

Classic Poetry Series

Herbert Bashford
- poems -

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Herbert Bashford(1871-1928)

Alice

Of deepest blue of summer skies
Is wrought the heaven of her eyes.

Of that fine gold the autumns wear
Is wrought the glory of her hair.

Of rose leaves fashioned in the south
Is shaped the marvel of her mouth.

And from the honeyed lips of bliss
Is drawn the sweetness of her kiss,

'Mid twilight thrushes that rejoice
Is found the cadence of her voice,

Of winds that wave the western fir
Is made the velvet touch of her.

Of all earth's songs God took the half
To make the ripple of her laugh.

I hear you ask, 'Pray who is she?' -
This maid that is so dear to me.

'A reigning queen in Fashion's whirl?'
Nay, nay! She is my baby girl.

Herbert Bashford

By The Pacific

FROM this quaint cabin window I can see
The strange, vague line of ghostly drift-wood, though
No ray of silver moon or soft star-glow
Steals through the summer night's solemnity.
Pale forms drive landward and wild figures flee
Like spectres up the shore; I hear the slow,
Firm tread of marching billows which I know
Will walk beside the years that are to be.
Sweet, gentle sleep is banished from mine eyes;
I lie and think of wrecks until the sobs
And groans of drowning sailors, lost at sea,
Come mingled with the gray gulls' plaintive cries
And those tumultuous, incessant throbs—
The heavy heart-beats of Eternity.

Herbert Bashford

Morning In Camp

A BED of ashes and a half-burned brand
Now mark the spot where last night's campfire sprung
And licked the dark with slender, scarlet tongue;
The sea draws back from shores of yellow sand,
Nor speaks lest he awake the sleeping land.
Tall trees grow out of shadows; high among
Their sombre boughs one clear, sweet song is sung,
In deep ravine by drooping cedars spanned,
All drowned in gloom; a flying pheasant's whirr
Rends morning's solemn hush; gray rabbits run
Across the clovered glade, while far away
Upon the hills each huge, expectant fir
Holds open arms in welcome to the sun—
Great, pulsing heart of bold, advancing day!

Herbert Bashford

Night In Camp

FIERCE burns our fire of driftwood; overhead
Gaunt maples lift arms against the night;
The stars are sobbing,—sorrow-shaken, white,
And high they hang, or show sad eyes grown red
With weeping for their queen,—the moon, just dead.
Black shadows backward reel when tall and bright
The broad flames stand and fling a golden light
On mats of soft green moss around us spread.
A sudden breeze comes in from off the sea,
The vast, old forest draws a troubled breath,
A leaf awakens; up the shore of sand
The slow tide, silver-lipped, creeps noiselessly;
The campfire dies; then silence deep as death;
The darkness pushing down upon the land.

Herbert Bashford

One Autumn Night

Can I forget that glorious autumn night,
So full of joyous pain, when you and I
Stood on the shore beneath a cloudless sky,
And watched the moon, all drenched with holy light,
Sail slowly up, and toss a veil of white
Across the heaving sea?—when waves rode by
And pressed broad palms upon the rocks, to try
And bear away the rough stone from our sight?

Ah, no! 'twas then I spoke to you of love,—
My secret which you long ere that had guessed;
'Twas then I first knew passion's fiery heat
And kissed your cheek, your lips, while high above
A great star shook, and in its burning breast,
As in my own, a red heart beat and beat.

Herbert Bashford

Quatrains

MOUNT RAINIER

LONG hours we toiled up through the solemn wood
Beneath moss-banners stretched from tree to tree;
At last upon a barren hill we stood
And, lo, above loomed Majesty!

ALONG SHORE

WHAT wondrous sermons these seas preach to men!
What lofty pinnacles they seek to climb!
How old and bent they are, yet strong as when
They rocked the infant Time!

SUNSET

LIKE some huge bird that sinks to rest,
The sun goes down—a weary thing—
And o'er the water's placid breast
It lays a scarlet, outstretched wing.

Herbert Bashford

The Arid Lands

THESE lands are clothed in burning weather,
These parched lands pant for God's cool rain;
I look away where strike together
The burnished sky and barren plain.

I look away; no green thing gladdens
My weary eye—no flower, no tree,
Naught save the earth, the sage-brush saddens
The scorched, gray earth that sickens me.

Oh for the pines, where the sweet wind revels!
The ringing laugh of the crystal creek!
Alas, gaunt Hunger haunts these levels,
And Thirst goes wandering wan and weak.

No shadow falls where swiftly passes
The gray coyote's noiseless feet,
No song of bird, no hint of grasses—
The home of Silence and of Heat!

Herbert Bashford

The Russet-Backed Thrush

He dwells where pine and hemlock grow,
A merry minstrel seldom seen;
The voice of Joy is his I know—
Shy poet of the Evergreen!

In dawn's first holy hush I hear
His one ecstatic, thrilling strain,
So sweet and strong, so crystal clear
'Twould tingle e'en the soul of Pain.

At close of day when Twilight dreams
He shakes the air beneath his tree
With such exquisite song it seems
That Passion breathes through Melody.

Herbert Bashford

The Seagull

A ceaseless rover, waif of many climes,
He scorns the tempest, greets the lifting sun
With wings that fling the light and sinks at times
To ride in triumph where the tall waves run.

The rocks tide-worn, the high cliff brown and bare
And crags of bleak, strange shores he rests upon;
He floats above, a moment hangs in air
Clean-etched against the broad, gold breast of dawn.

Bold hunter of the deep! Of thy swift flights
What of them all brings keenest joy to thee—
To drive sharp pinions through storm-beaten nights,
Or shriek amid black hollows of the sea?

Herbert Bashford

The Song Of The Forest Ranger

Oh, to feel the fresh breeze blowing
From lone ridges yet untrod!
Oh, to see the far peak growing
Whiter as it climbs to God!

Where the silver streamlet rushes
I would follow - follow on
Till I heard the happy thrushes
Piping lyrics to the dawn.

I would hear the wild rejoicing
Of the wind-blown cedar tree,
Hear the sturdy hemlock voicing
Ancient epics of the sea.

Forest aisles would I be winding,
Out beyond the gates of Care;
And, in dim cathedrals, finding
Silence at the shrine of Prayer.

When the mystic night comes stealing
Through my vast, green room afar,
Never king had richer ceiling -
Beaded bough and yellow star!

Ah, to list the sacred preaching
Of the forest's faithful fir,
With his strong arms upward reaching -
Mighty, trustful worshipper!

Come and learn the joy of living!
Come and you will understand
How the sun his gold is giving
With a great, impartial hand!

How the patient pine is climbing,
Year by year to gain the sky;
How the rill makes sweetest rhyming,
Where the deepest shadows lie.

I am nearer the great Giver,
Where His handiwork is crude;
Friend am I of peak and river,
Comrade of old Solitude.

Not for me the city's riot!
Not for me the towers of Trade!
I would seek the house of Quiet,
That the Master Workman made!

Herbert Bashford

The Woodsy Of The West

Oh, woods of the west, leafy woods that I love.
Where through the long days I have heard
The prayer of the wind in the branches above,
And the tremulous song of the bird.
Where the clust'ring blooms of the dog-wood hang o'er—
White stars in the dusk of the pine,
And down the dim aisles of the old forest pour
The sunbeams that melt into wine!

Oh, woods of the west, I am sighing today
For the sea-songs your voices repeat,
For the evergreen glades, for the glades far away
From the stifling air of the street,
And I long, ah, I long to be with you again
And to dream in that region of rest.
Forever apart from this warring of men—
Oh, wonderful woods of the west!

Herbert Bashford