

COOLIDGE
SUSAN

VERSES

Susan Coolidge

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Содержание

TO J. H. AND E. W. H	4
PRELUDE	6
COMMISSIONED	8
THE CRADLE TOMB IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY	11
"OF SUCH AS I HAVE."	13
A PORTRAIT	14
WHEN?	16
ON THE SHORE	19
AMONG THE LILIES	21
NOVEMBER	22
EMBALMED	24
GINEVRA DEGLI AMIERI	26
EASTER LILIES	34
EBB-TIDE	36
FLOOD-TIDE	38
A YEAR	40
TOKENS	42
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	43

Susan Coolidge

Verses

TO J. H. AND E. W. H

Nourished by peaceful suns and gracious dew,
Your sweet youth budded and your sweet lives grew,
And all the world seemed rose-beset for you.

The rose of beauty was your mutual dower,
The stainless rose of love, an early flower,
The stately blooms of ease and wealth and power.

And treading thus on pathways flower-bestrewn,
It well might be, that, cold and careless grown,
You both had lived for your own joys alone.

But, holding all these fair things as in trust.
Gently you walked, still scattering on the dust
Of harder roads, which others tread, and must,—

Your heritage of brightness, not a ray
Of noontide sought you out, but straight away
You caught and halved it with some darker day:

And as the sweet saint's loaves were turned, it is said,
To roses, so your roses turned to bread,
That hungering souls and weary might be fed.

Dear friends, my poor words do but paint you wrong,
Nor can I utter, in one trivial song,
The goodness I have honored for so long.

Only this leaf, a single petal flung,
One chord from a full harmony unsung,
May speak the life-long love that lacks a tongue.

PRELUDE

Poems are heavenly things,
And only souls with wings
May reach them where they grow,
May pluck and bear below,
Feeding the nations thus
With food all glorious.

Verses are not of these;
They bloom on earthly trees,
Poised on a low-hung stem,
And those may gather them
Who cannot fly to where
The heavenly gardens are.

So I by devious ways
Have pulled some easy sprays
From the down-dropping bough
Which all may reach, and now
I knot them, bud and leaf,
Into a rhymed sheaf.

Not mine the pinion strong
To win the nobler song;
I only cull and bring

A hedge-row offering
Of berry, flower, and brake,
If haply some may take.

COMMISSIONED

*"Do their errands; enter into the sacrifice with them;
be a link yourself in the divine chain, and feel the joy
and life of it."—ADELINE D. T. WHITNEY*

What can I do for thee, Beloved,
Whose feet so little while ago
Trode the same way-side dust with mine,
And now up paths I do not know
Speed, without sound or sign?

What can I do? The perfect life
All fresh and fair and beautiful
Has opened its wide arms to thee;
Thy cup is over-brimmed and full;
Nothing remains for me.

I used to do so many things,—
Love thee and chide thee and caress;
Brush little straws from off thy way,
Tempering with my poor tenderness
The heat of thy short day.

Not much, but very sweet to give;
And it is grief of griefs to bear

That all these ministries are o'er,
And thou, so happy, Love, elsewhere,
Never can need me more:—

And I can do for thee but this
(Working on blindly, knowing not
If I may give thee pleasure so):
Out of my own dull, burdened lot
I can arise, and go

To sadder lives and darker homes,
A messenger, dear heart, from thee
Who wast on earth a comforter,
And say to those who welcome me,
I am sent forth by her.

Feeling the while how good it is
To do thy errands thus, and think
It may be, in the blue, far space,
Thou watchest from the heaven's brink,—
A smile upon my face.

And when the day's work ends with day,
And star-eyed evening, stealing in,
Waves a cool hand to flying noon,
And restless, surging thoughts begin,
Like sad bells out of tune,

I'll pray: "Dear Lord, to whose great love

Nor bound nor limit line is set,
Give to my darling, I implore,
Some new sweet joy not tasted yet,
For I can give no more."

And with the words my thoughts shall climb
With following feet the heavenly stair
Up which thy steps so lately sped,
And, seeing thee so happy there,
Come back half comforted.

THE CRADLE TOMB IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

A little, rudely sculptured bed,
With shadowing folds of marble lace,
And quilt of marble, primly spread
And folded round a baby's face.

Smoothly the mimic coverlet,
With royal blazonries bedight,
Hangs, as by tender fingers set
And straightened for the last good-night.

And traced upon the pillowing stone
A dent is seen, as if to bless
The quiet sleep some grieving one
Had leaned, and left a soft impress.

It seems no more than yesterday
Since the sad mother down the stair
And down the long aisle stole away,
And left her darling sleeping there.

But dust upon the cradle lies,
And those who prized the baby so,
And laid her down to rest with sighs,

Were turned to dust long years ago.

Above the peaceful pillowed head
Three centuries brood, and strangers peep
And wonder at the carven bed,—
But not unwept the baby's sleep,

For wistful mother-eyes are blurred
With sudden mists, as lingerers stay,
And the old dusts are roused and stirred
By the warm tear-drops of to-day.

Soft, furtive hands caress the stone,
And hearts, o'erleaping place and age,
Melt into memories, and own
A thrill of common parentage.

Men die, but sorrow never dies;
The crowding years divide in vain,
And the wide world is knit with ties
Of common brotherhood in pain;

Of common share in grief and loss,
And heritage in the immortal bloom
Of Love, which, flowering round its cross,
Made beautiful a baby's tomb.

"OF SUCH AS I HAVE."

Love me for what I am, Love. Not for sake
Of some imagined thing which I might be,
Some brightness or some goodness not in me,
Born of your hope, as dawn to eyes that wake
Imagined morns before the morning break.
If I, to please you (whom I fain would please),
Reset myself like new key to old tune,
Chained thought, remodelled action, very soon
My hand would slip from yours, and by degrees
The loving, faulty friend, so close to-day,
Would vanish, and another take her place,—
A stranger with a stranger's scrutinies,
A new regard, an unfamiliar face.
Love me for what I am, then, if you may;
But, if you cannot,—love me either way.

A PORTRAIT

All sweet and various things do lend themselves
And blend and intermix in her rare soul,
As chorded notes, which were untuneful else,
Clasp each the other in a perfect whole.

Within her spirit, dawn, all dewy-pearled,
Seems held and folded in by golden noons,
While past the sunshine gleams a further world
Of deep star-spaces and mysterious moons.

Like widths of blowing ocean wet with spray,
Like breath of early blooms at morning caught,
Like cool airs on the cheek of heated day,
Come the fair emanations of her thought.

Her movement, like the curving of a vine,
Seems an unerring accident of grace,
And like a flower's the subtle change and shine
And meaning of her brightly tranquil face.

And like a tree, unconscious of her shade,
She spreads her helpful branches everywhere
For wandering bird or bee, nor is afraid
Too many guests shall crowd to harbor there.

For she is kinder than all others are,
And weak things, sad things, gather where she dwells,
To reach and taste her strength and drink of her,
As thirsty creatures of clear water-wells.

Why vex with words where words are poor and vain?
In one brief sentence lies the riddle's key,
Which those who love her read and read again,
Finding each time new meanings: SHE IS SHE!

WHEN?

If I were told that I must die to-morrow,
That the next sun
Which sinks should bear me past all fear and sorrow
For any one,
All the fight fought, all the short journey through:
What should I do?

I do not think that I should shrink or falter,
But just go on,
Doing my work, nor change, nor seek to alter
Aught that is gone;
But rise and move and love and smile and pray
For one more day.

And, lying down at night for a last sleeping,
Say in that ear
Which hearkens ever: "Lord, within Thy keeping
How should I fear?
And when to-morrow brings Thee nearer still.
Do Thou Thy will."

I might not sleep for awe; but peaceful, tender,
My soul would lie
All the night long; and when the morning splendor

Flashed o'er the sky,
I think that I could smile—could calmly say,
"It is His day."

But, if instead a hand from the blue yonder
Held out a scroll,
On which my life was, writ, and I with wonder
Beheld unroll
To a long century's end its mystic clew,
What should I do?

What COULD I do, O blessed Guide and Master,
Other than this:
Still to go on as now, not slower, faster,
Nor fear to miss
The road, although so very long it be,
While led by Thee?

Step after step, feeling Thee close beside me,
Although unseen,
Through thorns, through flowers, whether the tempest hide
Thee,
Or heavens serene,
Assured Thy faithfulness cannot betray,
Thy love decay.

I may not know, my God; no hand revealeth
Thy counsels wise;
Along the path a deepening shadow stealeth,

No voice replies
To all my questioning thought, the time to tell,
And it is well.

Let me keep on, abiding and unfearing
Thy will always,
Through a long century's ripening fruition,
Or a short day's.
Thou canst not come too soon; and I can wait
If thou come late.

ON THE SHORE

The punctual tide draws up the bay,
With ripple of wave and hiss of spray,
And the great red flower of the light-house tower
Blooms on the headland far away.

Petal by petal its fiery rose
Out of the darkness buds and grows;
A dazzling shape on the dim, far cape,
A beckoning shape as it comes and goes.

A moment of bloom, and then it dies
On the windy cliff 'twixt the sea and skies.
The fog laughs low to see it go,
And the white waves watch it with cruel eyes.

Then suddenly out of the mist-cloud dun,
As touched and wooed by unseen sun,
Again into sight bursts the rose of light
And opens its petals one by one.

Ah, the storm may be wild and the sea be strong,
And man is weak and the darkness long,
But while blossoms the flower on the light-house tower
There still is place for a smile and a song.

AMONG THE LILIES

She stood among the lilies
In sunset's brightest ray,
Among the tall June lilies,
As stately fair as they;
And I, a boyish lover then,
Looked once, and, lingering, looked again,
And life began that day.

She sat among the lilies,
My sweet, all lily-pale;
The summer lilies listened,
I whispered low my tale.
O golden anthers, breathing balm,
O hush of peace, O twilight calm,
Did you or I prevail?

She lies among the lily-snows,
Beneath the wintry sky;
All round her and about her
The buried lilies lie.
They will awake at touch of Spring,
And she, my fair and flower-like thing,
In spring-time—by and by.

NOVEMBER

Dry leaves upon the wall,
Which flap like rustling wings and seek escape,
A single frosted cluster on the grape
Still hangs—and that is all.

It hangs forgotten quite,—
Forgotten in the purple vintage-day,
Left for the sharp and cruel frosts to slay,
The daggers of the night.

It knew the thrill of spring;
It had its blossom-time, its perfumed noons;
Its pale-green spheres were rounded to soft runes
Of summer's whispering.

Through balmy morns of May;
Through fragrances of June and bright July,
And August, hot and still, it hung on high
And purpled day by day.

Of fair and mantling shapes,
No braver, fairer cluster on the tree;
And what then is this thing has come to thee
Among the other grapes,

Thou lonely tenant of the leafless vine,
Granted the right to grow thy mates beside,
To ripen thy sweet juices, but denied
Thy place among the wine?

Ah! we are dull and blind.
The riddle is too hard for us to guess
The why of joy or of unhappiness,
Chosen or left behind.

But everywhere a host
Of lonely lives shall read their type in thine:
Grapes which may never swell the tale of wine,
Left out to meet the frost.

EMBALMED

This is the street and the dwelling,
Let me count the houses o'er;
Yes,—one, two, three from the corner,
And the house that I love makes four.

That is the very window
Where I used to see her head
Bent over book or needle,
With ivy garlanded.

And the very loop of the curtain,
And the very curve of the vine,
Were full of the grace and the meaning
Which was hers by some right divine.

I began to be glad at the corner,
And all the way to the door
My heart outran my footsteps,
And frolicked and danced before,

In haste for the words of welcome,
The voice, the repose and grace,
And the smile, like a benediction,
Of that beautiful, vanished face.

Now I pass the door, and I pause not,
And I look the other way;
But ever, a waft of fragrance,
Too subtle to name or stay,

Comes the thought of the gracious presence
Which made that past time sweet,
And still to those who remember,
Embalms the house and the street,

Like the breath from some vase, now empty
Of a flowery shape unseen,
Which follows the path of its lover,
To tell where a rose has been.

GINEVRA DEGLI AMIERI

A STORY OF OLD FLORENCE

So it is come! The doctor's glossy smile
Deceives me not. I saw him shake his head,
Whispering, and heard poor Giulia sob without,
As, slowly creaking, he went down the stair.
Were they afraid that I should be afraid?
I, who had died once and been laid in tomb?
They need not.

Little one, look not so pale.
I am not raving. Ah! you never heard
The story. Climb up there upon the bed:
Sit close, and listen. After this one day
I shall not tell you stories any more.

How old are you, my rose? What! almost twelve?
Almost a woman? Scarcely more than that
Was your fair mother when she bore her bud;
And scarcely more was I when, long years since,
I left my father's house, a bride in May.
You know the house, beside St. Andrea's church,
Gloomy and rich, which stands, and seems to frown

On the Mercato, humming at its base;
And hold on high, out of the common reach,
The lilies and carved shields above its door;
And, higher yet, to catch and woo the sun,
A little loggia set against the sky?
That was my play-place ever as a child;
And with me used to play a kinsman's son,
Antonio Rondinelli. Ah, dear days!
Two happy things we were, with none to chide
Or hint that life was anything but play.

Sudden the play-time ended. All at once
"You must be wed," they told me. "What is wed?"
I asked; but with the word I bent my brow,
Let them put on the garland, smiled to see
The glancing jewels tied about my neck;
And so, half-pleased, half-puzzled, was led forth
By my grave husband, older than my sire.

O the long years that followed! It would seem
That the sun never shone in all those years,
Or only with a sudden, troubled glint
Flashed on Antonio's curls, as he went by
Doffing his cap, with eyes of wistful love
Raised to my face,—my conscious, woful face.
Were we so much to blame? Our lives had twined
Together, none forbidding, for so long.
They let our childish fingers drop the seed,
Unhindered, which should ripen to tall grain;

They let the firm, small roots tangle and grow,
Then rent them, careless that it hurt the plant.
I loved Antonio, and he loved me.

Life was all shadow, but it was not sin!
I loved Antonio, but I kept me pure,
Not for my husband's sake, but for the sake
Of him, my first-born child, my little child,
Mine for a few short weeks, whose touch, whose look
Thrilled all my soul and thrills it to this day.
I loved; but, hear me swear, I kept me pure!
(Remember that, Madonna, when I come
Before thy throne to-morrow. Be not stern,
Or gaze upon me with reproachful look,
Making my little angel hide his face
And weep, while all the others turn glad eyes
Rejoicing on their mothers.)

It was hard
To sit in darkness while the rest had light,
To move to discords when the rest had song,
To be so young and never to have lived.
I bore, as women bear, until one day
Soul said to flesh, "This I endure no more,"
And with the word uprose, tore clay apart,
And what was blank before grew blanker still.

It was a fever, so the leeches said.
I had been dead so long, I did not know

The difference, or heed. Oil on my breast,
The garments of the grave about me wrapped,
They bore me forth, and laid me in the tomb.
The rich and beautiful and dreadful tomb,
Where all the buried Amteris lie,
Beneath the Duomo's black and towering shade.

Open the curtain, child. Yes, it is night.
It was night then, when I awoke to feel
That deadly chill, and see by ghostly gleams
Of moonlight, creeping through the grated door,
The coffins of my fathers all about.
Strange, hollow clamors rang and echoed back,
As, struggling out of mine, I dropped and fell.
With frantic strength I beat upon the grate.
It yielded to my touch. Some careless hand
Had left the bolt half-slipped. My father swore
Afterward, with a curse, he would make sure
Next time. NEXT TIME. That hurts me even now!

Dead or alive I issued, scarce sure which.
High overhead Giotto's tower soared;
Behind, the Duomo rose all white and black;
Then pealed a sudden jargoning of bells,
And down the darkling street I wildly fled,
Led by a little, cold, and wandering moon,
Which seemed as lonely and as lost as I.
I had no aim, save to reach warmth and light
And human touch; but still my witless steps

Led to my husband's door, and there I stopped,
By instinct, knocked, and called.

A window oped.

A voice—t'was his—demanded: "Who is there?"
"Tis I, Ginevra." Then I heard the tone
Change into horror, and he prayed aloud
And called upon the saints, the while I urged,
"O, let me in, Francesco; let me in!
I am so cold, so frightened, let me in!"
Then, with a crash, the window was shut fast;
And, though I cried and beat upon the door
And wailed aloud, no other answer came.

Weeping, I turned away, and feebly strove
Down the hard distance towards my father's house.
"They will have pity and will let me in,"
I thought. "They loved me and will let me in."
Cowards! At the high window overhead
They stood and trembled, while I plead and prayed:
"I am your child, Ginevra. Let me in!
I am not dead. In mercy, let me in!"
"The holy saints forbid!" declared my sire.
My mother sobbed and vowed whole pounds of wax
To St. Eustachio, would he but remove
This fearful presence from her door. Then sharp
Came click of lock, and a long tube was thrust
From out the window, and my brother cried,
"Spirit or devil, go! or else I fire!"

Where should I go? Back to the ghastly tomb
And the cold coffined ones? Up the long street,
Wringing my hands and sobbing low, I went.
My feet were bare and bleeding from the stones;
My hands were bleeding too; my hair hung loose
Over my shroud. So wild and strange a shape
Saw never Florence since. The people call
That street through which I walked and wrung my hands
"Street of the Dead One," even to this day.
The sleeping houses stood in midnight black,
And not a soul was in the streets but I.

At last I saw a flickering point of light
High overhead, in a dim window set.
I had lain down to die; but at the sight
I rose, crawled on, and with expiring strength
Knocked, sank again, and knew not even then
It was Antonio's door by which I lay.

A window opened, and a voice called out:
"Qui e?" "I am Ginevra." And I thought,
"Now he will fall to trembling, like the rest,
And bid me hence." But, lo! a moment more
The bolts were drawn, and arms whose very touch
Was life, lifted and clasped and bore me in.
"O ghost or angel of my buried love,
I know not, care not which, be welcome here!
Welcome, thrice welcome, to this heart of mine!"

I heard him say, and then I heard no more.

It was high noontide when I woke again,
To hear fierce voices wrangling by my bed,—
My father's and my husband's; for, with dawn,
Gathering up valor, they had sought the tomb,
Had found me gone, and tracked my bleeding feet
Over the pavement to Antonio's door.
Dead, they cared nothing: living, I was, theirs.
Hot raged the quarrel; then came Justice in,
And to the court we swept—I in my shroud—
To try the cause.

This was the verdict given:

"A woman who has been to burial borne,
Made fast and left and locked in with the dead;
Who at her husband's door has stood and plead
For entrance, and has heard her prayer denied;
Who from her father's house is urged and chased,
Must be adjudged as dead in law and fact.

The Court pronounces the defendant—dead!
She can resume her former ties at will,
Or may renounce them, if such be her will.
She is no more a daughter, or a spouse,
Unless she choose, and is set free to form
New ties, if so she choose."

O, blessed words!

That very day we knelt before the priest,
My love and I, were wed, and life began.

Child of my child, child of Antonio's child,
Bend down and let me kiss your wondering face.
'Tis a strange tale to tell a rose like you.
But time is brief, and, had I told you not,
Haply the story would have met your ears
From them, the Amieri, my own blood,
Now turned to gall, whose foul and bitter lips
Will wag with lies when once my lips are dumb.
(Pardon me, Virgin. I was gentle once,
And thou hast seen my wrongs. Thou wilt forgive.)
Now go, my dearest. When they wake thee up,
To tell thee I am dead, be not too sad.
I, who have died once, do not fear to die.

Sweet was that waking, sweeter will be this.
Close to Heaven's gate my own Antonio sits
Waiting, and, spite of all the Frati say,
I know I shall not stand long at that gate,
Or knock and be refused an entrance there,
For he will start up when he hears my voice,
The saints will smile, and he will open quick.
Only a night to part me from that joy.
Jesu Maria! let the dawning come.

EASTER LILIES

Darlings of June and brides of summer sun,
Chill pipes the stormy wind, the skies are drear;
Dull and despoiled the gardens every one:
What do you here?

We looked to see your gracious blooms arise
Mid soft and wooing airs in gardens green,
Where venturesome brown bees and butterflies
Should hail you queen.

Here is no bee nor glancing butterfly;
They fled on rapid wings before the snow:
Your sister lilies laid them down to die,
Long, long ago.

And here, amid the slowly dropping rain,
We keep our Easter feast, with hearts whose care
Mars the high cadence of each lofty strain,
Each thankful prayer.

But not a shadow dims your joyance sweet,
No baffled hope or memory darkly clad;
You lay your whiteness at the Lord's dear feet,
And are all glad.

O coward soul! arouse thee and draw near,
Led by these fragrant acolytes to-day!
Let their sweet confidence rebuke thy fear,
Thy cold delay.

Come with thy darkness to the healing light,
Come with thy bitter, which shall be made sweet,
And lay thy soil beside the lilies white,
At His dear feet!

EBB-TIDE

Long reaches of wet grasses sway
Where ran the sea but yesterday,
And white-winged boats at sunset drew
To anchor in the crimsoning blue.
The boats lie on the grassy plain,
Nor tug nor fret at anchor chain;
Their errand done, their impulse spent,
Chained by an alien element,
With sails unset they idly lie,
Though morning beckons brave and nigh;
Like wounded birds, their flight denied,
They lie, and long and wait the tide.

About their keels, within the net
Of tough grass fibres green and wet,
A myriad thirsty creatures, pent
In sorrowful imprisonment,
Await the beat, distinct and sweet,
Of the white waves' returning feet.
My soul their vigil joins, and shares
A nobler discontent than theirs;
Athirst like them, I patiently
Sit listening beside the sea,
And still the waters outward glide:

When is the turning of the tide?

Come, pulse of God; come, heavenly thrill!
We wait thy coming,—and we will.
The world is vast, and very far
Its utmost verge and boundaries are;
But thou hast kept thy word to-day
In India and in dim Cathay,
And the same mighty care shall reach
Each humblest rock-pool of this beach.
The gasping fish, the stranded keel,
This dull dry soul of mine, shall feel
Thy freshening touch, and, satisfied,
Shall drink the fulness of the tide.

FLOOD-TIDE

All night the thirsty beach has listening lain,
With patience dumb,
Counting the slow, sad moments of her pain;
Now morn has come,
And with the morn the punctual tide again.

I hear the white battalions down the bay
Charge with a cheer;
The sun's gold lances prick them on their way,—
They plunge, they rear,—
Foam-plumed and snowy-pennoned, they are here!

The roused shore, her bright hair backward blown,
Stands on the verge
And waves a smiling welcome, beckoning on
The flying surge,
While round her feet, like doves, the billows crowd and urge.

Her glad lips quaff the salt, familiar wine;
Her spent urns fill;
All hungering creatures know the sound, the sign,—
Quiver and thrill,
With glad expectance crowd and banquet at their will.

I, too, the rapt contentment join and share;
My tide is full;
There is new happiness in earth, in air:
All beautiful
And fresh the world but now so bare and dull.

But while we raise the cup of bliss so high,
Thus satisfied,
Another shore beneath a sad, far sky
Waiteth her tide,
And thirsts with sad complainings still denied.

On earth's remotest bound she sits and waits
In doubt and pain;
Our joy is signal for her sad estates;
Like dull refrain
Marring our song, her sighings rise in vain.

To each his turn—the ebb-tide and the flood,
The less, the more—
God metes his portions justly out, I know;
But still before
My mind forever floats that pale and grieving shore.

A YEAR

She has been just a year in Heaven.
Unmarked by white moon or gold sun,
By stroke of clock or clang of bell,
Or shadow lengthening on the way,
In the full noon and perfect day,
In Safety's very citadel,
The happy hours have sped, have run;
And, rapt in peace, all pain forgot,
She whom we love, her white soul shriven,
Smiles at the thought and wonders not.

We have been just a year alone,—
A year whose calendar is sighs,
And dull, perpetual wishfulness,
And smiles, each covert for a tear,
And wandering thoughts, half there, half here,
And weariful attempts to guess
The secret of the hiding skies,
The soft, inexorable blue,
With gleaming hints of glory sown,
And Heaven behind, just shining through.

So sweet, so sad, so swift, so slow,
So full of eager growth and light,

So full of pain which blindly grows,
So full of thoughts which either way
Have passed and crossed and touched each day,
To us a thorn, to her a rose;
The year so black, the year so white,
Like rivers twain their course have run;
The earthly stream we trace and know,
But who shall paint the heavenly one?

A year! We gather up our powers,
Our lamps we consecrate and trim;
Open all windows to the day,
And welcome every heavenly air.
We will press forward and will bear,
Having this word to cheer the way:
She, storm-tossed once, is safe with Him,
Healed, comforted, content, forgiven;
And while we count these heavy hours
Has been a year,—a year in Heaven.

TOKENS

Each day upon the yellow Nile, 'tis said.
Joseph, the youthful ruler, cast forth wheat,
That haply, floating to his father's feet,—
The sad old father, who believed him dead,—
It might be sign in Egypt there was bread;
And thus the patriarch, past the desert sands
And scant oasis fringed with thirsty green,
Be lured toward the love that yearned unseen.
So, flung and scattered—ah! by what dear hands?—
On the swift-rushing and invisible tide,
Small tokens drift adown from far, fair lands,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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