

Classic Poetry Series

Edith Matilda Thomas
- poems -

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Edith Matilda Thomas(12 August 1854 – 13 September 1925)

Edith Matilda Thomas was an American poet who "was one of the first poets to capture successfully the excitement of the modern city."

Life

Born in Chatham Center, Ohio, Edith Thomas was educated at the normal school of Geneva, Ohio, and attended Oberlin College (though she had to drop out). She taught school for two years, and then became a typesetter.

She began writing early for the local newspapers, then was encouraged by author Helen Hunt Jackson to send verse to more important periodicals. She "gained national attention with her poetry.... Scribner's, The Atlantic Monthly, The Century and other prominent magazines published her poems." Jackson's "enthusiastic endorsement produced almost immediate literary celebrity."

In 1884, Canadian poet Charles G.D. Roberts wrote of her that "as far as I am aware her poems are not yet gathered in book form, and are therefore only to be obtained, few in number, by gleaning from the magazines and periodicals. Yet so red-blooded are these verses, of thought and of imagination all compact, so richly individual and so liberal in promise, that the name of their author is already become conspicuous.... We are justified in expecting much from her genius."

Her first volume appeared in 1885 entitled 'A New Year's Masque and Other Poems'.

In 1887 she moved to New York City, where she worked for Harper's and Century Dictionary. She lived in New York for the rest of her life. She published over 300 poems between 1890 and 1909, although "the demands of the leading literary magazines constantly exceeded her supply."

On her death she was called "one of the most distinguished American poets" by the New York Times.

Her Selected Poems came out in 1926, a year after her death.

Writing

Canadian poet Sir Charles G.D. Roberts wrote that "Miss Thomas's work, in some of its best characteristics, recalls to me Shakespeare's sonnets."

In *Modern American Poetry*, Louis Untermeyer called her "the author of some dozen books of verse, most of them lightly lyrical in mood, although a few of her poems have a more dramatic quality. The best of her work may be found in *Lyrics and Sonnets* (1887), *The Inverted Touch* (1890), and *The Flower from the Ashes* (1915).

Thomas acknowledged Helen Hunt Jackson as a major influence on her work.

The biographical dictionary *Notable American Women* says that "she drew her principal literary inspiration from the lyrics of John Keats. She was a classic poet in her prosodic regularity and in her continuing attention to Greek subjects. She was romantic in her emphasis on the self, although an aura of sentiment and pathos kept her from developing a constructive romantic position.... She was one of the first poets to capture successfully the excitement (the "ardent bulbs") of the modern city, and one of the most consistent in crying out against the inroads of the dollar sign on American culture."

"Frost To-Night"

Apple-green west and an orange bar,
And the crystal eye of a lone, one star . . .
And, "Child, take the shears and cut what you will,
Frost to-night -- so clear and dead-still."

Then, I sally forth, half sad, half proud,
And I come to the velvet, imperial crowd,
The wine-red, the gold, the crimson, the pied, --
The dahlias that reign by the garden-side.

The dahlias I might not touch till to-night!
A gleam of the shears in the fading light,
And I gathered them all, -- the splendid throng,
And in one great sheaf I bore them along.

.

In my garden of Life with its all-late flowers
I heed a Voice in the shrinking hours:
"Frost to-night -- so clear and dead-still" . . .
Half sad, half proud, my arms I fill.

Edith Matilda Thomas

Black Flag!

Run up your Black Flag,
Skull and crossbones display!
Why should you palter—why should you lag?—
 For never was freebooting crew,
From Heligoland to Cathay—
 And the Coast of Barbary, too,
 So deserved the foul ensign as you!

Yes, run up the Black Flag,
 Too long have your colors been hid!
Make good your insolent brag,
 Who have staked off the waters at will,
And the honored sea-law have defied,
 Going forth to plunder and kill!
 You have staked off the waters at will—

What! You yet think to forbid?
 Sea-way for other Flags, too—
 Way for the Red-White-and-Blue!

But it's down with your Black Flag—
 Down, in the end, it must be,
In the depths where you lurk let it drag—
Down to the charnelled abyss . . .
 You hearken the World's decree?—
Pirates were hunted ere this,
 And you shall be swept from the sea!

Edith Matilda Thomas

Broadway

I

Between these frowning granite steeps
The human river onward sweeps;
And here it moves with torrent force,
And there it slacks its heady course:
But what controls its variant flow
A keener wit than mine must show,
Who cast myself upon the tide,
And merging with its current glide-
A drop, an atom, of the whole
Of its great bulk and wandering soul.

O curbless river, savage stream,
Thou art my wilderness extreme,
Where I may move as free, as lone,
As in the waste with wood o'ergrown,
And broodings of as brave a strain
May here unchallenged entertain,
Whether meridian light display
The swift routine of current day,
Or jet electric, diamond-clear,
Convoke a world of glamour here.

Yet when of solitude I tire,
Speak comradeship to my desire,
O most companionable tide,
Where all to all are firm allied,
And each hath countenance from the rest,
Although the tie be unconfessed!

II

I muse upon this river's brink;
I listen long; I strive to think
What cry goes forth, of many blent,
And by that cry what thing is meant-
What simple legend of old fate
Man's voice, here inarticulate,

From out this dim and strange uproar
Still heaves upon the skyey shore!

Amid this swift, phantasmal stream
Sometimes I move as in a dream;
Then wondrous quiet, for a space,
The clanging tumult will displace;
And toil's hard gride and pleasure's hum
No longer to my ear may come:
A pantomimic, haunted throng
Fareth in silence deep and strong,
And seems in summoned haste to urge,
Half prescient, towards a destined verge!

The river flows- unwasting flows;
Nor less nor more its volume grows,
From source to sea still onward rolled,
As days are shed and years are told;
And yet, so mutable its wave,
That no man twice therein may lave,
But, ere he can return again,
Himself shall subtle change sustain;
Since more and more each life must be
Tide-troubled by the drawing sea.

Edith Matilda Thomas

Dreams

As I came through the Valley Sleep
(Upon each side a frowning steep),
A dream my weighted steps o'ertook:
'I am the Fear thou wouldst not brook
Through all the hours of light,
But thrust my face from sight,
My whisper from thine ear;
Now close on thee I wait-
Thy secret Fear-
And I foreshadow fate!'

As I came through the Valley Sleep,
Where singing waters hidden creep,
A dream arose and kissed my brow:
'I am the Heart's Desire, whom thou
Wouldst lift no voice to greet,
Nor own me conquering-sweet,
A mounting cordial fire;
I am thy bosom-mate-
Deep Heart's Desire-
And I forshadow fate!'

Whoso comes through the Valley Sleep,
Whether he wakes to laugh or weep,
Meets with no herald from afar,
No warning gleam of natal star;
But, in her regal place,
And with no masking face,
Unhoodwinked and unbought,
Most pure, inviolate,
The lord of thought-
The Soul foreshadows fate!

Edith Matilda Thomas

In One's Age to One's Youth

Listen, thou child I used to be!
I know what thou didst fret to know-
Knowledge thou couldst not lure to thee,
Whatever bribe thou wouldst bestow.
That knowledge but a waymark plants
Along the road of ignorance.

Listen, thou child I used to be!
I am enlarged where thou wert bound,
Though vaunting still that thou wast free,
And lord of thine own pleasure crowned.
True freedom heeds a hidden stress,
Whereby desire to range grows less.

Listen, thou child I used to be!
Unmoved I meet thy fear of old,
Where thou, but masked with bravery,
Didst ever charge thyself, Be bold!
True courage owns a dread extreme-
Led blind through the blind battle's scheme!

Listen, thou child I used to be!
I love, I serve with proffered veins,
Where thou demandest praise thy fee,
And grateful solace for thy pains.
True love and service do but win
That I may more exceed therein.

Listen, thou child I used to be!
My soul to wrath 'gainst wrong is used,
Where thy rash combat utterly
The doer and the deed confused.
Right wrath the deed stabs soon or late,
The doer spares, his deed to hate.

Listen, thou child I used to be!
Unproud I move, and yet unbowed,
Where thou wast fed with vanity,
Thy chiefest pride- thou wast not proud!

True lowliness forgets its state,
And equal trains with small or great.

Listen, thou child I used to be!
I am what thy dream-wandering sense
Did shape, and thy fresh will decree,
Yet all with subtle difference:
Where heaven's arc did seem to end,
Still on and on fair fields extend.

Yet listen, child I used to be!
Nothing of thine I dare despise,
Nor passion, deed, nor fantasy;
For lo! the soul's far years shall rise
And with unripeness charge this hour
Would boast o'er thine its riper power.

Edith Matilda Thomas

Nature And Man

Oh, the glance of the dew! Oh, the flame of the rose springing forth of the thorn!
Oh, the song of the arrow-marked finch singing love in the front of the morn!
Who will speak to them all of the rapture they wake in the children of men?
Who will so lovingly speak, they will heed, and answer again?

The glance of the dew but repeateth the liquid glance of the sky,
And the flame of the rose is not brighter, in token, as man passes by,
And the song of the finch, though his little heart with ecstasy break,
From the answering rapture of man no quickening impulse shall take.

O drops of the dew! O pride of the thorn! O singing bird!
Is there never a mutual tongue, is there never a common word,
Wherein to give thanks, wherein to give praise, from the hearts ye have filled
With the pure distilment of joy which your cup, over-brimming, has spilled?

If but one moment, in all the swift season giddy with change,
We that are God's one creation, yet strangers, might be less strange!
But this is the pain of the pleasure — the bitter-sweet which man drains:
Unconscious-glad Nature unconscious of man forever remains!

Edith Matilda Thomas

Ride, Vigilantes!

Ride through the land, Vigilantes, ride!
From this bound of the East where the inrolling tide
With more than the red of the sunrise is dyed,
As crimson the foam is borne to our strand!

Ride!

Draw not the rein, and make not your stand,
Till ye come to the slumbering heart of the land:
Tell them who sleep—so loth to awake,
All unprepared for the storm that must break—
Tell them, Humanity's all is at stake!
Tell them, 'Tis Freedom that falls in the breach!'

If they murmur, adream, 'Our peace, we beseech—
The peoples at war—they speak not our speech!'
Ye will say, 'If ye sleep, then sleep—to your shame!
Freedom's no alien, but one and the same;
Wake ye, and arm ye, in her great name!'

Ride, Vigilantes, lifting your light,
Ride through the day, and ride through the night,
Searching out Men of Valor and Might!—

Ride!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Blessed Present

Pluck me yon rose, but say not, 'T will not last!
Or that 'To-morrow's rose may be more sweet.'
Say not, the darling bird I hear, will fleet
When its green summer home yields to the blast.
This moment, freed from Fear, that shrank aghast—
From Hope, that ran on wing'd, mercurial feet,
I, Sovereign of the Present, hold my seat!
All smile on me, and smiles on all I cast.
Oh, hitherto, my love, I have been thrall
To the old Past, dim ringing with regret;
Or else, uncertain days of bliss to be
Made me all restless with their veering call:
But thou bestowest wealth I ne'er had yet—
The blessed Present thou dost bring to me!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Burden of Age

There is a dancing in the morning beams,
There is a rainbow sown amid the dew,
There is a glint of gold shot through the sands,
A molten sapphire in the mountains' hue,
And Hope down comes with all her singing bands.
Nay, nay, it is not so; 'twas long ago!
There was a dancing in the morning beams:
Ah, how the years exile us into dreams!

There is a glamour in the moon's white gleams,
There is the touch that charmed Endymion's eyes,
A spirit mounting from the clod and stone,
A spirit bending from the bending skies-
And Love in midst of all sets up his throne!
Nay, nay, it is not so; 'twas long ago!
There was a glamour in the moon's white gleams:
Ah, how the years exile us into dreams!

There is a wonder-light on woodland streams,
A murmur in the green o'erhanging boughs,
A rustle in the fronded ranks of fern-
And, lo! the Muse with rapt enwreathèd brows,
And eyes that seen and unseen things discern!
Nay, nay, it is not so; 'twas long ago!
There was a wonder-light on woodland streams:
Ah, how the years exile us into dreams!

Some other world, perchance, our loss redeems-
Light to dead eyes and speech to lips all dumb
Brings back- brings us and ours from banishment!
So may our dreams a living joy become;
But here all things that are, without doubt are blent,
Within the mists that blow from long ago!
Some other world, not this, our loss redeems:
Ah, how the years exile us into dreams!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Dark Before Dawn

Oh, mystery of the morning gloam,
Of haunted air, of windless hush!
Oh, wonder of the deepening dome-
Afar, still far, the morning's flush!
My spirit hears, among the spheres,
The round earth's ever-quickenning rush!

A single leaf, on yonder tree,
The planet's rush hath felt, hath heard,
And soon all branches whispering be;
That whisper wakes the nested bird-
The song of the thrush, before the blush
Of Dawn, the dreaming world hath stirred!

The old moon withers in the East-
The winds of space may drive her far!
In heaven's chancel waits the priest-
Dawn's pontiff-priest, the morning star!
And yonder, lo! a shafted glow-
The gates of Day-spring fall ajar!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Dragons of the Air

There is a circle of malignant hell
Not given to the Florentine to know.
It is not hidden in the earth below,
But far aloft its fateful legions dwell.

They are not human, though from earth they rise-
They are of him, the Prince who rules the Air
The quiver of his torments on they bear-
The cities cower and fend them from the skies!

The azure and the grey of heaven they snatch
To be their banner; masked in cloud they sail,
The levin-bolts they break in murderous hail-
Up flames the palace roof, the cottage thatch.

They are not human! They renounce their kind,
They join them with the arch antagonist....
O world that kindly yet remains- resist!
Find means the dragons of the air to bind!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Enchanted Ring

A Tale of Halloween

I

You ask me for a tale of Halloween?
'Tis well. I lately read a treasure tome
Within whose legend-haunted lone demesne
The free, wild Fancy finds herself at home.
Now, while the night wind wings the starlit dome,
And while the dead leaves eerie converse hold,
Through the rich Conjuror's Kingdom with me roam;
And, wandering there, the story shall be told
Of what befell in Leinster in the days of old.

II

In Leinster in the days of old, I wis,
There was no maiden of the countryside
But on All Hallows (such a night as this!)
In Love's dim chancery her fortune tried.
The bursting nut upon the hearth she plied;
Or, while a lighted candle she would bear,
Gazed in her glass with eyes intent and wide;
Or, with weird mutterings, like a witch's prayer,
She sowed three rows of nothing on the empty air!

III

All rites had little Barbara performed,
Yet nothing did she see, and nothing hear;
Her busy thoughts soon into dreamland swarmed.
The rosy apple lay, untasted, near
For him who, ere another rounded year,
Should taste Love's feast with her. And now the wind
(As on this very night) with sighings drear,
Spake close beneath her latticed window-blind
Such dreamwise things as it hath spoke time out of mind.

IV

Why moans our little sister? 'Rest thee, rest!
Fear naught.' Soon careful arms have clasp'd her round,
And a soft cheek against her own is pressed.
For thus, since childhood, Barbara hath found
In mother-love with sister's love upbound,
Swift respite from the terrors of the night.
But now, what sleep so restless, yet so sound,
That not for touch or tone will take its flight,
Or aught at all except the broadcast morning light!

V

'My precious one, such troubled dreams were thine;
Yet, though I strove, I could not waken thee.'
'Dear mother-sister- dearest sister mine-
Methought an unknown guide did beckon me
Far, far from here. My will I could not free;
I needs must follow through weald and waste.
Outworn I reached a manor fair to see;
Outworn, alone, through a long hall I paced,
That was with many a speaking, stately portrait graced.

VI

'Then, stilly as a spirit loosed from earth,
I climbed a stair, and to a chamber came,
Rich hung with broidered cloths. Upon the hearth
Dull embers held a little fitful flame.
A sudden trembling ran through all my frame,
When, from amidst those silken hangings rare,
A voice pronounced: 'Reveal thy face and name,
I conjure thee! At least, some token spare
That I may trace thee when thou goest I know not where!'

VII

'It was a grievous and a sinful thing-
But over me was sovereign, stern command
I must obey. Thy gift, the birthday ring,
With my own name engraved within the band-
The ring, alas! I drew it from my hand,

And laid it on the marble mantel high.
Then died the flame from out the falling brand,
Then were the four walls darkling earth and sky;
And, once again, till dawn a wanderer was I.

VIII

'But, Agatha, thou art not vexed at me?
Thou dost not mourn the ring? 'Twas mine last eve,
This morning it is gone, as thou canst see!'
'Nay, darling, thou no reason hast to grieve:
I may not tell thee why, but I believe
That ere another wingèd year is flown
Some brightest threads for thee will Fortune weave.'
So spake her sister, sage of look and tone,
And held the little, fevered hand within her own.

IX

The Winter long is over in the land,
And mellow is the furrowed soil, and quick
With hopeful promise to the toiler's hand.
He, too, that toils not, leaning on his stick,
Is cheered to see the bean-flowers set so thick,
And thick the blossoms on the orchard bough.
How sweet the air! Hath any soul been sick?
Oh, let that soul drink health from beauty now;
Stand forth beneath the sky; unknit the careworn brow!

X

'Say, children, if ye guess, what aileth him-
The stranger who oft leans beyond the hedge
To see our budding roses? Yet so dim
His eye, he knows them not from ragged sedge!
The black ox's hoof hath trod on him, I pledge
My hopes beyond the grave, he seeketh aye
For that which flees him to the world's far edge!
Come, children, tell me what the gossips say:
Your grandsire nothing hears- the old at home must stay!'

XI

Good Agatha replies with playful look:
'Let Barbara speak. And if she be the rose
(To us the sweetest flower in any nook-
Or tame or wild- that in our Leinster grows)
Hath drawn the stranger to our garden-close,
With what true eye hath he the best discerned.'
(A blush-rose, on the moment, springs and blows!)
'Ay, sister, grandsire, all that I have learned,
I freely tell you; since deceit I always spurned.

XII

'But twice have I had speech with him- no more,
First time he asked a rose, and spake me fair,
I gave it him, so sad a look he wore;
And on he passed, as one who doth not care.
Again, as I was searching everywhere
My bracelet that had fallen to the ground,
He leaped the hedge-row ere I was aware;
And he it was that, searching, quickly found
My bracelet. Surely, I to courtesy was bound.'

XIII

'Ay, surely, child. Your grandsire taught you that,
What said you then?' 'I bade him stay and rest;
And down upon the old oak bench we sat.
He spake of losses- how another's quest
'Twas ever his to aid, for he was blest
With wizard sight, save for the thing he sought-
A thing not lost, since never yet possessed;
He had but dreamed of it! I answered naught;
But much, in truth, since then of what he said have thought.'

XIV

By this time closed are the ears of age,
And lid-fast are the eyes. And now, alone,
Spake carelessly good Agatha the sage:
'Great prudence, little Barbe, thou hast shown;
But I have heard the stranger well is known,

That gentle is his birth, and the estate
Is broad and fair, which singly he doth own.
'Tis said his health hath suffered much of late;
Wholesome this air; so he prolongs his visit's date.'

XV

Then subtly did fond Agatha contrive:
'Thou dost but a charitable deed,
If from his soul this withering gloom thou drive.
Lightly along the self-same channel lead
Thy talk. Say that thou gav'st his words good heed;
Since back to thee thy bracelet he could bring,
Thou would'st, once more, consult his wizard rede,
For thou hast lost a yet more precious thing-
Thy sister's gift to thee- the name, too, on the ring!'

XVI

'That dare I not- !' broke in the little maid;
'For well thou knowest how the ring was lost,
And all the tricks at Halloween I played.
Alas, those charms were wrought at heavy cost,
To be, as I have been, a homeless ghost-
A shadow of myself- of self bereft!'
'Then, child, tell only what importeth most-
A ring of thine was somewhere lost, or left;
And thou, once more, art fain to seek his counsel deft.'

XVII

The Rose sends challenge to the flower-world all:
What bloom like mint- at once both proud and sweet?
Unstored to the Rose's burning accents fall
Upon the twain within the garden-seat.
Yet, what can make the Rose's color fleet
From a young maiden's cheek- what sudden stress?
What words are these a young man may repeat,
While light springs up in eyes long lustreless?
But come, let us o'erhear- 'twere idle, still to guess?

XVIII

It thus had chanced: when came the moment fit,
Full simply little Barbara broached the theme
Directed by her sister's subtler wit:
Since he had found her bracelet, it would seem
A yet more precious loss he might redeem:
A ring of hers had vanished- left no trace.
So great a wizard might some potent scheme
Devise, to bring it from its hiding-place.'
She lightly spake. Intent, her comrade scanned her face.

XIX

'Speak thou the truth, no word from me withhold;
Lift up thine eyes, and they the truth shall speak,
For it must be that slender ring of gold
Bounds the whole world of happiness I seek.
Tell me when thou this ring didst lose, and eke
All circumstance that did the time attend.'
'Twas then the Rose's color fled her cheek;
But since her tongue to guile she could not lend,
She told straightforwardly her story to the end.

XX

'As thou hast spoken truth, and naught beside'
He said, 'I'll speak the living truth to thee.
That night some charms of Halloween I tried,
Dared thus to do by a blithe company
In mine old hall, far in the West Country.
The charms performed, I thought of them no more;
Yet deemed it strange that sleep came not to me;
And as the rising wind shook blind and door,
I watched with half-shut eyes the firelight on the floor.

XXI

'Then glidingly, and noiseless as a dream,
A figure stoled in white, with floating hair,
Touched faintly by the embers' fitful gleam,
Approached the fireplace and stood wavering there-
Stood piteously, with tender feet all bare,

And tender palms reached out above the coals
(As they had borne too long the frosty air).
Then, I remembered me the time- All Souls,
When visions vanish as the hour of midnight tolls!

XXII

'Already was the clock upon the stroke,
Already had the vision turned to go
When, in a voice I scarcely knew, I spoke,
Desiring that the presence should bestow
Some sign, or constant pledge of truth, to show
When daylight should to disbelief incline.
The vision faded. On the mantel, lo!
This ring I found. And surely, it is thine,
And surely, maiden, both the ring and thou art mine!'

XXIII

Needs not to say what afterwards befell-
How smiled the mother-sister sage and dear,
When came the fine confession, guessed full well;
Or how, before the rounding of the year,
She saw- through many a rainbow-lighted tear-
Her darling pace the aisle, a happy bride!
Nay!- rather must I counsel all who hear
Leave juggling wiles of Halloween untried,
Lest no such powers benign your doubtful venture guide!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Inverted Torch

Threading a darksome passage all alone,
The taper's flame, by envious current blown,
Crouched low, and eddied round, as in affright,
So challenged by the vast and hostile night,
Then down I held the taper; -- swift and fain
Up climbed the lovely flower of light again!

Thou Kindler of the spark of life divine,
Be henceforth the Inverted Torch a sign
That, though the flame beloved thou dost depress,
Thou wilt not speed it into nothingness;
But out of nether gloom wilt reinspire,
And homeward lift the keen empyreal fire!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Life of a Bird

Thou art clothed on with plumes, as with leaves,
Fronde-like, and lighter than air;
Thy pinions are arrows in sheaves,
That carry thee none knoweth where.

Thou fliest, and none gives pursuit,
Thy realm both the earth and the sky;
Thou hast in thy bosom a flute,
The glance of a soul in thine eye.

Thou obeyest a sovereign power
That sets thee on Summer's track;
Thou knowest the tide and the hour
When to advance, or turn back.

Into the world thou art flung,
Thou herald of rapture and light.
Thou weavest a home for thy young-
And none but thyself hath the sleight.

Out of the world thou art gone,
And who shall say where is thy rest?
A rapture and light are withdrawn
Into some Heaven-side nest.

For who of my kind hath beheld
Where, stricken, were any of thine?
Hast thou not been, from of old-
A spirit unscathed and divine?

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Masquerade Of Time

I heard the New Year whisper, passing by,
'I am the Old Year, and did never die.

'As phenix bird, that from the sunset springs,
Next in the East replumes his wondrous wings,

'As dewdrop trembling in the morning flower,
Exhaled ere noon, returns at evening hour,

'So never lost was I, though steeple chime
Hurl out my knell—for I, behold, am Time!

'The Years but lend so many a quaint disguise
Wherein I masquerade to mortal eyes.'

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Mother Who Died Too

She was so little—little in her grave,
The wide earth all around so hard and cold—
She was so little! therefore did I crave
My arms might still her tender form enfold.
She was so little, and her cry so weak
When she among the heavenly children came—
She was so little—I alone might speak
For her who knew no word nor her own name.

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Red Cross Nurse

The battle-smoke still fouled the day,
With bright disaster flaming through;
Unchecked, absorbed, she held her way—
The whispering death still past her flew.

A cross of red was on her sleeve;
And here she stayed, the wound to bind,
And there, the fighting soul relieve,
That strove its Unknown Peace to find.

A cross of red . . . yet one has dreamed
Of her he loved and left in tears;
But unto dying sight she seemed
A visitant from other spheres.

The whispering death—it nearer drew,
It holds her heart in strict arrest . . .
And where was one, are crosses two—
A crimson cross is on her breast!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The War Of Bread

'There shall be no unwarranted manipulation of the nation's food supply by those who handle it on the way to the consumer.'—President Wilson.

Of all the wars that waste this world,
Where the life of man has bled,
This is the war I most abhor—
The theft of the people's bread!

They who hold back what the kind Earth gave
In the billowing fields of grain,
Are the cowardliest foe—for their secret blow
Strikes for their own base gain.

Arm of the law, reach forth in your might,
And the hidden stores unbind,
And defeat their power who, at this hour,
Wage dastardly war on their kind!

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Witch's Child

'Tis Elfinell- a witch's child,
From holy minster banned....
Again the old glad bell rings out
Through all the Christmas land.

No gift might she receive or give,
Nor kneel to Mary's child:
She watched from far the joyous troop
That past the Crib defiled;

Far in the shadow of the porch,
Yet even there espied:
'Now, hence away, unhallowed Elf!
The sacristan did chide.

'Hence, till some witness thou canst bring
Of gift received from thee,
In His dear name, whose birth we sing,
But this shall never be!'

Poor Elfinell- she turned away:
'Though none for me may speak,
Yet there be those may take my gift;
And them I go to seek!'

So, flitting light through lonesome fields
By summer long forgot,
She crossed the valley drifted deep-
The brook in icy grot;

And gained, at last, a still, white wood
All hung with flowers of snow:
There, down she sat, and quaintly called
In tender tones and low.

They heard and came- the doe and fawn,
The squirrel and hare,
And dwellers shy in earthy homes,
And wanderers of the air!

To these she gave fresh leaves of kale.
To those the soft white bread,
Or filberts smooth, or yellow corn;
So each and all she fed.

She fed them from her hand- she sighed;
'Might you but speak for me,
And say, ye took my Christmas gift,
Then, I the Crib might see!'

At this, those glad, wild creatures join,
And close the child around;
They draw her on, she scarce knows how,
Across the snowy ground!

They crowd with soft, warm, furry touch;
They stoop with frolic wing:
Grown strangely bold, to haunts of men
The elfin child they bring!

They reach the town, the minster door;
The door they straightway pass;
And up the aisle and by the priest
That saith the holy mass.

Nor stay, until they reach the Crib
With all its wreathen greens;
And there above, with eyes of love,
The witch-child looks and leans!

Spake, then, the priest to all his flock:
'Forbid no more this child!
To speak for her, God sendeth these,
His loved ones of the wild!

"'Twas God that made them take her gift,
Our stubborn hearts to shame!
Melt, hearts of ours; and open, hands,
And give in Christ's dear name.'

Thus, Elfinell with gifts was showered,

Upon a Christmas Day;
The while, beside the altar's font,
The ban was washed away.

A carven stall the minster shows,
Whereon ye see the priest-
The kneeling child- and clustering forms
Of friendly bird and beast.

Edith Matilda Thomas

The Young of Spring

There are so many, many young!
So many, in thy world, O Spring,
And scarcely yet they find a tongue,
Their wants to cry, their joys to sing.

There are so many, many young-
Be tender to such tenderness;
And let soft arms be round them flung,
Keep them from blight, from weather stress!

White lambs upon the green-lit sward,
And dappled darlings of the kine-
O Spring, have them in watch and ward
And mother them- for all are thine.

There are so many, many young!
Thine, too, the wild mouse and her brood
Within a last year's bird's-nest swung-
And all shy litters of the wood!

There are so many, many young-
Guard all- guard closest this year's nest;
Oh, guard, for Joy, the songs unsung
Within the thrush's speckled breast!

Edith Matilda Thomas

Thefts Of The Morning

Bund us the Morning, mother of the stars
And of the winds that usher in the day!
Ere her light fingers slide the eastern bars,
A netted snare before her footsteps lay;
Ere the pale roses of the mist be strown,
Bind us the Morning, and restore our own!

With her have passed all things we held most dear,
Most subtly guarded from her amorous stealth;
We nothing gathered, toiling year by year,
But she hath claimed it for increase of wealth;
Our gems make bright her crown, incrust her throne:
Bind us the Morning, and restore our own!

Where are they gone, who round our myrtles played,
Or bent the vines' rich fruitage to our hands,
Or breathed deep song from out the laurels' shade?
She drew them to her; who can slack the bands?
What lure she used, what toils, was never known:
Bind us the Morning, and restore our own!

Enough that for her sake Orion died,
Slain by the silver Archer of the sky-
That Iliion's prince amid her splendors wide
Lies chained by age, nor wins his prayer to die;
Enough! but hark! our captive loves make moan:
Bind us the Morning, and restore our own!

We have beheld them whom we lost of old,
Among her choring Hours, in sorrow bowed.
A moment gleam their faces, faint and cold,
Through some high oriel window wreathed with cloud,
Or on the wind before her they are blown:
Bind us the Morning, and restore our own!

They do her service at the noiseless looms
That weave the misty vesture of the hills;
Their tears are drink to thirsting grass and blooms,
Their breath the darkling wood-bird wakes and thrills;

Us too they seek, but far adrift are thrown:
Bund us the Morning, and restore our own!

Yea, cry her Thief! from where the light doth break
To where it merges in the western deep!
If aught of ours she, startled, should forsake,
Such waifs the waiting Night for us will keep.
But stay not; still pursue her, falsely flown:
Bund us the Morning, and restore our own!

Edith Matilda Thomas

Tip's Kitten

The master- he loved my kitten, my kitten;
She was still too weak to stand,
When he placed her upon one hand,
And over it laid the other,
And looked at me kindly, and said,
'Tip, you're a proud little mother!'

For they'd left me but one, my kitten, my kitten-
As sweet as a kitten could be-
And I loved her for all the three
They had taken away without warning.
I watched her from daylight till dark,
Watched her from night until morning!

I never left my kitten, my kitten
(For I feared- and I loved her so!)
Till I thought it time she should know
That cats in the house have a duty,
And a right to be proud of their skill,
As well as their grace and their beauty.

I only left my kitten, my kitten,
A few short moments in all,
To punish the mouse in the wall,
Each day growing bolder and bolder;
And I brought her the mouse to show
What kittens must do when older.

I brought her the mouse- my kitten, my kitten!
I tossed it, I caught it for her;
But she would not see, nor stir.
My heart it beat fast and faster;
And I caught her up in my mouth,
And carried her so, to the master.

I thought he would help- my kitten, my kitten!
And I laid her down at his feet-
(Never a kitten so sweet,
And he knew that I had no other!)

But he only said, 'Poor Tip,
'Tis a sad day for you, little mother!'

Edith Matilda Thomas

Winter Sleep

I know it must be winter (though I sleep) --
I know it must be winter, for I dream
I dip my bare feet in the running stream,
And flowers are many, and the grass grows deep.

I know I must be old (how age deceives!)
I know I must be old, for, all unseen,
My heart grows young, as autumn fields grow green,
When late rains patter on the falling sheaves.

I know I must be tired (and tired souls err) --
I know I must be tired, for all my soul
To deeds of daring beats a glad, faint roll,
As storms the riven pine to music stir.

I know I must be dying (Death draws near) --
I know I must be dying, for I crave
Life -- life, strong life, and think not of the grave,
And turf-bound silence, in the frosty year.

Edith Matilda Thomas