

The Heptalogia eBook

The Heptalogia by Algernon Swinburne

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THE HEPTALOGIA

By Algernon Charles Swinburne

Taken from *the collected poetical works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Vol. V*

SWINBURNE'S POETICAL WORKS

I. POEMS AND BALLADS (First Series).

II. *Songs before Sunrise, and songs of two Nations.*

III. *Poems and ballads (Second and Third Series), and songs of the SPRINGTIDES.*

IV. *TRISTRAM of LYONESSE, the tale of BALEN, ATALANTA in CALYDON, Erechtheus.*

V. *Studies in song, A century of ROUNDELS, sonnets on English dramatic poets, the Heptalogia, etc.*

VI. *A midsummer Holiday, ASTROPHEL, A Channel passage and other poems.*



LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

THE HEPTALOGIA

By

Algernon Charles Swinburne

1917

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* * * * *

SPECIMENS OF MODERN POETS

THE HEPTALOGIA



OR



Page 2

THE SEVEN AGAINST SENSE

A CAP WITH SEVEN BELLS

THE HIGHER PANTHEISM IN A NUTSHELL

One, who is not, we see: but one, whom we see not, is:
Surely this is not that: but that is assuredly this.

What, and wherefore, and whence? for under is over and under:
If thunder could be without lightning, lightning could be without thunder.

Doubt is faith in the main: but faith, on the whole, is doubt:
We cannot believe by proof: but could we believe without?

Why, and whither, and how? for barley and rye are not clover:
Neither are straight lines curves: yet over is under and over.

Two and two may be four: but four and four are not eight:
Fate and God may be twain: but God is the same thing as fate.

Ask a man what he thinks, and get from a man what he feels:
God, once caught in the fact, shows you a fair pair of heels.

Body and spirit are twins: God only knows which is which:
The soul squats down in the flesh, like a tinker drunk in a ditch.

More is the whole than a part: but half is more than the whole:
Clearly, the soul is the body: but is not the body the soul?

One and two are not one: but one and nothing is two:
Truth can hardly be false, if falsehood cannot be true.

Once the mastodon was: pterodactyls were common as cocks:
Then the mammoth was God: now is He a prize ox.

Parallels all things are: yet many of these are askew:
You are certainly I: but certainly I am not you.

Springs the rock from the plain, shoots the stream from the rock:
Cocks exist for the hen: but hens exist for the cock.

God, whom we see not, is: and God, who is not, we see:
Fiddle, we know, is diddle: and diddle, we take it, is dee.



* * * * *

JOHN JONES'S WIFE

I

AT THE PIANO

I

Love me and leave me; what love bids retrieve me? can June's fist
grasp May?
Leave me and love me; hopes eyed once above me like spring's sprouts
decay;
Fall as the snow falls, when summer leaves grow false—cards packed
for storm's play!

II

Nay, say Decay's self be but last May's elf, wing shifted, eye sheathed—
Changeling in April's crib rocked, who lets 'scape rills locked fast
since frost breathed—
Skin cast (think!) adder-like, now bloom bursts bladder-like,—bloom
frost bequeathed?

III

Ah, how can fear sit and hear as love hears it grief's heart's cracked
grate's screech?
Chance lets the gate sway that opens on hate's way and shews on shame's
beach
Crouched like an imp sly change watch sweet love's shrimps lie, a
toothful in each.



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IV

Time feels his tooth slip on husks wet from Truth's lip, which drops
them and grins—
Shells where no throb stirs of life left in lobsters since joy thrilled
their fins—
Hues of the prawn's tail or comb that makes dawn stale, so red for our
sins!

V

Years blind and deaf use the soul's joys as refuse, heart's peace as
manure,
Reared whence, next June's rose shall bloom where our moons rose last
year, just as pure:
Moons' ends match roses' ends: men by beasts' noses' ends mete sin's
stink's cure.

VI

Leaves love last year smelt now feel dead love's tears melt—flies
caught in time's mesh!
Salt are the dews in which new time breeds new sin, brews blood and
stews flesh;
Next year may see dead more germs than this weeded and reared them
afresh.

VII

Old times left perish, there's new time to cherish; life just shifts
its tune;
As, when the day dies, earth, half afraid, eyes the growth of the moon;
Love me and save me, take me or waive me; death takes one so soon!

II

BY THE CLIFF



I

Is it daytime (guess),
You that feed my soul
To excess
With that light in those eyes
And those curls drawn like a scroll
In that round grave guise?
No or yes?

II

Oh, the end, I'd say!
Such a foolish thing
(Pure girls' play!)
As a mere mute heart,
Was it worth a kiss, a ring,
This? for two must part—
Not to-day.

III

Look, the whole sand crawls,
Hums, a heaving hive,
Scrapes and scrawls—
Such a buzz and burst!
Here just one thing's not alive,
One that was at first—
But life palls.

IV

Yes, my heart, I know,
Just my heart's stone dead—
Yes, just so.
Sick with heat, those worms
Drop down scorched and overfed—
No more need of germs!
Let them go.



V

Yes, but you now, look,
You, the rouged stage female
With a crook,
Chalked Arcadian sham,
You that made my soul's sleep's dream ail—
Your soul fit to damn?
Shut the book.

III

ON THE SANDS

I

There was nothing at all in the case (conceive)
But love; being love, it was not (understand)
Such a thing as the years let fall (believe)
Like the rope's coil dropt from a fisherman's hand
When the boat's hauled up—"by your leave!"



Page 4

II

So—well! How that crab writhes—leg after leg
Drawn, as a worm draws ring upon ring
Gradually, not gladly! Chicken or egg,
Is it more than the ransom (say) of a king
(Take my meaning at least) that I beg?

III

Not so! You were ready to learn, I think,
What the world said! “He loves you too well (suppose)
For such leanings! These poets, their love’s mere ink—
Like a flower, their flame flashes—a rosebud, blows—
Then it all drops down at a wink!

IV

“Ah, the instance! A curl of a blossomless vine
The vinedresser passing it sickens to see
And mutters ‘Much hope (under God) of His wine
From the branch and the bark of a barren tree
Spring reared not, and winter lets pine—

V

“His wine that should glorify (saith He) the cup
That a man beholding (not tasting) might say
“Pour out life at a draught, drain it dry, drink it up,
Give this one thing, and huddle the rest away—
Save the bitch, and be hanged to the pup!”

VI

“Let it rot then!’ which saying, he leaves it—we’ll guess,
Feels (if the sap move at all) thus much—
Yearns, and would blossom, would quicken no less,
Bud at an eye’s glance, flower at a touch—
‘Die, perhaps, would you not, for her?’—‘Yes!’



VII

“Note the hitch there! That’s piteous—so much being done,
 (He’ll think some day, your lover) so little to do!
Such infinite days to wear out, once begun!
 Since the hand its glove holds, and the footsole its shoe—
Overhead too there’s always the sun!”

VIII

Oh, no doubt they had said so, your friends—been profuse
 Of good counsel, wise hints—“where the trap lurks, walk warily—
Squeeze the fruit to the core ere you count on the juice!
 For the graft may fail, shift, wax, change colour, wane, vary, lie—”
You were cautious, God knows—to what use?

IX

This crab’s wiser, it strikes me—no twist but implies life—
 Not a curl but’s so fit you could find none fitter—
For the brute from its brutehood looks up thus and eyes life—
 Stoop your soul down and listen, you’ll hear it twitter,
Laughing lightly,—my crab’s life’s the wise life!

X

Those who’ve read S. T. Coleridge remember how Sammy sighs
 To his pensive (I think he says) Sara—“most soothing-sweet”—
Crab’s bulk’s less (look!) than man’s—yet (quoth Cancer) I am my size,
 And my bulk’s girth contents me! Man’s maw (see?) craves two things—
 wheat
And flesh likewise—man’s gluttonous—damn his eyes!



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XI

Crab's content with crab's provender: crab's love, if soothing,
Is no sweeter than pincers are soft—and a new sickle
Cuts no sharper than crab's claws nip, keen as boar's tothing!
Yet crab's love's no less fervent than bard's, if less musical—
'Tis a new thing I'd lilt—but a true thing.

XII

Old songs tell us, of all drinks for Englishmen fighting, ale's
Out and out best: salt water contents crab, it seems to me,
Though pugnacious as sailors, and skilled to steer right in gales
That craze pilots, if slow to sing—"Sleep'st thou? thou dream'st
o' me!"
In such love-strains as mine—or a nightingale's.

XIII

Ah, now, look you—tail foremost, the beast sets seaward—
The sea draws it, sand sucks it—he's wise, my crab!
From the napkin out jumps his one talent—good steward,
Just judge! So a man shirks the smile or the stab,
And sets his sail duly to leeward!

XIV

Trust me? Hardly! I bid you not lean (remark)
On my spirit, your spirit—my flesh, your flesh—
Hold my hand, and tread safe through the horrible dark—
Quench my soul as with sprinklings of snow, then refresh
With some blast of new bellows the spark!

XV

By no means! This were easy (men tell me) to say—
"Give her all, throw your chance up, fall back on her heart!"
(Say my friends) "she must change! after night follows day—"
No such fool! I am safe set in hell, for my part—
So let heaven do the worst now he may!



XVI

What they bid me? Well, this, nothing more—"Tell her this—
'You are mine, I yours, though the whole world fail—
Though things are not, I know there is one thing which is—
Though the oars break, there's hope for us yet—hoist the sail!
Oh, your heart! what's the heart? but your kiss!'

XVII

"Then she breaks, she drops down, she lies flat at your feet—
Take her then!" Well, I knew it—what fools are men!
Take the bee by her horns, will your honey prove sweet?
Sweet is grass—will you pasture your cows in a fen?
Oh, if contraries could but once meet!

XVIII

Love you call it? Some twitch in the moon's face (observe),
Wet blink of her eyelid, tear dropt about dewfall,
Cheek flushed or obscured—does it make the sky swerve?
Fetch the test, work the question to rags, bring to proof all—
Find what souls want and bodies deserve!

XIX



Page 6

Ah, we know you! Your soul works to infinite ends,
Frets, uses life up for death's sake, takes pains,
Flings down love's self—"but you, bear me witness, my friends!
Have I lost spring? count up (see) the winter's fresh gains!
Is the shrub spoilt? the pine's hair impends!"

XX

What, you'd say—"Mark how God works! Years crowd, time wears thin,
Earth keeps good yet, the sun goes on, stars hold their own,
And you'll change, climb past sight of the world, shift your skin,
Never heeding how life moans—'more flesh now, less bone!
For that cheek's worn waste outline (death's grin)

XXI

"Pleads with time still—'what good if I lose this? but see—"
(There's the crab gone!) "I said, "Though earth sinks,"" (you perceive?
Ah, true, back there!) your soul now—"yet some vein might be
(Could one find it alive in the heart's core's pulse, cleave
Through the life-springs where "you" melts in "me")—

XXII

"Some true vein of the absolute soul, which survives
All that flesh runs to waste through"—and lo, this fails!
Here's death close on us! One life? a million of lives!
Why choose one sail to watch of these infinite sails?
Time's a tennis-play? thank you, no, fives!

XXIII

"Stop life's ball then!' Such folly! melt earth down for that,
Till the pure ore eludes you and leaves you raw scoriae?
Pish, the vein's wrong!" But you, friends—come, what were you at
When God spat you out suddenly? what was the story He
Cut short thus, the growth He laid flat?



XXIV

Wait! the crab's twice alive, mark! Oh, worthy, your soul,
Of strange ends, great results, novel labours! Take note,
I reject this for one! (ay, now, straight to the hole!
Safe in sand there—your skirts smooth out all as they float!)
I, shirk drinking through flaws in the bowl?

XXV

Or suppose now that rock's cleft—grim, scored to the quick,
As a man's face kept fighting all life through gets scored,
Mossed and marked with grey purulent leprosies, sick,
Flat and foul as man's life here (be swift with your sword—
Cut the soul out, stuck fast where thorns prick!)

XXVI

—Say it let the rock's heart out, its meaning, the thing
All was made for, devised, ruled out gradually, planned—
Ah, that sea-shell, perhaps—since it lies, such a ring
Of pure colour, a cup full of sunbeams, to stand
(Say, in Lent) at the priest's hand—(no king!)

XXVII



Page 7

Blame the cleft then? Praise rather! So—just a chance gone!
Had you said—“Save the seed and secure souls in flower”—
Ah, how time laughs, years palpitate, pro grapples con,
Till one day you shrug shoulders—“Well, gone, the good hour!”
Till one night—“Is God off now? or on?”

IV

UP THE SPOUT

I

Hi! Just you drop that! Stop, I say!
Shirk work, think slink off, twist friend's wrist?
Where that spined sand's lined band's the bay—
Lined blind with true sea's blue, as due—
Promising—not to pay?

II

For the sea's debt leaves wet the sand;
Burst worst fate's weights in one burst gun?
A man's own yacht, blown—What? off land?
Tack back, or veer round here, then—queer!
Reef points, though—understand?

III

I'm blest if I do. Sigh? be blown!
Love's doves make break life's ropes, eh? Tropes!
Faith's brig, baulked, sides caulked, rides at road;
Hope's gropes befogged, storm-dogged and bogged—
Clogged, water-logged, her load!

IV

Stowed, by Jove, right and tight, away!
No show now how best plough sea's brow,
Wrinkling—breeze quick, tease thick, ere day,



Clear sheer wave's sheen of green, I mean,
With twinkling wrinkles—eh?

V

Sea sprinkles winkles, tinkles light
Shells' bells—boy's joys that hap to snap!
It's just sea's fun, breeze done, to spite
God's rods that scourge her surge, I'd urge—
Not proper, is it—quite?

VI

See, fore and aft, life's craft undone!
Crank plank, split spritsail—mark, sea's lark!
That grey cold sea's old sprees, begun
When men lay dark i' the ark, no spark,
All water—just God's fun!

VII

Not bright, at best, his jest to these
Seemed—screamed, shrieked, wreaked on kin for sin!
When for mirth's yell earth's knell seemed please
Some dumb new grim great whim in him
Made Jews take chalk for cheese.

VIII

Could God's rods bruise God's Jews? Their jowls
Bobbed, sobbed, gaped, aped the plaice in face:
None heard, 'tis odds, his—God's—folk's howls.
Now, how must I apply, to try
This hookiest-beaked of owls?

IX

Well, I suppose God knows—I don't.
Time's crimes mark dark men's types, in stripes
Broad as fen's lands men's hands were wont
Leave grieve unploughed, though proud and loud
With birds' words—No! he won't!



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X

One never should think good impossible.
Eh? say I'd hide this Jew's oil's cruse—
His shop might hold bright gold, engrossible
By spy—spring's air takes there no care
To wave the heath-flower's glossy bell!

XI

But gold bells chime in time there, coined—
Gold! Old Sphinx winks there—"Read my screed!"
Doctrine Jews learn, use, burn for, joined
(Through new craft's stealth) with health and wealth—
At once all three purloined!

XII

I rose with dawn, to pawn, no doubt,
(Miss this chance, glance untried aside?)
John's shirt, my—no! Ay, so—the lout!
Let yet the door gape, store on floor
And not a soul about?

XIII

Such men lay traps, perhaps—and I'm
Weak—meek—mild—child of woe, you know!
But theft, I doubt, my lout calls crime.
Shrink? Think! Love's dawn in pawn—you spawn
Of Jewry! Just in time!

V

OFF THE PIER



I

One last glance at these sands and stones!
Time goes past men, and lives to his liking,
Steals, and ruins, and sometimes atones.
Why should he be king, though, and why not I king?
There now, that wind, like a swarm of sick drones!

II

Is it heaven or mere earth (come!) that moves so and moans?
Oh, I knew, when you loved me, my soul was in flowerage—
Now the frost comes; from prime, though, I watched through to nones,
Read love's litanies over—his age was not our age!
No more flutes in this world for me now, dear! trombones.

III

All that youth once denied and made mouths at, age owns.
Facts put fangs out and bite us; life stings and grows viperous;
And time's fugues are a hubbub of meaningless tones.
Once we followed the piper; now why not the piper us?
Love, grown grey, plays mere solos; we want antiphones.

IV

And we sharpen our wits up with passions for hones,
Melt down loadstars for magnets, use women for whetstones,
Learn to bear with dead calms by remembering cyclones,
Snap strings short with sharp thumbnails, till silence begets tones,
Burn our souls out, shift spirits, turn skins and change zones;

V

Then the heart, when all's done with, wakes, whimpers, intones
Some lost fragment of tune it thought sweet ere it grew sick;
(Is it life that disclaims this, or death that disowns?)
Mere dead metal, scrawled bars—ah, one touch, you make music!
Love's worth saving, youth doubts, but experience depones.



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VI

In the darkness (right Dickens) of Tom-All-Alone's
Or the Morgue out in Paris, where tragedy centuples
Life's effects by Death's algebra, Shakespeare (Malone's)
Might have said sleep was murdered—new scholiasts have sent you pills
To purge text of him! Bread? give me—Scottice—scones!

VII

Think, what use, when youth's saddle galls bay's back or roan's,
To seek chords on love's keys to strike, other than his chords?
There's an error joy winks at and grief half condones,
Or life's counterpoint grates the C major of discords—
'Tis man's choice 'twixt sluts rose-crowned and queens age dethrones.

VIII

I for instance might groan as a bag-pipe groans,
Give the flesh of my heart for sharp sorrows to flagellate,
Grief might grind my cheeks down, age make sticks of my bones,
(Though a queen drowned in tears must be worth more than Madge elate)[1]
Rose might turn burdock, and pine-apples cones;

IX

My skin might change to a pitiful crone's,
My lips to a lizard's, my hair to weed,
My features, in fact, to a series of loans;
Thus much is conceded; now, you, concede
You would hardly salute me by choice, John Jones?

[Footnote 1: First edition:— And my face bear his brand—mine, that once bore Love's badge elate!]

* * * * *



THE POET AND THE WOODLOUSE

Said a poet to a woodlouse—"Thou art certainly my brother;
I discern in thee the markings of the fingers of the Whole;
And I recognize, in spite of all the terrene smut and smother,
In the colours shaded off thee, the suggestions of a soul.

"Yea," the poet said, "I smell thee by some passive divination,
I am satisfied with insight of the measure of thine house;
What had happened I conjecture, in a blank and rhythmic passion,
Had the aeons thought of making thee a man, and me a louse.

"The broad lives of upper planets, their absorption and digestion,
Food and famine, health and sickness, I can scrutinize and test;
Through a shiver of the senses comes a resonance of question,
And by proof of balanced answer I decide that I am best."

"Man, the fleshly marvel, alway feels a certain kind of awe stick
To the skirts of contemplation, cramped with nympholeptic weight:
Feels his faint sense charred and branded by the touch of solar caustic,
On the forehead of his spirit feels the footprint of a Fate."

"Notwithstanding which, O poet," spake the woodlouse, very blandly,
"I am likewise the created,—I the equipoise of thee;
I the particle, the atom, I behold on either hand lie
The inane of measured ages that were embryos of me.



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“I am fed with intimations, I am clothed with consequences,
And the air I breathe is coloured with apocalyptic blush:
Ripest-budded odours blossom out of dim chaotic stench,
And the Soul plants spirit-lilies in sick leagues of human slush.

“I am thrilled half cosmically through by cryptophantic surgings,
Till the rhythmic hills roar silent through a spongy kind of blee:
And earth’s soul yawns disembowelled of her pancreatic organs,
Like a madrepore if mesmerized, in rapt catalepsy.

“And I sacrifice, a Levite—and I palpitate, a poet;—
Can I close dead ears against the rush and resonance of things?
Symbols in me breathe and flicker up the heights of the heroic;
Earth’s worst spawn, you said, and cursed me? look! approve me! I
have wings.

“Ah, men’s poets! men’s conventions crust you round and swathe you
mist-like,
And the world’s wheels grind your spirits down the dust ye overtrod:
We stand sinlessly stark-naked in effulgence of the Christlight,
And our polecat chokes not cherubs; and our skunk smells sweet to God.

“For He grasps the pale Created by some thousand vital handles,
Till a Godshine, bluey winnowed through the sieve of thunderstorms,
Shimmers up the non-existent round the churning feet of angels;
And the atoms of that glory may be seraphs, being worms.

“Friends, your nature underlies us and your pulses overplay us;
Ye, with social sores unbandaged, can ye sing right and steer wrong?
For the transient cosmic, rooted in imperishable chaos,
Must be kneaded into drastics as material for a song.

“Eyes once purged from homebred vapours through humanitarian passion
See that monochrome a despot through a democratic prism;
Hands that rip the soul up, reeking from divine evisceration,
Not with priestlike oil anoint him, but a stronger-smelling chrism.

“Pass, O poet, retransfigured! God, the psychometric rhapsode,
Fills with fiery rhythms the silence, stings the dark with stars
that blink;
All eternities hang round him like an old man’s clothes collapsed,
While he makes his mundane music—and *he will not stop, I think.*”

* * * * *



THE PERSON OF THE HOUSE

IDYL CCCLXVI

THE ACCOMPANIMENTS

1. *The monthly nurse* 2. *The caudle* 3. *The sentences*

THE KID

1. *The monthly nurse*



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The sickly airs had died of damp;
Through huddling leaves the holy chime
Flagged; I, expecting Mrs. Gamp,
Thought—"Will the woman come in time?"
Upstairs I knew the matron bed
Held her whose name confirms all joy
To me; and tremblingly I said,
"Ah! will it be a girl or boy?"
And, soothed, my fluttering doubts began
To sift the pleasantness of things;
Developing the unshapen man,
An eagle baffled of his wings;
Considering, next, how fair the state
And large the license that sublimes
A nineteenth-century female fate—
Sweet cause that thralls my liberal rhymes!
And Chastities and colder Shames,
Decorums mute and marvellous,
And fair Behaviour that reclaims
All fancies grown erroneous,
Moved round me musing, till my choice
Faltered. A female in a wig
Stood by me, and a drouthy voice
Announced her—Mrs. Betsy Prig.

2. *The caudle*

Sweet Love that sways the reeling years,
The crown and chief of certitudes,
For whose calm eyes and modest ears
Time writes the rule and text of prudes—
That, surpliced, stoops a nuptial head,
Nor chooses to live blindly free,
But, with all pulses quieted,
Plays tunes of domesticity—
That Love I sing of and have sung
And mean to sing till Death yawn sheer,
He rules the music of my tongue,
Stills it or quickens, there or here.
I say but this: as we went up
I heard the Monthly give a sniff
And "*if* the big dog makes the pup—"
She murmured—then repeated "*if!*"
The caudle on a slab was placed;



She snuffed it, snorting loud and long;
I fled—I would not stop to taste—
And dreamed all night of things gone wrong.

3. *The sentences*

I

Abortive Love is half a sin;
But Love's abortions dearer far
Than wheels without an axle-pin
Or life without a married star.

II

My rules are hard to understand
For him whom sensual rules depress;
A bandbox in a midwife's hand
May hold a costlier bridal dress.

III

"I like her not; in fact I loathe;
Bugs hath she brought from London beds."
Friend! wouldst thou rather bear their growth
Or have a baby with two heads?

IDYL CCCLXVI

THE KID

My spirit, in the doorway's pause,
Fluttered with fancies in my breast;
Obsequious to all decent laws,
I felt exceedingly distressed.
I knew it rude to enter there
With Mrs. V. in such a state;
And, 'neath a magisterial air,
Felt actually indelicate.
I knew the nurse began to grin;
I turned to greet my Love. Said she—
"Confound your modesty, come in!
—What shall we call the darling, V.?"
(There are so many charming names!



Girls'—Peg, Moll, Doll, Fan, Kate, Blanche, Bab:
Boys'—Mahershahal-hashbaz, James,
Luke, Nick, Dick, Mark, Aminadab.)



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Lo, as the acorn to the oak,
As well-heads to the river's height,
As to the chicken the moist yolk,
As to high noon the day's first white—
Such is the baby to the man.
There, straddling one red arm and leg,
Lay my last work, in length a span,
Half hatched, and conscious of the egg.
A creditable child, I hoped;
And half a score of joys to be
Through sunny lengths of prospect sloped
Smooth to the bland futurity.
O, fate surpassing other dooms,
O, hope above all wrecks of time!
O, light that fills all vanquished glooms,
O, silent song o'ermastering rhyme!
I covered either little foot,
I drew the strings about its waist;
Pink as the unshell'd inner fruit,
But barely decent, hardly chaste,
Its nudity had startled me;
But when the petticoats were on,
"I know," I said; "its name shall be
Paul Cyril Athanasius John."
"Why," said my wife, "the child's a girl."
My brain swooned, sick with failing sense;
With all perception in a whirl,
How could I tell the difference?
"Nay," smiled the nurse, "the child's a boy."
And all my soul was soothed to hear
That so it was: then startled Joy
Mocked Sorrow with a doubtful tear.
And I was glad as one who sees
For sensual optics things unmeet:
As purity makes passion freeze,
So faith warns science off her beat.
Blessed are they that have not seen,
And yet, not seeing, have believed:
To walk by faith, as preached the Dean,
And not by sight, have I achieved.
Let love, that does not look, believe;
Let knowledge, that believes not, look:
Truth pins her trust on falsehood's sleeve,



While reason blunders by the book.
Then Mrs. Prig addressed me thus;
“Sir, if you’ll be advised by me,
You’ll leave the blessed babe to us;
It’s my belief he wants his tea.”

* * * * *

LAST WORDS OF A SEVENTH-RATE POET

Bill, I feel far from quite right—if not further: already the pill
Seems, if I may say so, to bubble inside me. A poet’s heart, Bill,
Is a sort of a thing that is made of the tenderest young bloom on a fruit.
You may pass me the mixture at once, if you please—and I’ll thank you
to boot
For that poem—and then for the julep. This really is damnable stuff!
(Not the poem, of course.) Do you snivel, old friend? well, it’s nasty
enough,
But I think I can stand it—I think so—ay, Bill, and I could were it
worse.
But I’ll tell you a thing that I can’t and I won’t. ’Tis the old, old
curse—
The gall of the gold-fruited Eden, the lure of the angels that fell.
’Tis the core of the fruit snake-spotted in the hush of the shadows of
hell,
Where a lost man sits with his head drawn down, and a weight on his eyes.



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You know what I mean, Bill—the tender and delicate mother of lies,
Woman, the devil's first cousin—no doubt by the female side.
The breath of her mouth still moves in my hair, and I know that she lied,
And I feel her, Bill, sir, inside me—she operates there like a drug.
Were it better to live like a beetle, to wear the cast clothes of a slug,
Be the louse in the locks of the hangman, the mote in the eye of the bat,
Than to live and believe in a woman, who must one day grow aged and fat?
You must see it's preposterous, Bill, sir. And yet, how the thought of
it clings!

I have lived out my time—I have prigged lots of verse—I have kissed
(ah, that stings!)
Lips that swore I had cribbed every line that I wrote on them—cribbed—
honour bright!

Then I loathed her; but now I forgive her; perhaps after all she was right.
Yet I swear it was shameful—unwomanly, Bill, sir—to say that I fibbed.
Why, the poems were mine, for I bought them in print. Cribbed? of course
they were cribbed.

Yet I wouldn't say, cribbed from the French—Lady Bathsheba thought it
was vulgar—
But picked up on the banks of the Don, from the lips of a highly
intelligent Bulgar.

I'm aware, Bill, that's out of all metre—I can't help it—I'm none of
your sort

Who set metres, by Jove, above morals—not exactly. They don't go to
Court—

As I mentioned one night to that cowslip-faced pet, Lady Rahab Redrabbit
(Whom the Marquis calls Drabby for short). Well, I say, if you want a
thing, grab it—

That's what I did, at least, when I took that *danseuse* to a swell
cabaret,

Where expense was no consideration. A poet, you see, now and then must
be gay.

(I declined to give more, I remember, than fifty centesims to the waiter;
For I asked him if that was enough; and the jackanapes answered—
Peut-etre.

Ah, it isn't in you to draw up a *menu* such as ours was, though humble:
When I told Lady Shoreditch, she thought it a regular *grand tout
ensemble*.)

She danced the heart out of my body—I can see in the glare of the lights,
I can see her again as I saw her that evening, in spangles and tights.



When I spoke to her first, her eye flashed so, I heard—as I
fancied—the spark whiz
From her eyelid—I said so next day to that jealous old fool of a Marquis.
She reminded me, Bill, of a lovely volcano, whose entrails are lava—
Or (you know my *penchant* for original types) of the upas in Java.
In the curve of her sensitive nose was a singular species of dimple,
Where the flush was the mark of an angel's creased kiss—if it wasn't
a pimple.
Now I'm none of your bashful John Bulls who don't know a pilau from a
puggaree
Nor a chili, by George, from a chopstick. So, sir, I marched into her



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snuggery,
And proposed a light supper by way of a finish. I treated her, Bill,
To six *entrees* of ortolans, sprats, maraschino, and oysters. It made
her quite ill.
Of which moment of sickness I took some advantage. I held her like this,
And availed myself, sir, of her sneezing, to shut up her lips with a kiss.
The waiters, I saw, were quite struck; and I felt, I may say, *entre nous*,
Like Don Juan, Lauzun, Almaviva, Lord Byron, and old Richelieu.
(You'll observe, Bill, that rhyme's quite Parisian; a Londoner, sir,
would have cited old Q.
People tell me the French in my verses recalls that of Jeames or John
Thomas: I
Must maintain it's as good as the average accent of British diplomacy.)
These are moments that thrill the whole spirit with spasms that excite
and exalt.
I stood more than the peer of the great Casanova—you know—de Seingalt.
She was worth, sir, I say it without hesitation, two brace of her sisters.
Ah, why should all honey turn rhubarb—all cherries grow onions—all
kisses leave blisters?
Oh, and why should I ask myself questions? I've heard such before—once
or twice.
Ah, I can't understand it—but, O, I imagine it strikes me as nice.
There's a deity shapes us our ends, sir, rough-hew them, my boy, how
we will—
As I stated myself in a poem I published last year, you know, Bill—
Where I mentioned that that was the question—to be, or, by Jove, not
to be.
Ah, it's something—you'll think so hereafter—to wait on a poet like me.
Had I written no more than those verses on that Countess I used to
call Pussy—
Yes, Minette or Manon—and—you'll hardly believe it—she said they
were all out of Musset.
Now I don't say they weren't—but what then? and I don't say they
were—I'll bet pounds against pennies on
The subject—I wish I may never die Laureate, if some of them weren't
out of Tennyson.
And I think—I don't like to be certain, with Death, so to speak, by
me, frowning—
But I think there were some—say a dozen, perhaps, or a score—out of
Browning.



And—though God knows his poems are not (as all mine are, sir) perfumed
with orris—

Or at least with patchouli—I wouldn't be sworn there were none out of
Morris.

And it's possible—only the legend of Circe is quite an old yarn—old
As the hills—that I might have been thinking, perhaps, of a poem by Arnold
When I sang how Ulysses—Odysseus I mean—would have yearned to dishevel
her

Bright hair with his kisses, and painted myself at her feet—a Strayed
Reveller.

As for poets who go on a contrary tack to what I go and you go—
You remember my lyrics *translated*—like “sweet bully Bottom”—from Hugo?
Though I will say it's curious that simply on just that account there



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should be
Men so bold as to say that not one of my poems was written by me.
It would stir the political bile or the physical spleen of a drab or a Tory
To hear critics disputing my claim to Empedocles, Maud, and the Laboratory.
Yes, it's singular—nay, I can't think of a parallel (ain't it a high lark?
As that Countess would say)—there are few men believe it was I wrote the
Ode to a Skylark.
And it often has given myself and Lord Albert no end of diversion
To hear fellows maintain to my face it was Wordsworth who wrote the
Excursion,
When they know that whole reams of the verses recur in my authorized works
Here and there, up and down! Why, such readers are infidels—heretics—
Turks.
And the pitiful critics who think in their paltry presumption to pay me a
Pretty compliment, pairing me off, sir, with Keats—as if *he* could
write Lamia!
While I never produced a more characteristic and exquisite book,
One that gave me more real satisfaction, than did, on the whole, Lalla
Rookh.
Was it there that I called on all debtors, being pestered myself by a
creditor, (he
Isn't paid yet) to rise, by the proud appellation of bondsmen—hereditary?
Yes—I think so. And yet, on my word, I can't think why I think it was so.
It more probably was in the poem I made a few seasons ago
On that Duchess—her name now? ah, thus one outlives a whole cycle of joys!
Fair supplants black and brown succeeds golden. The poem made rather a
noise.
And indeed I have seen worse verses; but as for the woman, my friend—
Though his neck had been never so stiff, she'd have made a philosopher
bend.
As the broken heart of a sunset that bleeds pure purple and gold
In the shudder and swoon of the sickness of colour, the agonies old
That engirdle the brows of the day when he sinks with a spasm into rest
And the splash of his kingly blood is dashed on the skirts of the west,
Even such was my own, when I felt how much sharper than any snake's tooth
Was the passion that made me mistake Lady Eve for her niece Lady Ruth.
The whole world, colourless, lapsed. Earth fled from my feet like a dream,
And the whirl of the walls of Space was about me, and moved as a stream
Flowing and ebbing and flowing all night to a weary tune
("Such as that of my verses"? Get out!) in the face of a sick-souled moon.



The keen stars kindled and faded and fled, and the wind in my ears
Was the wail of a poet for failure—you needn't come snivelling tears
And spoiling the mixture, confound you, with dropping your tears into that!
I know I'm pathetic—I must be—and you soft-hearted and fat,
And I'm grateful of course for your kindness—there, don't come hugging
me, now—
But because a fellow's pathetic, you needn't low like a cow.



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I should like—on my soul, I should like—to remember—but somehow I
can't—

If the lady whose love has reduced me to this was the niece or the aunt. But whichever it was, I feel sure, when I published my lays of last year (You remember their title—The Tramp—only seven-and-sixpence—not dear), I sent her a copy (perhaps her tears fell on the title-page—yes— I should like to imagine she wept)—and the Bride of Bulgaria (MS.) I forwarded with it. The lyrics, no doubt, she found bitter—and sweet; But the Bride she rejected, you know, with expressions I will not repeat. Well—she did no more than all publishers did. Though my prospects were
marred,

I can pity and pardon them. Blindness, mere blindness! And yet it was hard. For a poet, Bill, is a blossom—a bird—a billow—a breeze— A kind of creature that moves among men as a wind among trees. And a bard who is also the pet of patricians and dowagers doubly can Express his contempt for canaille in his fables where beasts are republican.

Yet with all my disdainful forgiveness for men so deficient in *ton* I cannot but feel it was cruel—I cannot but think it was wrong. I with the heat of my heart still burning against all bars As the fire of the dawn, so to speak, in the blanched blank brows of
the stars—

I with my tremulous lips made pale by musical breath— I with the shade in my eyes that was left by the kisses of Death— (For Death came near me in youth, and touched my face with his face, And put in my lips the songs that belong to a desolate place— Desolate truly, my heart and my lips, till her kiss filled them up!) I with my soul like wine poured out with my flesh for the cup— It was hard for me—it was hard—Bill, Bill, you great owl, was it not? For the day creeps in like a Fate: and I think my grand passion is rot: And I dreamily seem to perceive, by the light of a life's dream done, The lotion at six, and the mixture at ten, and the draught before one.

Yes—I feel rather better. Man's life is a mull, at the best; And the patent perturbator pills are like bullets of lead in my chest. When a man's whole spirit is like the lost Pleiad, a blown-out star, Is there comfort in Holloway, Bill? is there hope of salvation in Parr? True, most things work to their end—and an end that the shroud overlaps. Under lace, under silk, under gold, sir, the skirt of a winding-sheet
flaps—

Which explains, if you think of it, Bill, why I can't, though my soul
thereon broodeth,

Quite make out if I loved Lady Tamar as much as I loved Lady Judith. Yet her dress was of violet velvet, her hair was hyacinth-hued, And her ankles—no matter. A face where the music of every mood Was touched by the tremulous fingers of passionate feeling, and made Strange melodies, scornful, but sweeter than strings whereon sorrow has
played

To enrapture the hearing of mirth when his garland of blossom and green Turns to lead
on the anguished



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forehead—"you don't understand what I
mean"?

Well, of course I knew you were stupid—you always were stupid at school— Now don't
say you weren't—but I'm hanged if I thought you were quite
such a fool!

You don't see the point of all this? I was talking of sickness and death— In that poem I
made years ago, I said this—"Love, the flower-time
whose breath

Smells sweet through a summer of kisses and perfumes an autumn of tears Is sadder at
root than a winter—its hopes heavy-hearted like fears. Though I love your Grace more
than I love little Letty, the maid of
the mill,

Yet the heat of your lips when I kiss them" (you see we were intimate,
Bill)

"And the beat of the delicate blood in your eyelids of azure and white Leave the taste of
the grave in my mouth and the shadow of death on my
sight.

Fill the cup—twine the chaplet—come into the garden—get out of the
house—

Drink to *me* with your eyes—there's a banquet behind, where worms
only carouse!

As I said to sweet Katie, who lived by the brook on the land Philip
farmed—

Worms shall graze where my kisses found pasture!" The Duchess, I may
say, was charmed.

It was read to the Duke, and he cried like a child. If you'll give me
a pill,

I'll go on till past midnight. That poem was said to be—Somebody's, Bill. But you see
you can always be sure of my hand as the mother that bore me By the fact that I never
write verse which has never been written
before me.

Other poets—I blush for them, Bill—may adore and repudiate in turn a Libitina, perhaps,
or Pandemos; my Venus, you know, is Laverna. Nay, that epic of mine which begins
from foundations the Bible is
built on—

"Of man's *first* disobedience"—I've heard it attributed, dammy, to
Milton.

Well, it's lucky for them that it's not worth my while, as I may say,
to break spears

With the hirelings, forsooth, of the press who assert that Othello was
Shakespeare's.

When he that can run, sir, may read—if he borrows the book, or goes



on tick—

In my poems the bit that describes how the Hellespont joins the Propontic. There are men, I believe, who will tell you that Gray wrote the whole
of The Bard—

Or that I didn't write half the Elegy, Bill, in a Country Churchyard. When you know that my poem, The Poet, begins—"Ruin seize thee!" and ends With recapitulations of horrors the poet invokes on his friends. And I'll swear, if you look at the dirge on my relatives under the turf,

you

Will perceive it winds up with some lines on myself—and begins with
the curfew.

Now you'll grant it's more probable, Bill—as a man of the world, if
you please—

That all these should have prigged from myself than that I should have
prigged from all these.

I could cry when I think of it, friend, if such tears



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would comport

with my dignity,

That the author of *Christabel* ever should smart from such vulgar malignity. (You remember perhaps that was one of the first little things that I

carolled

After finishing *Marmion*, the *Princess*, the *Song of the Shirt*, and

Childe Harold.)

Oh, doubtless it always has been so—Ah, doubtless it always will be— There are men who would say that myself is a different person from me. Better the porridge of patience a poor man snuffs in his plate Than the water of poisonous laurels distilled by the fingers of hate.

'Tis a dark-purple sort of a moonlighted kind of a midnight, I know;

You remember those verses I wrote on Irene, from Edgar A. Poe? It was Lady Aholibah Levison, daughter of old Lord St. Giles, Who inspired those delectable strains, and rewarded her bard with her

smiles.

There are tasters who've sipped of Castalia, who don't look on *my* brew as *the* brew:

There are fools who can't think why the names of my heroines of title should always be Hebrew.

'Twas my comrade, Sir Alister Knox, said, "Noo, dinna ye fash wi' Apollo, mon;

Gang to Jewry for wives and for concubines, lad—look at David and Solomon.

And it gives an erotico-scriptural twang," said that high-born young man, "—tickles

The lug" (he meant ear) "of the reader—to throw in a touch of the Canticles."

So I versified half of *The Preacher*—it took me a week, working slowly.

Bah!

You don't half know the sex, Bill—they like it. And what if her name was Aholibah?

I recited her charms, in conjunction with those of a girl at the *cafe*, In a poem I published in collaboration with Templeton (Taffy). There are prudes in a world full of envy—and some of them thought it

too strong

To compare an earl's daughter by name with a girl at a French *restaurant*. I regarded her, though, with the chivalrous eyes of a knight-errant on

quest;

I may say I don't know that I ever felt prouder, old friend, of a conquest. And when I've been made happy, I never have cared a brass farthing who



knew it; I

Thank my stars I'm as free from mock-modesty, friend, as from vulgar
fatuity.

I can't say if my spirit retains—for the subject appears to me misty—any
tie

To such associations as Poesy weaves round the records of Christianity. There are
bards—I may be one myself—who delight in their skill to unlock
a lip's

Rosy secrets by kisses and whispers of texts from the charming Apocalypse. It was
thus that I won, by such biblical pills of poetical manna, From two elders—Sir Seth and
Lord Isaac—the liking of Lady Susanna. But I left her—a woman to me is no more than
a match, sir, at tennis is— When I heard she'd gone off with my valet, and burnt my
rhymed version

of Genesis.

You may see by my shortness of speech that my time's



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almost up: I perceive That my new-fangled brevity strikes you: but don't—though the public will—grieve.

As it's sometimes my whim to be vulgar, it's sometimes my whim to be brief; As when once I observed, after Heine, that "she was a harlot, and I" (which is true) "was a thief."

(Though you hardly should cite this particular line, by the way, as an instance of absolute brevity:

I'm aware, man, of that; so you needn't disgrace yourself, sir, by such grossly mistimed and impertinent levity.)

I don't like to break off, any more than you wish me to stop: but my fate is

Not to vent half a million such rhymes without blockheads exclaiming—

JAM SATIS.

Specimen from the speaker's original poems.

Come into the orchard, Anne,
For the dark owl, Night, has fled,
And Phosphor slumbers, as well as he can
With a daffodil sky for a bed:
And the musk of the roses perplexes a man,
And the pimpernel muddles his head.

* * * * *

SONNET FOR A PICTURE

That nose is out of drawing. With a gasp,
She pants upon the passionate lips that ache
With the red drain of her own mouth, and make
A monochord of colour. Like an asp,
One lithe lock wriggles in his rutilant grasp.
Her bosom is an oven of myrrh, to bake
Love's white warm shewbread to a browner cake.
The lock his fingers clench has burst its hasp.
The legs are absolutely abominable.
Ah! what keen overgust of wild-eyed woes
Flashes in that bosom, flushes in that nose?
Nay! Death sets riddles for desire to spell,



Responsive. What red hem earth's passion sews,
But may be ravenously unripped in hell?

* * * * *

NEPHELIDIA

From the depth of the dreamy decline of the dawn through a notable nimbus
of nebulous noonshine,
Pallid and pink as the palm of the flag-flower that flickers with fear
of the flies as they float,
Are they looks of our lovers that lustrously lean from a marvel of mystic
miraculous moonshine,
These that we feel in the blood of our blushes that thicken and threaten
with throbs through the throat?
Thicken and thrill as a theatre thronged at appeal of an actor's appalled
agitation,
Fainter with fear of the fires of the future than pale with the promise
of pride in the past;
Flushed with the famishing fullness of fever that reddens with radiance
of rathe recreation,
Gaunt as the ghastliest of glimpses that gleam through the gloom of
the gloaming when ghosts go aghast?
Nay, for the nick of the tick of the time is a tremulous touch on the
temples of terror,
Strained as the sinews yet strenuous with



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strife of the dead who is
dumb as the dust-heaps of death:
Surely no soul is it, sweet as the spasm of erotic emotional exquisite
error,
Bathed in the balms of beatified bliss, beatific itself by beatitude's
breath.
Surely no spirit or sense of a soul that was soft to the spirit and soul
of our senses
Sweetens the stress of suspiring suspicion that sobs in the semblance
and sound of a sigh;
Only this oracle opens Olympian, in mystical moods and triangular tenses—
“Life is the lust of a lamp for the light that is dark till the dawn
of the day when we die.”
Mild is the mirk and monotonous music of memory, melodiously mute as
it may be,
While the hope in the heart of a hero is bruised by the breach of
men's rapiers, resigned to the rod;
Made meek as a mother whose bosom-beats bound with the bliss-bringing
bulk of a balm-breathing baby,
As they grope through the grave-yard of creeds, under skies growing
green at a groan for the grimness of God.
Blank is the book of his bounty beholden of old, and its binding is
blacker than bluer:
Out of blue into black is the scheme of the skies, and their dews
are the wine of the bloodshed of things;
Till the darkling desire of delight shall be free as a fawn that is
freed from the fangs that pursue her,
Till the heart-beats of hell shall be hushed by a hymn from the hunt
that has harried the kennel of kings.