

They find in dreams of restitution and
A promised land, whose king will dower and
Reward their loyalty with bliss eternal.
This promise of his kingdom and the immense
Illusion that he had, shared still by you,
Of coming once again and shortly to
Select mankind for punishment or saving
Are above all the concepts that ensure
His following, which when the fact disproves
Will fall away and be forgotten till
His name will vanish and the careless years
Hide with their passing sandals' dust his dream.

Yet in this Jesus I detect always
Something more true and sound and saving than
The postulates of his philosophy.
Compared with Socrates his intellect
Lacked wonder, self-delight, sufficiency.
The Athenian in his noblest eloquence
Assumed himself a son of God, yet him
I understood, somehow: it seemed at least
Poetically true. But when your Jew
Speaks of his father, all that I never learned
Is near, I cannot think, but I can feel,
And 'spite of me, I have the sense of wisdom
Simpler and fruitfuller and wiser than
All wisdom we had hardly learned before,
That turns irrelevant and pitiful
Much we had frayed and tattered our poor souls
In guessing. Yet when I turn to you for counsel —
And who of his untutored band but you

Is qualified in wide and leisured learning
To parley equal-minded with a Greek? —
I find a blur of words, a wall of thought,
That more completely hide the god I sense
Than the fantastic patter of his humble
Ignorant worshipers . . . Paul, Paul, I'd give
My Greek inheritance, my wealth and youth,
To speak one evening with that Christ you love
And never saw and cannot understand!

But he is dead and you alone are left,
Irrascible and vehement and sure,
For me to turn to with the bleak bad question --
Do we then die? Or shall we be raised up? . . .
There is the hope always of other life,
After this choking room a width of air,
A star perhaps after this sallow earth,
After this place of prayer, a place of deeds.
No man but in his heart's locked privacy
Dares hope this muffled transiency we hate
For its most bitter and ignoble failure
Ends not with what our ignorance calls death.
A Christ with promise of eternity
And proof could Christianize a hundred hundred worlds!
There are such glimpses of the never-seen,
Such breathings from the outer infinite,
The possible hath such nobility
As makes us suppliant for further chance —
Not repetition, but more scope, O Powers!
Yet better purposeless mortality
Than this mad answer you proclaim to us.

We shall rise up, you say: so far well said.
This essence that disquieteth itself
With less than truth, that will not tolerate
The fare whereon 'tis fed, but sickens so
For immortalities that it doth shape
Of its own yearning — piteously methinks —
Gods and a dwelling place of distant stars,
This surely hath a strength beyond mere days!
But then you add, with equal certainty,
“ There's too a resurrection of the flesh.”
This is your creed and final comfort, Jew,
That these our gyves and chains are never slipped,
That this captivity we thought a term
Carks to eternity, do what we will!
The impediments to every high resolve,
The traitors to our nascent deity,
The perfumed, warm, corporeal parts of us
That drug to sleep or death the impetuous will,
These are partakers of such after-life
As our fierce souls may grievously attain!
Tarsus, I'll not accept eternal life
Hampered and foiled by this vile thing of flesh!
There is no fire can burn it pure, no rain
Can wash it clean, no death can scourge it slave!
The spirit that is holier than light
Its touch will stain, its vesture will pollute!

You cannot understand, you are a Jew!
Your pores, un sentient, have never drunk
The perfume of a bush that's red by dawn,
And were you here upon this roof tonight

With Corinth at your feet, you'd never know
It was a night of summer, never feel
The straining on the slender leash of will
At all the murmurs and warm silences.
There's a girl's laugh . . . and footsteps loitering.
You'd never guess why they are slow, nor hear
The half-words breathed, nor smile to find yourself
Wondering if the kiss were mouth or throat. . . .
Perfumes! . . .
The night-wind wakes but to caress,
And kissing sleeps . . . the lover's way. . . .
Gods, gods! This fool would have the harlots' mouth
Immortal as the soul of Socrates!
Forgive me, follower of Jesus. I
Am Greek, all Greek; I know the loveliness
Of flesh and its sweet snare, and I am hurt
At finding nothing where I sought for much.
O Paul, had you been more as other men
Your wisdom had been wiser! Christ, perhaps —
But I was born too late and so miss all.
I see no aim nor end. And yet myself
Hopeless of aught of profit from the fight
Fight on. . . . Perhaps there's something truer than
The truth we can deduce. . . . And after all
Our best is but a turning toward the stars,
An upward gaze. . . .

PART III

ENZIO'S KINGDOM, AND OTHER POEMS

I

LYRICS

*Diverging paths we climb,
But if you find a flower
I will applaud its perfume,
I will confess its power.*

*I seek an amaranth
More lovely than its name,
For me a very heart's rue,
For your hearts not the same.*

*It blows above the blue
Far-vistaed Paphian sea,
Or so the woman said
Whose green eyes 'sorcelled me.*

*Joy to you in your meadows,
But I'll search mine alone
And find an amaranth —
Or else a quiet stone.*



OCTOBER

These are the days, too few, that I would hold
Of birds that pause before they seek the south,
Of leaves that rustle not, but, dying, fall
In richer beauty than they ever lived,

Of light that is too merciful at last
To be all gold, but aureoles with blue
Or such dim purple as the moon exhales
The wasted brambles and the wounded trees.

Now are untended ways made beautiful
By cobweb flowers, the wistfullest I know,
Rememberers of all forgotten dead —
Wild asters in my country they are called.

At last it is too late for all regret,
Too late for deeds, and dreams hold no reproach,
And might have been is vague as what may be,
And all is well though much has never been.

A CANTICLE

Lovely is daytime when the joyful sun goes singing,
Lovely is night with stars and round or sickled moon,
Lovely are trees, forever lovely, whether in winter
Or musical midsummer or when they bud and tassel
Or crown themselves with stormy splendors in the fall.
But lovelier than day or night or trees in blossom
Is there no secret infinite loveliness behind?

Beautiful is water, running on rocks in mountains,
Or bosoming sunsets where the valley rivers ponder;
Beautiful is ocean with its myriad colors,
Its southern blues and purples, its arctic gray and silver,
Blown into green frost-fretted or wine-dark in the evening.
But still more beautiful than waters calm or cloven,
Than ocean thunder-maned or floored for delicate springtime,
Is there no beauty visible save to our eyes?

Marvellous is the grass, friendly and very clean,
Though intimate with all the dead, the ceaseless dead,
It has great heart and makes the ancient earth forgetful;
It is not troubled by the wind and from the storm
It learns a radiance; all night it wears the dew
And in the morning it is glad with a pure gladness.
More marvellous than dew-strown morning grasses, is there
No brave immortal joyousness that wrought the grass?

Who lifteth in the eastern sky the dark, gold moon?
Who painteth green and purple on the blackbird's throat?

What hand of rapture scattereth sunshine through the rain
And flingeth round the barren boughs of spring returned
Dim fire? Who stenciled with caught breath the moth's wide wing
And lit the ruby in his eyes? Whose ecstasy
Set silver ripples on the racing thunder-cloud
And flared the walls of storm with terrible dead green?
What dreamer fretted dew upon the flat-leafed corn
And twined in innocence of useless perfect art
The morning-glory with its bubble blue, soon gone?
Was there no hand that braided autumn branches in
Their solemn brede and stained them with a sombre rust?
Was there no love conceived the one-starred, rivered evening,
And dipped in crocus fire the gray horns of the moon?

They say there never was a god men loved but died —
Dead is Astarte, Astoreth is dead, and Baal;
Zeus and Jehovah share a single grave and deep;
Olympus hears no laughter, Sinai no voice;
Spring comes, but Freia comes not nor Persephone:
On temple plinth and porch the random grasses run;
Of all their priests alone the white-stoled stars are faithful.
Dead are the gods, forever dead! And yet — and yet —
Who lifteth in the eastern sky the dark, gold moon? . . .
There is a loveliness outlasts the temporal gods,
A beauty that, when all we know as beautiful
Is gone, will fashion in delight the forms it loves,
In that wide room where all our stars are but a drift
Of glimmering petals down an air from far away.

TO ONE DYING

When you are gone the stars will be content,
Gazing as always in the deep of ocean;
There will not be a fluttering bird that cries
With anguish more importunate beneath the moon;
The rolling seasons with unhindered flow
Of bloom and scarlet tatterings and feathered ice
Will fold the world in loveliness as now.
But I shall have but these, and these with glory shorn
And half invisible because you went. . . .
Then I shall pass. And none because of me
Will be less glad of spring or watch with eyes that blur
The evening's one bright star.
Only, I think, in some remote demesne
That you have learned to love regretfully
There will be added brightness and a cry
Of patient waiting done.

COURAGE

Into a brown wood flew a brown bird
In the winter time:
The sky was dark with snow unfallen,
The leaves were bent with rime.

Once north he flew, once south he flew,
He perched in a naked tree.
He looked into the dismal dusk
And whistled merrily.

HIS PEACE

I love to think of them at dawn
Beneath the frail pink sky
Casting their nets in Galilee
And fish-hawks circling by.

Casting their nets in Galilee
Just off the hills of brown,
Such happy, simple fisherfolk
Before the Lord walked down.

Contented, peaceful fishermen,
Before they ever knew
The peace of God that filled their hearts
Brim-full, and broke them too.

Young John who trimmed the flapping sail,
Homeless, in Patmos died.
Peter who hauled the teeming net,
Head-down, was crucified.

The peace of God, it is no peace,
But strife closed in the sod.
Yet, brothers, pray for but one thing,
The marvellous peace of God.

HYMN OF THE MAGDALENE

I could not see the morning stars He made,
Nor hear the morning birds who pray aloud;
The flowers were not my brothers nor the winds
Who blow the silver-lined trees to cloud.

No light upon the hills, no purple bloom
Behind the lifting moon in summer time;
No sweetness in the everyday of life,
No peace, no tears, no rest in Fancy's clime.

But now my sin is done and I can lift
Mine eyes unto the mansions that He made,
And I am wrapped about with holiness
And drenched in glories that can never fade.

Yea, I have put mine olden sin away
And broke and strewn my heart beneath His feet;
His wisdom robbeth me of any fear,
His tenderness upon my mouth is sweet.

O holy light upon the sacred hills,
O birds that flash above the flowered sod,
O clean, immortal beauty of the earth,
I have returned to you and to my God!

BETH MARIE

Impatiently she drew her breath,
So new was life, so wild:
But patiently she waited death
And when he touched her, smiled.

She who had never wished to die,
Who had such fear of pain,
Was tranquil as an evening sky
That flowers from spent rain.

For us her loss was different
From all we could suppose:
The calm of Spartan stars she lent
Who only seemed a rose.

AUTUMN SONG

Time was when billowy autumn skies
And red rain-dabbled leaves
Would fling the tears across my eyes.
'Tis happiness that grieves.

Now lengths of scarlet-littered rain
May lash the howling eaves;
My eyes are casual as pain.
'Tis happiness that grieves.

FOR A WORD

How shall you ever know the adoration
I spread like samite cloths beneath your feet?
How shall you guess the brooding desolation
Learned from your eyes so passionless and sweet?

There must be some word like the star that pauses
In summer's rose transparency of dusk,
Or like the bird-note heard through slumber's gauzes
The unsilvering hour before dew warms to musk.

There must be some one word that is more tender
Than any word my lips have ever learned,
Without which I can never, never render
In speech the love your cool sweet love has earned.

You know as none my heart's forlorn distresses,
Its passionate tides, its daily tint and glow, —
Why must there be within obscure recesses
This tenderness of love you cannot know?

SAFE SECRETS

I will carry terrible things to the grave with me:

So much must never be told.

My eyes will be ready for sleep and my heart for dust

With all the secrets they hold.

The piteous things alive in my memory

Will be safe in that soundless dwelling:

In the clean loam, in the dark where the dumb roots rust

I can sleep without fear of telling.

YOUTH

When I look on the youth of the world I weep:
Their eyes are so shadowless and candid,
They run so eagerly to meet the future,
They are so beautiful even in their passions —
So restless to live, so fickle, so yearning;
They have such faith in happiness,
Such songs in their hearts, such dreams in their eyes.
The light of them shines like light on the meadows,
Their laughter is sturdy and full of innocence;
Their vehemence, their proud assurance,
And most, their sweetness and their happiness
I watch till my eyes are blurred with pity.
For they will learn and wither with their learning;
Their flower look will die a flower's death.
And one will learn of love and one of want
And one of death and one of weakened will,
But all will learn and all will weep alone.
There will be no shining left for death to darken,
And their lovely throats and eyes will not be lovely
Before the dust corrodes them, long before.
Cold pain will kiss them and they will not smile
As once they smiled when peach-blow kisses fell;
And fear will blanch the red run of their blood,
And doubt uncurve the bow of their sweet mouths,
And tears that were a gust of gold-shot rain
Will turn a brackish drink for their poor hearts,
And they will know what we have known too long.
Spare them, O heartless gods who spared not us!

SIGHT AND SOUND

I saw a handful of white stars
Blooming in a width of grass;
I saw a cherry tree, snow-white,
In woods as naked-cold as glass.

I saw a blue leaf zigzag down —
The bluebird with his russet throat!
From out the sallow cane-brake stole
Another bluebird's aching note.

The blue, the white, I wrote them down
To soothe my heart when spring was over.
No need, or help, alas, to write
That bluebird's " Lover, lover, lover! "

SHE GRIEVES IN THE DUSK

Ah, he was white and slender
And the lamplight turned him gold
And his groping hands were tender
And his kisses never bold.
How shall I sleep through the long, long nights
In my wide cold-sheeted bed,
Hearing the wild geese crying in their flights,
And me afraid,
And him not by to turn and hold me to his heart
In the way he knew,
And me no longer folded to his heart,
Thinking him true!