

Cawein Madison Julius

Kentucky Poems



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INTRODUCTION

Since the disappearance of the latest survivors of that graceful and somewhat academic school of poets who ruled American literature so long from the shores of Massachusetts, serious poetry in the United States seems to have been passing through a crisis of languor. Perhaps there is no country on the civilised globe where, in theory, verse is treated with more respect and, in practice, with a greater lack of grave consideration than America. No conjecture as to the reason of this must be attempted here, further than to suggest that the extreme value set upon sharpness, ingenuity and rapid mobility is obviously calculated to depreciate and to condemn the quiet practice of the most meditative of the arts. Hence we find that it is what is called 'humorous' verse which is mainly in fashion on the western side of the Atlantic. Those rhymes are most warmly welcomed which play the most preposterous tricks with language, which dazzle by the most mountebank swiftness of turn, and which depend most for their effect upon paradox and the negation of sober thought. It is probable that the diseased craving for what is 'smart,' 'snappy' and wide-awake, and the impulse to see everything foreshortened

and topsy-turvy, must wear themselves out before cooler and more graceful tastes again prevail in imaginative literature.

Whatever be the cause, it is certain that this is not a moment when serious poetry, of any species, is flourishing in the United States. The absence of anything like a common impulse among young writers, of any definite and intelligible, if excessive, *partis pris*, is immediately observable if we contrast the American, for instance, with the French poets of the last fifteen years. Where there is no school and no clear trend of executive ambition, the solitary artist, whose talent forces itself up into the light and air, suffers unusual difficulties, and runs a constant danger of being choked in the aimless mediocrity that surrounds him. We occasionally meet with a poet in the history of literature, of whom we are inclined to say, Charming as he is, he would have developed his talent more evenly and conspicuously, – with greater decorum, perhaps, – if he had been accompanied from the first by other young men like-minded, who would have formed for him an atmosphere and cleared for him a space. This is the one regret I feel in contemplating, as I have done for years past, the ardent and beautiful talent of Mr. Cawein. I deplore the fact that he seems to stand alone in his generation; I think his poetry would have been even better than it is, and its qualities would certainly have been more clearly perceived, and more intelligently appreciated, if he were less isolated. In his own country, at this particular moment, in this matter of serious nature-painting in lyric verse, Mr. Cawein possesses what

Cowley would have called 'a monopoly of wit,' In one of his lyrics Mr. Cawein asks —

'The song-birds, are they flown away,
The song-birds of the summer-time,
That sang their souls into the day,
And set the laughing hours to rhyme?
No cat-bird scatters through the hush
The sparkling crystals of her song;
Within the woods no hermit-thrush
Trails an enchanted flute along.'

To this inquiry, the answer is: the only hermit-thrush now audible seems to sing from Louisville, Kentucky. America will, we may be perfectly sure, calm herself into harmony again, and possess once more her school of singers. In those coming days, history may perceive in Mr. Cawein the golden link that bound the music of the past to the music of the future through an interval of comparative tunelessness.

The career of Mr. Madison Cawein is represented to me as being most uneventful. He seems to have enjoyed unusual advantages for the cultivation and protection of the poetical temperament. He was born on the 23rd of March 1865, in the metropolis of Kentucky, the vigorous city of Louisville, on the southern side of the Ohio, in the midst of a country celebrated for tobacco and whisky and Indian corn. These are commodities which may be consumed in excess, but in moderation they make

glad the heart of man. They represent a certain glow of the earth, they indicate the action of a serene and gentle climate upon a rich soil. It was in this delicate and voluptuous state of Kentucky that Mr. Cawein was born, that he was educated, that he became a poet, and that he has lived ever since. His blood is full of the colour and odour of his native landscape. The solemn books of history tell us that Kentucky was discovered in 1769, by Daniel Boone, a hunter. But he first discovers a country who sees it first, and teaches the world to see it; no doubt some day the city of Louisville will erect, in one of its principal squares, a statue to 'Madison Cawein, who discovered the Beauty of Kentucky.' The genius of this poet is like one of those deep rivers of his native state, which cut paths through the forests of chestnut and hemlock as they hurry towards the south and west, brushing with the impulsive fringe of their currents the rhododendrons and calmias and azaleas that bend from the banks to be mirrored in their flushing waters.

Mr. Cawein's vocation to poetry was irresistible. I do not know that he ever tried to resist it. I have even the idea that a little more resistance would have been salutary for a talent which nothing could have discouraged, and which opposition might have taught the arts of compression and selection. Mr. Cawein suffered at first, I think, from lack of criticism more than from lack of eulogy. From his early writings I seem to gather an impression of a Louisville more ready to praise what was second-rate than what was first-rate, and practically, indeed, without any scale of

appreciation whatever. This may be a mistake of mine; at all events, Mr. Cawein has had more to gain from the passage of years in self-criticism than in inspiring enthusiasm. The fount was in him from the first; but it bubbled forth before he had digged a definite channel for it. Sometimes, to this very day, he sports with the principles of syntax as Nature played games so long ago with the fantastic caverns of the valley of the Green River or with the coral-reefs of his own Ohio. He has bad rhymes, amazing in so delicate an ear; he has awkwardness of phrase not expected in one so plunged in contemplation of the eternal harmony of Nature. But these grow fewer and less obtrusive as the years pass by.

The virgin timber-forests of Kentucky, the woods of honey-locust and buck-eye, of white oak and yellow poplar, with their clearings full of flowers unknown to us by sight or name, from which in the distance are visible the domes of the far-away Cumberland Mountains, this seems to be the hunting-field of Mr. Cawein's imagination. Here all, it must be confessed, has hitherto been unfamiliar to the Muses. If Persephone 'of our Cumnor cowslips never heard,' how much less can her attention have been arrested by clusters of orchids from the Ocklawaha, or by the song of the Whippoorwill, rung out when 'the west was hot geranium-red' under the boughs of a black-jack on the slopes of Mount Kinnex. 'Not here,' one is inclined to exclaim, 'not here, O Apollo, are haunts meet for thee,' but the art of the poet is displayed by his skill in breaking down these prejudices

of time and place. Mr. Cawein reconciles us to his strange landscape – the strangeness of which one has to admit is mainly one of nomenclature, – by the exercise of a delightful instinctive pantheism. He brings the ancient gods to Kentucky, and it is marvellous how quickly they learn to be at home there. Here is Bacchus, with a spicy fragment of calamus-root in his hand, trampling down the blue-eyed grass, and skipping, with the air of a hunter born, into the hickory thicket, to escape Artemis, whose robes, as she passes swiftly with her dogs through the woods, startle the humming-birds, silence the green tree-frogs, and fill the hot still air with the perfumes of peppermint and penny-royal. It is a queer landscape, but one of new natural beauties frankly and sympathetically discovered, and it forms a *mise en scène* which, I make bold to say, would have scandalised neither Keats nor Spenser.

It was Mr. Howells, – ever as generous in discovering new native talent as he is unflinching in reproof of the effeteness of European taste, – who first drew attention to the originality and beauty of Mr. Cawein's poetry. The Kentucky poet had, at that time, published but one tentative volume, the *Blooms of the Berry*, of 1887. This was followed, in 1888, by *The Triumph of Music*, and since then hardly a year has passed without a slender sheaf of verse from Mr. Cawein's garden. Among these (if a single volume is to be indicated), the quality which distinguishes him from all other poets, – the Kentucky flavour, if we may call it so, – is perhaps to be most agreeably detected in *Intimations*

of the Beautiful. But it is time that I should leave the American lyricist to make his own appeal to English ears, with but one additional word of explanation, namely, that in this selection Mr. Cawein's narrative poems on mediæval themes, and in general his cosmopolitan writings, have been neglected in favour of such lyrics as would present him most vividly in his own native landscape, no visitor in spirit to Europe, but at home in that bright and exuberant West —

Where, in the hazy morning, runs
The stony branch that pools and drips,
Where red-haws and the wild-rose hips
Are strewn like pebbles; where the sun's
Own gold seems captured by the weeds;
To see, through scintillating seeds,
The hunters steal with glimmering guns.
To stand within the dewy ring
Where pale death smites the bone-set blooms,
And everlasting's flowers, and plumes
Of mint, with aromatic wing!
And hear the creek, — whose sobbing seems
A wild man murmuring in his dreams, —
And insect violins that sing!

So sweet a voice, so consonant with the music of the singers of past times, heard in a place so fresh and strange, will surely not pass without its welcome from the lovers of genuine poetry.

EDMUND GOSSE.

PROLOGUE

There is a poetry that speaks
Through common things: the grasshopper,
That in the hot weeds creaks and creaks,
Says all of summer to my ear:
And in the cricket's cry I hear
The fireside speak, and feel the frost
Work mysteries of silver near
On country casements, while, deep lost
In snow, the gatepost seems a sheeted ghost.

And other things give rare delight:
Those guttural harps the green-frogs tune,
Those minstrels of the falling night,
That hail the sickle of the moon
From grassy pools that glass her lune:
Or, – all of August in its loud
Dry cry, – the locust's call at noon,
That tells of heat and never a cloud
To veil the pitiless sun as with a shroud.

The rain, – whose cloud dark-lids the moon,
The great white eyeball of the night, —
Makes music for me; to its tune
I hear the flowers unfolding white,

The mushroom growing, and the slight
Green sound of grass that dances near;
The melon ripening with delight;
And in the orchard, soft and clear,
The apple redly rounding out its sphere.

The grigs make music as of old,
To which the fairies whirl and shine
Within the moonlight's prodigal gold,
On woodways wild with many a vine:
When all the wilderness with wine
Of stars is drunk, I hear it say —
'Is God restricted to confine
His wonders only to the day,
That yields the abstract tangible to clay?'

And to my ear the wind of Morn, —
When on her rubric forehead far
One star burns big, — lifts a vast horn
Of wonder where all murmurs are:
In which I hear the waters war,
The torrent and the blue abyss,
And pines, — that terrace bar on bar
The mountain side, — like lovers' kiss,
And whisper words where naught but grandeur is.

The jutting crags, — all iron-veined
With ore, — the peaks, where eagles scream,
That pour their cataracts, rainbow-stained,

Like hair, in many a mountain stream,
Can lift my soul beyond the dream
Of all religions; make me scan
No mere external or extreme,
But inward pierce the outward plan
And learn that rocks have souls as well as man.

FOREST AND FIELD

I

Green, watery jets of light let through
The rippling foliage drenched with dew;
And golden glimmers, warm and dim,
That in the vistaed distance swim;
Where, 'round the wood-spring's oozy urn,
The limp, loose fronds of forest fern
Trail like the tresses, green and wet,
A wood-nymph binds with violet.
O'er rocks that bulge and roots that knot
The emerald-amber mosses clot;
From matted walls of brier and brush
The elder nods its plumes of plush;
And, Argus-eyed with many a bloom,
The wild-rose breathes its wild perfume;
May-apples, ripening yellow, lean
With oblong fruit, a lemon-green,
Near Indian-turnips, long of stem,
That bear an acorn-oval gem,
As if some woodland Bacchus there, —
While braiding locks of hyacinth hair
With ivy-tod, — had idly tost

His thyrsus down and so had lost:
And blood-root, that from scarlet wombs
Puts forth, in spring, its milk-white blooms,
That then like starry footsteps shine
Of April under beech and pine;
At which the gnarled eyes of trees
Stare, big as Fauns' at Dryades,
That bend above a fountain's spar
As white and naked as a star.

The stagnant stream flows sleepily
Thick with its lily-pads; the bee, —
All honey-drunk, a Bassarid, —
Booms past the mottled toad, that, hid
In calamus-plants and blue-eyed grass,
Beside the water's pooling glass,
Silenus-like, eyes stolidly
The Mænad-glittering dragonfly.
And pennyroyal and peppermint
Pour dry-hot odours without stint
From fields and banks of many streams;
And in their scent one almost seems
To see Demeter pass, her breath
Sweet with her triumph over death. —
A haze of floating saffron; sound
Of shy, crisp creepings o'er the ground;
The dip and stir of twig and leaf;
Tempestuous gusts of spices brief
Borne over bosks of sassafras

By winds that foot it on the grass;
Sharp, sudden songs and whisperings,
That hint at untold hidden things —
Pan and Sylvanus who of old
Kept sacred each wild wood and wold.
A wily light beneath the trees
Quivers and dusks with every breeze —
A Hamadryad, haply, who, —
Culling her morning meal of dew
From frail, accustomed cups of flowers, —
Now sees some Satyr in the bowers,
Or hears his goat-hoof snapping press
Some brittle branch, and in distress
Shrinks back; her dark, dishevelled hair
Veiling her limbs one instant there.

II

Down precipices of the dawn
The rivers of the day are drawn,
The soundless torrents, free and far,
Of gold that deluge every star.
There is a sound of brooks and wings
That fills the woods with carollings;
And, dashed on moss and flow'r and fern,
And leaves, that quiver, breathe and burn,

Rose-radiance smites the solitudes,
The dew-drenched hills, the dripping woods,
That twitter as with canticles
Of shade and light; and wind, that smells
Of flowers, and buds, and boisterous bees,
Delirious honey, and wet trees. —
Through briers that trip them, one by one,
With swinging pails, that take the sun,
A troop of girls comes – berries,
Whose bare feet glitter where they pass
Through dewdrop-trembling tufts of grass.
And, oh! their laughter and their cheers
Wake Echo 'mid her shrubby rocks
Who, answering, from her mountain mocks
With rapid fairy horns; as if
Each mossy vale and weedy cliff
Had its imperial Oberon,
Who, seeking his Titania, hid
In coverts caverned from the sun,
In kingly wrath had called and chid.

Cloud-feathers, oozing orange light,
Make rich the Indian locks of night;
Her dusky waist with sultry gold
Girdled and buckled fold on fold.
One star. A sound of bleating flocks.
Great shadows stretched along the rocks,
Like giant curses overthrown
By some Arthurian champion.

Soft-swimming sorceries of mist
That streak blue glens with amethyst.
And, tinkling in the clover dells,
The twilight sound of cattle-bells.
And where the marsh in reed and grass
Burns, angry as a shattered glass,
The flies make golden blurs, that shine
Like drops of amber-scattered wine
Spun high by reeling Bacchanals,
When Bacchus wreathes his curling hair
With vine-leaves, and from every lair
His worshippers around him calls.
They come, they come, a happy throng,
The berriers with gibe and song;
Their pails brimmed black to tin-bright eaves
With luscious fruit, kept cool with leaves
Of aromatic sassafras;
'Twixt which some sparkling berry slips,
Like laughter, from the purple mass,
Wine-swollen as Silenus' lips.

III

The tanned and tired noon climbs high
Up burning reaches of the sky;
Below the drowsy belts of pines

The rock-ledged river foams and shines;
And over rainless hill and dell
Is blown the harvest's sultry smell:
While, in the fields, one sees and hears
The brawny-throated harvesters, —
Their red brows beaded with the heat, —
By twos and threes among the wheat
Flash their hot scythes; behind them press
The binders – men and maids that sing
Like some mad troop of piping Pan; —
While all the hillsides swoon and ring
Such sounds of Ariel airiness
As haunted freckled Caliban.
'O ho! O ho! 'tis noon I say.

The roses blow.

Away, away, above the hay,
To the tune o' the bees the roses sway;
The love-songs that they hum all day,
So low! So low!
The roses' Minnesingers they.'

Up velvet lawns of lilac skies
The tawny moon begins to rise
Behind low, blue-black hills of trees, —
As rises up, in Siren seas,
To rock in purple deeps, hip-hid,
A virgin-bosomed Oceanid. —
Gaunt shadows crouch by tree and scaur,
Like shaggy Satyrs waiting for

The moonbeam Nymphs, the Dryads white,
That take with loveliness the night,
And glorify it with their love.
The sweet, far notes I hear, I hear,
Beyond dim pines and mellow ways,
The song of some fair harvester,
The lovely Limnad of the grove,
Whose singing charms me while it slays.
'O deep! O deep! the earth and air
Are sunk in sleep.
Adieu to care! Now everywhere
Is rest; and by the old oak there
The maiden with the nut-brown hair
Doth keep, doth keep
Tryst with her lover the young and fair.'

IV

Like Atalanta's spheres of gold,
Within the orchard, apples rolled
From sudden hands of boughs that lay
Their leaves, like palms, against the day;
And near them pears of rusty brown
Lay bruised; and peaches, pink with down,
And furry as the ears of Pan,
Or, like Diana's cheeks, a tan

Beneath which burnt a tender fire;
Or wan as Psyche's with desire.
And down the orchard vistas, – young,
A hickory basket by him swung,
A straw-hat, 'gainst the sloping sun
Drawn brim-broad o'er his face, – he strode;
As if he looked to find some one,
His eyes far-fixed beyond the road.
Before him, like a living burr,
Rattled the noisy grasshopper.
And where the cows' melodious bells
Trailed music up and down the dells,
Beside the spring, that o'er the ground
Went whimpering like a fretful hound,
He saw her waiting, fair and slim,
Her pail forgotten there, for him.

Yellow as sunset skies and pale
As fairy clouds that stay or sail
Through azure vaults of summer, blue
As summer heavens, the wildflowers grew;
And blossoms on which spurts of light
Fell laughing, like the lips one might
Feign for a Hebe, or a girl
Whose mouth is laughter-lit with pearl.
Long ferns, in murmuring masses heaped;
And mosses moist, in beryl steeped
And musk aromas of the wood
And silence of the solitude:

And everything that near her blew
The spring had showered thick with dew. —
Across the rambling fence she leaned,
Her fresh, round arms all white and bare;
Her artless beauty, bonnet-screened,
Rich-coloured with its auburn hair.
A wood-thrush gurgled in a vine —
Ah! 'tis his step, 'tis he she hears;
The wild-rose smelt like some rare wine —
He comes, ah, yes! 'tis he who nears.
And her brown eyes and all her face
Said welcome. And with rustic grace
He leant beside her; and they had
Some talk with youthful laughter glad:
I know not what; I know but this
Its final period was a kiss.

SUMMER

I

Hang out your loveliest star, O Night! O Night!
Your richest rose, O Dawn!
To greet sweet Summer, her, who, clothed in light,
Leads Earth's best hours on.
Hark! how the wild birds of the woods
Throat it within the dewy solitudes!
The brook sings low and soft,
The trees make song,
As, from her heaven aloft
Comes blue-eyed Summer like a girl along.

II

And as the Day, her lover, leads her in,
How bright his beauty glows!
How red his lips, that ever try to win
Her mouth's delicious rose!
And from the beating of his heart

Warm winds arise and sighing thence depart;
And from his eyes and hair
The light and dew
Fall round her everywhere,
And Heaven above her is an arch of blue.

III

Come to the forest, or the treeless meadows
Deep with their hay or grain;
Come where the hills lift high their thrones of shadows,
Where tawny orchards reign.
Come where the reapers whet the scythe;
Where golden sheaves are heaped; where berries blythe,
With willow-basket and with pail,
Swarm knoll and plain;
Where flowers freckle every vale,
And beauty goes with hands of berry-stain.

IV

Come where the dragon-flies, a brassy blue,
Flit round the wildwood streams,
And, sucking at some horn of honey-dew,

The wild-bee hums and dreams.
Come where the butterfly waves wings of sleep,
Gold-disked and mottled over blossoms deep;
Come where beneath the rustic bridge
The green frog cries;
Or in the shade the rainbowed midge,
Above the emerald pools, with murmurings flies.

V

Come where the cattle browse within the brake,
As red as oak and strong;
Where far-off bells the echoes faintly wake,
And milkmaids sing their song.
Come where the vine-trailed rocks, with waters hoary,
Tell to the sun some legend or some story;
Or, where the sunset to the land
Speaks words of gold;
Where ripeness walks, a wheaten band
Around her hair and blossoms manifold.

VI

Come where the woods lift up their stalwart arms

Unto the star-sown skies;
Knotted and gnarled, that to the winds and storms
Fling mighty rhapsodies:
Or to the moon repeat what they have seen,
When Night upon their shoulders vast doth lean.
Come where the dew's clear syllable
Drips from the rose;
And where the fire-flies fill
The night with golden music of their glows.

VII

Now while the dingles and the vine-roofed glens
Whisper their flowery tale
Unto the silence; and the lakes and fens
Unto the moonlight pale
Murmur their rapture, let us seek her out,
Her of the honey throat, and peachy pout,
Summer! and at her feet,
The love of old
Lay like a sheaf of wheat,
And of our hearts the purest gold of gold.

TO SORROW

I

O dark-eyed goddess of the marble brow,
Whose look is silence and whose touch is night,
Who walkest lonely through the world, O thou,
Who sittest lonely with Life's blown-out light;
Who in the hollow hours of night's noon
Criest like some lost child;
Whose anguish-fevered eyeballs seek the moon
To cool their pulses wild.
Thou who dost bend to kiss Joy's sister cheek,
Turning its rose to alabaster; yea,
Thou who art terrible and mad and meek,
Why in my heart art thou enshrined to-day?
O Sorrow say, O say!

II

Now Spring is here and all the world is white,
I will go forth, and where the forest robes

Itself in green, and every hill and height
Crowns its fair head with blossoms, – spirit globes
Of hyacinth and crocus dashed with dew, —
I will forget my grief,
And thee, O Sorrow, gazing on the blue,
Beneath a last year's leaf,
Of some brief violet the south wind woos,
Or bluet, whence the west wind raked the snow;
The baby eyes of love, the darling hues
Of happiness, that thou canst never know,
O child of pain and woe.

III

On some hoar upland, sweet with clustered thorns,
Hard by a river's windy white of waves,
I shall sit down with Spring, – whose eyes are morns
Of light; whose cheeks the rose of health enslaves, —
And so forget thee braiding in her hair
The snowdrop, tipped with green,
The cool-eyed primrose and the trillium fair,
And moony celandine.
Contented so to lie within her arms,
Forgetting all the sear and sad and wan,
Remembering love alone, who o'er earth's storms,
High on the mountains of perpetual dawn,

Leads the glad hours on.

IV

Or in the peace that follows storm, when Even,
Within the west, stands dreaming lone and far,
Clad on with green and silver, and the Heaven
Is brightly brooched with one gold-glittering star.
I will lie down beside some mountain lake,
'Round which the tall pines sigh,
And breathing musk of rain from boughs that shake
Storm balsam from on high,
Make friends of Dream and Contemplation high
And Music, listening to the mocking-bird, —
Who through the hush sends its melodious cry, —
And so forget a while that other word,
That all loved things must die.

NIGHT

Out of the East, as from an unknown shore,
Thou comest with thy children in thine arms, —
Slumber and Dream, – whom mortals all adore,
Their flowing raiment sculptured to their charms:
Soft on thy breast thy lovely children rest,
Laid like twin roses in one balmy nest.
Silent thou comest, swiftly too and slow.
There is no other presence like to thine,
When thou approachest with thy babes divine,
Thy shadowy face above them bending low,
Blowing the ringlets from their brows of snow.

Oft have I taken Sleep from thy dark arms,
And fondled her fair head, with poppies wreathed,
Within my bosom's depths, until its storms
With her were hushed and I but faintly breathed.
And then her sister, Dream, with frolic art
Arose from rest, and on my sleeping heart
Blew bubbles of dreams where elfin worlds were lost;
Worlds where my stranger soul sang songs to me,
And talked with spirits by a rainbowed sea,
Or smiled, an unfamiliar shape of frost,
Floating on gales of breathless melody.

Day comes to us in garish glory garbed;
But thou, thou bringest to the tired heart
Rest and deep silence, in which are absorbed
All the vain tumults of the mind and mart.
Whether thou comest with hands full of stars,
Or clothed in storm and clouds, the lightning bars,
Rolling the thunder like some mighty dress,
God moves with thee; we seem to hear His feet,
Wind-like, along the floors of Heaven beat;
To see His face, revealed in awfulness,
Through thee, O Night, to ban us or to bless.

A FALLEN BEECH

Nevermore at doorways that are barken
Shall the madcap wind knock and the moonlight;
Nor the circle which thou once didst darken,
Shine with footsteps of the neighbouring moonlight,
Visitors for whom thou oft didst hearken.

Nevermore, gallooned with cloudy laces,
Shall the morning, like a fair freebooter,
Make thy leaves his richest treasure-places;
Nor the sunset, like a royal suitor,
Clothe thy limbs with his imperial graces.

And no more, between the savage wonder
Of the sunset and the moon's up-coming,
Shall the storm, with boisterous hoof-beats, under
Thy dark roof dance, Faun-like, to the humming
Of the Pan-pipes of the rain and thunder.

Oft the Satyr-spirit, beauty-drunken,
Of the Spring called; and the music measure
Of thy sap made answer; and thy sunken
Veins grew vehement with youth, whose pressure
Swelled thy gnarly muscles, winter-shrunken.

And the germs, deep down in darkness rooted,
Bubbled green from all thy million oilets,
Where the spirits, rain-and-sunbeam-suited,
Of the April made their whispering toilets,
Or within thy stately shadow footed.

Oft the hours of blonde Summer tinkled
At the windows of thy twigs, and found thee
Bird-blithe; or, with shapely bodies, twinkled
Lissom feet of naked flowers around thee,
Where thy mats of moss lay sunbeam-sprinkled.

And the Autumn with his gypsy-coated
Troop of days beneath thy branches rested,
Swarthy-faced and dark of eye; and throated
Songs of roaming; or with red hand tested
Every nut-bur that above him floated.

Then the Winter, barren-browed, but rich in
Shaggy followers of frost and freezing,
Made the floor of thy broad boughs his kitchen,
Trapper-like, to camp in; grimly easing
Limbs snow-furred and moccasin'd with lichen.

Now, alas! no more do these invest thee
With the dignity of whilom gladness!
They – unto whose hearts thou once confessed thee
Of thy dreams – now know thee not! and sadness
Sits beside thee where, forgot, dost rest thee.

A TWILIGHT MOTH

All day the primroses have thought of thee,
Their golden heads close-haremed from the heat;
All day the mystic moonflowers silkenly
Veiled snowy faces, — that no bee might greet
Or butterfly that, weighed with pollen, passed; —
Keeping Sultana-charms for thee, at last,
Their lord, who comest to salute each sweet.

Cool-throated flowers that avoid the day's
Too fervid kisses; every bud that drinks
The tipsy dew and to the starlight plays
Nocturns of fragrance, thy wing'd shadow links
In bonds of secret brotherhood and faith;
O bearer of their order's shibboleth,
Like some pale symbol fluttering o'er these pinks.

What dost thou whisper in the balsam's ear
That sets it blushing, or the hollyhock's, —
A syllabled silence that no man may hear, —
As dreamily upon its stem it rocks?
What spell dost bear from listening plant to plant,
Like some white witch, some ghostly ministrant,
Some spectre of some perished flower of phlox?

O voyager of that universe which lies
Between the four walls of this garden fair, —
Whose constellations are the fireflies
That wheel their instant courses everywhere, —
'Mid fairy firmaments wherein one sees
Mimic Boötes and the Pleiades,
Thou steerest like some fairy ship-of-air.

Gnome-wrought of moonbeam fluff and gossamer,
Silent as scent, perhaps thou chariotest
Mab or King Oberon; or, haply, her
His queen, Titania, on some midnight quest. —
Oh for the herb, the magic euphrasy,
That should unmask thee to mine eyes, ah me!
And all that world at which my soul hath guessed!

THE GRASSHOPPER

What joy you take in making hotness hotter,
In emphasising dulness with your buzz,
Making monotony more monotonous!
When Summer comes, and drouth hath dried the water
In all the creeks, we hear your ragged rasp
Filling the stillness. Or, – as urchins beat
A stagnant pond whereon the bubbles gasp, —
Your switch-like music whips the midday heat.
O bur of sound caught in the Summer's hair,
We hear you everywhere!

We hear you in the vines and berry-brambles,
Along the unkempt lanes, among the weeds,
Amid the shadeless meadows, gray with seeds,
And by the wood 'round which the rail-fence rambles,
Sawing the sunlight with your sultry saw.
Or, – like to tomboy truants, at their play
With noisy mirth among the barn's deep straw, —
You sing away the careless summer-day.
O brier-like voice that clings in idleness
To Summer's drowsy dress!

You tramp of insects, vagrant and unheeding,
Improvident, who of the summer make

One long green mealtime, and for winter take
No care, aye singing or just merely feeding!
Happy-go-lucky vagabond, – 'though frost
Shall pierce, ere long, your green coat or your brown,
And pinch your body, – let no song be lost,
But as you lived into your grave go down —
Like some small poet with his little rhyme,
Forgotten of all time.

BEFORE THE RAIN

Before the rain, low in the obscure east,
Weak and morose the moon hung, sickly gray;
Around its disc the storm mists, cracked and creased,
Wove an enormous web, wherein it lay
Like some white spider hungry for its prey.
Vindictive looked the scowling firmament,
In which each star, that flashed a dagger ray,
Seemed filled with malice of some dark intent.

The marsh-frog croaked; and underneath the stone
The peevish cricket raised a creaking cry.
Within the world these sounds were heard alone,
Save when the ruffian wind swept from the sky,
Making each tree like some sad spirit sigh;
Or shook the clumsy beetle from its weed,
That, in the drowsy darkness, bungling by,
Sharded the silence with its feverish speed.

Slowly the tempest gathered. Hours passed
Before was heard the thunder's sullen drum
Rumbling night's hollow; and the Earth at last,
Restless with waiting, – like a woman, dumb
With doubting of the love that should have clomb
Her casement hours ago, – avowed again,

'Mid protestations, joy that he had come.
And all night long I heard the Heavens explain.

AFTER RAIN

Behold the blossom-bosomed Day again,
With all the star-white Hours in her train,
Laughs out of pearl-lights through a golden ray,
That, leaning on the woodland wildness, blends
A sprinkled amber with the showers that lay
Their oblong emeralds on the leafy ends.
Behold her bend with maiden-braided brows
Above the wildflower, sidewise with its strain
Of dewy happiness, to kiss again
Each drop to death; or, under rainy boughs,
With fingers, fragrant as the woodland rain,
Gather the sparkles from the sycamore,
To set within each core
Of crimson roses girdling her hips,
Where each bud dreams and drips.
Smoothing her blue-black hair, — where many a tusk
Of iris flashes, — like the falchions' sheen
Of Faery 'round blue banners of its Queen, —
Is it a Naiad singing in the dusk,
That haunts the spring, where all the moss is musk
With footsteps of the flowers on the banks?
Or just a wild-bird voluble with thanks?

Balm for each blade of grass: the Hours prepare

A festival each weed's invited to.
Each bee is drunken with the honied air:
And all the air is eloquent with blue.
The wet hay glitters, and the harvester
Tinkles his scythe, – as twinkling as the dew, —
That shall not spare
Blossom or brier in its sweeping path;
And, ere it cut one swath,
Rings them they die, and tells them to prepare.

What is the spice that haunts each glen and glade?
A Dryad's lips, who slumbers in the shade?
A Faun, who lets the heavy ivy-wreath
Slip to his thigh as, reaching up, he pulls
The chestnut blossoms in whole bosomfuls?
A sylvan Spirit, whose sweet mouth doth breathe
Her viewless presence near us, unafraid?
Or troops of ghosts of blooms, that whitely wade
The brook? whose wisdom knows no other song
Than that the bird sings where it builds beneath

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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