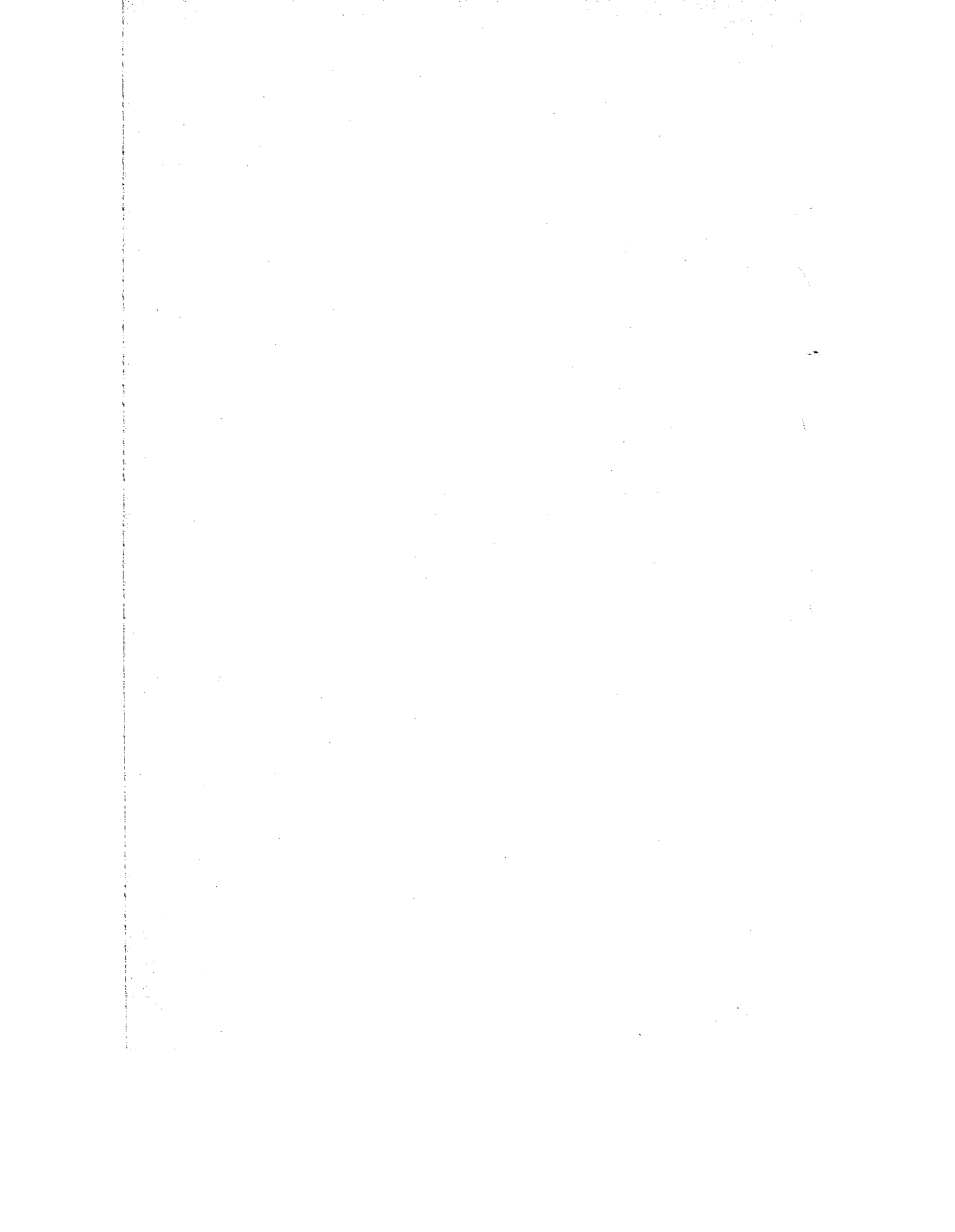


PART III  
ENZIO'S KINGDOM, AND OTHER POEMS

II  
DELTA SKETCHES



IN THE DELTA

The river country's wide and flat  
And blurred ash-blue with sun,  
And there all work is dreams come true.  
All dreams are work begun.

The silted river made for us  
The black and mellow soil  
And taught us as we conquered him  
Courage and faith and toil.

The river town that water oaks  
And myrtles hide and bless  
Has broken every law except  
The law of kindness.

And north and south and east the fields  
Of cotton close it round,  
Where golden billows of the sun  
Break with no shade or sound.

Dear is the town, but in the fields  
A little house could be,  
If built with care and auspices,  
A heart's felicity.

O friend, who love not much indoors  
Or lamp-lit, peopled ways,  
What of a field and house to pass  
Our residue of days?

We'd learn of fret and labor there  
A patience that we miss  
And be content content to be  
Nor wish nor hope for bliss.

With the immense untrammelled sun  
For brother in the fields,  
And every night the stars' crusade  
Flashing to us their shields,

We'd meet, perhaps, some dusk as we  
Turned home to well-earned rest,  
Unhurried Wisdom, tender-eyed,  
A pilgrim and our guest.

## GREENVILLE TREES

### THE LOMBARDY POPLARS:

Captive in this drab alien land,  
We dreamed of all the great and wise  
Who took the roads our shadows spanned  
With song on lips and sword on thighs.

King Richard fared, one morn of May,  
Our leafy lane to Palestine  
With Blondel following. Well-a-day,  
They sang of God and love and wine!

We leaned to pity once that girl  
Who left the Loire one dripping spring,  
So red of mouth, so brown of curl,  
To be love's slave and Scotland's king.

Crusaders, knights, and troubadours  
Rode through our golden-panelled shade:  
We never thought these songless shores  
Could rival that dead cavalcade.

But, petulant of simple joys,  
Loving Death's mother, blind Romance,  
We watched the passionate Delta boys  
Stride down the street that leads to France.

## THE CHINA-BERRIES:

Thousands of years ago,  
We were weaving in moonlit Manchu gardens  
Webs and arabesques of purple  
On the moon-gray pebbled paths  
For slender empresses,  
In silver, lavender, and rose,  
To tread on with their fuchsia-tinted sandals.  
And one, on such a night,  
Paused in our falling veils of subtle fragrance  
And lifted up her arms  
To the weary, much-prayed-to moon,  
And wept for love.  
But we have never seen these pale new people  
Lift their arms to the exquisite moon  
Or linger in our perfume.  
They seem unconscious  
Of the marvel of our blossoms,  
Our stamens purpler-black than clematis,  
Our delicate wisteria-tinged corolla.  
Yet slender-fingered undulant princesses  
Have bit their coral lips  
And slain in anger  
Prostrate imperial attendants  
Because no loom could match our secret dyes.

Here we must tolerate small girls  
With strange, sun-colored hair  
Who thread our blossoms

And loop them with coarse clover-chains  
About their throats.  
Or worse, near summer-time,  
Small boys, with eyes that have no darkness,  
Will clamber into our branches,  
Wounding our tender bark of satin,  
Snapping our wonderful patterned leaves,  
And pull our berries,  
Hard, green, with infinitesimal speckles;  
Then filling our indignant shade with laughter,  
Jolly, uncouth, immoderate,  
Mash them into their popguns  
And frighten the sparrows even  
And the reverent ancient negroes  
With their insolent bombardment. . . .

Only the winter robins love us,  
And then our boughs are naked,  
And our shrivelled berries  
Hang down in milky yellow clusters,  
Fingered by faded winds,  
Against a gray interminable sky.  
Yet then too we are beautiful!

THE LOCUSTS:

In vain we fill the winter's palms  
With rush of round, thin, golden alms.  
The winter has no care for us  
But breaks our brittle branches thus,  
Abjuring calms.

Yet one week of the year is ours:  
We sun our creamy, scented flowers  
And madden all the town. Oh, they  
Are powerless, though prim, to stay  
Our fragrant powers.

The crowded church we bloom before  
Leaves carelessly an open door:  
Young sinners' eyes desert their books  
And meet with long-lashed pagan looks  
And read no more.

Ah, watch for them, when shadows wait,  
Walking the levee, slow, sedate!  
But blush to guess the darling sights  
When perfumes are the only lights,  
And it grows late.

THE WATER OAKS:

Once in our branches  
Swarms of green parakeets in seething turmoil settled,  
Chattering north from the sweltering rank pampas,  
Clothing us doubly in delightful leaves,  
And suddenly departing.  
But long ago, one violet spring,  
We watched their wavering throngs melt down the south  
To come again no more. . . .  
We have been darkened by clouds of pigeons  
Weltering like a cyclone  
Across the watery rose sunset.



But some great death  
Slew them: they come no more. . . .  
More beautiful than all the wings that fly in beauty,  
The wild swans,  
Noble and full of fellowship,  
Came in old days  
Down the broad curves and brimming tremble of the river,  
Or overland, at night, against the stars.  
Oppressed with solemn joy  
And ever-urgent purpose undisclosed,  
They hovered in the twilight of cool autumn  
Or mounted on the sunrise, trumpeting  
And glad of rest, though brief.  
For all their beauty  
Each year we saw their glistening ranks dissolve,  
Dissolve and waste, till now  
Once in a winter and with pain  
We spy perhaps a lone white wanderer,  
Mateless and without friend,  
Circling uncertainly and with hoarse piteous cries,  
Till mercifully, with no thought of mercy,  
The gray-eyed hunter on the river bars,  
Making of murder sport, deprives  
Him of his loneliness, the deep sky of a swan.  
So too the races passed that lived beneath our leaves —  
The patient, thought-pressed builders of the mounds  
That came from mystery,  
Returning whence they came;  
The stealthy copper tribes  
Whose arrows slit the blue beyond our heights,  
Who, making moonlight haggard with their fires,

Danced in bad triumph at their brothers' death,  
But in the end found never a cause to dance.  
So too shall pass their pallid conquerors  
Who now in slaying us have made the land  
Naked and without loveliness of shade.  
Though they have planted seed where once we towered  
And hemmed the river's strength  
And wedged us in their curveless hot-floored towns,  
They too shall pass,  
And we shall watch them die.

In the beginning there were three  
And in the end there shall be only three:  
The trees, the river,  
And the outspread lonely tree of heaven,  
Whose boughs are blossomy apple-wreaths at dawn,  
Autumnal red and purple in the sunset,  
And laden, night long, with the fruitage of the stars,  
A harvest for some still-delaying husbandman.

*THE HOLY WOMEN*

I have seen Mary at the cross  
And Mary at the tomb  
And Mary weeping as she spread her hair  
In a leper's room.

But it was not in Bethany  
Or groping up Calvary hill  
I learned how women break their hearts to ease  
Another's ill.

Compassionate and wise in pain,  
Most faithful in defeat,  
The holy Marys I have watched and loved  
Live on our street.

## A BURNISHED CALM

If I could be as calm as willow branches  
When the sunlight turns them copper-pink and gold  
And they lift their slender wands in the winter sunshine  
From out the red-brown coffee-weeds into the blueness;  
If I could know the calm of willow branches  
When the hollows of the woods hold azure smoke  
And the southern winter blurs and tarnishes;  
If I could feel their passive unstrained certainty  
As they wait the still-uneager, leaf-laden springtime,  
Not fearing it will never come or come  
Less beautiful, not doubting the return in time  
Of downy buds and wrinkled burgeoning  
And all the filmy lustre of warm days;  
If I could be like willows by the river-bank in winter,  
I think that was remembered and presaged,  
The drugging sense of doom and old disaster,  
Would not oppress and strangle me as now.  
But I should have a faith unflawed by these,  
Discerning through the mad inclement now  
The right's august recurrence in the race,  
And like the leafless willows by the river  
Wait in the winter sunshine trustfully  
And with a burnished calm.

*LEVEE NOCTURNE*

A swan hangs brooding where the light  
Is colorless and cool —  
Or is it but the moon above  
Her amethystine pool?

The powdered dusk is sifting down,  
The purple willows blur,  
The air awaits its stars and bats  
And unseen moths that whirl.

The houses light their lamps of gold  
Where bread is blessed and broken;  
The noises of the day seem but  
A foolish word once spoken.

Only the quietness remains,  
So tender and so deep,  
When the weary, weary pent-in-life  
Escape awhile in sleep.

## A MEMORY

I saw four days of spring come floating down  
Among the hard-gray lonely days of winter.  
They came with full-blown warmth down the blue air  
Like four pink petals shook from a loose wild rose  
Or four pink clouds crossing an April sunrise  
Or four young pilgrims stoled in misty rose,  
Smelling of musk and with an Eastern grace.  
And as they fell, softly, one after one,  
On the shrivelled earth, delight returned, long absent:  
The single trees in the fields, the many trees  
In the woods, wrapped them in webs of rainbow gauze;  
Lads dreamed of braided tresses, and the breeze  
Of clear, clear water falling in pure sunlight;  
Violets came, the purple and the gray  
Wild sort that flaunt themselves and have no smell;  
The jonquils trooped out in their sky-gold dresses,  
Nodding and whispering like girls from school;  
The great oaks seemed a haze the breeze might scatter,  
Though blackbirds creaked and coughed on every bough;  
The weeping willows, amber gales at anchor,  
Danced in the rhythm of spring waterfalls;  
And there was wistfulness and joy four days and nights.  
Then came the frost:  
The wizened buds lay speckled on the ground,  
Winter came back, more bitter for its going.  
Four days of spring and of a spring long past!  
You ask me why I should remember them?

If you had ever loved and been beloved,  
Even so briefly as four days and nights,  
You would remember many things perhaps  
That now I think you do not even see.

SONG

Sorrowful leaves of the winter oak  
That cannot fall and cannot flutter,  
Clutching, with love too deep to utter,  
The branches that loved you when green was  
    your cloak —  
Fall, fall, for your green is gone,  
And none loves love for itself alone,  
And a faithful lover's a worrisome thing  
In the spring, the spring, the tender spring.



### OUTCAST

A summer's twilight ramble brought me where  
I too shall sleep, if prayers are answered still.  
No sad particular errand led me there,  
But thoughts I let, that evening, have their will.

The graves are very quiet in that light,  
Simple, despite their angels and their urns;  
"Asleep in Jesus," "Rest in Peace," the trite  
Poor epitaphs, seem then the due one earns.

Each bore its name and date, and so appealed  
To cherish what already was forgot;  
Some still could boast of wreaths, some, hardly healed,  
Of wilted flowers and a mown grass-plot.

I passed with half a smile and half a sigh,  
And came to those wild grasses where they too,  
With no rememberer to tend them, lie  
With equal peace in hammocked rags of dew.

I found there, by a purple iron-weed  
Hung with black beetles, one lone slab that bore  
No name, no date, but only this strange screed:  
"Nature, who played the trick, can laugh no more."

Whether that outcast grave was tenanted  
Or waits for one still walking earth's wide floor  
I knew not, yet in fear I stooped and read:  
"Nature, who played the trick, can laugh no more."

*THE DELTA AUTUMN*

Give me an ebbing sunset of the fall  
With chilly flare of cosmos-colored light,  
A white-winged moon in frozen, downward flight,  
Ethereal, naked trees where no birds call;  
Leave me to watch my infinite, gaunt river,  
Its solemn width, its willow-purpled coil,  
Its floor of hammered brass and azure oil,  
Its silence where far strands of wild geese quiver —  
And I'll not miss the hopeful, passionate spring,  
Spring that knows naught of thought or masterful will  
Or conquered grief or peace when cold winds chill,  
But sings and struts with sunlight-dabbled wing  
And is too sweet where men yet hate and kill.  
Autumn as autumn comes in my dim-lustered land —  
Of that be my dreaming under the fennel-crust sand.