

JEAN BLEWETT

THE CORNFLOWER, AND
OTHER POEMS

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The Cornflower, and Other Poems

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The Cornflower, and Other Poems

TO

Lillian Massey Treble

A woman with a heart of gold
I heard her called before I knew
How noble was that heart and true,
How full of tenderness untold.

Her sympathies both broad and sure,
Her one desire to do the right —
Clear visioned from the inner light
God gives to souls unworldly, pure.

A heart of gold that loves and gives,
God's almoner from day to day,
Of her there is but this to say:
The world is better that she lives.

THE CORNFLOWER

The day she came we were planting corn,
The west eighty-acre field, —
These prairie farms are great for size,
And they're sometimes great for yield.

"The new school-ma'am is up to the house,"
The chore-boy called out to me;
I went in wishing anyone else
Had been put in chief trustee.

I was to question that girl, you see,
Of the things she ought to know;
As for these same things, I knew right well
I'd forgot them long ago.

I hadn't kept track of women's ways,
'Bout all I knew of the sex
Was that they were mighty hard to please,
And easy enough to vex.

My sister Mary, who ruled my house —
And me – with an iron hand,
Was all the woman I knew real well —
Her I didn't understand.

But I'd no call to grumble at fate,
Fifty, well off, and unwed;
Young as a lad in spite of the dust
Old Time had thrown on my head.

I engaged the school-ma'am on the spot,
And the reason, I surmise,
Was this, she didn't giggle or blush,
But looked me fair in the eyes.

The planting over, why, every lad
In a space of ten good mile
Was off for the school with a sudden zeal
That made all us old folks smile.

How she took to our wide prairie
After towns with narrow streets!
To watch that west eighty-acre field
Was one of her queer conceits.

"You planted that corn the day I came,"
She said, "and I love to go
And watch the sun-mother kiss and coax
Each slim green stalk to grow."

I called her "Cornflower" when she took
To wearing 'em in her belt.
The young chaps were all in love with her —
And I knew just how they felt.

Oh, I tell you that was a summer,
Such sunshine, such dew, such rain;
Never saw crops grow so in my life —
Don't expect I will again.

To watch that west eighty-acre field,
When the fall came clear and cold,
Was something like a sermon to me —
Made me think of streets of gold.

But about that time the new school-ma'am
Had words with the first trustee;
A scholar had taken the fever
And she was for blaming *me*.

That schoolhouse should be raised from the ground —
Grave reason there for alarm;
A new coat of plaster be put on
That the children be kept warm.

A well – a good one – should take the place
Of the deathtrap that was there.
"This should all be done at once," she said.
Cost five hundred dollars clear!

I told her I couldn't think of it,
But, when all my work was through,
If the taxes came in middling good,
I would see what I could do.

"Remember you're only the steward,"
She said, "of your acres broad,
And that the cry of a little child
Goes straight to the ears of God."

I remarked that it wasn't her place
To dictate to the trustee,
And Cornflower lifted her eyes of blue
And *looked* what she thought of me.

That night as we came up from the fields,
And talked of the threatened frost,
The chore-boy called out, half pleased, half scared:
"The school-ma'am's got herself lost."

I turned me about and spoke no word;
I'd find her and let her see
I held no spite 'gainst a wayward girl
For lecturing a trustee.

For I knew before I found the knot
Of ribbon that she had worn,
That somehow Betty had lost her way
In the forest of ripened corn.

The sun went down and left the world
Beautiful, happy and good;
True, the girl and myself had quarrelled,
But when I found her and stood

With silver stars mistily shining
Through the deep blue of the skies,
Heard somebody sob like a baby,
Saw tears in somebody's eyes.

Why, I just whispered, "Betty, Betty,"
Then whispered "Betty" some more;
Not another word did I utter —
I'll stick to this o'er and o'er.

You needn't ask me to explain, friends,
I don't know how 'twas myself,
That first "Betty" said I was ashamed
Of my greedy love of pelf.

The second one told her I'd be glad
To raise the old schoolhouse up,
And be in haste to put down a well,
With a pump and drinking cup.

The third "Betty" told her I would act
A higher and nobler part;
The fourth "Betty" told her I loved her —
Loved her with all my heart.

"Ah, well! there's no fool like an old fool,"
Was what sister Mary said;
"No fool in the world like an old fool,

You'll find that out, brother Ned."

"Mary," I said, "there's a better thing
Than land, or dollar, or dime;
If being in love is being a fool
Here's one till the end of time."

I should think so, I'm a married man
Four years come this Christmastide,
And autumn now is flinging her gold
O'er the fields on every side.

My wife called out as I drove the cows
To the pasture-field this morn,
"Ned, please go look for your son and heir,
He toddled off in the corn."

And sister Mary must make a joke;
"Go find him at once," said she,
"You know to get lost in a field of corn
Runs in that boy's family."

THE QUARREL

When Mary found fault with me that day the trouble was well begun.
No man likes being found fault with, no man really thinks it fun
To have a wisp of a woman, in a most obnoxious way,
Allude to his temper as beastly, and remark that day by day
He proves himself so careless, so lacking in love, so mean,
Then add, with an air convincing, she wishes she'd never seen
A person who thinks so little of breaking a woman's heart,
And since he is – well, what he is – 'tis better that they should part.

Now, no man enjoys this performance – he has his faults, well and good,
He doesn't want to hear them named – this ought to be understood.
Mary was aggravating, and all because I'd forgot
To bring some flowers I'd promised – as though it mattered a lot;
But that's the way with a woman, your big sins she may forgive,
But little things, not worth mention, you hear of as long as you live.

A few sweet peas and carnations to start a tempest, forsooth!
For Mary got in a temper – I did the same, of a truth.
I said things that weren't gentle; she pretended not to mind —
But answered back in a manner that left me away behind.

It ended up in our saying good-bye for the rest of our days,
Both vowing we'd be happier going our different ways.
And I strode out in the garden where the trees were pink and white,
Where bobolinks scolded sparrows, and robins, wild with delight,
Chirped and called and fluttered in the blossoming trees above,
Where Nature was busy teaching her lessons of joy and love.
I made a bed of the soft, warm earth, stretched me out in the sun.
Vext and weary, I fell asleep, and slept till the day was done.
The voice of my brother waked me, crying, "Quickly arise and come;
Bear up like a man, Heaven help you! Death has suddenly entered your
home!"

'Twas Mary, my own sweet Mary! The eyelashes slept on her cheek,
The lips had a half-smile on them, as though they were going to speak
Some of the old-time tender words, witty rejoinder or jest,
Or ask the question they'd asked so oft, "Jim, who do you love the
best?"

But the small hands gave no pressure when I took them in my own,
And bending down to kiss her face, I found it cold as a stone.
And it came to me I could never – never, since Mary was dead —
Say, "Dear one, I didn't mean them, the bitter words that I said."
Never see the tears go from her sweet, dark eyes, and the brightness
take their place,

Never watch the joy and gladness come back to my darling's face.
Not a fault could I remember – she'd been perfect all her days,
With her sweetness and her laughter, her tender womanly ways.
Dead – dead in her fresh young beauty – oh, I had an anguished heart
At thought of the quarrel ending in our agreeing to part!

When two people love each other, I'll tell you the wisest way,
'Tis to think before speaking harshly, for there surely will come a day
When one will sleep on so soundly that he or she will not wake,
The other sit in the stillness and cry with a great heart-break.
It is to ears all unheeding our tenderest words are said —
The love that the living long for we waste it upon the dead.
We say this life is so dreary, talk much of heaven, I know,
But if we were good to each other we'd have our heaven below.
"Mary," I whispered, "my Mary, no flowers to you I gave,
But I'll heap them on your coffin and plant them over your grave."
A bird sang sweetly and shrilly in the blossoms over-head,
And I awoke, awoke, awoke – I'd *dreamed* that Mary was dead!
I woke in the golden sunshine, the birds were singing aloud.
There was no still form beside me, nor any coffin or shroud,
But just a slip of a woman with her brown eyes full of tears —
Oh, that blessed, blessed waking I've remembered through all the years.
I told the story to Mary, who hasn't let me forget
That dream in the blossoming orchard – I hear of it often yet.
If I neglect to bring flowers, it's: "Oh, you're going to save
Your roses to heap on my coffin, your pansies to plant on my grave?"

And if I lose my temper – a common weakness of men —
The sweetest voice in the world says: "You'll have to get dreaming
again."

IN SUNFLOWER TIME

In the farmhouse kitchen were Nan and John,
With only the sunflowers looking on.

A farmhouse kitchen is scarce the place
For knight or lady of courtly grace.

But this is just an everyday pair
That hold the kitchen this morning fair.

A saucy, persistent thorn-tree limb
Had sacrificed a part of the brim

Of the youth's straw hat. His face was brown,
And his well-shaped forehead wore a frown.

His boots were splashed with mud and clay
From marshland pasture over the way.

Where alderbushes and spicewood grew,
And frogs croaked noisily all night through.

'Neath muslin curtains, snowy and thin,
The homely sunflowers nodded in.

Nan was a picture. Her muslin gown
Had maybe a bit old-fashioned grown.

But fitted the slender shape so well.
In its low-cut neck the soft lace fell.

Sleeves, it had none from the elbows down;
In length – well, you see, the maid had grown.

A labor of love her homely task —
To share it none need hope nor ask,

For Nan was washing each trace of dirt
From fluted bodice and ruffled skirt.

Now, few that will, and fewer that can,
Bend over a tub like pretty Nan.

The frail soap bubbles sailed high in air
As she drew each piece from frothy lair,

And rubbed with cruel yet tender hand
As only a woman could, understand.

Then wrung with twist of the wrist so strong,
Examined with care, shook well and long,

Flung in clear water to lie in state —
Each dainty piece met the same hard fate.

"'Tis done!" with a look of conscious pride
At the rinsing bucket deep and wide.

Wiping the suds from each rounded arm,
She turned to John with a smile so warm:

"I've kept you waiting – excuse me, please,
The soapsuds ruin such goods as these."

"You're over fond of finery, Nan,
Dresses and furbelows," he began.

"Maybe I am, of a truth," she said.
Each sunflower nodded its yellow head.

"Ned Brown's growing rich" – John's words came slow —
"That he loves you well you doubtless know.

"My house and acres, I held them fast,
Was stubborn over them to the last,

"For when my father was carried forth,
And men were asking 'What was he worth?'

"I saw them look and nod and smile
As they whispered together all the while,

"'A fine old homestead, but mortgaged so,
A foolish thing for a man to do!'

"I said, 'My father's dead and gone,
But he's left behind a strong-armed son.'

"My heart was hot with a purpose set
To clear that mortgage, to pay that debt.

"I've worked, heaven knows, like any slave,
I've learned the lesson of scrimp and save,

"Kept a good horse, but dressed like a clown —

And I've not a dollar to call my own.

"I'm beaten – well beaten; yesterday
Everything went to Ned Brown from me.

"My woods, my meadows, my tasseled corn,
The orchard planted when I was born,

"The old rose garden my mother loved,
My chestnut mare – can't help feeling moved,

"For I'm a beggar, Nan, you see —
Don't think me begging for sympathy.

"The world is wide, I don't care – much.
Thank God, health's a thing the law can't touch.

"The happiest man I ever knew
Was born a beggar, and died one, too."

Each sunflower, nodding its yellow head,
Listened to every word that was said,

As Nan in her slow and easy way,
In the farmhouse kitchen that summer day,

Set a great and weighty problem forth,
One that no scholar on this green earth

Has been able to solve since things began
With Adam – a lone and lonesome man.

Yet very coolly she set it forth:
"Tell me the truth, how much am *I* worth?"

The sunbeams kissing her golden hair,
Her cheeks, her round arms dimpled and bare,

Seemed stamping value of mighty wealth
On youth, and love, and the bloom of health.

John looked and looked till his eyes grew dim,
Then tilted the hat with worthless brim.

To hide what he would not have her see —
"You are worth the whole world, Nan," said he.

"Then you're no beggar," said sweet, bold Nan,
"You're the whole world richer than any man."

A girl queen wearing a crown of gold
Set a precedent, the tale is told,

But no royal prince this world has seen
Ever felt so proud as John, I ween,

As he clasped her hands in new-born hope —
And never noticed they smelt of soap.

Only the sunflowers looking on,
So he kissed the maid – oh, foolish John!

As he went out through the garden gate
Ned Brown was coming to learn his fate.

He was riding John's own chestnut mare,
But, somehow, John didn't seem to care.

The two men met at top of the hill,
And eyed each other as rivals will.

Ned thought of the home he'd won from John,
"Poor beggar!" he said, as he rode on.

John thought of all he had won from Ned,
"You poor, poor beggar!" was what he said.

Why? Under the heavens clear and blue
Only our John and the sunflowers knew.

THE WOOING O' KATIE

McLeod of Dare called his son to him.
McLeod of Dare looked stern and grim,

For he was sending on mission grave
His son, and though he knew him brave

The old man trembled lest he should make
In heedless youth a grave mistake.

'Twas not for the country, nor for the king,
Nay, 'twas a more important thing

Than country, or clan, or feud, or strife,
The young man went to woo a wife.

He listened, did Neil, with scanty grace,
Haughty gloom on his handsome face,

While the old man told him where to go,
And what to say, and what to do.

"The morrow ye'll go for a lang, lang stay
Wi' your rich uncle, Donald Gray.

"He'll gie ye a welcome wairm and true,
And mate his only child wi' you.

"She's weel worth winning, for in her hand
She hauds the deed o' a' his land.

"She's far frae haun'some – a homely lass,
As you will see – but let that pass."

"Why should I wed a woman that's plain?
You didn't yourself." McLeod was vain.

He smiled and he smirked, "Ah, true, Neil, true,
But I was haun'somer nor you.

"Juist coort this cousin, and never mind
Squint or freckle, since luve is blind —

"Or ought tae be in sic case as this —
'Tis no a chance I'd hae ye miss.

"Jane's na sae braw as her cousin Kate,
But 'tis wi' Jane I'd hae ye mate;

"For Kate, poor lassie, she hasna land —
Her face is her fortune, understand.

"Gie her guid day when ye chance tae meet,
But Jane, remember, your fain tae greet

"Wi' warmer words, and a gallant air.
Go, win a wife – and a warld o' care!"

Neil listened closest to what was said
Of Kate, the poor but pretty maid.

And when he reached his good uncle's place
'Twas Kate that in his eyes found grace,

The while Jane simpered with conscious pride,
As if to say: "Behold your bride!"

In this home he dwelt for many a day,
A favorite, he, of Donald Gray.

They walked together over the hill,
Or through the valleys solemn and still,

And the old man showed him acres wide
That would be Jane's dower as a bride,

Then spoke of the cousin, poor but fair,
Her eyes of blue and her golden hair.

"She'll hae na flocks, and she'll hae na laund,
She'll hae na fortune rich and graund,

"But gin she stood in her scanty dress,
Would man o' mettle luve her less?

The lad's heart warmed to the logic old.
What worth has land? What worth has gold?

Compared with the light in Katie's eyes,
What worth was aught beneath the skies?

Jane courted briskly day by day,
If he walked out she walked his way.

Did he sit him down to rest awhile,

She looked his way with tender smile.

Did he try to get a word with Kate,
Jane was there like the hand of fate.

One day it chanced, as he rode to mill,
He met with Kate just under the hill.

Would she mount beside him, ride along?
Yes, if he felt 'twould not be wrong.

He helped her up with a trembling arm;
Surely the day is close and warm.

Whoa, mare! steady! there's no need for haste
With two soft arms about his waist.

Neil – shame on him! – pressed Kate's finger-tips,
Then turned about and pressed her lips.

All over the road the blossoms white
Scattered themselves in sheer delight.

A bird flew singing a tender rhyme
Of meadow, mate, and nesting time.

The world looked beautiful in the glow
That heaven flung on the hills below.

Ah me, if that ride could but last a week,
Her gold hair blowing against his cheek!

The road to the mill, says worldly wise —
Nay, nay, the road to Paradise!

Travel it once if you wish to know
Something of heaven here below.

Though your eyes grow dim, and locks grow white,
You'll not forget this journey – quite.

But Neil must go to the old home place,
Meet his stern father face to face.

Altho' his cheek was a trifle pale,
Boldly enough he told his tale.

He would marry Kate – and Kate alone —
He could not love the other one.

Her eyes were crooked, her hair was red,
Freckles over her face were spread,

And the whole world held no lass for him
But Kate. Then laughed the old man grim.

"Your mither, she was a stubborn lass,
Self-willed, handsome – but let that pass.

"In a' oor battles 'twas she who won,
And Neil, you're juist your mither's son.

"But I hae na lived these mony days
Wi'oot walking in wisdom's ways.

"I saw your Kate, and like't her weel —
In luiks she's like your mither, Neil;

"The same blue een, and the same gowd hair —
But no sae fair, Neil, no sae fair.

"I tou'd your uncle to let Kate be
The lassie poor, o' low degree,

"And gie ye at once to understand
'Twas Jane who owned baith flocks and land.

"Why gie mysel' sic a senseless task?
I wunner, lad, ye've hairt tae ask.

"Gin ye was driven ye wouldna' move,
Too stubborn to even fa' in luv!

"Like a' the Campbells, ye'll hae your way —
Your mither has hers every day.

""Tis prood ye should be, upon my word,
Tak' time to yoursel' and thank the Lord

For plans that gat ye a bonny bride —
An' heaps o' wardly gear beside."

Ah! thankful enough was Neil that day —
Joy flashed in his eager eyes of gray.

'Twas not for the land, not for the gold,
Not for the flocks that slept in fold,

Not for the wealth – the worldly gear —
But something wonderful, sweet and dear.

"Thank heaven," he cried, with a glow and thrill,
"Thank heaven for the day I rode to mill!"

THE OLD MAN'S VISIT

Joe lives on the farm, and Sam lives in the city,
I haven't a daughter at all – more's the pity,
For girls, to my mind, are much nicer and neater;
Not such workers as boys, but cuter and sweeter.
Sam has prospered in town, has riches a-plenty,
Big house, fine library – books written by Henty,
And Kipling, and Cooper, and all those big writers —
Swell pictures and busts of great heroes and fighters.
His home is a fine one from cellar to garret,
But not to my notion – in fact, I can't bear it.
I'm not hard to please, but of all things provoking
Is a woman around who sniffs when you're smoking.

Last springtime Sam said: "Now, Father, how is it
I can't coax you oftener up on a visit?"
I couldn't think up any plausible reason,
So off I went with him to stop for a season.
Sam said with a laugh as we stepped from the ferry,
"You won't mind my wife; she's particular, very."
It wasn't like home, that house in the city,
Our Sam took his fun at the club – more's the pity.

It is in his own house, when he has the leisure,
A man should find comfort and freedom and pleasure.
It wasn't so bad for me in the daytime,
Sam took me all over and made it a playtime;
But evenings were awful – we sat there so proper,
While Sam's wife, if nobody came in to stop her,
Read history to us, or, column by column,
A housekeeping journal, or other dry volume.
I used to wish someone would give me a prodding,
My eyes would go shut and head fall a-nodding.
She's an awful good housewife, nothing gets musty,
Or littered about, or untidy, or dusty;
But a little disorder never did fret me,
And these perfect women they always upset me.
I can stand her dusting, her shining, her poking,
But wilt like a leaf when she sniffs when I'm smoking.

I got so blamed homesick I couldn't be jolly;
I wanted our Joe, and his little wife, Molly,
My old corner at home, and all the old places;
I wanted the youngsters – who cared if their faces
Were smeared up a trifle? I didn't, a penny.
Molly tends to 'em, though she has so many.

I was tickled to death when I got a letter
From Joe, which ran: "Dear Dad, I think you had better
Get back to the farm in pretty short order.
Molly's papered your room and put on a border;
The baby, she says, has two new teeth to show you —
If you don't hustle back the dear thing won't know you.
She says to inform you that Bob, Sue, and Mary
Are good as can be, but your namesake's contrary,
Wants granddaddy's story, and granddaddy's ditty —
And granddaddy off on a trot to the city."
I packed my belongings. They tried to dissuade me —
Sam's wife said so proper: "I'm really afraid we
Have not succeeded in our entertaining."
"Oh, yes!" said I – some things won't stand much explaining.
She really meant well, but of all things provoking
Is a woman so perfect she sniffs when you're smoking.

I was glad to get home; it made me quite silly
To hear the loud whinny of Starling and Billy;
And here was the farm with its orchards and meadows,
The big maple trees all throwing their shadows,
The stubble-fields yellow, the tall stacks of clover,
The wag of the stub of a tail on old Rover.
And here came dear Mary, her hat on her shoulder,
With Sue trying hard to catch her and hold her;
Here came Tommy and Joe, always foot in their classes,
And Bob, with his features all crumbs and molasses,
Carrying a basin with fishworms and dirt in —
Oh, that scalawag, Bob, I'm morally certain
Is a chip of the old block – it just seemed to strike me
They'd named the boy rightly, for he was so like me —
All laughing and calling: "Here's grandpa to play with!"
And Bob supplementing: "And sleep 'ith and *stay* 'ith!"
And then such a hugging, with Molly behind me,
The tears came so fast that they threatened to blind me.
My heart overflowed with sorrow and pity
For the boy I had left back there in the city.
His lot is a hard one – indeed, I'm not joking —
He lives with a woman who sniffs when he's smoking.

The supper we had, sir, and when it was over
The walk round the homestead close followed by Rover,
Who's most like a human. You'd fancy him saying:
"See those stacks? Oh, yes, we have finished the haying!
That colt should be broken. Old friend, I'd just mention
This farm stands in need of our closest attention."
And when, the lamp lighted, with Mary's beside me,
The boys at my feet, and Bob up astride me,
I felt like a king – I really can't write it —

Molly must take my pipe and fill it and light it,
Then plump herself down in her own little rocker
For a visit with me. Oh, she is a talker
Worth the listening to. The threshing was over,
Joe had got ten dollars a ton for the clover,
Deacon Hope had had a sharp tiff with the preacher
Over immersion, and the pretty school-teacher
Intended to marry – resigned her position.
Yes, most of the church folks had signed the petition
Against granting a license to Baker's saloon,
The Thanksgiving service would be coming on soon,
The neighbors were hearty, had every one missed me —
Right here Molly stood on her tip-toes and kissed me.
Sho! Sam's wife is handsome and cultured and clever,
But she's not the woman that Molly is – never.
Molly's smile is so kind, and her hair is so glossy,
Her brown eyes look at you so sweet and so saucy!
Yes, Joe's richer than Sam, though Joe's but a farmer,
For his home atmosphere is brighter and warmer.
Sam has lots of money, there's no use denying;
Has made himself wealthy, and that without trying;
But what chance has a man – indeed, I'm not joking —
Who lives with a woman who sniffs when he's smoking!

JACK

Jack's dead an' buried; it seems odd,
A deep hole covered up with sod
Lyin' out there on the hill,
An' Jack, as never could keep still,
A sleepin' in it. Jack could race,
And do it at a good old pace,
Could sing a song, an' laugh so hard
That I could hear him in our yard
When he was half a mile away.
Why, not another boy could play
Like him, or run, or jump so high,
Or swim, no matter how he'd try;
An' I can't get it through my head
At all, at all, that Jack is dead.

Jack's mother didn't use to be
So awful good to him and me,
For often when I'd go down there
On Saturdays, when it was fair,
To get him out to fish or skate,
She'd catch me hangin' round the gate
And look as cross as some old hen,
An' tell me, "Go off home again.
It's not the thing for boys," she'd say,
"A hangin' round the creek all day;
You go off home and do your task —
No, Jack can't go, you needn't ask."
And when he got in scrapes, why, she
Would up and lay it on to me,
An' wish I lived so far away
Jack couldn't see me every day.

But last night when I'd done the chores
It seemed so queer-like out of doors,
I kept a listenin' all the while,
An' looking down the street a mile;
I couldn't bear to go inside,
The house is lonesome since he died.
The robber book we read by turns
Is lyin' there – an' no boy learns
All by himself, 'cause he can't tell
How many words he'll miss or spell,
Unless there's some one lookin' on
To laugh at him when he gets done.

An' neighbor women's sure to come
A visitin' a feller's home,
An' talkin', when they look at me,
'Bout how thick us two used to be,
A stealin' off from school, an' such,
An' askin' do I miss him much,
'Till I sneak off out doors – you see,
They just can't let a feller be!
Well, I walked down the road a bit.
Smith's dog came out. I throwed at it,
An', do you know, it never howled
Same as it always did, or growled;
It seemed to say, "Why, Jim's alone!
I wonder where's that other one?"

Afore I knew it I was down
'Way at the other end of town,
A hangin' round in the old way
For someone to come out and play.
There wasn't no one there to look,
So I slipped into our old nook.
I found his knife down in the grass
Where we'd been Zulus at the pass.
The can of bait, the hook and line
Were lyin' with the ball of twine,
An' "Jim," I seemed to hear him say,
"The fish will suffer some to-day."

'Twas more than I could stand just then;
I got up to go off home, when
Someone kissed me on the cheek,
An' hugged me so I couldn't speak.
You wouldn't believe it, like as not,
But 'twas Jack's mother, an' a lot
Of great big tears came stealin' down
Right on my face. She didn't frown
A single bit – kept sayin' low,
"My blue-eyed boy, I loved you so!"
Of course, I knew just right away
That she meant Jack. My eyes are gray,
But Jack, he had the bluest eyes,
Blue like you see up in the skies,
An' shine that used to come and go —
One misses eyes like his, you know.

An' by-an'-by she up an' tried
To tell me that she'd cried an' cried
A thinkin' of the times that she
Had scolded Jack an' scolded me,

An' other things that I won't tell
To anyone, because – Oh, well,
Boys can't do much, but they can hold
Tight on to secrets till they're old.
She's Jack's relation, that's why she
Feels kind of lovin' like to me.
But when she called me her own lad,
Oh, say, I felt just awful bad;
My head it went round in a whirl —
I up an' cried just like a girl.

But say, if Jack could see us two
He'd laugh a little, don't you know;
For if I'd ever brag around
That I'd lick some one safe an' sound,
He'd laugh an' say, "Jim, hold your jaw!
You know you're scared to death of maw."
Oh, I'd give all this world away
If I could hear him laugh to-day!
I get so lonesome, it's so still,
An' him out sleepin' on that hill;
There's nothin' seems just worth the while
A doin' up in the old style;
'Cause everything we used to do
Seemed allus just to need us two.
My throat aches till I think 'twill crack —
I don't know why – it must be Jack.
There ain't no fun, there ain't no stir.
His mother – well, it's hard on her,
But she can knit an' sew, an' such —
Oh, she can't miss him half as much!

AT THE SICK CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

A little crippled figure, two big pathetic eyes,
A face that looked unchildish, so wan it was and wise;
I watched her as the homesick tears came chasing down each cheek.
"I had to come," she whispered low, "I was so tired and weak.
My spine, you know! I used to be so strong, and tall, and straight!
I went to school and learned to read and write upon a slate,
And add up figures – such a lot, and play with all my might,
Until I hurt my back – since then I just ache day and night.
'Tis most a year since I could stand, or walk around at all;
All I am good for now, you see, is just to cry and crawl."
Poor, pale-faced thing! there came to us the laughter gay and sweet
Of little ones let out from school, the sound of flying feet.
She listened for a moment, then turned her to the wall
To hide the tears. "Oh, me!" she cried, "I'm tired of it all.
I feel so hurt and useless, why can't I run about
As others do?" "Some day, please God, you will," I said, but doubt
Was in the eyes she turned on mine, and doubt was in her tone.
"Perhaps," she faltered, then the pain grew harsh; the plaintive moan
Smote sharply on my heart. I knew she had but lately come
From mother's care and father's love, and all the joys of home.
"I wished I'd lived on earth," she sobbed, "a long, long time ago,
When Jesus came at eventide, because He loved folks so,
And just by stretching out His hand made all the sick folks well.
If it were now, oh, wouldn't I creep close to Him, and tell
All that I wanted Him to do. I'd kneel down low and say:
'It is my back, dear Jesus, please cure it right away.
I'm tired of being weak and sick, I want to jump and run,
And play at games, and laugh out loud, and have such heaps of fun!
Be good to your poor crippled girl,' and He would touch me – so —
And every atom of the pain and crookedness would go."
I held her close, and kissed her, and soothed her off to rest,
So frail she was, so homesick for the ones she loved the best!
But yesterday I saw her, and would have passed her by
Had I not caught the greeting smile, the glance so bright and shy.
"Can this be you?" I questioned. She laughed, "O yes, I thought
You'd hardly know me when you came, I've changed, oh, such a lot!
For see how tall and straight I am! My back don't hurt at all,
And I can stand and I can walk – I never have to crawl.
I'll tell you, it's a secret, I raced with nurse last night.
Just think of it! I raced and won," and then, in sheer delight,
She laughed so loudly and so long the nurse looked in to say,
"Is not this little girl of ours quite boisterous to-day?"
"They are so good to me," she said, "I know I'll want to cry
When I start off for home next week, and have to say good-bye.
What if I hadn't come at all?" – the sweet blue eyes grew wet —

"My back would ache and throb and hurt – I'd be a cripple yet.
For folks as poor as my folks are, they haven't much to spare
For nurse's bills, and doctor's bills, and all – but won't they stare
When I go home, red-cheeked and straight, and fat as I can be?
My daddy, he will never take his dear eyes off of me;
My mamma, she will cry some tears, and bend her head and pray,
While all the others kiss and hug; then I can hear her say:
'Give me my girlie, she's been gone so many long months – five,'
And hold me close – oh, I will be the gladdest thing alive!"

CHRISTY AND THE PIPERS

'Twas a score of years since I'd heard the pipes,
But the other night I heard them;
There are sweet old memories in my heart,
And the music woke and stirred them.

In the armories, at the big parade
The highland regiment was giving,
A half-dozen pipers piping away —
Ah! 'twas music, as sure as your living.

Donald's lowland, he shook his head at me,
And glowered with every feature,
And a pretty young lassie just behind
Said: "Oh, what a funny old creature!"

But the skirl o' the pipes got in my ears,
In my eyes, and made them misty;
I laughed and I cried, and Donald said low:
"Dinna act so daft, noo, Christy!"

"Do ye no see the elder sitting there?
Dinna act sae daft, my wooman.
Can ye no hear the airs o' auld lang syne
Wi'oot fashin' yersel' sae, wooman?"

But the skirl o' the pipes got in my heart,
It got in my throat and choked me,
It got in my feet, and tapped my toes,
And my shame-faced Donald poked me.

"But isn't it grand? O, isn't it grand?"
"Ay, a fine auld player is Mylands,
But the pipes' wild sound disna stir my bluid" —
He was not born in the highlands.

Do you know what I saw as I sat there?
I saw the hills and the heather,
The green, and the lads and the lassies there
All dancing the reels together.

I saw our glen, half hid, and the rocks
Standing guard like grim old watchmen.
Oh, the land o' heather and hill and loch
Must e'en be dear to a Scotchman.

And I saw, too, the soldiers blithe and brave
Their flag to the breeze unfurling,
As they marched away on a morning fair
To the bagpipes' merry skirling.

My brother was one. As he kissed my cheek,
I could hear him proudly saying:
"Ho! you'll know when we come marching home,
For you'll hear our pipers playing."

Oh, the bonniest lads in kilt and hose —
Braver men, you cannot find them —
And few, so few, came marching home
To the loved ones left behind them.

'Twas a loyal heart, and a strong right arm,
With a stubborn foe before them;
A soldier's grave in a far off land,
And God's blue sky bending o'er them.

As I hearkened to sweet old martial airs
I could hear my brother saying:
"Ho! you'll know when we come marching home,
For you'll hear our pipers playing."

There are only harps in heaven, I'm told,
And maybe I shouldn't say it,
For a harp of gold's a wondrous thing
In a hand that's skilled to play it.

But those highland lads, 'twas the pibroch's call
They heard morning, noon, and even,
And the pibroch's call, I believe in my heart,
They will hear in the streets of heaven.

They marched to the old beloved airs
'Mid the bullets' hail and rattle;
'Twas the last sweet sound that fell on their ears
'Mid the clamor and clang of battle.

O a harp when an angel strikes the strings
Is softer and sweeter, but try
As I will, I cannot fancy a harp
In the hands of, say, Peter MacKay.

And were an angel to proffer him one,
Methinks I can hear him saying:
"'Twas not on an instrument like the same
That Pete MacKay will be playing,

"For she neffer set eyes on it before,
Isn't quick to learn, or cleffer;
She'd break the strings if she took it in hand,
She couldn't do it, whateffer.

"So please be excusing old Pete MacKay —
But hark! bring the chanter to me,
I'll play the 'March o' the Cameron Men,'
And afterward 'Bonnie Dundee.'"

I told this to Donald late that night;
He said, as he sipped his toddy,
"Do ye ken ye shocked the elder the night?
Yersel' is the doited body.

"And are ye speaking o' bagpipes in Heaven?
Ah, Christy, I'm that astounded
I'll hae the guid meenister speak tae ye,
For, Christy, ye're no weel groounded."

Well, if it is heresy to believe
In the promise of the Father,
"Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard,"
I am heretical, rather.

I believe when the last loud trump shall sound,
The old flag again unfurling,
My highland lads will come marching home
To the bagpipes grandly skirling.

THE STABLE-BOY'S GUEST

The Wise Men came to the inn that night,
"Now open to us," they cried,
"We have journeyed far that we might kneel
To One who doth here abide."

The door was opened with eager haste.
"Of whom do ye come in quest?
Can it be that a lord of high degree
Is with us this night as guest?"

The Wise Men answered: "The eastern sky
Is luminous still, and clear,
With the radiance of a golden star
That hath led our footsteps here.

"Blessed, O keeper, this inn of thine,
Both thatch and foundation stone,
For the open door and hearth-fire warm
When the King came to His own!"

"The King! the King!" loud the keeper's cry,
"The King in this house of mine!
Lights ho! lights ho! set the place aglow,
Bring forth the meat and the wine!"

"The King! let the guest-room be prepared —
Honor and homage we pay
To royal son of a royal line
Who tarries with us to-day!"

From room to room of the inn they went,
The Wise Men and keeper proud,
But not a trace of the One they sought
Found they in that motley crowd.

"You have other guests?" the Wise Men asked,
And the keeper's face flamed red;
"But a straggling pair who came so late
They found neither room nor bed."

"My masters," a lad said timidly,
"As I gave the cattle feed,
Came creeping down to the stable door
A woman in sorest need.

"I made her a bed in the manger low,
At head of the oxen mild,
And, masters, I heard a moan of pain,
Then the cry of a new-born child."

"A prince shalt thou be!" the Wise Men cried,
"For hearkening to that moan,
A prince shalt thou be for succor given
When the King came to His own!"

"Nay, I'm but a stable-boy," he smiled,
With his eager eyes aglow;
"No King, but a little naked child,
Sleeps out in my manger low."

Hast come to these homes of ours, O Christ,
In quest of a meal or bed,
And found no welcoming cheer set forth,
Nor place to pillow thine head?

Give us a heart aflame with love,
Filled with a pity divine,
Then come Thou as beggar, or babe, or king,
The best that we have is Thine.

SOLDIERS ALL

They're praying for the soldier lads in grim old London town;
Last night I went, myself, and heard a bishop in his gown
Confiding to the Lord of Hosts his views of this affair.
"We do petition Thee," he said, "to have a watchful care
Of all the stalwart men and strong who at their country's call
Went sailing off to Africa to fight, perchance to fall!"
"Amen!" a thousand voices cried. I whispered low: "Dear Lord,
A host is praying for the men, I want to say a word
For those who stay at home and wait – the mothers and the wives.
Keep close to them and help them bear their cheerless, empty lives!"

The Bishop prayed: "Our cause is good, our quarrel right and just;
The God of battles is our God, and in His arm we trust."
He never got that prayer of his in any printed book,
It came straight from the heart of him, his deep voice, how it shook!
And something glistened in his eye and down his flushed cheek ran.
I like a Bishop best of all when he is just a man.

"Amen!" they cried out louder still, but I bent low my head;
"Dear Christ, be kind to hearts that break for loved ones dying – dead;
Keep close to women folk who wait beset with anxious fears,
The wan-faced watchers whose dim eyes are filled with bitter tears!
I know, dear Christ, how hard it is," I whispered as I kneeled,
"For long ago my bonnie boy fell on the battlefield.
Find comfort for the broken hearts of those weighed down to-day
With love and longing for the ones in danger far away."

"They will not shrink," the Bishop prayed, "nor fear a soldier's grave;
Nay, each man will acquit himself like Briton true and brave.
God of battles, march with them, keep guard by day and night,
And arm them with a trust in Thee when they go up to fight!"

"Amen!" a sound of muffled sobs. The deep voice trembled some,
But I, with hot tears on my face, prayed hard for those at home:
"Keep watch and ward of all that wait in fever of unrest,
Who said good-bye and let them go, the ones they loved the best!
O comfort, Christ! Above the din of martial clamor, hark!
The saddest sound in all God's world – a crying in the dark."

AS GOOD AS A GIRL

Oh, a big broad-shouldered fellow was Ben,
And homely as you would see,
Such an awkward walker and stammering talker,
And as bashful as he could be.

The son of a lone, widowed mother was he,
And right well did he act his part,
A giant at sowing and reaping and mowing —
His farm was the pride of his heart.

His mother depended on his strong arm;
In the cottage so neat and trim
He kept the fires burning, did sweeping and churning —
Oh, the odd jobs saved up for him!

"My Ben's a comfort," she said every day,
With pride that made his head whirl,
"As handy at sweeping as he is at reaping —
Ben is just as good as a girl!"

"A six-foot fellow to work round the house!
We'll call him 'Miss Ben,'" said the girls;
But Ben, heaven bless him, never let this distress him
Till there came a day when the curls

And blue eyes of Gladys, the prettiest girl,
And the proudest in all the place,
His young heart set beating at every chance meeting —
Though she only laughed in his face.

"I'll have none but a gay and a gallant man" —
Her lips took a scornful curl —
"Your pride is in hearing your mother declaring,
'Ben is just as good as a girl!'"

But sweet little Marjory laughed not at Ben;
He was homely, awkward, shy,
But she liked the fellow whose voice was so mellow,
And she smiled as she passed him by.

He went to the front when the war broke out,
And filled his post like a man;
The good-natured giant was bold and defiant
As soon as the battle began.

You'd never have thought of the broom and the churn,
Nor of the nickname "Miss Ben,"
Had you heard his voice cheering, seen his arm clearing
A path for his own gallant men.

Capt. Benjamin Brooks he came riding home
When the war was over and done,
As homely and backward, as shy and as awkward,
As tender and loyal a son.

Now Gladys gave him her sunniest smile —
On heroes she ever did dote —
And the proud little beauty felt it her duty
To be kind to this young man of note.

But Ben, wise fellow, liked Marjory best;
He knew her lips did not curl
When mother said sweetly, "Ben does work so neatly —
He is just as good as a girl!"

So he wooed and won this Marjory true,
And made her his loving bride,
While Gladys she fretted, bemoaned and regretted
The goal she had missed by her pride.

To-day Ben is filling a prominent place,
A statesman, honest and bold;
He frees the oppressed, and he helps the distressed,
Wins love, which is better than gold.

For the very grandest men you can find
In this great world's busy whirl
Are men like my farmer — no praise need be warmer
Than "he's just as good as a girl."

FOOL'S LUCK

The Allans o' Airlie they set muckle store
On ancestry, acres, and siller,
Nor cared to remember the good days of yore,
Nor grandfather Allan, the miller —
The honest old miller.

"We're wealthy fowk now, tak' oor place wi' the best,"
Said the heid o' the Allans, one Dougal,
A man whom Dame Fortune had royally blest,
Of sensible habits, and frugal —
Uncommonly frugal.

"We're honored by great fowk and wise fowk, now min',
O' the kirk each Allan's a pillar —
What more could we spier o' a providence kin',
Unless 'twere a little more siller —
A little more siller.

"For it's get what ye can, and keep what ye get;
Ye'll fin' this an unco' guid motto,
We chose it lang syne, and we stick to it yet,
Altho' not sae close as we ought to —
Not nearly sae close as we ought to.

"There is ane o' the name is a spendthrift, an ass;
The reason tae ye I'll discover:
Oor gran'faither marrit an Inverness lass,
Juist because he happened to luv her —
Foolish mon, he happened to luv her!

"And the wild Highland strain is still i' the bluid —
'Tis i' Colin, as sure's you're leeving;
Ye ken how it is wi' the whole Highland brood —
'Tis a' for spending and geeving.

"Gin ye're freen' o' the clan, why, ask what ye may,
Ye'll get o' the best, ay, get double;
Gin ye're foe o' the clan, weel, juist gang your way
If so be ye're no hunting trouble.

"Brither Colin was daft when a lad at the school,
Wi' ways and wi' morals improper,
Had high flowing notions – poor family fool,
His notions ha' made him a pauper.

"What owns he? Bare acres a few, and a house,
Yet when we, last year, were expecting
Twa relatives, ane puir as ony church mouse,
Ane freighted wi' wealth, unreflecting,

"He spat oot graun' like, 'Sin' ye're ower fond o' pelf
'Ye can hae,' said he, 'the rich pairty,
But I'll tak' the mon that is puir as mysel'
And gie him a welcome right hearty' —
A welcome right hearty.

"Gosh! I had tae lauch at the feckless auld mon
As he stood there, his bonnet-strings twirling;
Ye'd think he was chief o' a whole Highland clan
That marched to the pibroch's mad skirling.

"Ah! hot-headed, high-handed, go as you please,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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