Sumnest the spirit of a newer age,
The unprophetic confidence
Of this new-sinewed western world.

Cease, cease thy song of triumph and unwisdom!
To-night I long to hear an alien sweetness that
Long vision hath made sad.
Oh, for a silver-steepèd garden overseas,
Hung with too poignant perfumes,
Where thy frail sister lifts her pitious cry,
Her little hidden cry,
Sharp with a hundred centuries of pain,
Hurt with the constant woe,
The weariness and all the tears
Of generations that have gone, darkly!
Oh, to forget this western flaunt of living!
To breathe in those far lands that air
Breathèd by dreamers dead, lovely and purposeless;
To hear the anguished nightingale that Sappho heard;
To see beneath the moon the olive trees
And cypresses asleep, as when Antinous,
With eastern-scented brows and poppy lids
Looked forth, godlike, upon them;
To catch, perhaps, — the myrtle boughs between —
Glimpse of that unforgettable, sweet sea
That heard of yore Sicilian shepherd boys
Piping across their shining pastures,
That still, upon the shores of Ithaca,
Bearèth the blue, Homeric, star-entangled tide!
ALL SOULS' DAY

Quiet with amber light
The pale enfolding afternoon;
In sleep the slow leaves fall;
Tranquil as misting tears or swoon,
The pendent blue that bears
No cloud except the daylight moon.

Opal, a-drowse, and vast,
The river takes its southward way;
And southwards sweep the birds,
Swift and mysterious and grey. . . .
Do so the gusty dead
Wing the warm air in troops to-day?

Surely this peacefulness
Of feathered fields of golden-rod,
The wistful, songless trees,
And asters clouding from the sod,
Them, homing, lure from out
The bleak infinitudes of God.

Oh, surely all the south
Our prayers and dear remembrance make
Calls from the cold, blue tides
Their wings to-day, and they forsake
Their solemn ways for us,
Remembering death and all the ache.
And thou, so lately one —
Not all the new adventuring
In starry realms can hold
Thee from return. To-day thy wing,
Pausing above my heart,
Doth courage and assurance bring.
A PAGE'S ROAD SONG

(13TH CENTURY)

Jesu,

If Thou wilt make
Thy peach trees bloom for me,
And fringe my bridle path both sides
With tulips, red and free,
If Thou wilt make Thy skies as blue
As ours in Sicily,
And wake the little leaves that sleep
On every bending tree —
I promise not to vexen Thee
That Thou shouldst make eternally
Heaven my home;
But right contentedly,
A singing page I'll be
Here, in Thy springtime,
Jesu.
SOARING

My heart is a bird to-night
That streams on the washed, icy air.
My heart is a bird to-night
'Twixt the stars and the branches bare.

My heart is abroad to-night
Rushed on by the fierce, crystal air.
No nest will it seek to-night
In the branches, ice-brittle and bare.

Wide-wingèd my heart to-night
With joy on the surge of the air.
What matter that spirits of night
Make shudder the trees, lean and bare!
FOR MUSIC

O singer, canst thou summon up
    The early blue-bird’s wing?
The pang of those uncertain days
    That swoon with unborn spring?

O singer, canst thou summon up
    The crimson of the rose,
The silver gloom of April dawns,
    The breathless unrepose;

The yearning in the dark divine,
    Deep woods, a-bloom and dumb,
The starry, tear-blurred nights of May
    That bring delirium?

O singer, canst thou summon up
    In music all the spring
Whose crowding incense caught my heart
    So long ago? — Then sing!
AUTUMN TUNE

Sweeter than spring, sweeter than spring,
These brown and blue and lingering
    Soft days that wing
Like filmy dreams across the world,
One by one unfurled, unfurled,
Where the ripe fields slumber and glitter and swing.

Sadder than song, sadder than song,
The choral drowse with madness strong
    That all day long
The locusts lift to their god the sun,
For joy of the life that is almost done —
Raptured and shrill and regretless throng.

Wilder than wings, wilder than wings,
The flight of the golden leaves when springs
    The fear that flings
Them swirling and shining up from the bare
Dark branches that reach to the calm of the air
Where death is a-dream on azure wings.
A SEA-BIRD.

I cry, I cry
Into the night. You cannot hear
Along the waves, the sea's despair
I gleam and fly, a haunted flight;
A cry, a cry
Into the night.

Lone, alone,
And the sea is mad.
Mourning, mourning,
Broken and strown.

It nurseth the dead,
The dead alone —
And my heart that is mad.
ECSTASY

(AFTER VERLAINE)

The moon shines now
White in the woods;
From every bough
Cometh in floods
A voice divine . . .
O love of mine!

The pool of jet,
Deep mirror sees
In silhouette
The willow trees
That moan and gleam . . .
O hour of dream!

Tender and vast,
A peacefulness
Drifts downward past
The shadowless
Star-purple night . . .
Hour of delight!
IN AN AUTUMN WOOD

Thou, too, O bronze-eyed darling of the feast,
Under the deep, brown leaves and faded sky
At last wilt lie,
Forgetful of the joy thy beauty leased.

But ere that time, how many times, alas,
Wilt thou with careless hand sweep all the vain,
Taut strings of pain
That are my heart nor hear the hurt chords pass.

Almost I wish to-day that thou didst lie
Beyond the leaves, unsummonably still —
So well, so ill
I love thy loveliness that hears no cry.
PRISON SONG

Beat, beat, wings of my heart,
Stormy and swift as you will!
Beat and break, but the walls of the world
Will hold you captive still.

Oh, the bird of the moon flies into the west
To dip in the sun's lagoon,
And, following her, the wild geese blur
In the depths of a golden swoon.

But, heart of mine, O bird of my heart,
Tho' they curve to the sunken stars,
You follow not with the strain of your wings,
For between — the iron bars.

THE RETURN OF THE LEAVES

Leaves and the sweet-choired blue;
And my heart set free again.
Leaves, leaves and the dew;
Free, but not free from pain.

The laughter of June is shed;
And my heart gives heed again.
But, ah, for youth that is fled,
Fled, with all but its pain.
MARCH MAGIC

Once more the fickle birds return
Across the sloping seas,
And strew the tender fields again
With their old melodies.

The sky is magic as the month,
Low sun, high stars between,
The icy winds have washed it clear;
But it, too, dreams of green.

The boats are breathing on the sea;
They cannot wait for men;
Some undertide has brought them word
Straight from a blue-starred fen.

Unpiloted they steal away,
No man shall see them soon,
The sea birds follow but a mile,
Then leave them to the moon.

We, too, shall steal upon the spring
With amber sails blown wide;
Shall drop, some day, behind the moon,
Borne on a star-blue tide.

Enchanted ports we, too, shall touch,
Cadiz or Cameroon;
Nor other pilot need besides
A magic wisp of moon.
ST. FRANCIS TO THE BIRDS

Daytime? The stars quite gone?
O brother Sleep, you tripped me in my prayers,
And bound me in your scarves of colored dreams!
Pray God the brethren find me not
Flat in the dew and just awake.
Fie! fie! thou slug-a-bed!

Up! kneel to thine orisons — compose thy robe —
And get thee from this green and idle wood.

Back to the world!
Alas, the summer air hath blown
Shame from my heart! Jesu, the prayers must wait —
Light-hearted day on naked feet
Runs thro’ the woods, and I must watch her here.

Shaking the boughs above my head,
And winning with her rogueries the leaves’ applause.

Delicious so! . . .
Idler, pagan, Francis, up! Ah, well —

Prophets and patriarchs!
What company is this?
The blessed birds of God —
Silent and orderly, row on row,

Thick on the branches, scholarwise on the grass —
Sparrows and swallows, bobolinks and larks —
Tiny and big, and gay- and hempen-gowned —
Attentive all and silent; eyes on me —

Littlest children, my brothers — O birds,
Good morrow! For your presence thanks. . . .
And yet, may I confess —
Beseeming you will not mistake my ignorance
For lack of gentleness or knightly courtesy —
I know not quite what mission draws you here?
Only has Father Noah seen such multitudes.
Is it, perchance, with tree-top news you come
Requiring such deliverance?
Alack, I have not any roof at all,
Much less an ark.
But should your needs petition one, content yourselves;
The brethren shall be willing carpenters.
Your watchful eyes and silence, courteous and prim,
Betray I have mistook your coming’s cause.
Perhaps on your first-waking flights,
Beholding me so quiet in the grass,
You thought me dead, and came with friendly haste
To hide in leaves my obvious corruption.
Three hops and a silver chuckle —
Robin, irreverent robin, wrong again?
Ho! ho! at last the dear God sends me sense!
A sermon 'tis! Robin, I guessed!
Come nearer, darling children, close!
O lovely cloud of wings! O tiny storm of twitter!
What barren faith was ours
To pass you by these many days
Without one salutation in Christ's name,
Or news of His impending kingdom once!
Let these poor words win your forgiveness,
And His, whose frailest ones we have o'erlooked.
Brethren!...

Ahem!—

(Saints! what text can serve!)

"In those days Jesus said:
My Father's kingdom may be likened to
A grain of mustard seed,
Which, being sown, is smallest of all seeds,
But, growing up, is greatest of all herbs,
Till in the shadow of its branches lodge
The birds of heaven."

Yet, not these words He never spoke.

He knew as you or I

The idle ways of summer, and the fields

Where poppies in their silken kerchiefs crowd the wheat,

And, when the dry, quick autumn winds had stripped

their scarlet,

He, too, had seen their tiny million seeds —

Mere dust beside the mustard's burliness,

Mark nodded or forgot, poor fisherman!

How often thus they understood Him not!

And in these far-off days their surface words we seize,

Set up, adore, and miss the gospel underneath

Forgetting they were simple men,

And He, dear God, who only aimed at simpleness.

But still He did say Heaven's kingdom was a tree,

A mighty tree with branches' room for all,

And sunny babblement of leaves where all

His wingèd ones might skim and shine at ease.

O little, brown minores,

Come — let's skip the text! But after it
In any well-conducted sermon comes, you know, 
The exhortation. Now I should proclaim 
The evil of your lives and urge repentance! 
When summer dawn is here? and only choristers? 
How may it be? 
What evils may I warn your hearts against? 
What words of guidance give? 
None come to me. . . . No ownership is yours, 
But winds and trees and evening waters and the sun 
Are yours in largesse, without counterclaim — 
The eighth commandment was not meant for you! 
I would not coax you from your ways of lechery; 
For not your will, but God's, 
Fills all the April air with mating and the chirp 
Of love. Obedient be to His good season. 
I think ye do no murder, yet — 
Sometimes it grieves my very soul to see 
The lesser brethren fly your swift pursuit. 
If God directed so you take your livelihood, 
'Tis well, but spare, I pray, their tiny span of bliss 
If food less petulant may serve instead; 
Nor their destruction ever make your sport. 
Little children, no rebuke is meant; 
I only pray your gentleness. . . . 
Indeed, indeed, He set your flight 
Above the paths of sin! Advise? conjure? 
I do you wrong. Rather, I think, 
He put it in your hearts to come to me 
Not judging I could give 
Morsel of help or little twig of truth, 
But that the comfort of your presence might be mine.
For sometimes, little brethren of the woods,
We, in the common world beneath your trees,
So clearly see the weakness and the sin about,
That only them we see, and we forget

The holiness that still persists, the light, yea, God, Himself!
Belike He feared for me such hour,
And in His care sent you, His seraphs of the trees.
For you, tho' of the world, share not its taint,
Nor breathe nor know its sin.

If we lived so, the sudden curve
And anxious fanning of soft plumes
Would stir our bending heads,
And off we'd fly to — to that same mustard tree of yours!

Was ever such a sermon?
I, no text; no morals, you!
Let's call it then no sermon, but instead
I'll sit within the shadow of this tree
With you companionably close,
And while the hoyden breeze on emerald wings
Let's through the shimmering lances of the sun,
And hums aloud for wantonness — we'll gossip!

Oh, not of sin or other grave concern,
But right familiarly of what we know — His life.
Saints! what a fluttering
And sparkle of expectancy!
Upon my lap at last, robin of mine?
'Twas thus about His knees that day
The children came and begged for tales, "A
Vexing poor Matthew, and bequeathing us
His dearest page.
Let me see... ah...

The book is not so full of tales for birds;
'Twas writ for men, you see.
I doubt not men had far the greater need—
'Twas not because he loved you less!
But now I do recall a story; one you'll love—
That day by Jordan!
They had been urchin comrades years before,
That lonely Jordan prophet and our Lord,
But him the wilderness and stars and solitude
Had swallowed up this many a day.
So now his eyes were full of tears
To see, across the grass where all the people sat,
The little boy he loved run to him, call his name,
And in the cool, clear water kneel
To beg his blessing.
The desert had not dried his heart away;
And so he wept, and clasped Him close, and prayed...
But I'd forgot the Holy Ghost!
He could have been
A scarlet cloud of seraphim, a lightning bolt,
Fire or darkness, what He willed!
But what chose He? what creature honored there?
From out of Heaven He flew—a lovely dove!
That was a day for birds!
Sure, you must love the Holy Ghost—and keep
Your hearts and plumage clean and bright for Him,
And make your mourning baths baptismal in a way!
Another story I recall, dear children.
But whether it be writ or only dreamed
I cannot say... Gethsemane...
My heart is there so much, I do remember more,
Perhaps, than they that set it down. . . .
It is not spring talk for a golden dawn,
But even you, gleamers of God, should know.
Before the end He longed to come once more
To that familiar garden that He loved.
Its olive trees and sandy barrenness
That drank the moon were home to Him,
For other home He had not, save
Such waste and lonely places off the way
As men forgot. And so that night, the last, He knew,
That He might pray together with the twelve,
He came unto the garden where it lay
All full of moonlight and of silence,
And with Him brought for comfort them He loved.
Indeed, He loved us all — too well, too well —
But ah, the mortal of His heart had need to choose
For special tenderness, those few.
How tired He was! Oh, weary unto death;
And needed most mere human love!
But they whom He had chosen, whom He loved,
His own, His very own — they slept!
God! God!
Had Lancelot or Tristram been His knights,
They had not slept. . . .
When those we love have failed us in our need
There is no bitterness undrunk for death. . . .
That night, as thus He lay,
After the prayer, too tired for tears,
And even God forgot Him with the rest,
I think that one of you, beholding from
The shadows where you hid, that agony,
Trembled and paused and bent your head,
Then, for you knew no other, quavered forth
Your silver serenade for healing to His heart.
The torches and the sudden faces broke
Your song. Likely He never heard
But only you betought to comfort Him that night.

They slept God! Let me back into the world!
Lest coming suddenly again
He finds them sleeping still.
Good-bye, good-bye!

Remember to give thanks each day to Him
Who made your feathers clean and fair and warm,
Who set within your hearts clear springs of happiness,
Who shares with you His home, the sacred sky.
And I beseech you, little brothers, think
On us, who, soaring, never leave the earth.
O swallows, should you see, when evening comes,
One leaning from his darkened window, dark,
His eyes unlighted, bitter with the day's defeat,
Toss where your vagrant flight may catch his gaze;
For, as you scatter up the golden sky,
Haply he may remember Jacob's dream,
The ladder and the wings, and, holpen, send his heart
In God's light careless way to climb with you.
And you, sweet singers of the dark,
That tune your serenades but by the stars,
Love gardens most;
For garden casements do unlock themselves
With magic silentness unto your spell,