

Cawein Madison Julius

# The Cup of Comus: Fact and Fancy



Madison Cawein

**The Cup of Comus: Fact and Fancy**

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# Madison J. Cawein

## The Cup of Comus: Fact and Fancy

TO MY GOOD FRIEND

W. T. H. HOWE

Friend, for the sake of loves we hold in common,  
The love of books, of paintings, rhyme and fiction;  
And for the sake of that divine affliction,  
The love of art, passing the love of woman; —  
By which all life's made nobler, superhuman,  
Lifting the soul above, and, without friction  
Of Time, that puts failure in his prediction, —  
Works to some end through hearts that dreams illumine:  
To you I pour this Cup of Dreams – a striver,  
And dreamer too in this sad world, – unwitting  
Of that you do, the help that still assureth, —  
Lifts up the heart, struck down by that dark driver,  
Despair, who, on Life's pack-horse – effort – sitting,  
Rides down Ambition through whom Art endureth.

## THRENODY IN MAY

(In memory of Madison Cawein.)

Again the earth, miraculous with May,  
Unfolds its vernal arras. Yesteryear  
We strolled together 'neath the greening trees,  
And heard the robin tune its flute note clear,  
And watched above the white cloud squadrons veer.  
And saw their shifting shadows drift away  
Adown the Hudson, as ships seek the seas.  
The scene is still the same. The violet  
Unlids its virgin eye; its amber ore  
The dandelion shows, and yet, and yet,  
He comes no more, no more!

He of the open and the generous heart,  
The soul that sensed all flowerful loveliness,  
The nature as the nature of a child;  
Who found some rapture in the wind's caress.  
Beauty in humble weed and mint and cress.  
And sang, with his incomparable art,  
The magic wonder of the wood and wild.  
The little people of the reeds and grass  
Murmur their blithe, companionable lore,  
The rills renew their minstrelsy. Alas,  
He comes no more, no more!

And yet it seems as though he needs must come,  
Albeit he has cast off mortality,  
Such was his passion for the bourgeoning time,  
Such to his spirit was the ecstasy  
The hills and valleys chorus when set free,  
No music mute, no lyric instinct dumb,  
But keyed to utterance of immortal rhyme.  
Ah, haply in some other fairer spring  
He sees bright tides sweep over slope and shore,  
But here how vain is ell my visioning!  
He comes no more, no more!

Poet and friend, wherever you may fare  
Enwrapped in dreams, I love to think of you  
Wandering amid the meads of asphodel,  
Holding high converse with the exalted few  
Who sought and found below the elusive clue

To beauty, and in that diviner air  
Bowling in worship still to its sweet spell.  
Why sorrow, then, though fate unkindly lays  
Upon our questioning hearts this burden sore,  
And though through all our length of hastening days  
He comes no more, no more!

*Clinton Scollard.*

## FOREWORD

It is with a sense of sadness and regret that this book, written by one who universally has endeared himself to lovers of nature through his revelation of her mysteries, must be prefaced as containing the last songs of this exquisite singer of the South.

When the final word is spoken it is fitting that it be by one of authority. William Dean Howells, in the pages of *The North American Review*, offers this tribute:

"I had read his poetry and loved it from the beginning, and in each successive expression of it, I had delighted in its expanding and maturing beauty. Between the earliest and the latest thing there may have been a hundred different things in the swan-like life of a singer ... but we take the latest as if it summed him up in motive and range and tendency... Not one of his lovely landscapes but thrilled with a human presence penetrating to it from his most sensitive and subtle spirit until it was all but painfully alive with memories, with regrets, with longings, with hopes, with all that from time to time mutably constitutes us men and women, and yet keeps us children. He has the gift, in a measure, that I do not think surpassed in any poet, of touching some commonest thing in nature, and making it live, from the manifold associations in which we have our being, and glow thereafter with an indistinguishable beauty... No other poet can outword this poet when it comes to choosing some epithet fresh from the earth and air, and with the morning sun and light upon it, for an emotion or an experience in which the race renews its youth from generation to generation... His touch leaves everything that was dull to the sense before glowing in the light of joyful recognition."

With a tone of conviction Edwin Markham says:

"No other poet of the later American choir offers so large a collection of verse as Mr. Cawein does, and no other American minstrel has so unvarying a devotion to nature. And none other, perhaps, has so keen an eye, so sure a word for nature's magic of mood, her trick of color, her change of form. He is not so wild and far-flying as Bliss Carmen, nor so large and elemental as Joaquin Miller; but he is often as delicate and eerie as Aldrich, and sometimes as warm and rich as Keats in the April affluence of 'Endymion.'"

"Mr. Cawein's landscape is not the sea, nor the desert, nor the mountain, but the lovely inland levels of his Kentucky. His work is almost wholly objective. A dash more of human import mixed into the beauty and melody of his poetry would rank him with Lowell and the other great lyrists of our elder choir."

Some of the new poems portray a high moral passion, potent with the belief of life beyond, where his delicacy of vision penetrates the shadow and seems to have sighted the shore that has given his soul greeting "somewhere yonder in a world uncharted."

Clear, sure, and strong is the vocal loveliness and inevitable word with which this poet endears the little forms of life in the field of Faery. The "Song of Songs" (1913) could be characterized as prophecy, by one in whom seemed inherent the fatal instinct of the predestined. He sought for "Song to lead her way above the crags of wrong," and he gave

"Such music as a bird  
Gives of its soul when dying  
Unconscious if it's heard!"  
And so he went, singing, to his "Islands of Infinity."

*Rose de Vaux-Royer.*

This edition is called the Friendship Edition, as it carries in its significance a testimonial of love and admiration for the author, extended by those who wish his last collected poems preserved for futurity.

Acknowledgment is due W. D. Howells, *The North American Review*, The Macmillan Co., Clinton Scollard and Edwin Markham for their courtesy.

## BROKEN MUSIC

(IN MEMORIAM)

There it lies broken, as a shard, —  
What breathed sweet music yesterday;  
The source, all mute, has passed away  
With its masked meanings still unmarred.

But melody will never cease!  
Above the vast cerulean sea  
Of heaven, created harmony  
Rings and re-echoes its release!

So, thin dumb instrument that lies  
All powerless, – [with spirit flown,  
Beyond the veil of the Unknown  
To chant its love-hymned litanies, – ]

Though it may thrill us here no more  
With cadenced strain, – in other spheres  
Will rise above the vanquished years  
And breathe its music as before!  
[Louisville Times]

*Written December 7th, 1914.*

*Rose de Vaux-Royer.*

*The spirit of Madison Cawein passed at midnight from this world of intimate beauty "To stand a handbreadth nearer Heaven and what is God!"*

## MADISON CAWEIN

(1865-1914)

The wind makes moan, the water runneth chill;  
I hear the nymphs go crying through the brake;  
And roaming mournfully from hill to hill  
The maenads all are silent for his sake!

He loved thy pipe, O wreathed and piping Pan!  
So play'st thou sadly, lone within thine hollow;  
He was thy blood, if ever mortal man,  
Therefore thou weepest – even thou, Apollo!

But O, the grieving of the Little Things,  
Above the pipe and lyre, throughout the woods!  
The beating of a thousand airy wings,  
The cry of all the fragile multitudes!

The moth flits desolate, the tree-toad calls,  
Telling the sorrow of the elf and fay;  
The cricket, little harper of the walls,  
Puts up his harp – hath quite forgot to play!

And risen on these winter paths anew,  
The wilding blossoms make a tender sound;  
The purple weed, the morning-glory blue,  
And all the timid darlings of the ground!

Here, here the pain is sharpest! For he walked  
As one of these – and they knew naught of fear,  
But told him daily happenings and talked  
Their lovely secrets in his list'ning ear!

Yet we do bid them grieve, and tell their grief;  
Else were they thankless, else were all untrue;  
O wind and stream, O bee and bird and leaf,  
Mourn for your poet, with a long adieu!

*Margaret Steele Anderson.*  
*Louisville Post, December 12th, 1914.*

## THE CUP OF COMUS

### PROEM

The Nights of song and story,  
With breath of frost and rain,  
Whose locks are wild and hoary,  
Whose fingers tap the pane  
With leaves, are come again.

The Nights of old October,  
That hug the hearth and tell,  
To child and grandsire sober,  
Tales of what long befell  
Of witch and warlock spell.

Nights, that, like gnome and faery,  
Go, lost in mist and moon.  
And speak in legendary  
Thoughts or a mystic rune,  
Much like the owlet's croon.

Or whirling on like witches,  
Amid the brush and broom,  
Call from the Earth its riches,  
Of leaves and wild perfume,  
And strew them through the gloom.

Till death, in all his starkness,  
Assumes a form of fear,  
And somewhere in the darkness  
Seems slowly drawing near  
In raiment torn and sere.

And with him comes November,  
Who drips outside the door,  
And wails what men remember  
Of things believed no more,  
Of superstitious lore.

Old tales of elf and dæmon,  
Of Kobold and of Troll,  
And of the goblin woman  
Who robs man of his soul  
To make her own soul whole.

And all such tales, that glamoured  
The child-heart once with fright,  
That aged lips have stammered  
For many a child's delight,  
Shall speak again to-night.

To-night, of moonlight minted,  
That is a cup divine,  
Whence Death, all opal-tinted, —  
Wreathed red with leaf and vine, —  
Shall drink a magic wine.

A wonder-cup of Comus,  
That with enchantment streams,  
In which the heart of Momus, —  
That, moon-like, glooms and gleams,  
Is drowned with all its dreams.

## THE INTRUDER

There is a smell of roses in the room  
Tea-roses, dead of bloom;  
An invalid, she sits there in the gloom,  
And contemplates her doom.

The pattern of the paper, and the grain.  
Of carpet, with its stain,  
Have stamped themselves, like fever, on her brain,  
And grown a part of pain.

It has been long, so long, since that one died,  
Or sat there by her side;  
She felt so lonely, lost, she would have cried, —  
But all her tears were dried.

A knock came on the door: she hardly heard;  
And then – a whispered word,  
And someone entered; at which, like a bird,  
Her caged heart cried and stirred.

And then – she heard a voice; she was not wrong:  
*His* voice, alive and strong:  
She listened, while the silence filled with song —  
Oh, she had waited long!

She dared not turn to see; she dared not look;  
But slowly closed her book,  
And waited for his kiss; could scarcely brook  
The weary time he took.

There was no one remembered her – no one!  
But him, beneath the sun, —  
*Who* then had entered? entered but to shun  
Her whose long work was done.

She raised her eyes, and – no one! – Yet she felt  
A presence near, that smelt  
Like faded roses; and that seemed to melt  
Into her soul that knelt.

She could not see, but *knew* that he was there,  
Smoothing her hands and hair;  
Filling with scents of roses all the air,  
Standing beside her chair.

\* \* \* \*

And so they found her, sitting quietly,  
Her book upon her knee,  
Staring before her, as if she could see —  
What was it – Death? or he?

## A GHOST OF YESTERDAY

There is a house beside a way,  
Where dwells a ghost of Yesterday:  
The old face of a beauty, faded,  
Looks from its garden: and the shaded  
Long walks of locust-trees, that seem  
Forevermore to sigh and dream,  
Keep whispering low a word that's true,  
Of shapes that haunt its avenue,  
Clad as in days of belle and beau,  
Who come and go  
Around its ancient portico.

At first, in stock and beaver-hat,  
With flitting of the moth and bat,  
An old man, leaning on a cane,  
Comes slowly down the locust lane;  
Looks at the house; then, groping, goes  
Into the garden where the rose  
Still keeps sweet tryst with moth and moon;  
And, humming to himself a tune,  
— "Lorena" or "Ben Bolt" we'll say, —  
Waits, bent and gray,  
For some fair ghost of Yesterday.

The Yesterday that holds his all —  
More real to him than is the wall  
Of mossy stone near which he stands,  
Still reaching out for her his hands —  
For her, the girl, who waits him there,  
A lace-gowned phantom, dark of hair,  
Whose loveliness still keeps those walks,  
And with whose Memory he talks;  
Upon his heart her happy head, —  
So it is said, —  
The girl, now half a century dead.

## LORDS OF THE VISIONARY EYE

I came upon a pool that shone,  
Clear, emerald-like, among the hills,  
That seemed old wizards round a stone  
Of magic that a vision thrills.

And as I leaned and looked, it seemed  
Vague shadows gathered there and here —  
A dream, perhaps the water dreamed  
Of some wild past, some long-dead year...

A temple of a race unblessed  
Rose huge within a hollow land,  
Where, on an altar, bare of breast,  
One lay, a man, bound foot and hand.

A priest, who served some hideous god,  
Stood near him on the altar stair,  
Clothed on with gold; and at his nod  
A multitude seemed gathered there.

I saw a sword descend; and then  
The priest before the altar turned;  
He was not formed like mortal man,  
But like a beast whose eyeballs burned.

Amorphous, strangely old, he glared  
Above the victim he had slain,  
Who lay with bleeding bosom bared,  
From which dripped slow a crimson rain.

Then turned to me a face of stone  
And mocked above the murdered dead,  
That fixed its cold eyes on his own  
And cursed him with a look of dread.

And then, it seemed, I knew the place,  
And how this sacrifice befell:  
I knew the god, the priest's wild face,  
I knew the dead man — knew him well.

And as I stooped again to look,  
I heard the dark hills sigh and laugh,  
And in the pool the water shook  
As if one stirred it with a staff.

And all was still again and clear:  
The pool lay crystal as before,  
Temple and priest were gone; the mere  
Had closed again its magic door.

A face was there; it seemed to shine  
As round it died the sunset's flame —  
The victim's face? – or was it mine? —  
They were to me the very same.

And yet, and yet – could this thing be? —  
And in my soul I seemed to know,  
At once, this was a memory  
Of some past life, lived long ago.

Recorded by some secret sense,  
In forms that we as dreams retain;  
Some moment, as experience,  
Projects in pictures on the brain.

## THE CREAKING DOOR

Come in, old Ghost of all that used to be! —  
You find me old,  
And love grown cold,  
And fortune fled to younger company:  
Departed, as the glory of the day,  
With friends! – And you, it seems, have come to stay. —  
'T is time to pray.

Come; sit with me, here at Life's creaking door,  
All comfortless. —  
Think, nay! then, guess,  
What was the one thing, eh? that made me poor? —  
The love of beauty, that I could not bind?  
My dream of truth? or faith in humankind? —  
But, never mind!

All are departed now, with love and youth,  
Whose stay was brief;  
And left but grief  
And gray regret – two jades, who tell the truth; —  
Whose children – memories of things to be,  
And things that failed, – within my heart, ah me!  
Cry constantly.

None can turn time back, and no man delay  
Death when he knocks, —  
What good are clocks,  
Or human hearts, to stay for us that day  
When at Life's creaking door we see his smile, —  
Death's! at the door of this old House of Trial? —  
Old Ghost, let's wait awhile.

## AT THE END OF THE ROAD

This is the truth as I see it, my dear,  
Out in the wind and the rain:  
They who have nothing have little to fear, —  
Nothing to lose or to gain.  
Here by the road at the end o' the year,  
Let us sit down and drink o' our beer,  
Happy-Go-Lucky and her cavalier,  
Out in the wind and the rain.

Now we are old, oh isn't it fine  
Out in the wind and the rain?  
Now we have nothing why snivel and whine? —  
What would it bring us again? —  
When I was young I took you like wine,  
Held you and kissed you and thought you divine —  
Happy-Go-Lucky, the habit's still mine,  
Out in the wind and the rain.

Oh, my old Heart, what a life we have led,  
Out in the wind and the rain!  
How we have drunken and how we have fed!  
Nothing to lose or to gain! —  
Cover the fire now; get we to bed.  
Long was the journey and far has it led:  
Come, let us sleep, lass, sleep like the dead,  
Out in the wind and the rain.

## THE TROUBADOUR OF TREBIZEND

Night, they say, is no man's friend:  
And at night he met his end  
In the woods of Trebizend.

Hate crouched near him as he strode  
Through the blackness of the road,  
Where my Lord seemed some huge toad.

Eyes of murder glared and burned  
At each bend of road he turned,  
And where wild the torrent churned.

And with Death *we* stood and stared  
From the bush as by he fared, —  
But he never looked or cared.

He went singing; and a rose  
Lay upon his heart's repose —  
With what thought of her – who knows?

He had done no other wrong  
Save to sing a simple song,  
*"I have loved you – loved you long."*

And my lady smiled and sighed;  
Gave a rose and looked moist eyed,  
And forgot she was a bride.

My sweet lady, Jehan de Grace,  
With the pale Madonna face,  
He had brought to his embrace.

And my Lord saw: gave commands:  
I was of his bandit bands. —  
Love should perish at our hands.

Young the Knight was. He should sing  
Nevermore of love or spring,  
Or of any gentle thing.

When he stole at midnight's hour,  
To my Lady's forest bower,  
We were hidden near the tower.

In the woods of Trebizend

There he met an evil end. —  
Night, you know, is no man's friend.

He has fought in fort and field;  
Borne for years a stainless shield,  
And in strength to none would yield.

But we seized him unaware,  
Bound and hung him; stripped him bare,  
Left him to the wild boars there.

Never has my Lady known. —  
But she often sits alone,  
Weeping when my Lord is gone...

Night, they say, is no man's friend. —  
In the woods of Trebizend  
There he met an evil end.

Now my old Lord sleeps in peace,  
While my Lady – each one sees —  
Waits, and keeps her memories.

## GHOSTS

Low, weed-climbed cliffs, o'er which at noon  
The sea-mists swoon:  
Wind-twisted pines, through which the crow  
Goes winging slow:  
Dim fields, the sower never sows,  
Or reaps or mows:  
And near the sea a ghostly house of stone  
Where all is old and lone.

A garden, falling in decay,  
Where statues gray  
Peer, broken, out of tangled weed  
And thorny seed:  
Satyr and Nymph, that once made love  
By walk and grove:  
And, near a fountain, shattered, green with mold,  
A sundial, lichen-old.

Like some sad life bereft,  
To musing left,  
The house stands: love and youth  
Both gone, in sooth:  
But still it sits and dreams:  
And round it seems  
Some memory of the past, still young and fair,  
Haunting each crumbling stair.

And suddenly one dimly sees,

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