



*THE AUGUSTAN BOOKS OF  
MODERN POETRY*

ALICE  
MEYNELL

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ALICE MEYNELL, 1850-1922.

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## *A Poet's Song of Derivations*

**I** COME from nothing; but from where  
Come the undying thoughts I bear?  
Down, through long links of death and birth,  
From the past poets of the earth;  
My immortality is there.

I am like the blossom of an hour.  
But long, long vanished sun and shower  
Awoke my breath i' the young world's air;  
I track the past back everywhere  
Through seed and flower, and seed and flower.

Or I am like a stream that flows  
Full of the cold springs that arose  
In morning lands, in distant hills;  
And down the plain my channel fills  
With melting of forgotten snows.

Voices I have not heard possessed  
My own fresh songs; my thoughts are blessed  
With relics of the far unknown.  
And, mixed with memories not my own,  
The sweet streams throng into my breast.

Before this life began to be,  
The happy songs that wake in me  
Woke long ago and far apart.  
Heavily on this little heart  
Presses this immortality.

## *Singers to Come*

NO new delights to our desire  
The singers of the past can yield.  
I lift mine eyes to hill and field,  
And see in them your yet dumb lyre,  
Poets unborn and unrevealed.

Singers to come, what thoughts will start  
To song? What words of yours be sent  
Through man's soul, and with earth be blent?  
These worlds of nature and the heart  
Await you like an instrument.

Who knows what musical flocks of words  
Upon these pine-tree tops will light,  
And crown these towers in circling flight,  
And cross these seas like summer birds,  
And give a voice to the day and night?

Something of you already is ours;  
Some mystic part of you belongs  
To us, whose dreams your future throngs;  
Who look on hills, and trees, and flowers,  
Which will mean so much in your songs.

I wonder, like the maid who found,  
And knelt to lift, the lyre supreme  
Of Orpheus from the Thracian stream.  
She dreams on its sealed past profound;  
On a deep future sealed I dream.

She bears it in her wanderings  
Within her arms, and has not pressed  
Her unskilled fingers but her breast  
Upon those silent sacred strings;  
I, too, clasp mystic strings at rest.

For I, i' the world of lands and seas,  
The sky of wind and rain and fire,  
And in man's world of long desire—  
In all that is yet dumb in these—  
Have found a more mysterious lyre.

### *The Poet to His Childhood*<sup>1</sup>

**I**N my thought I see you stand with a path on either  
hand,—  
Hills that look into the sun, and there a river'd meadow land.  
And your lost voice, with the things that it decreed, across  
me thrills,

When you thought—and chose the hills:

“If it prove a life of pain, greater have I judged the gain.  
With a singing soul, for music's sake I climb and meet the  
rain;  
And I choose, while I am calm, my thought and labouring  
to be

Unconsoled by sympathy.”

Do you know, who are so bold, how in sooth the rule will  
hold,  
Settled by a wayward child's ideal at some ten years old?—  
How the human arms you slip from, thoughts and love  
you stay not for,

Will not open to you more?

You were rash then, little child, for the skies with storms  
are wild,  
And you faced the dim horizon with its whirl of mists, and  
smiled;  
Climbing a little higher, lonelier, in the solitary sun,  
To feel how the winds came on.

<sup>1</sup> From an early poem, not included in the author's Collected Edition.

And if e'er you should come down to the village or the town,  
With the cold rain for your garland, and the wind for your  
renown,  
You will stand upon the thresholds with a face of dumb  
desire,  
Nor be known by any fire.

\* \* \* \* \*

I rebel not, child gone by, but obey you wonderingly:  
For you knew not, rash young speaker, all you spoke; and  
now will I,  
With the life and all the loneliness revealed that you saw fit,  
Sing the Amen, knowing it.

### *Unlinked*

**I**F I should quit thee, sacrifice, forswear,  
To what, my art, shall I give thee in keeping?  
To the long winds of heaven? Shall these come sweeping  
My songs forgone against my face and hair?

Or shall the mountain streams my lost joys bear,  
My past poetic pain in rain be weeping?  
No, I shall live a poet waking, sleeping,  
And I shall die a poet unaware.

From me, my art, thou canst not pass away;  
And I, a singer though I cease to sing,  
Shall own thee without joy in thee or woe.

Through my indifferent words of every day,  
Scattered and all unlinked the rhymes shall ring,  
And make my poem; and I shall not know.



*To the Beloved*

O H, not more subtly silence strays  
Amongst the winds, between the voices,  
Mingling alike with pensive lays,  
And with the music that rejoices,  
Than thou art present in my days.

Thou art like silence all unvexed,  
Though wild words part my soul from thee.  
Thou art like silence unperplexed,  
A secret and a mystery  
Between one footfall and the next.

Most dear pause in a mellow lay!  
Thou art inwoven with every air.  
With thee the wildest tempests play,  
And snatches of thee everywhere  
Make little heavens throughout a day.

Darkness and solitude shine, for me.  
For life's fair outward part are rife  
The silver noises; let them be.  
It is the very soul of life  
Listens for thee, listens for thee.

O pause between the sobs of cares;  
O thought within all thought that is;  
Trance between laughters unawares:  
Thou art the shape of melodies,  
And thou the ecstasy of prayers!

## *An Unmarked Festival*

THERE'S a feast, undated, yet  
Both our true lives hold it fast,—  
Even the day when first we met.  
What a great day came and passed,  
—Unknown then, but known at last.

And we met: You knew not me,  
Mistress of your joys and fears;  
Held my hand that held the key  
Of the treasure of your years,  
Of the fountain of your tears.

For you knew not it was I,  
And I knew not it was you.  
We have learnt, as days went by.  
But a flower struck root and grew  
Underground, and no one knew.

Day of days! Unmarked it rose,  
In whose hours we were to meet;  
And forgotten passed. Who knows,  
Was earth cold or sunny, Sweet,  
At the coming of your feet?

One mere day, we thought; the measure  
Of such days the year fulfils.  
Now, how dearly would we treasure  
Something from its fields, its rills,  
And its memorable hills.

## *Your Own Fair Youth*

**Y**OUR own fair youth, you care so little for it—  
Smiling towards Heaven, you would not stay the  
advances

Of time and change upon your happiest fancies.  
I keep your golden hour, and will restore it.

If ever, in time to come, you would explore it—  
Your old self, whose thoughts went like last year's  
pansies,

Look unto me; no mirror keeps its glances;  
In my unfailing praises now I store it.

To guard all joys of yours from Time's estranging,  
I shall be then a treasury where your gay,  
Happy, and pensive past unaltered is.

I shall be then a garden charmed from changing,  
In which your June has never passed away.  
Walk there awhile among my memories.

## *The Garden*

**M**Y heart shall be thy garden. Come, my own,  
Into thy garden; thine be happy hours  
Among my fairest thoughts, my tallest flowers,  
From root to crowning petal thine alone.

Thine is the place from where the seeds are sown  
Up to the sky enclosed, with all its showers.  
But ah, the birds, the birds! Who shall build bowers  
To keep these thine? O friend, the birds have flown.

For as these come and go, and quit our pine  
To follow the sweet season, or, new-comers,  
Sing one song only from our alder-trees,

My heart has thoughts, which, though thine eyes hold mine,  
Flit to the silent world and other summers,  
With wings that dip beyond the silver seas.

### *Thoughts in Separation*

**W**E never meet; yet we meet day by day  
Upon those hills of life, dim and immense—  
The good we love, and sleep, our innocence.  
O hills of life, high hills! And, higher than they,

Our guardian spirits meet at prayer and play.  
Beyond pain, joy, and hope, and long suspense,  
Above the summits of our souls, far hence,  
An angel meets an angel on the way.

Beyond all good I ever believed of thee  
Or thou of me, these always love and live.  
And though I fail of thy ideal of me,

My angel falls not short. They greet each other.  
Who knows, they may exchange the kiss we give,  
Thou to thy crucifix, I to my mother.

## *Regrets*

AS, when the seaward ebbing tide doth pour  
Out by the low sand spaces,  
The parting waves slip back to clasp the shore  
With lingering embraces,—

So, in the tide of life that carries me  
From where thy true heart dwells,  
Waves of my thoughts and memories turn to thee  
With lessening farewells;

Waving of hands; dreams, when the day forgets;  
A care half lost in cares;  
The saddest of my verses; dim regrets;  
Thy name among my prayers.

I would the day might come, so waited for,  
So patiently besought,  
When I, returning, should fill up once more  
Thy desolated thought;

And fill thy loneliness that lies apart  
In still, persistent pain.  
Shall I content thee, O thou broken heart,  
As the tide comes again,

And brims the little sea-shore lakes, and sets  
Seaweeds afloat, and fills  
The silent pools, rivers and rivulets  
Among the inland hills?

## *Parted*

FAREWELL to one now silenced quite,  
Sent out of hearing, out of sight,—  
My friend of friends, whom I shall miss.  
He is not banished, though, for this,—  
Nor he, nor sadness, nor delight.

Though I shall talk with him no more,  
A low voice sounds upon the shore.  
He must not watch my resting-place,  
But who shall drive a mournful face  
From the sad winds about my door?

I shall not hear his voice complain,  
But who shall stop the patient rain?  
His tears must not disturb my heart,  
But who shall change the years, and part  
The world from every thought of pain?

Although my life is left so dim,  
The morning crowns the mountain-rim;  
Joy is not gone from summer skies,  
Nor innocence from children's eyes,  
And all these things are part of him.

He is not banished, for the showers  
Yet wake this green warm earth of ours  
How can the summer but be sweet?  
I shall not have him at my feet,  
And yet my feet are on the flowers.

## *Renouncement*

**I** MUST not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,  
I shun the thought that lurks in all delight—  
The thought of thee—and in the blue Heaven's height,  
And in the sweetest passage of a song.

O just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng  
This breast, the thought of thee waits hidden yet bright;  
But it must never, never come in sight;  
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.

But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,  
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,  
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,

Must doff my will as raiment laid away,—  
With the first dream that comes with the first sleep  
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.

## *After a Parting*

**F**AREWELL has long been said; I have  
forgone thee;  
I never name thee even.  
But how shall I learn virtues and yet shun thee?  
For thou art so near Heaven  
That Heavenward meditations pause upon thee.

Thou dost beset the path to every shrine;  
My trembling thoughts discern  
Thy goodness in the good for which I pine;  
And if I turn from but one sin I turn  
Unto a smile of thine.

How shall I thrust thee apart  
    Since all my growth tends to thee night and day—  
To thee faith, hope, and art?  
    Swift are the currents setting all one way;  
They draw my life, my life, out of my heart.

*A Letter from a Girl to Her Own  
    Old Age*

**L**ISTEN, and when thy hand this paper presses,  
O time-worn woman, think of her who blesses  
What thy thin fingers touch, with her caresses.

O mother, for the weight of years that break thee!  
O daughter, for slow time must yet awake thee,  
And from the changes of my heart must make thee!

O fainting traveller, morn is grey in heaven.  
Dost thou remember how the clouds were driven?  
And are they calm about the fall of even?

Pause near the ending of thy long migration;  
For this one sudden hour of desolation  
Appeals to one hour of thy meditation.

Suffer, O silent one, that I remind thee  
Of the great hills that stormed the sky behind thee,  
Of the wild winds of power that have resigned thee.



Know that the mournful plain where thou must wander  
Is but a grey and silent world; but ponder  
The misty mountains of the morning yonder.

Listen :—the mountain winds with rain were fretting,  
And sudden gleams the mountain-tops besetting.  
I cannot let thee fade to death, forgetting.

What part of this wild heart of mine I know not  
Will follow with thee where the great winds blow not,  
And where the young flowers of the mountain grow not.

Yet let my letter with thy lost thoughts in it  
Tell what the way was when thou didst begin it,  
And win with thee the goal when thou shalt win it.

I have not writ this letter of divining  
To make a glory of thy silent pining,  
A triumph of thy mute and strange declining.

Only one youth, and the bright life was shrouded;  
Only one morning, and the day was clouded;  
And one old age with all regrets is crowded.

O hush, O hush! Thy tears my words are steeping.  
O hush, hush, hush! So full, the fount of weeping?  
Poor eyes, so quickly moved, so near to sleeping?

Pardon the girl; such strange desires beset her.  
Poor woman, lay aside the mournful letter  
That breaks thy heart; the one who wrote, forget her :

The one who now thy faded features guesses,  
With filial fingers thy grey hair caresses,  
With morning tears thy mournful twilight blesses.

## *San Lorenzo's Mother*

I HAD not seen my son's dear face  
(He chose the cloister by God's grace)  
Since it had come to full flower-time.  
I hardly guessed at its perfect prime,  
That folded flower of his dear face.

Mine eyes were veiled by mists of tears  
When on a day in many years  
One of his Order came. I thrilled,  
Facing, I thought, that face fulfilled.  
I doubted, for my mists of tears.

His blessing be with me for ever!  
My hope and doubt were hard to sever;  
—That altered face, those holy weeds.  
I filled his wallet and kissed his beads,  
And lost his echoing feet for ever.

If to my son my alms were given  
I know not, and I wait for Heaven.  
He did not plead for child of mine,  
But for another Child divine,  
And unto Him it was surely given.

There is One alone who cannot change;  
Dreams are we, shadows, visions strange;  
And all I give is given to One.  
I might mistake my dearest son,  
But never the Son Who cannot change.

## *A Mother's Monody*<sup>1</sup>

### *Before Light.*

A MONG the first to wake. What wakes with me?  
A blind wind, and a few birds, and a star.  
With tremor of darkened flowers and whisper of birds,  
O, with a tremor, with a tremor of heart  
Begins the day in the dark. Like other days  
Among my flowers, the morning will awake;  
And I shall leave the high noon in my garden  
And go my journey, as I live, alone.  
"Come to the Port to-morrow," says the letter,  
And little more. He never was too kind,  
This man, the one in the world kin to my son,  
Who knew my sin, who watched me with cold eyes,  
And stayed me with calm hands, and hid the thing  
From horror more than pity; and took my son;  
And mercifully let me ebb away  
In this grey town of undesigned grey lives,  
Five years already. To-day he sends for me.  
And now I will prevent the dawn with prayers.

### *About Noon.*

And towards the noon she lifted up her eyes,  
Looked to the gentle hills; smiled, as she could,  
A difficult smile that hurt half of her mouth,  
Until she passed the streets and all sharp looks.

Sharp looks, and, since I was a child, sharp looks!  
They knew not, certainly, who scan me so,  
That not a girl of all their brightest girls  
Has such an eager heart for smiles as I.  
If they but knew what a poor child I am—

<sup>1</sup> From a *Study, in Three Monologues, with Interruptions*, now first reprinted from the early *Preludes*.

O, born of all the past, what a poor child!  
 I could waste golden days and showers of words,  
 And laugh for nothing, and read my poets again,—  
 I would not if I might. I would not cease,  
 No, if I might, the penance and the pain  
 For that lost soul down somewhere in the past,  
 That soul of mine; and yet I wish, I wish,  
 Such little wishes, and so longingly,—  
 Who would believe me, knowing what I am?  
 And I, being what I am, and having done  
 What I have done, look back upon my youth—  
 Before my sin I mean—and testify:  
 It was not happy, no, it was not white,  
 It was not innocent, no, the young fair time.  
 And now begins my one true white child-time,  
 This time of desolate altars and all ruins.  
 The world is full of endings for me, I find,  
 Emotions lost, and words and thoughts forgotten.  
 Yet, amid all these last things, there is one,  
 But one Beginning, a seed within my soul:  
 And I become a child with a world to learn,  
 Timorous, with another world to learn,  
 Timorous, younger, whiter towards my death.

Down the hills came she to the town and sea,  
 And met her child's friend where he waited her.  
 "I sent for you, mind, for your sake alone,—  
 No, my dear ward is well. But he has learnt,  
 What I had faithfully kept, your life, your past,  
 Your secret. Well, we hope that you repent,  
 Your son, and I." "God bless my son!  
 My little son hopes I repent at least."  
 "When he had read the papers by mischance—  
 Beside himself at first, though the young heart  
 Recovered, and is calm now, he resolved  
 On the completest parting; he gives up  
 His hopes in England, his career, and sails.

To-night to make a new life in the States.  
As to the question of your seeing him—  
He is in the town here—I persuaded him  
To let you choose—this last time in the world.”  
“Save me from the sick eyes of my one child,  
But let me see my one child once, I pray.”

*At Twilight.*

Gone, O my child, forsaking me, my flower!—  
Yet I, forsaken, pity you with tears.  
Gone, gone into the West; not you alone,  
My son who are leaving me, but he, the child  
Of five years back. That is the worst farewell—  
I had not thought him lost until to-day.  
For he had kept with me until to-day;—  
Never seen, never heard; but he was there,  
Behind the door on which I laid my hand,  
Out in the garden when I sat within.  
As others greet a presence, I did greet  
An absence, O my sweet, my sweet surprise!  
How will it be now? For he is so changed  
I hardly knew the face I saw pass by.  
And yet it is the one that must of needs  
Grow from that long ago face innocent,  
Grave with the presage of a human life.  
So, child, giving again in thought my kiss,  
My last long since, I kiss you tall and changed  
In that one kiss, and kiss you a man and old,  
And so I kiss you dead. And yet, O child,  
O child, a certain soul goes from my days;  
They fall together like a rosary told,  
Not Aves now, but beads,—you being gone.  
I was not worthy to be comfortless,  
I find; and feasts broke in upon my fasts;  
And innocent distractions and desires  
Surprised me in my penitential tears.

For my absent child, God gives me a child in Spring;  
New seasons, and the fresh and innocent earth,  
Ever new years, and children of the years  
Kin to the young thoughts of my weary heart,  
My kin in all the world. And He Himself  
Is young in the quiet time of cold and snows:  
Mary, who fled'st to Egypt with Him; Joseph;  
And thou whose tomb I kissed in Padua,  
Protect this perilous childhood in my heart!  
It's well I never guessed this thing before,—  
I mean the weakness and the littleness  
Of that which by God's grace begins in me.  
O earthly hopes and wishes, stay with me—  
(He will be patient): linger, O my loves  
And phases of myself, and play with this  
New life of grace, as He Whose gift it is  
With children played, a Child. . . .  
Less than I knew, less than I know, am I,  
Returning childless, but, O Father, a child.

## *The Shepherdess*

SHE walks—the lady of my delight—  
A shepherdess of sheep.  
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;  
She guards them from the steep;  
She feeds them on the fragrant height,  
And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,  
Dark valleys safe and deep.  
Into that tender breast at night  
The chastest stars may peep.  
She walks—the lady of my delight—  
A shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,  
Though gay they run and leap.  
She is so circumspect and right;  
She has her soul to keep.  
She walks—the lady of my delight—  
A shepherdess of sheep.

## *Via, et Veritas, et Vita*

“YOU never attained to Him?” “If to attain  
Be to abide, then that may be.”  
“Endless the way, followed with how much pain!”  
“The way was He.”

## *The Lady Poverty*

THE Lady Poverty was fair :  
But she has lost her looks of late,  
With change of times and change of air.  
Ah slattern! she neglects her hair,  
Her gown, her shoes; she keeps no state  
As once when her pure feet were bare.

Or—almost worse, if worse can be—  
She scolds in parlours, dusts and trims,  
Watches and counts. O is this she  
Whom Francis met, whose step was free,  
Who with Obedience carolled hymns,  
In Umbria walked with Chastity?

Where is her ladyhood? Not here,  
Not among modern kinds of men;  
But in the stony fields, where clear  
Through the thin trees the skies appear,  
In delicate spare soil and fen,  
And slender landscape and austere.

## *November Blue*

*The golden tint of the electric lights seems to give a complementary colour to the air in the early evening.—ESSAY ON LONDON.*

O HEAVENLY colour, London town  
Has blurred it from her skies;  
And, hooded in an earthly brown,  
Unheaven'd the city lies.  
No longer, standard-like, this hue  
Above the broad road flies;  
Nor does the narrow street the blue  
Wear, slender pennon-wise.



But when the gold and silver lamps  
Colour the London dew,  
And, misted by the winter damps,  
The shops shine bright anew—  
Blue comes to earth, it walks the street,  
It dyes the wide air through;  
A mimic sky about their feet,  
The throng go crowned with blue.

### *A Dead Harvest*

*(In Kensington Gardens)*

**A** LONG the graceless grass of town  
They rake the rows of red and brown,—  
Dead leaves, unlike the rows of hay  
Delicate, touched with gold and grey,  
Raked long ago and far away.

A narrow silence in the park,  
Between the lights a narrow dark.  
One street rolls on the north; and one,  
Muffled, upon the south doth run;  
Amid the mist the work is done.

A futile crop!—for it the fire  
Smoulders, and, for a stack, a pyre.  
So go the town's lives on the breeze,  
Even as the sheddings of the trees;  
Bosom nor barn is filled with these.

## *Veni Creator*

**S**O humble things Thou hast borne for us, O God,  
Left'st Thou a path of lowliness untrod?  
Yes, one, till now; another Olive-Garden.  
For we endure the tender pain of pardon,—  
One with another we forbear. Give heed,  
Look at the mournful world Thou hast decreed.  
The time has come. At last we hapless men  
Know all our haplessness all through. Come, then,  
Endure undreamed humility: Lord of Heaven,  
Come to our ignorant hearts and be forgiven.

## *Beyond Knowledge*

*"Your sins . . . shall be white as snow."*

**I**NTO the rescued world newcomer,  
The newly-dead stepped up, and cried,  
"O what is that, sweeter than summer  
Was to my heart before I died?  
Sir (to an angel), what is yonder  
More bright than the remembered skies,  
A lovelier sight, a softer splendour  
Than when the moon was wont to rise?  
Surely no sinner wears such seeming  
Even the Rescued World within?"

"O the success of His redeeming!  
O child, it is a rescued sin!"

## *Christ in the Universe*

WITH this ambiguous earth  
His dealings have been told us. These abide:  
The signal to a maid, the human birth,  
The lesson, and the young Man crucified.

But not a star of all  
The innumerable host of stars has heard  
How He administered this terrestrial ball.  
Our race have kept their Lord's entrusted Word.

Of His earth-visiting feet  
None knows the secret, cherished, perilous,  
The terrible, shamefast, frightened, whispered, sweet,  
Heart-shattering secret of His way with us.

No planet knows that this  
Our wayside planet, carrying land and wave,  
Love and life multiplied, and pain and bliss,  
Bears, as chief treasure, one forsaken grave.

Nor, in our little day,  
May His devices with the heavens be guessed;  
His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way,  
Or His bestowals there, be manifest.

But, in the eternities,  
Doubtless we shall compare together, hear  
A million alien Gospels, in what guise  
He trod the Pleiades, the Lyre, the Bear.

O be prepared, my soul!  
To read the inconceivable, to scan  
The million forms of God those stars unroll  
When, in our turn, we show to them a Man.

*Summer in England, 1914*

ON London fell a clearer light;  
Caressing pencils of the sun  
Defined the distances, the white  
Houses transfigured one by one,  
The "long, unlovely street" impearled.  
O what a sky has walked the world!

Most happy year! And out of town  
The hay was prosperous, and the wheat;  
The silken harvest climbed the down:  
Moon after moon was heavenly-sweet,  
Stroking the bread within the sheaves,  
Looking 'twixt apples and their leaves.

And while this rose made round her cup,  
The armies died convulsed. And when  
This chaste young silver sun went up  
Softly, a thousand shattered men,  
One wet corruption, heaped the plain,  
After a league-long throb of pain.

Flower following tender flower; and birds,  
And berries; and benignant skies  
Made thrive the serried flocks and herds.—  
Yonder are men shot through the eyes.  
Love, hide thy face  
From man's unpardonable race.

*At Night*

(To W. M.)

**H**OME, home from the horizon far and clear,  
Hither the soft wings sweep;  
Flocks of the memories of the day draw near  
The dovecote doors of sleep.

O, which are they that come through sweetest light  
Of all these homing birds?  
Which with the straightest and the swiftest flight?  
Your words to me, your words!

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