour of the grapes to the end,
Your teeth still on edge!

Bush Spirit.

HALF a sprite and half a woman,
All a spirit warm and rare;
I would have you as I see you
With the wattle on your hair.

Emanation of September,
Shall I touch you if I dare?
Or I watch you far adoring
With the blossom on your hair.

Are you mine, or of the bushland?
You are near me everywhere
With the ardent eyes and luring—
With the wattle on your hair.

None can claim you evanescent,
As you run along the air;
On your face the rose of morning,
And the wattle on your hair.

But a moment ere I lose you,
Once to touch you if I dare;
Then to dream of you for ever,
With the wattle on your hair.

The Cobbler.

OLD STUBBS has made a thousand shoes,
Ten thousand heeled and soled.
A-pegging on his wooden bench,
He's gone from young to old.

He never leaves his seat all day—
His high three-legged stool
Such as the dunce was stood upon
When the cobbler went to school.

Old Stubbs, who keeps the village shod,
What sort of shoes wears he?
Of waxy leather shining like
The apron on his knee?

Forbear to pry beneath his bench—
Fate loves her merry pranks—
There are no feet for leather shoon
Below those twisted shanks.

The Worm.

I TOOK a mulberry leaf
From which I wove for you
Silk for a lovely gown,
By all the art I knew.

I brought it, proud and mean;
I brought it, rich and glad;
That you, in dainty robe,
So fitly should be clad.

“This is my mulberry leaf,
And I have spun for you
A filamented gown
By all the art I knew.”

You looked not at my gift,
“A worm thus dares,” you cried,
“To lift itself to me
With insolence and pride.”

You looked not at my gift,
You spurned and bade me go.
Spring makes another leaf:
No other love I know.

Anna Dies.

TIRED ANNA lies still
From the long energy.
She surely has rest
Wherever she be!

In her box late last night
I searched for the cloth
To bind up her face
For the hour of the moth.

Her clothes were laid neat
'Gainst the failing of breath;
Gown and bonnet a-top,
The chemise underneath.

And her robe for the grave
Sewn featly and firm,
With its laces and frills
For the hour of the worm.

Wool socks for the feet,
Wool shawl for the head;
So she should lie warm
In the place of the dead!

All folded and smooth,
The things she had left
For those who should come—
Eager heirs and bereft.

Scarves, laces and such—
The treasures of her
Who laid them 'mid sprigs
Of crisp lavender.

I said to the helper:
“She knew IT was nigh;”
And the woman replied:
“She was ready to die.”

Then the parson came in,
Saw the Book by the bed;
“She was ready to die,”

In a whisper, he said.

I knew she was ready—

I knew by a sign:

A baby's gown yellowed—

A worn valentine.

Love and loss she had known—

The worst and the best;

What more could Life do

Save yield her to rest?

As Manna Falls.

DARK JANET, of the brooding brow,
Lived down the lane, alone;
And ne'er a one came near to her,
For her's was a heart of stone.

The days went by; the years went by,
And Janet down the lane
Was all alone when night-time came,
And the sun rose up again.

If e'er one passing down the lane
Paused by the broke briar fence,
Dark Janet, of the brooding eye,
Gave frown for recompense.

But, oh! a strange thing came to her,
Gentle as hair turns grey;
Her stony heart grew soft for love
Who had frightened love away.

She knew that she was in no heart,
For now, no one again
Had ever a word of hail for her
When passing down the lane.

Dark Janet sat with brooding brow,
Sat in her old worn chair,
While all about the garden place
Lay in the evening fair.

Her hands were folded in her lap,
She dreamed a new, wild thing:
That her's was not a stony heart,
And Autumn time was Spring.

And then that it was not, she wept—
Wept that her life was vain;
That she had frightened love away
From Janet down the lane.

There sudden came a little hand
That nestled into hers;
A form that moved against her knees

Soft as a doveling stirs.

A child's confiding touch and gaze,
A child's voice in her ears;
A babbled pity for the pain,
And tenderness for tears.

Dark Janet, of the stony heart,
Beyond the old briar fence,
What brought that peeping child to you
With healing consequence?

Then Janet, of the lonely heart,
Answered the springtime calls,
And stooping, gathered up the love
That came as manna falls.

The Slaughterman's Child.

I WATCHED the slaughterman's child
Running to meet him;
Confident, loving and glad,
Shouting to greet him.
All day long, I and the rest—
Barbaric enough—
Had strove by humanity's habit
To send him home rough;
To match his heart to his surface;
To stamp him; to hurt him;
So the gentler things of his nature
Should shrink and desert him.
So I watched the slaughterman's child
Run forth to meet him;
Confident, loving and glad,
Shouting to greet him.
I saw his eyes kindle, grow soft;
His hands flash forward to hold her;
He is free of the shambles—a father,
No butcher, enfolds her.
Thank God that we, who condemn him
To violence and thunder,
Have only disfigured the surface,
And not the man under.

Consecrated.

CARELESS he rode by the way;
Careless he kissed the maid;
Sudden upon his soul
She put the accolade.

He carried her kiss on his mouth
The long road home;
Not for one day his bliss,
But for every day to come.

He carries her kiss on his mouth,
And his feet are sure,
Evermore by that kiss
The way of his life is pure.

For she was his Woman Soul
He met by the winding way,
When idly he rode forth
To waste his idle day.

He stooped for the careless kiss
By the leisured path he trod,
And he lifted his face a knight,
For the kiss she gave was God.
