

S. AND W. T. TOPADHYAY

GREY CLOUDS AND WHITE
SHOWERS

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HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAY

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TO
K
THE SUNSHINE OF MY SOUL

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Grey Clouds and White Showers

IN THE RAIN-TIME

THE sky turns grey beneath a faery's wand.
The white rain showers,
The green frog croaks beside a lonely pond,
A freshness glimmers on the leaves and flowers,
And through these cool and silent rainy hours
My soul grows hungry for the dim Beyond,
Wherein strange colours glow and perfumes rise
And everything is known :
The meaning of the poem of the skies,
The mute philosophy that fills a stone,
And the white ecstasy of inner eyes
To us familiar grown.

The rich enchanted incense of the earth
That rises now, as it has ever risen
In mellow ages past,
To flood the hidden temple of the Vast
Beyond the pale world's disenchanting prison,
Thrills me with memories of some lost world
Wherein my body was a flower-incurl'd,
Invisible seed that blossomed into birth
On one such day, when grey clouds and white showers
Went heralding earth's motherhood of flowers.

THE CYCLE

THE clod of clay, in an eternal hour,
Desires to be a flower ;
The flower to spread its petals wide and far
And bird-like reach a star ;
The twinkling star desires its flame to fan
Into the soul of man ;
And man grows hungry to be somewhat greater
Than man and turn Creator ;
And then again the hungry dream of God
Is to become a clod :

Creation with its shadow and its fire
Is but a ceaseless cycle of desire.

FREEDOM

EACH time you make your moon
The heavens climb,
I give you a tune
And a rhyme.

Each time your world grows great
With singing birds,
I sit and create
My world of words.

For every flower you burn
Like a lamp of fire,
To you I return
A twin-desire.

For every streak of hue
You give the morn,
On my lips, for you,
A song is born.

For everything that lives
In heaven, on earth,
My spirit thrills and gives
An equal worth.

And therefore we retain
Our freedom yet,
And seeking mutual gain
Are free from debt.

THE CRITIC

THE buds are aflower for the joy of flowering,
The clouds are ashower for the joy of showering,
The thunders burst for the joy of bursting,
The dawn-flames spring for the joy of springing,
The world is athirst for the joy of thirsting,
And the poet sings for the joy of singing.

The leopard leaps for the joy of leaping,
The shadow sleeps for the joy of sleeping,
The serpent sways for the joy of swaying,
The white stars climb for the joy of climbing,
The Player plays for the joy of playing,
And the poet rhymes for the joy of rhyming.

A thread of rhythm runs through man
And blossom and brute and the body of God ;
But the critic, who oft is a lampless clod,
Still comes with his little envious span,
A hollow phrase and a measuring-rod.

LAMPS

First Lamp

I LIGHT a poet's dwelling through the nights
And in deep silence watch him while he writes
The poems of his spirit, till I feel
The Parent-Flame upon my body steal
Until my little flickering flame has grown
One with the holy fire that stars have known.

Second Lamp

I light the hidden and unholy gloom
That floods a hollow-hearted harlot's room,
And watch her paint her mouth with flaming scarlet
Until my very flame becomes a harlot
That hungers to enchant with its bright breath
Pale insect-crowds that are in love with death.

Third Lamp

I light the room wherein an infant lies
With innocence aglimmering in its eyes.
Until my very flame becomes a deep
And sacred reflex of an infant's sleep.
The strange mysterious sense of Some One seeing
Great worlds that grow within an infant's being.

Fourth Lamp

I light the listening glooms that beat and stir
In the black chamber of a murderer,
And through the midnight watch the woman he
Has murdered in a fit of jealousy.
I watch until my flame begins to gleam
Like a red impulse in a murderer's dream.

LAMPS (CONTINUED)

The Lamp on the Height

I am the lamp of God whose Parent-Spark
Lit all these myriad separate lamps to mark
The house of mortals through the lonely night,
And keep their voiceless vigils through the dark.

And whiles they pale and perish in the dawn
After their little life of praise or blame,
Behold! my parent and eternal Flame,
Beyond a trace of blemish, glimmers on
All incorruptible upon the height.

MARRIAGE

THE world is but a marriage-song :
The clouds that hang, the rains that fall,
The trees, the flowers, the moonbeams all
Are just the ancient guests that throng
God's bright eternal marriage-hall.

Look how they come in twos and threes,
The guests into God's marriage-hall,
The emerald grass, the purple bees,
The birds that fly, the worms that crawl,
The ocean-waves, the mountain-mists,
Since in God's golden marriage-hall
No difference at all exists
Between the mighty and the small.

But sometimes I am half-inclined
With somewhat strange and different sight
And deeper dreaming in my mind,
To view the sky, the tree, the wind,
The light of day, the dark of night.

Then I am half-inclined to sing !
God, the dim Player, loves to hide
A separate world in everything,
And in that separate world to bring
The Bridegroom to the anxious Bride.

THE POET

LIFE like a painted harlot laughed and said:
Poet, break up the world you build apart,
And hush the futile music in your heart,
The fruitless rhymes that echo in your head.
Behold! the age of poetry is dead . . .
What is the use of all your song and art,
If you have got to beg your daily bread?

Life mocked the poet's dreams, but no reply
Broke on his lips who seemed to see afar
Into the world to come, when earth and sky
Now growing bud by bud and star by star
Will flood her market and sweet Beauty's cry
Drown all the clamourous crowded cries—that mar
The silence in such things as never die.

In years to come when he is dead and gone
And blended with the growth of summer-grass,
Life will behold in her dim harlot's glass
The inner meaning of the dusk and dawn
Of heavens that spread a blue wing overhead,
And clouds that clothe the mighty mountain-peak,
And knowing these shall crown the poet's head
With the serene virginity that sleeps—
Within her harlot-solitude, and seek
At the dead poet's shrine her daily-bread.

ERAS

ONE gleam of hope smiles through my heart's despair,
One ray of vision through my body's blindness:
Each flower is the fulfilment of man's prayer,
Each sunset the assurance of God's kindness.

And everything we see is but a mask
That hides the Face behind, the Face that haunts us.
Dust is the dim reply to what we ask
And fire the swift reminder that He wants us.

Each roaming firefly with his fitful sparks
Which wizard Night holds in his black control
Beyond our conscious being, ever marks
A bright immortal era in our soul.

THE INN

I AM an Inn whose doors are open wide
To wayfarers who go and come and go and come ;
The Stream of Life goes gurgling by my side,
Its ever-living music makes me dumb.

Within me burns one little lonely lamp
Whose flame is nourished at my travellers' hands.
They come and go though nights be cold and damp,
And days be dim, in search of distant lands.

They are dream-people, they who come and go,
Feeding my solitary lamp awhile.
Their eyes are strange, their names I scarcely know,
A gleam of memory lingers in their smile.

Some dress in sunset-colours, some in pale
Tints as of clouds at dawn, but every one
Forever hides his face behind a veil
Of delicatest stars and moonbeams spun.

I stand without a word while they make merry
Awhile and flood the air with fleeting mirth,
And then I watch them crossing in a ferry
Life's golden Stream beyond the shores of earth.

SLEEP

SOME rainbow-wizard dwells among the caves
Of sleep, beyond the forests and the clouds,
Beyond the mountain-heights and ocean-waves,
Beyond the daylight—and its waking crowds,
And with his magic powers
Transforms our being through the midnight-hours.

The prisoner forgets his heavy chain,
The wanderer forgets his weariness,
The widow, at his touch, forgets the pain
Of separation from her lord's caress.

For lo! his wondrous wand uplifts the veil
Of waking and reveals a faery tale :

The yellow-sandalled moon, the red-eyed sun,
The forest-deer, the camel and the goat,
The worm, the grass-blade and the dust grown one
On some gay pilgrimage sail in a boat
Of visionary fire. Hark to the song
They sing together as they sail along
Unto a one-stringed lyre's monotonous note.

What in the daylight were but market-stalls
Where pale crowds bargained over fleeting things
Are now transformed to holy-built halls
Where lamps are lit and sweetest music rings,
And never a single shadow stains the walls
Since underneath the wizard's splendid spell
Both ants and men are recognised as kings.

When suddenly the drama's closing bell
Rings mournfully, thus bringing down the curtain.
The wizard's spell is gradually breaking !

And now I'm hardly certain
If sleep is not more wide-awake than waking !

THE SECRET

THE lone astronomer through midnight-hours
Launches upon his voyage to some far
Invisible shores of soundless night to learn
The ancient meaning of each tiny star.
The botanist is busy with his flowers
Which through the midnight of his being burn
To faery lamps of Vision in whose light
He sees them blossoming with deeper sight.
Pearl-fishers dive among wild waves that curl
And close upon him, so his eyes of sleep
Might open to the wonder of the pearl
Burning like rainbow-fire among the deep
Dark treasure-house of sea. Geologists
Play like wise children midst their coloured heap
Of glimmering stones behind the veil of mists
That shrouds Creation, till from out their glow
Visions like flaming faeries dance and leap.

But O! the shadowy secret that I keep
Buried within my soul, no man shall know.

THE WAYSIDE FLOWER

YON clouds that fill the sky are like the grey side
Of human lives that go and come and go . . .
To-night all suddenly I seem to grow
Like a sweet flower upon some country-wayside
Unnoticed by the casual passers-by . . .
I do not ask the Fashioner of flowers
Why I was born at all, or what the reason
Is for my trivial life of solitude.
He set me by the wayside for my good,
This much beyond a shade of doubt I know,
And so I am content to pass my hours
Unnoticed by the casual passers-by,
Yea, and to add unto the flowering season
My individual loveliness, and die.

MEMORY

THE day that mother died I hardly felt
Her loss. I left the gloomy desolate house
To spend a quiet day among the woods.
I sat alone beneath the banyan-boughs
And, all forgetful of earth's changes, dwelt
In a bright house of many-coloured moods.

I sang with singing birds as though my soul
Were unacquainted with the name of Death.
I grew to be a neighbour of the grass.
The winged breezes passed me like the breath
Of one who set his lip to heaven's great bowl,
Fashioned superb of gold and azure glass.

That day has gone, and seven years have passed . . .
To-day while through the window-bars I see
Lone lazy lingering clouds the space emboss,
A sorrow most unusual wakes in me,
And life all suddenly becomes a vast
And indefinable mood that mourns her loss.

AFTER-SUNSET

A SOFT breath blows from the mouth of the South,
And a gold-throb beats in the breast of the West,
And the soft grey shadows take birth on the earth,
And the young stars break to a cry in the sky.

I hear the shrill croaking of frogs in the bogs,
While the heavens are wrapt in the shroud of a cloud,
Lo, over the tree-tops the lightning is bright'ning
And the moments are broken asunder with thunder.

There's not the least echo of feet in the street,
But the street-lamp stands with his light through the
 night,
And the glow-worm scatters a spark in the dark
While the darkness voyages on to the dawn.

To-night in my heart there's a gleam of a dream
That is written in rhymes—on the pages of ages
The lips of an infant are pressed to the breast
Of the mother who won him with tears through the years.

NOCTURNE

TO-NIGHT a deep and silent impulse stirs
In me and bids me hush my hollow tune.
I sit and watch the starry worshippers
Seeking the floating temple of the moon.

And at the temple-gateway of my soul
Some wandering beggar from an antique land,
With a pale curious moonlight-carven bowl
Held like a symbol in his outstretched hand,
Chants of a love I hardly understand.

It is my narrow Self grown wise and great
And from the dead heap of the Past arisen
Freed from the lampless dungeon-cells of Fate
And from the grey world's grim and granite prison.

GARMENTS

I AM sewing my cloak of a million hues
That I may wear it again on earth.
For the Messenger has brought me news
That I am called to the Feast of Birth.

I am called to earth again and again
And so I fashion my garments bright,
Shot through with the threads of pleasure and pain
To clothe my formless body of light.

But with every birth one hue I lose
And the need of a robe grows less and less,
So when I outgrow my myriad hues
I will burn in my own sweet nakedness.

IN THE EVENING

A PALM-TREE stands alone and tall and straight
Against the pale green of an evening-sky.
It is the hour when lights and shadows mate
And in sweet ecstasy dissolve and die.
The air is throbbing slowly with the dim pulse
Of some remote half-sleepy god on high . . .

A star breaks yonder like a poet's impulse !

One star and then another and another,
Like new-born nurslings of the selfsame Mother,
Who feeds them at her bosom one by one
Until they fall asleep when night is done.

The Mother whom I speak of is the same
As She who gives the flowers their coloured fire,
Who gives the eyes of human children flame,
And kindles on my lips the great desire
Eternally to chant Her holy name.

THE SONG OF THE SOUL

BUT yesterday, O Wandering Bee !
I watched you in the painted bower
Humming and roaming noiselessly
About the calyx of a flower.

To-day your fiery wings are furled
Within its darkling depths O Bee !
Forgetful of the flowering world
You drain its nectar noiselessly.

VENOM

If we were good and kind and just
And free from thoughts of hate and greed,
The worm would cease to haunt the dust
With shadowy purpose, and to feed
Upon the delicate flower.

The light of seers would flood the fangs
Of snakes instead of poisoned flame.
And the black flying bat that hangs
All day, would blush its prey to claim
At the weird twilight-hour.

The spider and the centipede,
The thousand birds and beasts of prey
That on each other pounce and feed,
Hour after hour, day after day,

The lightning fire that splits our roofs
And whips the mountain and the tree,
Are but the harsh perpetual proofs
Of evil thoughts in you and me.

THE LONELY CITY

THEY tell me that, not very far away
They've built a lonely city out of dust
To house but passing creatures of the clay :
Corruption, Anger, Degradation, Lust,
Hypocrisy and Murder and Deceit,
Intrigue and Jealousy and mutual Hate . . .
These are but few who throng the desolate street
Whose name, if I remember now, is Fate.

The city-gates are stained with blood, and hung
With martyrs' bones and skulls that seem to grin.
Starvation ever curling his red tongue
Walks hand in hand with the mad woman, Sin.
And Flattery, the meanest thing among
Those dim inhabitants, doth smack his lip
With ecstasy beneath the master's whip.

Religion wears a mask and stalks about
With his huge giant-brother known as Doubt.
While in a dungeon-cell uncouth and vast
The Spirit like a drunken clout is cast,
And all because the poet's song, I'm told,
Is not respected half as much as gold.

THE PRICE

I HAVE found my God again
Whom I lost through earth-desire,
I have won His Love with pain,
And His Beauty with its fire.

Drenched in inward showering rain
Paths of sorrow I have trod,
Now I know that every pain
Brings the earth-born nearer God.

TO A SUFFERING BIRD

TO-DAY while dawn was purple-rich
And earth just waking from its sleep,
I found you in a little ditch
Among a rubbish-heap.

Like shadows of a funeral-dirge,
Hungry embodiments of death,
A crowd of crows sat round its verge
And watched you gasp for breath.

I picked you up, poor trivial thing!
And plucked the insects from your eye
And washed the wound upon your wing
That never knew the sky.

On milk and fruit I fed your beak
And stroked your wing without a word.
Would that my lips had learned to speak
The language of a bird,

Ah then could I have found escape
From this vast ignorance that stands
Between your little suffering shape
And these blind human hands.

A CLOUDED NIGHT

THERE'S not a star to-night in all the sky.
Across the silent street the flaring eye
Of a street lamp is glowing.
I see a shadowy solitary man turn
At the street's end, swinging a lonely lantern
That shows him where he's going.
The glow-worm, (and in all the world there's no worm
With so much inward splendour as the glow-worm.)
Sparkles by fits out of the hollow dark,
Flooding with its green momentary spark
Night's quiet clouded hours.

No wind is blowing . . .

Darkness has closed the eyelids of the flowers ;
I sit and meditate upon the powers
Of the Creator . . . Hark !
From some far village in the distance sweeps
The rain and comes with swift and leaping showers.
Over the house-tops and the trees it weeps
Its silver tears which, after
The clouds have passed, will paint the woods with
laughter.

Lo, with the leaping rain my spirit leaps !

The rain showers stop
But I can almost hear each unborn seed
Greedy drinking every tiny drop
Of those just come and gone.

Clouds are aware of every blossom's need . . .

The stars come out again, the skies are freed !
Within the house a new-born infant sleeps
Beside its mother, while the darkness creeps
Through an old habit towards another dawn.

HOLIDAY

I WILL not work to-day ; I'll sit and dream
Watching the outer world with inner eyes
Until at length my soul and body seem
The fiery fountain-sources
Of all the light that floods the summer-skies
The glittering green-and-purple flame that courses
Through the bright forests, and the wild sweet cries
Of forest birds that leap like prisoned forces.

I will not work to-day . . . I will not read
Even a poet's book through these warm hours,
Since I can hear a poet in each seed
Recite the poem of a million flowers
Written by him in delicate rain-showers.
Since I can hear some hidden poet chant
Eternal poems in each summer-plant.

I'll sit and dream alone until the sun
Drinks redness from the wine-cup of the West
And sinks intoxicated to his rest . . .
Yea, from the dawn until this day is done
I'll sit and dream and in the midnight hear
The bell of Wisdom ringing cool and clear.

THE FLOWER OF THE PAST

O WHAT is this deep and desolate cry
That rises out of the heart of me,
When I come face to face with the sky
The mountain and the sea?

I am possessed by a silent power
That makes my body and soul grow mute.
I seem to be full of the life of the flower
And its final death into fruit.

O what is this music that wakes on my lip,
That breaks in my soul to an echo of pain?
Is it born of some ancient comradeship
That echoes again and again?

THIRST

BECAUSE Creation came at first
Out of the depths of awful thirst
All things are thirsty everywhere . . .
The light is thirsty for the air,
The bee is thirsty for the flower,
The rain-bird thirsty for the shower.

Skies are athirst for stars above,
And Youth is thirsty for his love,
The day is thirsty for the night,
The bird is thirsty for the flight.

The months are thirsty for the years,
And years are thirsty for the ages,
God is athirst for saints and seers,
Time is athirst for godly sages.

The babe is thirsty in the womb,
The ghost is thirsty in the tomb . . .
The lonely poet is immersed
In seas of universal thirst.

MESSAGE

MOTHER

MY child! why have you left the heavens and come
Fashioned of human birth
Leaving the radiant mirth
Of the great Festival among the skies,
The holy music and the shadowless hum
Of unborn festive-crowds
Who dwell beyond the faery clouds
And the dark clamorous cries
Of our God-desolated earth ?

CHILD

Oh, I was weary of the golden shine
Of the sun's golden goblet, and the bright
White fruit of the round moon that grows
Upon the sacred height
Of Time's dim mountains.
And I was weary of the pale blue wine
Of stars and the rich essence of the Rose
Of faery dreams, and of the crimson light.
Of sunset-feasts, and of the purple nectar
Sprayed from the Dawn's fire-fountains.
And I was tired of drinking from the bowl
Of ages wrought in crystal.
And now I come with a divine epistle,
Which is my infant-soul,
From God our undeniable Protector.

MOTHER

Alas, the ancient light has left my eyes,
Pray, read to me the message of the skies.

MESSAGE (CONTINUED)

CHILD

Then hear it, mother . . . This is how it reads :
I send this child to you, the ancient brother
To unborn stars and clouds and flames and seeds.
Grown weary of god-nourishment, he needs
To quench his growing thirst
The final founts that burst
In the earth-bosom of a mortal mother.

VOICE

THE call has come to me from afar,
In the depths of my being I hear it, Sweet!
The loves and the longings of mortals are
The chains we strike for the spirit's feet.

I hear a soft voice calling to me
Across the forests, beyond the skies.
In the heart of the Silence I seem to see
A Beauty that ever eludes these eyes.

The lamps in your house are burning bright,
The music is flooding the festive-hour,
But I must needs go into the night
Through speechless forests where never a flower

Has bloomed and never a sound has stirred . . .
I draw me away from the festive mirth
For deep in my being my soul has heard
That heaven is waiting for me on earth.

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