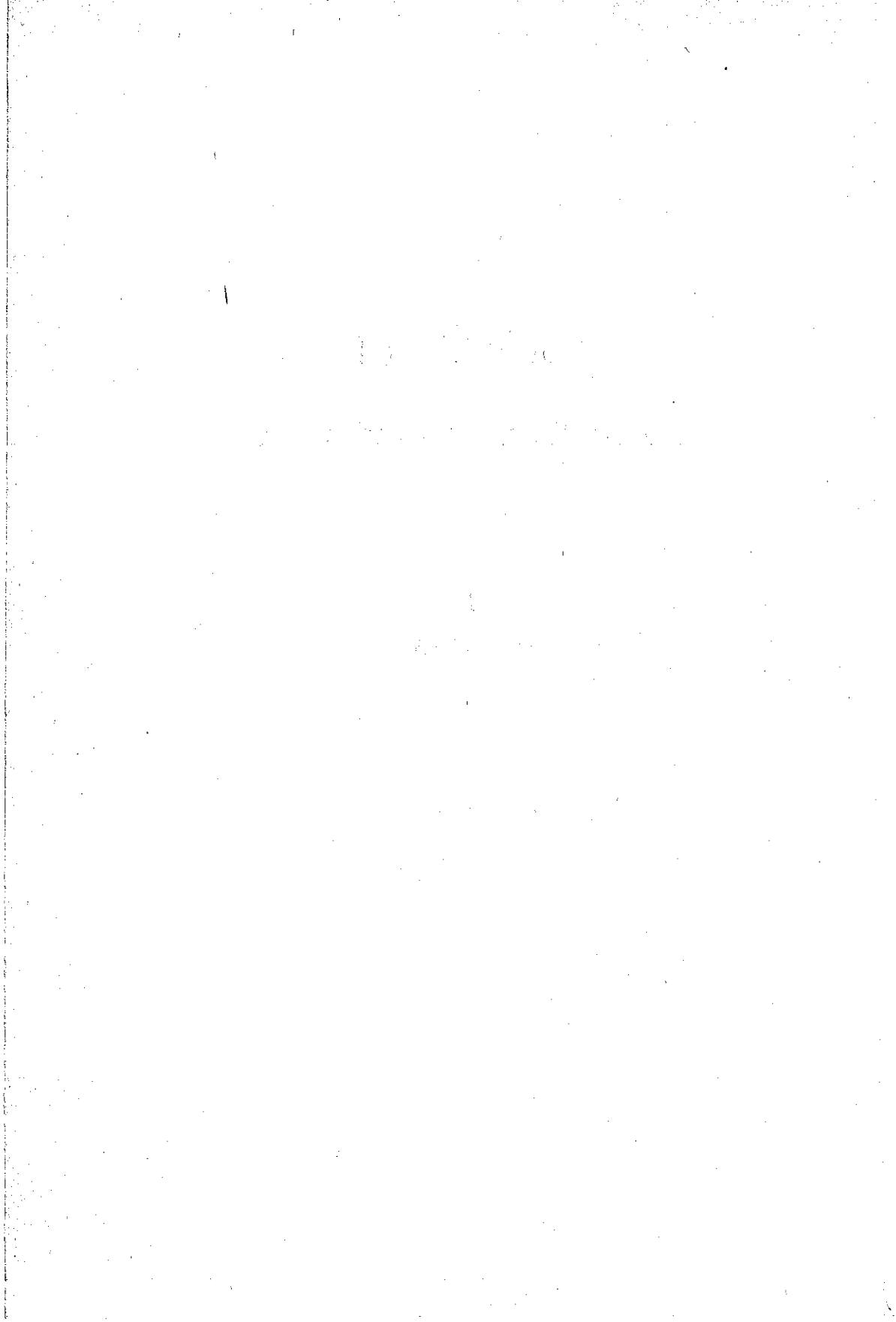


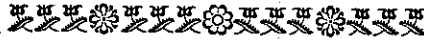
PART II

IN APRIL ONCE, AND OTHER POEMS

I

SICILIANA





Regretting that anything which bears his name should not be lovelier, but knowing that with him there would be no regret to find it here inscribed, I dedicate this poem of which we spoke so often to Major WILLIAM SINKLER MANNING. It was given him to die as only the best deserve, gloriously, in battle, leading his troops in the attack on Hill 378, November the sixth, 1918. Life, as we know it, lost a lover of all that was beautiful and right, and I, my dear friend.

IN APRIL ONCE

Characters	}	DAVID	SERLE DE LANLARAZON
		GUIDO	FELICE
		HUGO	GUARDS

THE YEAR A.D. 1220; a castle near Florence. A court on top of one of the bastions. To the right, a crenelated parapet over which a glimpse is had of an April landscape — hills, poplars, deep yellow sunlight. Fifty feet below, unseen, runs the road between Florence and the north. At the back, the walls of the castle and a wide doorway leading into the interior.

During the action, late afternoon changes to sunset, sunset to twilight, and at the end it is almost dark.

As the scene opens, the sound of retreating horses' hoofs is heard. DAVID is standing on the parapet watching. He is twenty-two, strongly built, blond, with blue, wide-set eyes and sullen, brooding expression, simply dressed, with coat of mail and sword. He whistles and GUIDO's head appears at a window.

GUIDO is of the same age, a trifle taller and more slender, very dark, beautiful, full of high spirits and humorous gusto. His dark eyes are vivid and changing. He is elegantly dressed as a courtier.

DAVID *throws him a rope with a rope ladder attached. GUIDO fastens it and descends to the court.*

GUIDO (*as he descends*). Thou are the knightliest jailer that ever stood

Betwixt light heart and the free world. Were I
 The Emperor, thou shouldst be seneschal
 Of my Sicilian Joyous Guard, instead
 Of jailer and henchman to the Florentines.
 There lie the fragrant spaces, the glistening air,
 The very troubadour and gypsy time o' year;
 And here am I, hindered and snared, mewed up,
 Because, forsooth, I sing the Emperor's songs,
 Set off his colors, bear his pleasantries
 To some adorèd lady of Provence,
 To which your gross and choleric Florentines
 Attach significance and secret import.
 Jailer, the very spring hath need of me,
 And that sweet southward-wending road
 Would fringe itself, I swear, with gayer tulips
 Were I but liltng to its guidance south.
 Couldn't you let me out, David?

DAVID. No, I could not.

GUIDO. If I should wheedle you; if I should be
 The very most delightfulest young squire
 And love you as my heart's most boon companion?
 Say, you slept and dreamed of good Saint Peter,
 What harm, if, when you woke, your keys were gone,
 By chance or miracle — or merely me?

DAVID. Were you Lord Jesus I'd not let you out.

GUIDO. I do almost surmise, somehow, I'm still
This prison's darling guest, and like to be
A many a month. Jesu, what waste, what waste!

DAVID. O can't you see? I must not let you go!
The Florentines to me are nothing,
But I made oath to serve them faithfully
And they believed me.

GUIDO. Indeed, I do see, David.
Why, if you should accede to my keen urgency,
I would not go . . .
At least, I think I would not go, perhaps.

DAVID. But, truly, are you so unhappy here?

GUIDO. In prison! and not most wretched! . . . How can you ask?

Yet now I come to think of it . . . David,
That is the loveliest window in my cell!
Sometimes, when the sky is blurry yellow,
Just before dawn, you know,
You'd think there were a thousand birds outside;
And in my bed I lie, all shimmery,
Thinking delicious things
I never can remember afterwards.
And when, at last, I'm up and washed and wake,
There is the tender sunlight in long sweeps,
And the rose-colored hills, and the youthful poplars,
And the first green, so faint
You fear to look at it right steadily
Lest it should mist and melt away.
It's splendid, David.
But — now I know why I am miserable!
Think of the things I miss cooped up in here.
Adventures by the thousand wait out there!

When we rode up from Sicily, the page and I,
We killed a robber, saw the Pope,
Danced in a masquerade, fasted two days,
Composed ten roundelays (in the vernacular),
And kissed a princess on the cheek.

DAVID (*impressed*). A brave existence! But I am free
To take my share of it and never do.

GUIDO. That's strange — you stay here willingly! But why?

DAVID. Adventures do not wait out there — for me.

GUIDO. Absurd! If we could only go right now —
Think, lad, of the seas unsailed, the tourneys missed,
The battles others fight, the roads not cantered on;
That very road, so plain and real and white,
Leads out to courts and castles of romance.
A road like that led to Emmaus once.
Why, now I think it would not be so hard
To meet Lord Jesus walking there alone,
Watching His springtime glisten up,
And humming to Himself! Yonder He comes!

DAVID. Hush, Guido! Hush, you fool!

GUIDO. But look! The sun is on his hair! He's very young.

(DAVID goes to the edge, looks down, and turns back.)

(A voice singing on the road.)

God's lark at morning I would be,
I'd set my heart within a tree
Close to His bed and sing to Him
Right merrily
A sunrise hymn.

DAVID. A monk.

GUIDO. He's stopped by Tonio's donkey.

DAVID. Means to steal him, likely.

VOICE. Brother Ass, I give you good den. As I came down the road desiring greatly of your company, I did bethink me of the noble part you played, times past, in Holy Writ. Whereon said I, to the next ass I meet I will impart the goodly thoughts vouchsafèd me. But, prithee, Brother Ass, let not thine ears recede upon thy nape, nor thy long face betoken grief of soul! These are *good* tidings that I bear. (*Laughs.*) Harken! Christ's Father, which is God, once spoke from out the belly of an ass, astounding much the prophet that bestrode him, and honoring your kinsman and his children's children, even to you. And later, another of your ancestors bore Christ Himself into Jerusalem. Wherefore, say I, you should be prouder than the horse, more praiseful than the bird, more — but that's enough!

GUIDO. Bravo, Sir Orator!

VOICE. I would have sermoned twice as long had I but known two asses heard.

GUIDO (*laughing*). Your hermit's frock mates not with your light page's tongue.

VOICE. Nay, Francis says the Lord loves best the happy heart.

GUIDO. And who is Francis?

VOICE. God-a-lack!

Not know the little poor man of Assisi?

He says he is mere man like us. Perhaps —

But one in whom the breath of God has not yet cooled.

GUIDO. And you?

VOICE. I am but one of many brethren!

We teach God's love and holy poverty,

But first we love and are ourselves most poor.

Come with us!

GUIDO. Are all as happy as you look?

VOICE. You should hear Brother Francis sing!
Bethink you, friend, if this is God's dear world,
And we His children, if the years we have
To do His will are few, so few, O think
How wasted is all work not done for Him.
Ponder these things, young heart, and come with us . . .
And Jesus keep you — and the woeful ass!

(Sings as he goes down the road.)

At night I'd be God's troubadour.
Beneath His starry walls I'd pour
Across the moat such roundelays
He'd love me sure,
And maybe, praise.

GUIDO (*watching him disappear*). I think I'd almost like to go with
him.

DAVID. That's not Emmaus road. He'll not meet God.

GUIDO. Isn't it strange how God is easy to
Forget? And to remember too! Whole days
I go so brimful of the bliss of things
I never think of Him. And then He comes,
Quite naturally, and not at all displeased —
Perhaps a summer night scattered with stars,
Or far off in the dusk a sweet song heard,
Or when you're lonely and you want someone
To kiss you, to hold you close, and let you cry;
Or sometimes when the splendors seem to rain
And sunset skies quiver and rock with gold,
And voices call you and you hear your own
Answering back, swearing to go crusading,
Or to a hermit's cell, or on some quest.

It's strange . . . But He doesn't worry me a bit!

DAVID. I hope you always find Him so, Guido.

But you've not sworn to go on the crusades?

GUIDO. Not truly sworn, just to myself.

Zounds! what a knightly quest! Worth all the blood

Spilled, and the failures! Let's go together, David.

DAVID. Not worth, I swear, the life of one good man,

Although it won the Sepulchre.

GUIDO. By all the saints! I don't believe you think that!

(DAVID is silent.)

'Tis natural we should revere His tomb —

Unless you have no faith that He is God?

David, do you, perchance, know other gods

Besides the old ones of the Trinity?

DAVID. No. Do you?

GUIDO. Lots of 'em! Only listen!

Pallas, Persephone, Olympian Zeus,

Hermes, Artemis, Ganymede, —

DAVID. And what became of them? Crucified too?

GUIDO. Oh, no; somehow they were forgotten.

DAVID. You jest.

I thought you'd found, perhaps, another hope.

GUIDO. I'll tell you just the way I learned of them.

You see, the Emperor wished his pages taught

All wisdom of all countries and all times

So they might adepts in delightfulness

Become, to grace the earthly paradise

He'd made his court. I was his favorite page.

Oh, it was fairy stuff, that life of ours!

We'd sit or lie or sprawl about the fountain

In Monreale's high-built orange-court,

A score of laughing pages, olive-hued,
 And gold-haired Enzo, the Emperor's son.
 'Twould be sun-splashed up there, not hot nor cool,
 But always thick with perfume from the trees,
 And dim with water sounds and litanies
 That friars pacing in the cloisters told.
 And, morning long, an Arab sage would read
 The precious parchments from Byzantium.
 You've seen, David, some arch half hid in flowers
 That winds and butterflies and birds blow through —
 Well, such an arch I've always been till now,
 With all the fragrance, rapture, melody
 Of all the world just blowing through, lightly.
 From those old parchments we young pages learned
 Of men long dead who seemed to us ourselves,
 Only more wise and radiant and fair,
 Who lived in Greece once, loved with their whole strength
 The earth and sun, and offered up their prayers
 To many cool-eyed gods with rippling names.
 But placid gods they were that never worked!
 DAVID. Forgotten gods in books to me are nothing.
 GUIDO. For everyday they're not as good as Christ.
 They are just beautiful; you pray to them,
 They hardly hear; you'd never make them weep.
 Of course you go to Christ when you are hurt,
 Or when you feel — like a young tree in bloom!
 DAVID. Do you feel that way all the time?
 GUIDO (*laughing*). Mostly!

(*Goes up on a parapet. The sunset is cloudless — transparencies of intense color.*)

God, God, how beautiful Your world is! Sometimes
 It seems to me I should do something noble,
 Some deed You'd love, to truly show my thanks . . .
 David, this riding up and down the world
 In scarlet hose is not enough, think you?
 Others leave all they love to fight for Christ,
 Or take the sea to find new lands for Him,
 Or quit the dear society of men
 To seek for angels in the wilderness.
 They say that in the north, whole villages
 Are sometimes struck with the wild thought of God,
 And careless of their personal, sharp needs,
 Give up their all to build Him palaces
 Of blue and emerald glass and marble lace.
 I'd hate another man to have
 A goodlier soul than I! . . .
 But how diversely we are lovable!
 We must be quite a pleasure to our Lord.

A voice screaming. Son of David, have mercy on me!

GUIDO (terribly startled). What was that cry!

DAVID. The madman's scream.

They burned out both his eyes for some old crime

And he went mad. His cell is under us.

Sometimes he screams like that.

GUIDO (horrified). Then there are other prisoners in this place?

DAVID. From that bright room of yours you never see

The ghastly crew that I am captain of.

But there are those beneath your very feet

In dungeon after dungeon, who will die

And never see the sun. This is a hive

Of misery. You only heard one buzz.

GUIDO. They never come up here?

DAVID. Only for you I break the prison's rules.

GUIDO. Who are they, down — down there?

DAVID. Thieves, politicians, murderers, and such.

Mostly they die. Two only have been here

For many years.

GUIDO. What crimes did they commit?

DAVID. One's a pirate, that roars and sings and curses;

Hugo by name. He begs to tell me his adventures.

GUIDO. I'd listen till he'd told me the last one!

I'd like to see that pirate . . . and the other?

DAVID. A heretic.

GUIDO (*laughing*). So's the Emperor!

DAVID. His is the deepest dungeon of them all,

No sun, no breath of air, just slime and stench.

Ten years ago when first they flung him there

His tongue was brash and peppery, they say,

His body broad and big, a fighting man's.

But he has rotted in that stinking hole.

I shade my lantern when I bring his food.

GUIDO. Horrible! Horrible! Does he cry out?

DAVID. No. . . . Though he is heretic, he has

A God whose name he praises and whose strength

Implores. To me he never makes complaint;

But once he asked,

“ Has Albi's faith yet spread to Italy? ”

GUIDO. Albi! The home of heretics!

DAVID. And once, “ Is Simon dead? ”

GUIDO. David, let's give a holiday to him

And to my pirate,

And bring them here to talk to us.

DAVID. You could not stand the sight of him; his flesh
Is crumbled off, or fetid, white and stale.

They gave him for his faith the lepers' cell.

GUIDO. God! God! Leave him down there!

DAVID. Yet I could hide him in a dead monk's cowl,
And, while the guards are absent, let them both
Come here to breathe the light and air once more.
You could guard one while I'd go fetch the other.

GUIDO. If both must come, bring up the pirate first,
So I may be alone with him -- not with that other!

DAVID. But *could* you guard the pirate? He's strong and --

GUIDO (*indignant*). By God! Could I? Because I dress in silk,
And sing a snatch, mayhap, and speak of birds
And blossoms and such amorous, frail things,
Thou thinkest me weakling!

With one good broadsword and a mind to it,
I'd guard secure a host of pirates! . . . 'Swounds!

(*Sees a sword lying on the bench.*)

Lend me that sword! . . . On guard! . . . Now, all your skill!

(*They fence. A sudden twist, and GUIDO catches DAVID's sword with his, whirling it into the air. GUIDO in high spirits runs up to the battlement.*)

GUIDO. That old Sicilian trick!

Now who is master here? Free, free, O world!
Now could I cut the gold-haired jailer's head off
And steal his keys and rush out to the road,
And lark it down to Sicily again.

DAVID (*repressing his admiration*). I'd love to be your battle brother
once,

And, standing by your side, strike down a hundred!

GUIDO. David, you almost angered me. Bring up the prisoners!

(Exit DAVID. GUIDO sits with his feet hanging over the parapet and sings.)

O, shall I sail the rough, bright sea,
And on some glittering morn
Blow with the wind that blows so free,
Up to a strange and a fair countree,
And wind on my silver horn?

Or shall I loosen my long, grey lance,
Leap my stallion astride,
And down the mottled wood-paths prance
To capture the city of romance
That the golden cloud-banks hide?

Sing heigh, sing ho! The bliss of being,
The glory of days that rush,
So much to be doing, hearing, seeing,
With spring foaming up, and winter a-fleeing,
And the rose of youth in blush!

(Enter DAVID with HUGO, enormous, red-bearded, this side of middle age. DAVID goes out.)

GUIDO. Men say you have been in your day
The fearfulest rover of the seas.

HUGO. They said not half. My soul can count
More dreadful deeds than the Old Man of the Mountain,
And more are yet to do.

GUIDO. You've sailed, perhaps, the western sea?

HUGO. Western and eastern, Pontic and Caspian!

GUIDO. And seen the marvels of the world's grey edge?

HUGO. All of them. Once for twenty days I sailed
Beyond the gateways of the world into the west.
The winds had voices like the damned,
There was no sun; the sea was like —

GUIDO. The flameless, grey, upheaving boundaries of hell
Where drift those truckling spirits who in life
Shunned the affray.

HUGO. A-hem! Have you been there?

GUIDO. Well, as it were . . . Go on. As you roved up
The heliotrope, soft sea of Greece
Did you, perchance, catch glimpses of
The women of the sea?

HUGO. A many a one.

GUIDO. How looked they?

HUGO. Sleek and bosomed high.

GUIDO. What color were their eyes?

HUGO. I noted not their eyes.

GUIDO. Blind fool! But never mind, I know.

*(DAVID enters with the heretic, who wears the white habit of a monk,
the cowl over his head hiding his face. He can hardly walk; DAVID
supports him. He pauses, dazed by the late sunlight, then sits on
the bench at back center, silently.)*

GUIDO *(nervously covering the embarrassment of their entrance)*.

David, this man hath seen the women of the sea,
And found them fair.

HUGO. But not as fair by half
As those of earth. Jesu, no sight of one
For these damned years I've rotted here;
And there's a many a town on many a shore
Where lasses weep and beat their breasts for me.

GUIDO. Hast thou adventured in the further south
Where spicier seas
Break on the carven shores of lovelier lands,
Where women, sultry-hued as summer's myrtle,
With half-closed, tawny eyes that never close,
Await far sails of vaster glittering
That bear superbly to their attared arms
More bright-haired, iron-chested lovers
Out of the north?

HUGO. To the neighboring isles,
And there I'll harbor on my next adventure.

GUIDO. I love thee, Hugo.
Thou art the most heroicallest liar
Leewards of greedy hell.

HUGO. A man must be to keep apace with you.
But you, I swear, are not a common jailer.
What is your land and lineage?

GUIDO. My home, Palermo; my estate, the Emperor's love.

HUGO. A courtly knight! A silken squire of dames!
I wager you are served with jades a-plenty.

DAVID. Do you know love, real love, Guido?

GUIDO. The gods have not vouchsafed me that transmuting test,
But I have longed for Circe and,
Remembering her sties, still longed.

HUGO. Who may that lady be?

GUIDO. A witch of qualities.

HUGO. As?

GUIDO. Shadow robes that cling, and shadow eyes,
Warm, tulip-tinted mouth, all else Carrara whiteness.
The prodigal son was hireling to her, and forgot
Even his father, eating of her husks.

- DAVID. Is she the lady, Guido, has a house
 In Florence, where the other jailers now
 Drink of her wine and — eat her husks?
- GUIDO. The same, the same! I'm glad you're here, David.
 It's easy to forget they're husks in April;
 Then lechery is iridescent-winged,
 Mere throbbing up of leafy sun-drawn sap;
 Mere clinging of frail lips; mere mockery
 Of light-intoxicated eyes,
 That thrill together under lowered lids —
 Half irresistible and wholly sweet.
 And yet — I'm glad we're here, David.
- HUGO. If I were free this afternoon,
 I know a harlot's house in Florence —
- GUIDO. Ah, there it is! Always the same!
 There's nothing this side love but vileness;
 And without either there's such rapture i' the world.
 Let's keep it so, O jailer of my heart.
 Forget the sirens for a while, thou bearded beast,
 And tell us brackish tales of the wild sea.
- HUGO. I have no notion who the sirens be,
 Nor Circe, nor what means
 That womanish, springtime talk of yours.
 I doubt me if ye know a broadsword from a dirk.
 You could not understand a lively man's adventures.
- GUIDO. David, I think we hold in vile captivity
 The fieriest brigand that ever slew — with words,
 The doughtiest sailor that ever sailed — by breath.
 Of course, he may have pulled a harbor yawl,
 Or held for ransom valiantly a capture of sardines.
 Nay, more, I grant, with faithful henchmen by,

He may have subjugated, cheese and all,
An irate granny-dame, sail set for market.

HUCO. Body of Christ!

Shall flesh and blood endure this popinjay,
This thing of silk, this — Before you came,
A red worm thing into the bellowing world,
I'd waded knee-deep in fresh human blood,
Slain Greeks a hundred, sacked the vizier's harem,
Gathered a hamper full of sacred bones,
And, drunk on sacramental wine, sailed back
To Venice with two span of iron horses.

GUIDO (*delighted*). You on the gorgeous Byzantine crusade?

Did you not catch the tale from other lips
When you were linkboy on the Grand Canal?

HUCO. These very hands, thou saucy innocent,

Have purpled with imperial bastards' blood;
These eyes saw Dandolo's fleet assault the walls,
The Greeks' vermilion tent and molten oil,
The mangonels and catapult and bridge.

When André of Urboise dashed through the breach
I followed, and 'twas I first lit the torch

That fired a thousand houses, where old men
And slattern women howled and cursed and burned!

That was a real crusade! Gold, wine

And women whose consent the sword could always win.

These are dull times! Hey, silent monk!

Preach Christ and war against the infidel!

That's the brave life! With heathen gold

And heathen concubines, who would not fight

For Christ?

DAVID. Now would you be crusader, Guido?

GUIDO. The beast!

HUGO (*in high fettle*). Then I've another crusade tale for you.

Sweet Christ! 'Twas a divine burlesque!
Of all that crossed the sea not one returned
Save me, their leader.

GUIDO. Your lies grow wearisome.

DAVID (*with premonition and repression*). Say on, say on!

HUGO. It was in France, near such a day as this;

We idled in the southern harbor there,
Our seven empty hulls against the quays.
I do remember well, 'twas afternoon.
On deck we slept beneath the sails or dived
And wished the night would come. Then suddenly,
From the hill crest where the wide street came down,
We heard a shout, and, looking up, beheld —
You'll know I'm lying now — it looked a dream —
A thousand children

(DAVID *leaps up and stands white and taut.*)

with flowers on their heads

And crosses in their hands and wreaths and banners;
And when they saw us or the sea or something,
They fell upon their knees with prayers and cries,
Kissed one another, wept, went mad with joy.
While we, chap-fallen, watched their antics, up
They sprang, broke into hymns to Jesus and
Came down the sloping street right to the sea.

GUIDO. But why?

HUGO. Baccho! It was the Crusade of the Children,
And they were marching with their songs and flowers
To take Christ's Sepulchre!

GUIDO. What's in Jerusalem?

HUGO. Yea, verily.

GUIDO. But that was Francel!

HUGO. They came to us and said, "We're almost there;
Dear friends, we know, for we have marched so long;
And Christ has sent you here with seven ships
To ferry us across the sea." Whereon,
They knelt to us and called us, "Brothers in Christ,"
"Seamen of God," "Our Lady's mariners."
It had astounded you.

GUIDO. But so you were!
You took them to the Holy Tomb of Christ?

HUGO. Thou fool! That night we spent apart in council.
Next day, our scheme complete, we went to them
And swore to bear them to the Sepulchre.

GUIDO. I knew you would, our Lady's mariner!

HUGO. We herded them aboard our seven ships
And sailed for Alexandria — a golden freight!

GUIDO. Why there, and not unto Jerusalem?

HUGO. Children are precious to the infidel!
We sold the last one to the Turk; not one returned!
And there they do remain to this good hour,
Their slaves and concubines!

(DAVID, with a terrible cry, flings himself on HUGO, hurls him to the floor, strangles him. GUIDO with difficulty pulls him off.)

GUIDO. Which is his cell?

DAVID. To the right, the last.

(DAVID lies sobbing on the floor, while GUIDO takes HUGO out and returns.)

GUIDO. There is some wickedness I had not guessed.

DAVID (*beside himself*). I was one! I was one!

GUIDO. What do you mean?

DAVID. I was a child-crusader! The dog! The dog!

Then they, too, failed. No man had heard their fate.

I thought they sailed and reached the Sepulchre!

There is no justice and no right,

No pity and no kindness in the world!

Only the vile things prosper and live on.

Where is your God?

GUIDO. I know not. I know nothing . . . But you —

Were you a child-crusader there in France?

DAVID. Oh, no. Listen, Guido! Here's my life!

(DAVID *pauses to control himself, then proceeds with suppressed passion.*)

I was a shepherd boy beyond the Rhine.

A hilltop was my home. All summer there

I'd watch my flocks about me pasturing.

I could throw a stone and hit the road below me;

It was the road that led out to the world.

All day I'd lie and watch from the deep grass

The marvelous people passing — troubadours

With viol da gambas on their backs and singing;

Fat priests and friars, sometimes a cardinal,

And green and scarlet pages, little like me, —

I'd halloa down to them — and then the knights,

Always the noble knights with flashing mail

And retinues of stalwart men-at-arms.

The proudest-seeming always journeyed south,

Seeking Christ's Sepulchre, they said. They said

The infidels had made it theirs somehow,

Ruined and fouled and desecrated it;
And if God's knights could capture it again,
The sins o' the world would pass, and every sorrow,
And likely Christ would come again unto His own,
And somehow there were wings through all the air
In those first days. In the deep silence when
The sun stood still at noon and the flocks slept,
I'd hear, I thought, the angels all about me;
They walked among my sheep upon my hill.
And something always was about to break
Between another world and me.
I waited and was sure, some day, quite soon,
A glory would come true and I would kneel
I' the grass and see the Lord before me, close,
Yes, close enough to touch and talk to. Then one day
I found what I'd been wishing for so long.
Down on the road, far off, behind the hill,
I heard a hundred voices singing, not
Gleemen or pages, but like seraphim.
I knelt and waited, and the sheep were still.
Louder the singing grew and louder, then
Around the hillside into the sun they burst,
A host of children, a heavenly host,
With crosses in their hands and on their breasts.
They called to me and I came down and left my flock
And went with them, a soldier of the Christ. . . .
Guido, Guido, Guido, it was not fair!
We were so sure of God, we meant so well!
He let us starve and rot among the fields,
He lost us in the snow and ice of mountains,
We died, and died, and died, but still pushed on,

For we were only children and believed.

GUIDO. And those that did not die?

DAVID. Half-frozen, starved,

We staggered from the dreadful mountain pass

And saw beneath us in the sunlight Italy.

We thought it was the Promised Land. In tears,

With arms around the weaker ones, we hurried

Down the great mountain side to meet the Christ.

GUIDO. If only this could be a lie or dream!

DAVID. We knew the end was surely near. We wove

Garlands and wreaths to lay upon His Tomb.

Our leader was a lad named Nicholas —

When souls are sacreder than his they will

Not take the flesh! . . . One night he called us round

And climbed upon a gateway in our midst

And spoke to us.

His face shone in the dark.

He said, a final test the Lord had laid —

Across our path He'd stretched the mighty sea.

The children, terrified, broke into sobs;

But Nicholas called, not loudly, but the way he had,

“ In olden times a children's army marched

Across the sea dry-shod; and they, indeed,

Were children but of one named Israel,

While we are Christ's!

The sea will hedge itself on either side

And leave a path for us to walk between.”

So we believed and sang beneath the stars.

The next day, verily, we saw the sea

And Genoa, beneath whose walls we camped.

Nicholas named the following dawn as hour

When we should march dry-shod across the sea.
How happy we who had been faithful to the end!
Our labors all were done. We could not sleep.
Long before dawn I went to Nicholas
And knelt and begged that I might be
Among the first of them that walked into the sea.
He flung his arms around me and cried out,
" David, we two shall lead the lambs of God."
After a long, long time the dawn began:
The army knelt and prayed together the last time,
And rose, and with their flowers and their roods
Marched solemnly unto the water's edge;
And first of all went Nicholas and I.
The water touched my shoes and did not part;
But yet I knew it would and kept right on.
Deeper and deeper — my knees — my waist — the cold
Stole to my heart — the prayers died out within me.
But I kept on. And I was blind before
The water reached my eyes and smothered me.

GUIDO. And then?

DAVID. I lay on the beach in the sun,
People laughing and shouting around . . .

GUIDO. That was the end?

DAVID. The end. The lambs were scattered.
In time they hid themselves about the world.

GUIDO. And you?

DAVID. A little band that still could not believe
God would so fool and trap them, went to Rome
To tell Christ's shepherd there, the Pope.
I went along, not knowing where to go.

GUIDO. The Holy Father said?

DAVID. That we were disobedient, pert children,
 That we should go with speed back to our homes,
 That we might win forgiveness if, when grown,
 We took the sword to win Christ's Sepulchre.
 So I knew that the world was bad, and one
 Must live in it awhile like any beast.
 I stole away, came here, and — here I am.
 That is my life!
 You say the world is beautiful, the spring
 Is God's, that road is lately trod by Christ —
 Lies! lies! God is not here! I don't believe!

*(It has grown dusk. The old man suddenly rises and strides forward to
 DAVID. He seems tall and fearful; his voice is terrible.)*

SERLE DE LANLARAZON. He is! Thou dost believe! Naught else so
 plain!
 Dost think this marvelous, shining soul of thine,
 That will not shatter into common vileness,
 Though tested with the blows of agony,
 Can be a cup for aught but heavenly wine?
 Lo, thou dost brim with God!

GUIDO. Who art thou, strange and terrible old man?

SERLE. Serle de Lanlarazon, the heretic!
 I, too, was once a soldier of the Lord,
 O shepherd boy, and I, too, met defeat.
 They that were noblest of the sons of men
 I have seen butchered, and the land of all
 Lands peacefulest ravished and soaked in blood!
 Mine eyes beheld five hundred women burned
 At Carcassonne — they walked into the flames
 As into lovers' arms! When Béziers fell,

They that were burned, women and boys and babes,
 Escaped such tortures and abominations
 As made the flames seem tenderer than sleep.
 Yet, blinded by injustice too clear seen,
 Shall I denial make of Him that steels
 This vile and coward soul of ours
 To unendurable and gainless agonies?
 Yea, verily, His acts, seen singly, take
 The cast of madness, and but momentarily
 We see what is as wisdom. Yet behold,
 Nothing can goad the bleeding soul of man
 Unto sublimity that tops the stars,
 Like undeservèd wrong and mad injustice!
 These women that died horribly for faith,
 Your children urged to folly by a dream,
 The broken spirits of the world that are
 Its torches — these are the testament of fire
 Struck from the flint! What hand but His
 Could draw from this poor stuff of ours — Light!
 Who sees the flame hath seen divinity!

GUIDO. What was the evil that your people wrought
 There in Provence to earn such punishment?

SERLE. They saw the truth and dared to speak it loud!
 Against them stood the Church of Rome, once pure,
 But now become as foul as leprosy!

(DAVID and GUIDO are horrified.)

We fearlessly cried out, "Unclean, unclean!
 Beseech the healing hands of Christ, proud Rome."

GUIDO (*aside to DAVID*). He does not know!

SERLE. But she that called herself the church of Christ,
 Hearing the truth, slew them that dared to speak.

GUIDO. What need was there to speak? In Sicily,
We see her faults, as you, but let them be.

SERLE. Then ye are cowards!

My people have a more heroic heart.

Wilt call it life to see the truth struck down
And not unsheathe thy sword in her defense?

Wilt call it life to hear the voice of God

But cravenly to hide and mute the tidings?

Life, life —

Is't not the test of all we know as good

Embattled 'gainst the all we know as evil,

The Eternal Right against the Eternal Wrong?

O child, the perfume and the bloom of life,

Youth's song of yearning underneath the moon,

These fade. But there's a splendor never fades;

And he enlisting as God's knight-at-arms

Wages a fight that has not any end,

Whose prize more sacred is than Palestine,

Whose gain's no tomb, but an eternal life.

DAVID. Then thou'dst not counsel us to cross the sea

And go crusading to Jerusalem?

SERLE. His fight is not across the seas, but here!

GUIDO. Then were the battles that my heroes fought —

Richard and Godfrey and the rest — all wrong?

SERLE. Nay, nay. Somehow, it is God's deep desire

That stirs the hearts of men to that adventure.

But 'tis a fool's adventure! To you, to me,

How could His Tomb more potent be to save

Than any field of earth where flowers grow?

The noble striving's everything, and Christ

In kindness let them fail! . . .

Yet, fairer far the quest for that poor Tomb
Than all the wars that men have waged before
For hate or gain or merely idleness. . . .
The world grows better. . . . Thou sayest Simon's dead?

DAVID. Ay.

SERLE. And Innocent that preached the war?

DAVID. Dead, too.

SERLE. And there is peace 'twixt heretic and Church?

DAVID. The wars have ceased.

GUIDO. And there's for emperor

A friend of truth, no matter how bedight —
A host to all the wisdom of the world
Though hailing from Provence or India,
Arab and Jew, Mohammedan and Greek,
Find courtesy and hearing in Palermo.

SERLE. Have I not heard the coming of the Lord?

The darkness giveth forth much inner light
And loneliness lets in diviner guests.
The years of my captivity have brought
Much wisdom I had missed. Even, I trace
Nobility in them that tortured us!
Simon and Innocent worked for a God
That is my God, although their work was mad
And evil only. We who swore that Evil was
Itself eternal and not born of Good,
Who died for that belief, we were not wholly wise.
It is a truth, but one forgetting which
Need vary not one whit the lives of men.
All know that good and evil are at war,
And in that war all lordly souls enlist,

Roman or heretic or infidel.
 What matter the first cause? For battle-cry
 To all the gallantry beneath the stars,
 Two words suffice: " He is! " . . .
 I long for but one thing before I die —
 Not to incite my people 'gainst the Pope,
 Nor bear the southern standard in the strife,
 But to assure them of the living God. . . .
 Across the edges of the world there blows a wind
 Mysterious with perfume of a spring;
 A spring that is not of the kindling earth,
 That's more than scent of bloom or gleam of bud;
 The spring of God in flower!
 Down there where neither sun nor air came through,
 I felt it blow across my dungeon walls —
 The wind before the footsteps of the Lord!
 It bloweth now across the world;
 It strangely stirs the hearts of men; wars cease;
 Rare deeds familiar grow; fastings and prayers,
 Forgiveness, poverty; temples are built
 On visioned impulses, and children march
 On journeys with no end.
 Far off, far off He comes,
 And we are swept upon our knees
 As meadow grasses kneeling to the wind.

GUIDO. Thou man of God!

(He falls impetuously on his knees before SERLE, catching hold of his hands. So close, he sees his hideous, disfigured face and falls back with an involuntary cry of loathing. It is twilight.)

SERLE (*gazing intently at his hands*). Are these my hands? Rotted
and numb!

(*He slowly realizes, and with a strangled groan falls to the ground.*)

SERLE. Leper! Leper!

GUIDO. Old man, old man, forgive me!

DAVID. Hush . . . He speaks!

SERLE. Dost think that I have lived these bloody years,
Endured these agonies and fought this fight,
That I should now deliver thee my soul
Because thou eatest away this flesh of mine,
Stealing the maggots' certain meal? Back, back,
O Prince of Darkness, this flame thou canst not eat!

(*Staggers to his feet.*)

Shepherd, I feel the stars!

DAVID. There will be many soon.

SERLE (*lifting his arms*). God of battles, I, that was a man,
Do offer up to Thee that which remains!
Thine enemy hath eat the flesh of me
And made me fetid in the sight of men,
And soon he sendeth death to bear me hence.
O Lord, the little life vouchsafèd me,
Let it not waste in useless burial.
Thou comest soon again to see Thy people.
O let me go once more to my Provence
To tell them of Thy coming and of Thee!
Thou that dost love the fighting heart of man,
Let me prepare them! Let me, O Lord, go home.

DAVID (*kneeling*). Lord, I am Thy child! Forgive me all
And let me fight again in Thy behalf!
Bless me, old man, for I shall take thee home.

GUIDO. David, thou'lt set him free?

DAVID. And more, much more.

I'll go with him, protect him, follow him,

And preach with him the God he's shown to me. . . .

I'll steal the horses and set forth to-night;

Across the Tuscan border we are safe.

GUIDO. But what, old man, is this that you would preach?

SERLE. Prepare, prepare! The Lord walks in His world!

GUIDO. And should they ask your name?

SERLE. Serle de Lanlarazon.

GUIDO. The heretic!

SERLE. But come to preach with late-learned gentleness

A God all men accept.

DAVID. The wars have ceased, Guido.

GUIDO. Because the heretics are slain.

SERLE. They could not wholly die.

GUIDO. If they should ask, "Serle de Lanlarazon,

When you cursed Rome, did you then lie?"

SERLE. It was the truth.

GUIDO. Is evil still itself, eternal?

SERLE. As always, hence the eternal strife.

GUIDO. Do you recant? Submit you to the church?

SERLE. A thousand times, no.

GUIDO. David, you ride to death!

When they discover he who preaches God's

Lanlarazon, they'll burn the two of you,

No matter if his words were learned of Christ!

SERLE. Wouldst counsel cowardice?

GUIDO. Not that, I swear, not that! But what's the gain?

SERLE. There is no gain, perhaps; the fight is all.

GUIDO. I see no fight. I see a wide-flung glory,

A world that is not bad, so full of beauty
I need no proof, as thou, it comes from God.

SERLE. The beauty thou dost know is temporal.

Thou seest the world dew-drenched! 'Tis drenched in blood!

GUIDO. I am not less a-shine with God than thou!

SERLE. The God of youth, a fair god but most frail.

GUIDO. Him I adore; I see, I need no other.

SERLE. Already thou dost fear and wait His death!

This little prelude to eternity,

Is it an hour of roses and of song?

This throe that leads at last to heaven or hell,

Is loveliness its only quality?

What of the large endurance of the soul?

The heroic heart, the wild nobility?

GUIDO. All that will come — I have so many years to live!

SERLE. If thou wert free this instant, where wouldst thou go?

GUIDO. To Sicily!

SERLE. Once there, what wouldst thou do?

GUIDO. The Emperor's court has thousands of delights.

SERLE. And is that all?

GUIDO. Then, later —

SERLE. What? What?

DAVID. No crusades, Guido.

SERLE. Wilt thou not offer up thy gallant heart

To something sterner than delights of youth?

Thou hast drunk deep of happiness, wilt still

Drink on, oblivious to all but bliss?

(Tenderly.) Child of the springtime voice, could youth last always

There were no need of heaven. . . .

In youth the world is but an April wood

Through which we ride with holiday, light hearts.