

Classic Poetry Series

Andrew Lang

- poems -

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A highly valuable chain of thoughts

HAD cigarettes no ashes,
And roses ne'er a thorn,
No man would be a funkier
Of whin, or burn, or bunker.
There were no need for mashies,
The turf would ne'er be torn,
Had cigarettes no ashes,
And roses ne'er a thorn.

Had cigarettes no ashes,
And roses ne'er a thorn,
The big trout would not ever
Escape into the river.
No gut the salmon smashes
Would leave us all forlorn,
Had cigarettes no ashes,
And roses ne'er a thorn.

But 'tis an unideal
Sad world in which we're born,
And things will 'go contrary'
With Martin and with Mary:
And every day the real
Comes bleakly in with morn,
And cigarettes have ashes,
And every rose a thorn.

Andrew Lang

A Scot to Jeanne D'Arc

DARK Lily without blame,
Not upon us the shame,
Whose sires were to the Auld Alliance true;
They, by the Maiden's side,
Victorious fought and died;
One stood by thee that fiery torment through,
Till the White Dove from thy pure lips had passed,
And thou wert with thine own St. Catherine at the last.

Once only didst thou see,
In artist's imagery,
Thine own face painted, and that precious thing
Was in an Archer's hand
From the leal Northern land.

Andrew Lang

Aesop

HE sat among the woods; he heard
The sylvan merriment; he saw
The pranks of butterfly and bird,
The humors of the ape, the daw.

And in the lion or the frog,—
In all the life of moor and fen,—
In ass and peacock, stork and dog,
He read similitudes of men.

"Of these, from those," he cried, "we come,
Our hearts, our brains descend from these."
And, lo! the Beasts no more were dumb,
But answered out of brakes and trees:

"Not ours," they cried; "Degenerate,
If ours at all," they cried again,
"Ye fools, who war with God and Fate,
Who strive and toil; strange race of men.

"For we are neither bond nor free,
For we have neither slaves nor kings;
But near to Nature's heart are we,
And conscious of her secret things.

"Content are we to fall asleep,
And well content to wake no more;
We do not laugh, we do not weep,
Nor look behind us and before:

"But were there cause for moan or mirth,
'T is we, not you, should sigh or scorn,
Oh, latest children of the Earth,
Most childish children Earth has born."

They spoke, but that misshapen slave
Told never of the thing he heard,
And unto men their portraits gave,
In likenesses of beast and bird!

Andrew Lang

Ballades I - To Theocritus, in Winter

AH! leave the smoke, the wealth, the roar
Of London, leave the bustling street,
For still, by the Sicilian shore,
The murmur of the Muse is sweet.
Still, still, the suns of summer greet
The mountain-grave of Helike,
And shepherds still their songs repeat
Where breaks the blue Sicilian sea.

What though they worship Pan no more
That guarded once the shepherd's seat,
They chatter of their rustic lore,
They watch the wind among the wheat:
Cicalas chirp, the young lambs bleat,
Where whispers pine to cypress tree;
They count the waves that idly beat,
Where breaks the blue Sicilian sea.

Theocritus! thou canst restore
The pleasant years, and over-fleet;
With thee we live as men of yore,
We rest where running waters meet:
And then we turn unwilling feet
And seek the world—so must it be—
We may not linger in the heat
Where breaks the blue Sicilian sea!

ENVOY

Master,—when rain, and snow, and sleet
And northern winds are wild, to thee
We come, we rest in thy retreat,
Where breaks the blue Sicilian sea!

Andrew Lang

Ballades II - Of the Book-Hunter

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Andrew Lang

Ballades III - Of Blue China

THERE'S a joy without canker or cark,
There 's a pleasure eternally new,
'T is to gloat on the glaze and the mark
Of china that 's ancient and blue;
Unchipp'd, all the centuries through
It has pass'd, since the chime of it rang,
And they fashion'd it, figure and hue,
In the reign of the Emperor Hwang.
These dragons (their tails, you remark,
Into bunches of gillyflowers grew),—
When Noah came out of the ark,
Did these lie in wait for his crew?
They snorted, they snapp'd, and they slew,
They were mighty of fin and of fang,
And their portraits Celestials drew
In the reign of the Emperor Hwang.

Here 's a pot with a cot in a park,
In a park where the peach-blossoms blew,
Where the lovers eloped in the dark,
Lived, died, and were changed into two
Bright birds that eternally flew
Through the boughs of the may, as they sang;
'T is a tale was undoubtedly true
In the reign of the Emperor Hwang.

ENVOY

Come, snarl at my ecstasies, do,
Kind critic; your "tongue has a tang,"
But—a sage never heeded a shrew
In the reign of the Emperor Hwang.

Andrew Lang

Ballades IV - Of Life

SAY, fair maids, maying
In gardens green,
In deep dells straying,
What end hath been
Two Mays between
Of the flowers that shone
And your own sweet queen?—
“They are dead and gone!”

Say, grave priests, praying
In dule and teen,
From cells decaying
What have ye seen
Of the proud and mean,
Of Judas and John,
Of the foul and clean?—
“They are dead and gone!”

Say, kings, arraying
Loud wars to win,
Of your manslaying
What gain ye glean?
“They are fierce and keen,
But they fall anon,
On the sword that lean,—
They are dead and gone!”

ENVOY

Through the mad world's scene
We are drifting on,
To this tune, I ween,
“They are dead and gone!”

Andrew Lang

Ballades V - Of His Choice of a Sepulchre

HERE I 'd come when weariest!
Here the breast
Of the Windberg's tufted over
Deep with bracken; here his crest
Takes the west,
Where the wide-winged hawk doth hover.

Silent here are lark and plover;
In the cover
Deep below, the cushat best
Loves his mate, and croons above
O'er their nest,
Where the wide-winged hawk doth hover.

Bring me here, Life's tired-out guest,
To the blest
Bed that waits the weary rover,—
Here should failure be confest;
Ends my quest,
Where the wide-winged hawk doth hover!

ENVOY

Friend, or stranger kind, or lover,
Ah, fulfil a last behest,
Let me rest
Where the wide-winged hawk doth hover!

Andrew Lang

Les Roses de Sâdi

This morning I vowed I would bring thee my roses,
They were thrust in the band that my bodice encloses;
But the breast-knots were broken, the roses went free.
The breast-knots were broken; the roses together
Floated forth on the wings of the wind and the weather,
And they drifted afar down the streams of the sea.
And the sea was as red as when sunset uncloses;
But my raiment is sweet from the scent of the roses,
Thou shalt know, love, how fragrant a memory can be.

Andrew Lang

Melville and Coghill - The Place Of The Little Hand

DEAD, with their eyes to the foe,
Dead, with the foe at their feet;
Under the sky laid low
Truly their slumber is sweet,
Though the wind from the Camp of the
Slain Men blow,
And the rain on the wilderness beat.

Dead, for they chose to die
When that wild race was run;
Dead, for they would not fly,
Deeming their work undone,
Nor cared to look on the face of the sky,
Nor loved the light of the sun.

Honor we give them and tears,
And the flag they died to save,
Rent from the raid of the spears,
Wet from the war and the wave,
Shall waft men's thoughts through the dust of the years,
Back to their lonely grave!

Andrew Lang

On Calais Sands

ON Calais Sands the gray began,
Then rosy red above they gray;
The morn with many a scarlet van
Leaped, and the world was glad with May!
The little waves along the bay
Broke white upon the shelving strands;
The sea-mews flitted white as they
On Calais Sands!

On Calais Sands must man with man
Wash honor clean in blood to-day;
On spaces wet from waters wan
How white the flashing rapiers play,—
Parry, riposte! and lunge! The fray
Shifts for a while, then mournful stands
The Victor: life ebbs fast away
On Calais Sands!

On Calais Sands a little space
Of silence, then the splash and spray,
The sound of eager waves that ran
To kiss the perfumed locks astray,
To touch these lips that ne'er said "Nay,"
To dally with the helpless hands,
Till the deep sea in silence lay
On Calais Sands!

Between the lilac and the may
She waits her love from alien lands;
Her love is colder than the clay
On Calais Sands!

Andrew Lang

Romance

MY Love dwelt in a Northern land.
A gray tower in a forest green
Was hers, and far on either hand
The long wash of the waves was seen,
And leagues on leagues of yellow sand,
The woven forest boughs between!

And through the silver Northern night
The sunset slowly died away,
And herds of strange deer, lily-white,
Stole forth among the branches gray;
About the coming of the light,
They fled like ghosts before the day!

I know not if the forest green
Still girdles round that castle gray;
I know not if the boughs between
The white deer vanish ere the day;
Above my Love the grass is green,
My heart is colder than the clay!

Andrew Lang

San Terenzo

MID April seemed like some November day,
When through the glassy waters, dull as lead,
Our boat, like shadowy barques that bear the dead,
Slipped down the long shores of the Spezian bay,
Rounded a point,—and San Terenzo lay
Before us, that gay village, yellow and red,
The roof that covered Shelley's homeless head,—
His house, a place deserted, bleak and gray.
The waves broke on the doorstep; fishermen
Cast their long nets, and drew, and cast again.
Deep in the ilex woods we wandered free,
When suddenly the forest glades were stirred
With waving pinions, and a great sea bird
Flew forth, like Shelley's spirit, to the sea!

Andrew Lang

Scythe Song

MOWERS, weary and brown, and blithe,
What is the word methinks ye know,
Endless over-word that the Scythe
Sings to the blades of the grass below?
Scythes that swing in the grass and clover,
Something, still, they say as they pass;
What is the word that, over and over,
Sings the Scythe to the flowers and grass?

Hush, ah hush, the Scythes are saying,
Hush, and heed not, and fall asleep;
Hush, they say to the grasses swaying;
Hush, they sing to the clover deep!
Hush—'t is the lullaby Time is singing—
Hush, and heed not, for all things pass;
Hush, ah hush! and the Scythes are swinging
Over the clover, over the grass!

Andrew Lang

The Odyssey

AS one that for a weary space has lain
Lull'd by the song of Circe and her wine
In gardens near the pale of Proserpine,
Where that Aeaeon isle forgets the main,
And only the low lutes of love complain,
And only shadows of wan lovers pine--
As such an one were glad to know the brine
Salt on his lips, and the large air again--
So gladly from the songs of modern speech
Men turn, and see the stars, and feel the free
Shrill wind beyond the close of heavy flowers,
And through the music of the languid hours
They hear like Ocean on a western beach
The surge and thunder of the Odyssey.

Andrew Lang

Three Portraits of Prince Charles

1731

BEAUTIFUL face of a child,
Lighted with laughter and glee,
Mirthful, and tender, and wild,
My heart is heavy for thee!

1744

Beautiful face of a youth,
As an eagle poised to fly forth
To the old land loyal of truth,
To the hills and the sounds of the North:
Fair face, daring and proud,
Lo! the shadow of doom, even now,
The fate of thy line, like a cloud,
Rests on the grace of thy brow!

1773

Cruel and angry face,
Hateful and heavy with wine,
Where are the gladness, the grace,
The beauty, the mirth that were thine?

Ah, my Prince, it were well,—
Hadst thou to the gods been dear,—
To have fallen where Keppoch fell,
With the war-pipe loud in thine ear!
To have died with never a stain
On the fair White Rose of Renown,
To have fallen, fighting in vain,
For thy father, thy faith, and thy crown!
More than thy marble pile,
With its women weeping for thee,
Were to dream in thine ancient isle,
To the endless dirge of the sea!
But the Fates deemed otherwise;
Far thou sleepest from home,
From the tears of the Northern skies,
In the secular dust of Rome.
A city of death and the dead,
But thither a pilgrim came,
Wearing on weary head
The crowns of years and fame:
Little the Lucrine lake
Or Tivoli said to him,
Scarce did the memories wake
Of the far-off years and dim,
For he stood by Avernus' shore.
But he dreamed of a Northern glen,
And he murmured, over and o'er,

"For Charlie and his men:"
And his feet, to death that went,
Crept forth to St. Peter's shrine,
And the latest Minstrel bent
O'er the last of the Stuart line.

Andrew Lang