

BEERS HENRY AUGUSTIN

THE TWO TWILIGHTS

Henry Beers

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PREFACE

The contents of this volume include selections from two early books of verse, long out of print; a few pieces from *The Ways of Yale* (Henry Holt & Co); and a handful of poems contributed of late years to the magazines and not heretofore collected.

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HENRY A. BEERS.

THE THANKLESS MUSE

The muses ring my bell and run away.
I spy you, rogues, behind the evergreen:
You, wild Thalia, romper in the hay;
And you, Terpsichore, you long-legged quean.
When I was young you used to come and stay,
But, now that I grow older, 'tis well seen
What tricks ye put upon me. Well-a-day!
How many a summer evening have ye been
Sitting about my door-step, fain to sing
And tell old tales, while through the fragrant dark
Burned the large planets, throbbed the brooding sound
Of crickets and the tree-toads' ceaseless ring;
And in the meads the fire-fly lit her spark
Where from my threshold sank the vale profound.

BLUE ROSES OF ACADEMUS

So late and long the shadows lie
Under the quadrangle wall:
From such a narrow strip of sky
So scant an hour the sunbeams fall,
They hardly come to touch at all
This cool, sequestered corner where,
Beside the chapel belfry tall,
I cultivate my small parterre.

Poor, sickly blooms of Academe,
Recluses of the college close,
Whose nun-like pallor would beseem
The violet better than the rose:
There's not a bud among you blows
With scent or hue to lure the bee:
Only the thorn that on you grows —
Only the thorn grows hardily.

Pale cloisterers, have you lost so soon
The way to blush? Do you forget
How once, beneath the enamored moon,
You climbed against the parapet,
To touch the breast of Juliet
Warm with a kiss, wet with a tear,
In gardens of the Capulet,
Far south, my flowers, not here – not here?

THE WINDS OF DAWN

Whither do ye blow?
For now the moon is low.
Whence is it that ye come,
And where is it ye go?
All night the air was still,
The crickets' song was shrill;
But now there runs a hum
And rustling through the trees.
A breath of coolness wakes,
As on Canadian lakes,
And on Atlantic seas,
And each high Alpine lawn
Begin the winds of dawn.

ANACREONTIC

I would not be
A voyager on the windy seas:
More sweet to me
This bank where crickets chirp, and bees
Buzz drowsy sunshine minstrelsies.

I would not bide
On lonely heights where shepherds dwell.
At twilight tide
The sounds that from the valley swell,
Soft breathing lute and herdsman's bell,
Are sweeter far
Than music of cold mountain rills.
The evening star
Wakes love and song below, but chills
With mist and breeze the gloomy hills.

I would not woo
Some storm-browed Juno, queenly fair.
Soft eyes of blue
And sudden blushes unaware
Do net my heart in silken snare.

I do not love
The eyrie, but low woodland nest
Of cushat dove:
Not wind, but calm; not toil, but rest
And sleep in grassy meadow's breast.

BUMBLE BEE

As I lay yonder in tall grass
A drunken bumble-bee went past
Delirious with honey toddy.
The golden sash about his body
Could scarce keep in his swollen belly
Distent with honey-suckle jelly.
Rose liquor and the sweet pea wine
Had filled his soul with song divine;
Deep had he drunk the warm night through:
His hairy thighs were wet with dew.
Full many an antic he had played
While the world went round through sleep and shade.
Oft had he lit with thirsty lip
Some flower-cup's nectared sweets to sip,
When on smooth petals he would slip
Or over tangled stamens trip,
And headlong in the pollen rolled,
Crawl out quite dusted o'er with gold.
Or else his heavy feet would stumble
Against some bud and down he'd tumble
Amongst the grass; there lie and grumble
In low, soft bass – poor maudlin bumble!
With tipsy hum on sleepy wing
He buzzed a glee – a bacchic thing
Which, wandering strangely in the moon,
He learned from grigs that sing in June,
Unknown to sober bees who dwell
Through the dark hours in waxen cell.
When south wind floated him away
The music of the summer day
Lost something: sure it was a pain
To miss that dainty star-light strain.

WATER LILIES AT SUNSET

Mine eyes have seen when once at sunset hour
White lily flocks that edged a lonely lake
All rose and sank upon the lifting swell
That swayed their long stems lazily, and lapped
Their floating pads and stirred among the leaves.
And when the sun from western gates of day
Poured colored flames, they, kissed to ruddy shame,
So blushed through snowy petals, that they glowed
Like roses morning-blown in dewy bowers,
When garden-walks lie dark with early shade.
That so their perfumed chalices were brimmed
With liquid glory till they overflowed
And spilled rich lights and purple shadows out,
That splashed the pool with gold, and stained its waves
In tints of violet and ruby blooms.
But when the flashing gem that lit the day
Dropped in its far blue casket of the hills,
The rainbow paintings faded from the mere,
The wine-dark shades grew black, the gilding dimmed,
While, paling slow through tender amber hues,
The crimsoned lilies blanched to coldest white,
And wanly shivered in the evening breeze.
When twilight closed – when earliest dew-drops fell
All frosty-chill deep down their golden hearts,
They shrank at that still touch, as maidens shrink,
When love's first footstep frights with sweet alarms
The untrod wildness of their virgin breasts;
Then shut their ivory cups, and dipping low
Their folded beauties in the gloomy wave,
They nodded drowsily and heaved in sleep.
But sweeter far than summer dreams at dawn,
Their mingled breaths from out the darkness stole,
Across the silent lake, the winding shores,
The shadowy hills that rose in lawny slopes,
The marsh among whose reeds the wild fowl screamed,
And dusky woodlands where the night came down.

BETWEEN THE FLOWERS

An open door and door-steps wide,
With pillared vines on either side,
And terraced flowers, stair over stair,
Standing in pots of earthenware
Where stiff processions filed around —
Black on the smooth, sienna ground.
Tubers and bulbs now blossomed there
Which, in the moisty hot-house air,
Lay winter long in patient rows,
Glassed snugly in from Christmas snows:
Tuberose, with white, waxy gems
In bunches on their reed-like stems;
Their fragrance forced by art too soon
To mingle with the sweets of June.
(So breathes the thin blue smoke, that steals
From ashes of the gilt pastilles,
Burnt slowly, as the brazier swings,
In dim saloons of eastern kings.)
I saw the calla's arching cup
With yellow spadix standing up,
Its liquid scents to stir and mix —
The goldenest of toddy-sticks;
Roses and purple fuchsia drops;
Camellias, which the gardener crops
To make the sickening wreaths that lie
On coffins when our loved ones die.
These all and many more were there;
Monsters and grandifloras rare,
With tropical broad leaves, grown rank,
Drinking the waters of the tank
Wherein the lotus-lilies bathe;
All curious forms of spur and spathe,
Pitcher and sac and cactus-thorn,
There in the fresh New England morn.
But where the sun came colored through
Translucent petals wet with dew,
The interspace was carpeted
With oriel lights and nodes of red,
Orange and blue and violet,
That wove strange figures, as they met,
Of airier tissue, brighter blooms
Than tumble from the Persian looms.
So at the pontiff's feasts, they tell,
From the board's edge the goblet fell,
Spilled from its throat the purple tide

And stained the pavement far and wide.
Such steps wise Sheba trod upon
Up to the throne of Solomon;
So bright the angel-crowded steep
Which Israel's vision scaled in sleep.
What one is she whose feet shall dare
Tread that illuminated stair?
Like Sheba, queen; like angels, fair?
Oh listen! In the morning air
The blossoms all are hanging still —
The queen is standing on the sill.
No Sheba she; her virgin zone
Proclaims her royalty alone:
(Such royalty the lions own.)
Yet all too cheap the patterned stone
That paves kings' palaces, to feel
The pressure of her gaiter's heel.
The girlish grace that lit her face
Made sunshine in a dusky place —
The old silk hood, demure and quaint,
Wherein she seemed an altar-saint
Fresh-tinted, though in setting old
Of dingy carving and tarnished gold;
Her eyes, the candles in that shrine,
Making Madonna's face to shine.
Lingering I passed, but evermore
Abide with me the open door,
The doorsteps wide, the flowers that stand
In brilliant ranks on either hand,
The two white pillars and the vine
Of bitter-sweet and lush woodbine,
And – from my weary paths as far
As Sheba or the angels are —
Between, upon the wooden sill,
Thou, Queen of Hearts, art standing still.

AS YOU LIKE IT

Here while I read the light forsakes the pane;
Metempsychosis of the twilight gray —
Into green aisles of Epping or Ardenne
The level lines of print stretch far away.

The book-leaves whisper like the forest-leaves;
A smell of ancient woods, a breeze of morn,
A breath of violets from the mossy paths
And hark! the voice of hounds – the royal horn,

Which, muffled in the ferny coverts deep,
Utters the three sweet notes that sound recall;
As, riding two by two between the oaks,
Come on the paladins and ladies all.

The court will rest from chase in this smooth glade
That slopes to meet yon little rushy stream,
Where in the shallows nod the arrow-heads,
And the blue flower-de-luce's banners gleam.

The gamekeepers are coupling of the hounds;
The pages hang bright scarfs upon the boughs;
The new-slain quarry lies upon the turf
Whereon but now he with the herd did browse.

The silk pavilion shines among the trees;
The mighty pasties and the flagons strong
Give cheer to the dear heart of many a knight,
And many a dame whose beauty lives in song.

Meanwhile a staging improvised and rude
Rises, whereon the masquers and the mimes
Play for their sport a pleasant interlude,
Fantastic, gallant, pointing at the times.

Their green-room is the wide midsummer wood;
Down some far-winding gallery the deer —
The dappled dead-head of that sylvan show —
Starts as the distant ranting strikes his ear.

They use no traverses nor painted screen
To help along their naked, out-door wit:
(Only the forest lends its leafy scene)
Yet wonderfully well they please the pit.

The plaudits echo through the wide parquet
Where the fair audience upon the grass,
Each knight beside his lady-love, is set,
While overhead the merry winds do pass.

The little river murmurs in its reeds,
And somewhere in the verdurous solitude
The wood-thrush drops a cool contralto note,
An orchestra well-tuned unto their mood.

As runs the play so runs the afternoon;
The curtain and the sun fall side by side;
The epilogue is spoke, the twilight come;
Then homeward through the darkening glades they ride.

THE OLD CITY

Ancient city, down thy street
Minstrels make their music sweet;
Sound of bells is on the air,
Fountains sing in every square,
Where, from dawn to shut of day,
Maidens walk and children play;
And at night, when all are gone,
The waters in the dark sing on,
Till the moonrise and the breeze
Whiten the horse-chestnut trees.
Cool thou liest, leisured, slow,
On the plains of long ago,
All unvexed of fretful trades
Through thy rich and dim arcades,
Overlooking lands below
Terraced to thy green plateau.

Dear old city, it is long
Since I heard thy minstrels' song,
Since I heard thy church-bells deep,
Since I watched thy fountains leap.
Yet, whichever way I turn,
Still I see the sunset burn
At the ending of the street,
Where the chestnut branches meet;
Where, between the gay bazaars,
Maidens walk with eyes like stars,
And the slippered merchants go
On the pavements to and fro.
Upland winds blow through my sleep,
Moonrise glimmers, waters leap,
Till, awaking, thou dost seem
Like a city of a dream, —
Like a city of the air,
Builded high, aloof and fair, —
Such as childhood used to know
On the plains of long ago.

AMETHYSTS

Not the green eaves of our young woods alone
Shelter new violets, by the spring rains kissed;
In the hard quartz, by some old April sown,
Blossoms Time's flower, the steadfast amethyst.

"Here's pansies, they're for thoughts" – weak thoughts though fair;
June sees their opening, June their swift decay.
But those stone bourgeons stand for thoughts more rare,
Whose patient crystals colored day by day.

Might I so cut my flowers within the rock,
And prison there their sweet escaping breath;
Their petals then the winter's frost should mock,
And only Time's slow chisel work their death.

If out of those embedded purple blooms
Were quarried cups to hold the purple wine,
Greek drinkers thought the glorious, maddening fumes
Were cooled with radiance of that gem divine.

Might I so wed the crystal and the grape,
Passion's red heart and plastic Art's endeavor,
Delirium should take on immortal shape,
Dancing and blushing in strong rock forever.

KATY DID

In a windy tree-top sitting,
Singing at the fall of dew,
Katy watched the bats a-flitting,
While the twilight's curtains drew
Closer round her; till she only
Saw the branches and the sky —
Rocking late and rocking lonely,
Anchored on the darkness high.
And the song that she was singing,
In the windy tree-tops swinging,
Was *under the tree, under the tree*
The fox is digging a pit for me.

When the early stars were sparkling
Overhead, and down below
Fireflies twinkled, through the darkling
Thickets she heard footsteps go —
Voice of her false lover speaking,
Laughing to his sweetheart new: —
"Half my heart for thee I'm breaking:
Did not Katy love me true?"
Then no longer she was singing,
But through all the wood kept ringing —
Katy did, Katy did, Katy did love thee
And the fox is digging a grave for me.

NARCISSUS

Where the black hemlock slants athwart the stream
He came to bathe; the sun's pursuing beam
Laid a warm hand upon him, as he stood
Naked, while noonday silence filled the wood.
Holding the boughs o'erhead, with cautious foot
He felt his way along the mossy root
That edged the brimming pool; then paused and dreamed.
Half like a dryad of the tree he seemed,
Half like the naiad of the stream below,
Suspended there between the water's flow
And the green tree-top world; the love-sick air
Coaxing with softest touch his body fair
A little longer yet to be content
Outside of its own crystal element.
And he, still lingering at the brink, looked down
And marked the sunshine fleck with gold the brown
And sandy floor which paved that woodland pool.
But then, within the shadows deep and cool
Which the close hemlocks on the surface made,
Two eyes met his yet darker than that shade
And, shining through the watery foliage dim,
Two white and slender arms reached up to him.
"Comest thou again, now all the woods are still,
Fair shape, nor even Echo from the hill
Calls her Narcissus? Would her voice were thine,
Dear speechless image, and could answer mine!
Her I but hear and thee I may but see;
Yet, Echo, thou art happy unto me;
For though thyself art but a voice, sad maid,
Thy love the substance is and my love shade.
Alas! for never may I kiss those dumb
Sweet lips, nor ever hope to come
Into that shadow-world that lies somewhere —

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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