

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Arthur H Adams**

**- poems -**

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## **A Pair Of Lovers In The Street**

A PAIR of lovers in the street!  
I dare not mock: with reverence meet  
My unforgetting heart I cheat.

Ah, God, spare me—so soon again  
At the barred door to beat in vain,  
And find their dalliance such fierce pain!

I, yearning up from Hell's abyss,  
See, dreaming through their worlds of bliss,  
This Dante and his Beatrice!

For these the distant goal have won  
For which God made the plasm and sun;  
His patient labouring is done.

For these each Spring has been a bride,  
And lonely worlds were spawned and died.  
Chaos for them in birth-throes cried.

Far out in seas of Space forlorn  
This crescent wave was slowly born  
That thunders on the beach of morn.

Ah, they, so soon to be meshed in  
The web of splendour, silken-thin,  
The nebulae were set to spin!

Up the long path from joy to joy  
Love led the way. Can aught destroy  
The task that was the stars' employ?

Their ecstasy to God is more  
Than Lucifer at Heaven's door  
Entreating pardon for his war.

These two are gods, for, by love swayed,  
They have God's special task essayed,  
And new worlds for their gladness made.

This little hour so lightly given  
Makes earth too mean a place to live in,  
And broken toys His Hell and Heaven.

All Time, expectant of their bliss,  
Hangs fearful. Space through her abyss  
Shudders if they this hour should miss.

For if their kiss they went without,  
The stars would be a raining rout,  
And time in anguish flicker out.

About God's room from star to sun  
A stealthy slippered Thing would run,  
Quenching cold tapers one by one.

But they have kissed. Eternity,  
Like a great clock, beats steadily  
For these mazed fools—but not for me!

Of God's wide universe the strands  
They hold within their clinging hands;  
The stars march on at their commands.

So from this moment blossom free  
New universes tirelessly—  
Aeons of unguessed ecstasy!

But I can only bow and beat  
Vain hands about God's mercy-seat,  
And, still remembering, still entreat.

Surely my penance is complete!  
The rack turns grimly when I meet  
A pair of lovers on the street

Arthur H Adams

## **A Spring Sonnet**

Last night beneath the mockery of the moon  
I heard the sudden startled whisperings  
Of wakened birds settling their restless wings;  
The North-east brought his word of gladness, "Soon!"  
And all the night with wonder was a-swoon.  
A soul had breathed into long-dreaming things;  
Some unseen hand hovered above the strings:  
Some cosmic chord had set the earth in tune.  
And when I rose I saw the Bay arrayed  
In her grey robe against the coming heat.  
A pulse awoke within the stirring street--  
The wattle-gold upon the pavements thrown,  
And through the quiet of the colonnade  
The smoky perfume of boronia blown.

Arthur H Adams

## **Bayswater.W.**

About me leagues of houses lie,  
Above me, grim and straight and high,  
They climb; the terraces lean up  
Like long grey reefs against the sky.

Packed tier on tier the people dwell;  
Each narrow, hollow wall is full;  
And in that hive of honeycomb,  
Remote and high, I have one cell.

And when I turn into my street  
I hear in murmurous retreat  
A tide of noises flowing out --  
The city ebbing from my feet!

And lo! two long straight walls between,  
There dwells a little park serene,  
Where blackened trees and railings hem  
A little handkerchief of green!

Yet I can see across the roof  
The sun, the stars and . . . God! For proof --  
Between the twisting chimney-pots  
A pointing finger, old, aloof!

The traffic that the city rends  
Within my quiet haven ends  
In a deep murmur, or across  
My pool a gentle ripple sends.

A chime upon the silence drab  
Paints music; hooting motors stab  
The pleasant peace; and, far and faint,  
The jangling lyric of the cab!

And when I wander, proud and free,  
Through my domain, unceasingly  
The endless pageant of the shops  
Marches along the street with me.

About me ever blossoming  
Like rich parterres the hoardings fling  
An opulence of hue, and make  
Within my garden endless Spring.

The droning tram-cars spitting light:  
And like great bees in drunken flight  
Burly and laden deep with bloom,  
The 'busses lumbering home at night!

Sometimes an afternoon will fling  
New meaning on each sombre thing,

And low upon the level roofs  
The sultry sun lies smouldering.

Sometimes the fog -- that faery girl --  
Her veil of wonder will unfurl,  
And crescent gaunt and looming flat  
Are sudden mysteries of pearl!

New miracles the wet streets show;  
On stems of flame the gas-lamps glow.  
I walk upon the wave and see  
Another London drowned below!

And when night comes strange jewels strew  
The winding streets I wander through:  
Like pearls upon a woman's throat  
The street-lamps' swerving avenue!

In every face that passes mine  
Unfathomed epics I divine:  
Each figure on the pavement is  
A vial of untasted wine!

Through lands enchanted wandering,  
To all a splendour seems to cling.  
Lo! from a window-beacon high  
Hope still the Night is questioning!

And so, ere sleep, I lie and mark  
Romance's stealthy footsteps. Hark!  
The rhythm of the horse's hoof  
Bears some new drama through the dark!

So in this tall and narrow street  
I lie as in Death's lone retreat  
And hear, loud in the pulse of Life,  
Eternity upon me beat!

Arthur H Adams

## **Bond Street**

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

Arthur H Adams

## China 1899

She lies, a grave disdain all her defence,  
Too imperturbable for scorn. She hears  
Only the murmur of the flowing years  
That thunder slowly on her shores immense  
And ebb away in moaning impotence.  
Giants enduring, she and Time are peers--  
Her dream-hazed eyes knowing no hopes, no tears,  
Her glance a languor-lidded insolence.  
And though the rabble of the restless West  
In her deserted courts set their rash sway,  
She heeds them not; as when the sun, withdrawn  
From his untarnished sky, knows it distressed  
By storm of weakling stars, that he at dawn  
Will wither with one ruthless glance away.

Arthur H Adams

## **Civilisation**

One moment mankind rides the crested wave,  
A moment glorious, beyond recall;  
And then the wave, with slow and massive fall,  
Obliterates the beauty that it gave.  
When discrowned king and manumitted slave  
Are free and equal to be slaves of all,  
Democracies in their wide freedom brawl,  
And go down shouting to a common grave.  
So one by one the petals of the rose  
Shrivel and fade, and all its splendour goes  
Back to the earth; and in her arms embraced  
Through wintry centuries the dead seeds sleep  
Till spring comes troubling them, and they unleap,  
Once more their petals on the world to waste.

Arthur H Adams

## **Fleet Street**

BENEATH this narrow jostling street,  
Unruffled by the noise of feet,  
Like a slow organ-note I hear  
The pulses of the great world beat.

Unseen beneath the city's show  
Through this aorta ever flow  
The currents of the universe—  
A thousand pulses throbbing low!

Unheard beneath the pavement's din  
Unknown magicians sit within  
Dim caves, and weave life into words  
On patient looms that spin and spin.

There, uninspired, yet with the dower  
Of mightier mechanic power,  
Some bent, obscure Euripides  
Builds the loud drama of the hour!

There, from the gaping presses hurled,  
A thousand voices, passion-whirled,  
With throats of steel vociferate  
The incessant story of the world!

So through this artery from age  
To age the tides of passion rage,  
The swift historians of each day  
Flinging a world upon a page!

And then I pause and gaze my fill  
Where cataracts of traffic spill  
Their foam into the Circus. Lo!  
Look up, the crown on Ludgate Hill!

Remote from all the city's moods,  
In high, untroubled solitudes,  
Like an old Buddha swathed in dream,  
St. Paul's above the city broods!

Arthur H Adams

## Lovers

I thought, because we had been friends so long,  
That I knew all your dear lips dared intend  
Before they dawned to speech. Our thoughts would blend,  
I dreamed, like memories that faintly throng.  
Your voice dwelt in me like an olden song.  
Petal, I thought, from petal I could rend  
The blossom of your soul, and at the end  
Find still the same sweet fragrance. I was wrong.  
Last evening in our eyes love brimmed to birth;  
Our friendship faded, lost in passion's mist.  
We had been strangers only! Here, close-caught  
Against my heart the dim face I had sought  
So long! And now the only thing on earth--  
Your piteous mouth, a-tremble to be kissed!

Arthur H Adams

## Nemesis

All things must fade. There is for cities tall  
The same tomorrow as for daffodils:  
Time's wind, that casts the seed, the petal spills.  
Grim London's ruined arches yet shall fall  
Back to the arms of Earth. A quiet pall  
The mother draws over those she loves--and kills;  
And though brief nations vaunt their upstart wills,  
The nemesis of grass shall cover all.  
So--from a caravan to Mecca bound  
Getting no more than one incurious glance--  
Tremendous Babylon, thrice-girt with walls,  
Sick of her thousand years of arrogance,  
With a few tamarisks upon a mound  
Her epigraph upon the desert scrawls.

Arthur H Adams

## Sydney

In her grey majesty of ancient stone  
She queens it proudly, though the sun's caress  
Her piteous cheeks, ravished of bloom, confess,  
And her dark eyes his bridegroom glance have know.  
Robed in her flowing parks, serene, alone,  
She fronts the east; and with the tropic stress  
Her smooth brow ripples into weariness;  
Yet hers the sea for footstool, and for throne  
A continent predestined. Round her trails  
The turbid squalor of her streets, and dim  
Into the dark heat-haze her domes flow up;  
Her long lean fingers, with their grey-old nails,  
Giving her thirsty lips to the cool brim  
Of the bronze beauty of her harbour's cup.

Arthur H Adams

## **The Australian**

ONCE more this Autumn-earth is ripe,  
Parturient of another type.

While with the Past old nations merge  
His foot is on the Future's verge.

They watch him, as they huddle, pent,  
Striding a spacious continent,

Above the level desert's marge  
Looming in his aloofness large.

No flower with fragile sweetness graced—  
A lank weed wrestling with the waste;

Pallid of face and gaunt of limb,  
The sweetness withered out of him;

Sombre, indomitable, wan,  
The juices dried, the glad youth gone.

A little weary from his birth,  
His laugh the spectre of a mirth,

Bitter beneath a bitter sky,  
To Nature he has no reply.

Wanton, perhaps, and cruel. Yes,  
Is not his sun more merciless?

So drab and neutral is his day,  
He finds a splendour in the grey,

And from his life's monotony  
He draws a dreary melody.

When earth so poor a banquet makes  
His pleasures at a gulp he takes;

The feast is his to the last crumb:  
Drink while he can...the drought will come.

His heart a sudden tropic flower,  
He loves and loathes within an hour.

Yet you who by the pools abide,  
Judge not the man who swerves aside;

He sees beyond your hazy fears;  
He roams the desert of the years;

Rearing his cities in the sand,

He builds where even God has banned;

With green a continent he crowns,  
And stars a wilderness with towns;

With paths the distances he snares;  
His gyves of steel the great plain wears.

A child who takes a world for toy,  
To build a nation or destroy,

His childish features frozen stern,  
His manhood's task he has to learn—

From feeble tribes to federate  
One white and peace-encompassed State.

But if there be no goal to reach?...  
The track lies open, dawns beseech!

Enough that he lay down his load  
A little farther on the road.

So, toward undreamt-of destinies  
He slouches down the centuries.

Arthur H Adams

## The Pleiades

LAST night I saw the Pleiades again,  
Faint as a drift of steam  
From some tall chimney-stack;  
And I remembered you as you were then:  
Awoke dead worlds of dream,  
And Time turned slowly back.

I saw the Pleiades through branches bare,  
And close to mine your face  
Soft glowing in the dark;  
For Youth and Hope and Love and You were there  
At our dear trysting-place  
In that bleak London park.

And as we kissed the Pleiades looked down  
From their immeasurable  
Aloofness in cold Space.  
Do you remember how a last leaf brown  
Between us flickering fell  
Soft on your upturned face?

Last night I saw the Pleiades again,  
Here in the alien South,  
Where no leaves fade at all;  
And I remembered you as you were then,  
And felt upon my mouth  
Your leaf-light kisses fall!

The Pleiades remember and look down  
On me made old with grief,  
Who then a young god stood,  
When you—now lost and trampled by the Town,  
A lone wind-driven leaf,—  
Were young and sweet and good!

Arthur H Adams

## The Weakling

I AM a weakling. God, who made  
The still, strong man, made also me.  
The God who could the tiger plan,  
In his lithe splendour unafraid—  
A thing of flame and poetry—  
That Puissance made of me—a Man!

The One who reared His vast design—  
Star, atom, system, germ, and soul—  
Could fashion forth this tremulous  
And paltry little heart of mine!  
The God who could conceive the Whole,  
Himself blasphemed in building thus.

When I dare look the glass within,  
The 'Mene Tekel' mark I see.  
God made this slinking, stunted thing,  
This narrowed face, this futile chin,  
Prisoned a soul deliberately  
'Neath these blunt nerves unanswering?

I see my fellows strong and proud,  
Lustful and splendid with desires,  
Secure and strenuous within,  
God opulently them endowed,  
And lit in them immortal fires;  
And left me scarcely strength to sin.

I watch them triumph by, afar,  
Crashing through life with crude disdain.  
Theirs is a universe so wide,  
So keen and rich the colours are  
That reach each fine responsive brain.  
They are the bridegrooms, Life the bride!

They carry in their veins their fate;  
Foredoomed are they to victory.  
Their broad brows are a diadem  
Of mastery; they but await  
Their long determined destiny,  
For at their birth Life laurelled them.

They have their chance to win, to fall—  
The fighting chance, the deathless hope;  
Their fate they venture to assail;  
They chafe for ever at their thrall;  
They dare with their despair to cope,  
Superbly strive, superbly fail.

But I starve with a stunted brain:  
My vision is so mean and scant  
That every hue it blurs and dulls.

God branded me—this brow of Cain!—  
Put in me this heart hesitant,  
And lamed me with a limping pulse.

I watch them striding on; they flout  
Death even; then my path I see:  
The narrow path—the narrow curse.  
Ah, wonder, if I dare to doubt  
If sin of mine prescribed for me  
This mean and niggard universe?

The end that is upon my face  
And in my wizened soul I wait—  
The end that I shall count for good.  
Yet they who pass me in the race  
Left me to falter to my fate:  
They did not slay me when they should.

But yet He found 'that it was good'.  
Ah! surely in the soul of God  
For me some kindly pity is?  
Or else I wonder how He could  
Raise me—a soul—up from the sod,  
Lift me from Nothingness—to this!

Yet—thin weak lips and woman-chin—  
Some unknown debt to me is paid,  
Some sacrifice I may not see.  
I expiate some other's sin.  
I am God's weakling. He who made  
The still, strong man, made also me.

Arthur H Adams

## Written In Australia

THE WIDE sun stares without a cloud:  
Whipped by his glances truculent  
The earth lies quivering and cowed.  
My heart is hot with discontent:  
I hate this haggard continent.

But over the loping leagues of sea  
A lone land calls to her children free:  
My own land holding her arms to me—  
But oh, the long loping leagues of sea.

The grey old city is dumb with heat;  
No breeze comes leaping, naked, rude,  
Adown the narrow, high-walled street;  
Upon the night thick perfumes brood:  
The evening oozes lassitude.

But over the edges of my town,  
Swept in a tide that ne'er abates,  
The riotous breezes tumble down;  
My heart looks home, looks home where waits  
The Windy City of the Straits!

The land lies desolate and stripped;  
Across its waste has thinly strayed  
A tattered host of eucalypt  
From whose gaunt uniform is made  
A ragged penury of shade.

But over my isles the forest drew  
A mantle thick—save where a peak  
Shows his grim teeth a-snarl—and through  
The filtered coolness creek and creek,  
Tangled in ferns, in whispers speak.

And there the placid great lakes are;  
And brimming rivers proudly force  
Their ice-cold tides. Here, like a scar,  
Dry-lipped, a withered water-course  
Crawls from a long-forgotten source.

My glance, home-gazing, scarce discerns  
This listless girl, in whose dark hair  
A starry red hibiscus burns;  
Her pallid cheeks are like a pair  
Of nuns, bloom-ravished, yet so fair.

And like a sin her warm lips flame  
In her wan face; swift passions brim  
In those brown eyes too soft for blame;  
Her form is sinuous and slim—  
That lyric line of breast and limb!

But one there waits whose brown face glows,  
Whose cheeks with Winter's kisses smart—  
The flushing petals of a rose.  
Of earth and sun she is a part;  
Her brow is Greek and Greek her heart.

At love she laughs a faint disdain;  
Her heart no weakly one to charm;  
Robust and fragrant as the rain,  
The dark bush soothed her with his balm,  
The mountains gave her of their calm.

Her fresh young figure, lithe and tall,  
Her radiant eyes, her brow benign,  
She is the peerless queen of all—  
The maid, the country, that I shrine  
In this far-banished heart of mine!

And over the loping leagues of green  
A lone land waits with a hope serene—  
My own land calls like a prisoner queen—  
But oh, the long loping leagues between!

Arthur H Adams