Classic Poetry Series

Charlotte Mary Mew

- poems -

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Charlotte Mary Mew (15 November 1869 – 24 March 1928)

Charlotte Mary Mew was an English poet, whose work spans the cusp between Victorian poetry and Modernism.

She was born in Bloomsbury, London the daughter of the architect Frederick Mew, who designed Hampstead town hall. Her father died in 1898 without making adequate provision for his family; two of her siblings suffered from mental illness, and were committed to institutions, and three others died in early childhood leaving Charlotte, her mother and her sister, Anne. Charlotte and Anne made a pact never to marry for fear of passing on insanity to their children. (One author calls Charlotte "chastely lesbian".)

In 1894, Mew succeeded in getting a short story into The Yellow Book, but wrote very little poetry at this time. Her first collection of poetry, The Farmer's Bride, was published in 1916, in chapbook format, by the Poetry Bookshop; in the USA, it was entitled Saturday Market and published in 1921. It earned her the admiration of Sydney Cockerell.

Her poems are varied: some of them (such as 'Madeleine in Church') are passionate discussions of faith and the possibility of belief in God; others are proto-modernist in form and atmosphere ('In Nunhead Cemetery'). Mew gained the patronage of several literary figures, notably Thomas Hardy, who called her the best woman poet of her day, Virginia Woolf, who said she was 'very good and quite unlike anyone else', and Siegfried Sassoon. She obtained a small Civil List pension with the aid of Cockerell, Hardy, John Masefield and Walter De La Mare. This helped ease her financial difficulties.

After the death of her sister, she descended into a deep depression, and was admitted to a nursing home where she eventually committed suicide by drinking Lysol.

Mew is buried in the northern part of Hampstead Cemetery, London NW6.

Eserleri:

"Passed" The Yellow Book, Volume 2 (1894).
The Cenotaph (1919)

A Farewell

Remember me and smile, as smiling too,
I have remembered things that went their way--
The dolls with which I grew too wise to play--
Or over-wise--kissed, as children do,
And so dismissed them; yes, even as yoy
Have done with this poor piece of painted clay--
Not wantonly, but wisely, shall we say?
As one who, haply, tunes his heart anew.

Only I wish her eyes may not be blue,
The eyes of a new angel. Ah! she may
Miss something that I found,--perhaps the clue
To those long silences of yours, which grew
Into one word. And should she not be gay,
Poor lady! Well, she too must have her day.

Charlotte Mary Mew

A Quoi Bon Dire

Seventeen years ago you said
Something that sounded like Good-bye;
And everybody thinks that you are dead,
But I.

So I, as I grow stiff and cold
To this and that say Good-bye too;
And everybody sees that I am old
But you.

And one fine morning in a sunny lane
Some boy and girl will meet and kiss and swear
That nobody can love their way again
While over there
You will have smiled, I shall have tossed your hair.

Charlotte Mary Mew

Absence

Sometimes I know the way
You walk, up over the bay;
It is a wind from that far sea
That blows the fragrance of your hair to me.

Or in this garden when the breeze
Touches my trees
To stir their dreaming shadows on the grass
I see you pass.

In sheltered beds, the heart of every rose
Serenely sleeps to-night. As shut as those
Your garded heart; as safe as they fomr the beat, beat
Of hooves that tread dropped roses in the street.

Turn never again
On these eyes blind with a wild rain
Your eyes; they were stars to me.--
There are things stars may not see.

But call, call, and though Christ stands
Still with scarred hands
Over my mouth, I must answer. So
I will come--He shall let me go!

Charlotte Mary Mew

Fin de Fête

Sweetheart, for such a day
    One mustn't grudge the score;
Here, then, it's all to pay,
    It's Good-night at the door.

Good-night and good dreams to you,—
    Do you remember the picture-book thieves
Who left two children sleeping in a wood the long night through,
    And how the birds came down and covered them with leaves?

So you and I should have slept,—But now,
    Oh, what a lonely head!
With just the shadow of a waving bough
    In the moonlight over your bed.

Charlotte Mary Mew

From a Window

Up here, with June, the sycamore throws
Across the window a whispering screen;
I shall miss the sycamore more I suppose,
Than anything else on this earth that is out in green.
But I mean to go through the door without fear,
Not caring much what happens here
When I'm away: --
How green the screen is across the panes
Or who goes laughing along the lanes
With my old lover all the summer day.

Charlotte Mary Mew

I Have Been Through The Gates

His heart to me, was a place of palaces and pinnacles and shining towers;
I saw it then as we see things in dreams,--I do not remember how long I slept;
I remember the tress, and the high, white walls, and how the sun was always on the towers;
The walls are standing to-day, and the gates; I have been through the gates, I have groped, I have crept
Back, back. There is dust in the streets, and blood; they are empty; darkness is over them;
His heart is a place with the lights gone out, forsaken by great winds and the heavenly rain, unclean and unswept,
Like the heart of the holy city, old blind, beautiful Jerusalem;
Over which Christ wept

Charlotte Mary Mew

I So Liked Spring

I so liked Spring last year
Because you were here;-
The thrushes too-
Because it was these you so liked to hear-
I so liked you.

This year's a different thing,-
I'll not think of you.
But I'll like the Spring because it is simply spring
As the thrushes do.

Charlotte Mary Mew

In Nunhead Cemetary

It is the clay what makes the earth stick to his spade;
He fills in holes like this year after year;
The others have gone; they were tired, and half afraid
But I would rather be standing here;

There is nowhere else to go. I have seen this place
From the windows of the train that's going past
Against the sky. This is rain on my face -
It was raining here when I saw it last.

There is something horrible about a flower;
This, broken in my hand, is one of those
He threw it in just now; it will not live another hour;
There are thousands more; you do not miss a rose.

One of the children hanging about
Pointed at the whole dreadful heap and smiled
This morning after THAT was carried out;
There is something terrible about a child.

We were like children last week, in the Strand;
That was the day you laughed at me
Because I tried to make you understand
The cheap, stale chap I used to be
Before I saw the things you made me see.

This is not a real place; perhaps by-and-by
I shall wake - I am getting drenched with all this rain:
To-morrow I will tell you about the eyes of the Chrystal Palace train
Looking down on us, and you will laugh and I shall see what you see again.

Not here, not now. We said 'Not yet
Across our low stone parapet
Will the quick shadows of the sparrows fall.

But still it was a lovely thing
Through the grey months to wait for Spring
With the birds that go a-gypsying
In the parks till the blue seas call.
And next to these, you used to care
For the Lions in Trafalgar Square,
Who'll stand and speak for London when her bell of Judgement tolls -
And the gulls at Westminster that were
The old sea-captains souls.
To-day again the brown tide splashes step by step, the river stair,

And the gulls are there!

By a month we have missed our Day:
The children would have hung about
Round the carriage and over the way
As you and I came out.

We should have stood on the gulls' black cliffs and heard the sea
And seen the moon's white track,
I would have called, you would have come to me
And kissed me back.

You have never done that: I do not know
Why I stood staring at your bed
And heard you, though you spoke so low,
But could not reach your hands, your little head;
There was nothing we could not do, you said,
And you went, and I let you go!

Now I will burn you back, I will burn you through,
Though I am damned for it we two will lie
And burn, here where the starlings fly
To these white stones from the wet sky - ;
Dear, you will say this is not I -
It would not be you, it would not be you!

If for only a little while
You will think of it you will understand,
If you will touch my sleeve and smile
As you did that morning in the Strand
I can wait quietly with you
Or go away if you want me to -
God! What is God? but your face has gone and your hand!
Let me stay here too.

When I was quite a little lad
At Christmas time we went half mad
For joy of all the toys we had,
And then we used to sing about the sheep
The shepherds watched by night;
We used to pray to Christ to keep
Our small souls safe till morning light - ;
I am scared, I am staying with you to-night -
Put me to sleep.

I shall stay here: here you can see the sky;
The houses in the street are much too high;
There is no one left to speak to there;
Here they are everywhere,
And just above them fields and fields of roses lie -
If he would dig it all up again they would not die.

Charlotte Mary Mew

In The Fields

Lord when I look at lovely things which pass,
Under old trees the shadow of young leaves
Dancing to please the wind along the grass,
Or the gold stillness of the August sun on the August sheaves;
Can I believe there is a heavenlier world than this?
And if there is
Will the heart of any everlasting thing
Bring me these dreams that take my breath away?
They come at evening with the home-flying rooks and the scent of hay,
Over the fields. They come in spring.

Charlotte Mary Mew

Ken

The town is old and very steep
A place of bells and cloisters and grey towers,
And black-clad people walking in their sleep—
A nun, a priest, a woman taking flowers
To her new grave; and watched from end to end
By the great Church above, through the still hours:
But in the morning and the early dark
The children wake to dart from doors and call
Down the wide, crooked street, where, at the bend,
Before it climbs up to the park,
Ken's is in the gabled house facing the Castle wall.

When first I came upon him there
Suddenly, on the half-lit stair,
I think I hardly found a trace
Of likeness to a human face
In his. And I said then
If in His image God made men,
Some other must have made poor Ken—
But for his eyes which looked at you
As two red, wounded stars might do.

He scarcely spoke, you scarcely heard,
His voice broke off in little jars
To tears sometimes. An uncouth bird
He seemed as he ploughed up the street,
Groping, with knarred, high-lifted feet
And arms thrust out as if to beat
Always against a threat of bars.

And oftener than not there'd be
A child just higher than his knee
Trotting beside him. Through his dim
Long twilight this, at least, shone clear,
That all the children and the deer,
Whom every day he went to see
Out in the park, belonged to him.

"God help the folk that next him sits
He fidgets so, with his poor wits,"
The neighbours said on Sunday nights
When he would go to Church to "see the lights!"
Although for these he used to fix
His eyes upon a crucifix
In a dark corner, staring on
Till everybody else had gone.
And sometimes, in his evil fits,
You could not move him from his chair—
You did not look at him as he sat there,
Biting his rosary to bits.
While pointing to the Christ he tried to say,
"Take it away".

Nothing was dead:
He said "a bird" if he picked up a broken wing,
A perished leaf or any such thing
Was just "a rose"; and once when I had said
He must not stand and knock there any more,
He left a twig on the mat outside my door.

Not long ago
The last thrush stiffened in the snow,
While black against a sullen sky
The sighing pines stood by.
But now the wind has left our rattled pane
To flutter the hedge-sparrow's wing,
The birches in the wood are red again
And only yesterday
The larks went up a little way to sing
What lovers say
Who loiter in the lanes to-day;
The buds begin to talk of May
With learned rooks on city trees,
And if God please
With all of these
We, too, shall see another Spring.

But in that red brick barn upon the hill
I wonder—can one own the deer,
And does one walk with children still
As one did here?
Do roses grow
Beneath those twenty windows in a row—
And if some night
When you have not seen any light
They cannot move you from your chair
What happens there?
I do not know.

So, when they took
Ken to that place, I did not look
After he called and turned on me
His eyes. These I shall see—

Charlotte Mary Mew

Madeline in Church

Here, in the darkness, where this plaster saint
Stands nearer than God stands to our distress,
And one small candle shines, but not so faint
As the far lights of everlastingness,
I'd rather kneel than over there, in open day
Where Christ is hanging, rather pray
To something more like my own clay,
Not too divine;
For, once, perhaps my little saint
Before he got his niche and crown,
Had one short stroll about the town;
It brings him closer, just that taint—
And anyone can wash the paint
Off our poor faces, his and mine!

Is that why I see Monty now? equal to any saint, poor boy, as good as gold,
But still, with just the proper trace
Of earthliness on his shining wedding face;
And then gone suddenly blank and old
The hateful day of the divorce:
Stuart got his, hands down, of course
Crowing like twenty cocks and grinning like a horse:
But Monty took it hard. All said and done I liked him best,—
He was the first, he stands out clearer than the rest.
It seems too funny all we other rips
Should have immortal souls; Monty and Redge quite damnably
Keep theirs afloat while we go down like scuttled ships.—
It's funny too, how easily we sink,
One might put up a monument, I think
To half the world and cut across it "Lost at Sea!"
I should drown Jim, poor little sparrow, if I netted him to-night—
No, it's no use this penny light—
Or my poor saint with his tin-pot crown—
The trees of Calvary are where they were,
When we are sure that we can spare
The tallest, let us go and strike it down
And leave the other two still standing there.
I, too, would ask Him to remember me
If there were any Paradise beyond this earth that I could see.
Oh! quiet Christ who never knew
The poisonous fangs that bite us through
And make us do the things we do,
See how we suffer and fight and die,
How helpless and how low we lie,
God holds You, and You hang so high,
Though no one looking long at You,
Can think You do not suffer too,
But, up there, from your still, star-lighted tree
What can You know, what can You really see
Of this dark ditch, the soul of me!

We are what we are: when I was half a child I could not sit

Watching black shadows on green lawns and red carnations burning in the sun,
Without paying so heavily for it
That joy and pain, like any mother and her unborn child were almost one.
I could hardly bear
The dreams upon the eyes of white geraniums in the dusk,
The thick, close voice of musk,
The jessamine music on the thin night air,
Or, sometimes, my own hands about me anywhere —
The sight of my own face (for it was lovely then) even the scent of my own hair,
Oh! there was nothing, nothing that did not sweep to the high seat
Of laughing gods, and then blow down and beat
My soul into the highway dust, as hoofs do the dropped roses of the street.
I think my body was my soul,
And when we are made thus
Who shall control
Our hands, our eyes, the wandering passion of our feet,
Who shall teach us
To thrust the world out of our heart: to say, till perhaps in death,
When the race is run,
And it is forced from us with our last breath
"Thy will be done"?
If it is Your will that we should be content with the tame, bloodless things.
As pale as angels smirking by, with folded wings—
Oh! I know Virtue, and the peace it brings!
The temperate, well-worn smile
The one man gives you, when you are evermore his own:
And afterwards the child's, for a little while,
With its unknowing and all-seeing eyes
So soon to change, and make you feel how quick
The clock goes round. If one had learned the trick—
(How does one though?) quite early on,
Of long green pastures under placid skies,
One might be walking now with patient truth.
What did we ever care for it, who have asked for youth,
When, oh! my God! this is going or has gone?

There is a portrait of my mother, at nineteen,
With the black spaniel, standing by the garden seat,
The dainty head held high against the painted green
And throwing out the youngest smile, shy, but half haughty and half sweet.
Her picture then: but simply Youth, or simply Spring
To me to-day: a radiance on the wall,
So exquisite, so heart-breaking a thing
Beside the mask that I remember, shrunk and small,
Sapless and lined like a dead leaf,
All that was left of oh! the loveliest face, by time and grief!

And in the glass, last night, I saw a ghost behind my chair—
Yet why remember it, when one can still go moderately gay—?
Or could—with any one of the old crew,
But oh! these boys! the solemn way
They take you and the things they say—

This "I have only as long as you"
When you remind them you are not precisely twenty-two—
Although at heart perhaps—God! if it were
Only the face, only the hair!
If Jim had written to me as he did to-day
A year ago—and now it leaves me cold—
I know what this means, old, old, old:
Et avec ça—mais on a vécu, tout se paie.

That is not always true: there was my Mother (well at least the dead are free!)
Yoked to the man that Father was; yoked to the woman I am, Monty too;
The little portress at the Convent School, stewing in hell so patiently;
The poor, fair boy who shot himself at Aix. And what of me—and what of me ?
But I, I paid for what I had, and they for nothing. No, one cannot see
How it shall be made up to them in some serene eternity.
If there were fifty heavens God could not give us back the child who went or never came;
Here, on our little patch of this great earth, the sun of any darkened day.
Not one of all the starry buds hung on the hawthorn trees of last year's May,
No shadow from the sloping fields of yesterday;
For every hour they slant across the hedge a different way,
The shadows are never the same.

"Find rest in Him" One knows the parsons' tags—
Back to the fold, across the evening fields, like any flock of baa-ing sheep:
Yes, it may be, when He has shorn, led us to slaughter, torn the bleating soul in us to rags,
For so He giveth His belovèd sleep.
Oh! He will take us stripped and done,
Driven into His heart. So we are won:
Then safe, safe are we? in the shelter of His everlasting wings—
I do not envy Him his victories, His arms are full of broken things.

But I shall not be in them. Let Him take
The finer ones, the easier to break.
And they are not gone, yet, for me, the lights, the colours, the perfumes,
Though now they speak rather in sumptuous rooms.
In silks and in gemlike wines;
Here, even, in this corner where my little candle shines
And overhead the lancet-window glows
With golds and crimsons you could almost drink
To know how jewels taste, just as I used to think
There was the scent in every red and yellow rose
Of all the sunsets. But this place is grey,
And much too quiet. No one here,
Why, this is awful, this is fear!
Nothing to see, no face.
Nothing to hear except your heart beating in space
As if the world was ended. Dead at last!
Dead soul, dead body, tied together fast.
These to go on with and alone, to the slow end:
No one to sit with, really, or to speak to, friend to friend:

Out of the long procession, black or white or red
Not one left now to say "Still I am here, then see you, dear, lay here your head".
Only the doll's house looking on the Park
To-night, all nights, I know, when the man puts the lights out, very dark.
With, upstairs, in the blue and gold box of a room, just the maids' footsteps overhead,
Then utter silence and the empty world—the room—the bed—
The corpse! No, not quite dead, while this cries out in me.
But nearly: very soon to be
A handful of forgotten dust—
There must be someone. Christ! there must,
Tell me there will be someone. Who?
If there were no one else, could it be You?

How old was Mary out of whom you cast
So many devils? Was she young or perhaps for years
She had sat staring, with dry eyes, at this and that man going past
Till suddenly she saw You on the steps of Simon's house
And stood and looked at You through tears.
I think she must have known by those
The thing, for what it was that had come to her.
For some of us there is a passion, I suppose,
So far from earthly cares and earthly fears
That in its stillness you can hardly stir
Or in its nearness, lift your hand,
So great that you have simply got to stand
Looking at it through tears, through tears.
Then straight from these there broke the kiss,
I think You must have known by this
The thing, for what it was, that had come to You:
She did not love You like the rest,
It was in her own way, but at the worst, the best,
She gave You something altogether new.
And through it all, from her, no word,
She scarcely saw You, scarcely heard:
Surely You knew when she so touched You with her hair,
Or by the wet cheek lying there,
And while her perfume clung to You from head to feet all through the day
That You can change the things for which we care,
But even You, unless You kill us, not the way.

This, then was peace for her, but passion too.
I wonder was it like a kiss that once I knew,
The only one that I would care to take
Into the grave with me, to which if there were afterwards, to wake.
Almost as happy as the carven dead
In some dim chancel lying head by head
We slept with it, but face to face, the whole night through—
One breath, one throbbing quietness, as if the thing behind our lips was endless life,
Lost, as I woke, to hear in the strange earthly dawn, his "Are you there?"
And lie still, listening to the wind outside, among the firs.

So Mary chose the dream of Him for what was left to her of night and day,

It is the only truth: it is the dream in us that neither life nor death nor any other
thing can take away:
But if she had not touched Him in the doorway of the dream could she have
cared so much ?
She was a sinner, we are what we are: the spirit afterwards, but first the touch.

And He has never shared with me my haunted house beneath the trees
Of Eden and Calvary, with its ghosts that have not any eyes for tears,
And the happier guests who would not see, or if they did, remember these,
Though they lived there a thousand years.
Outside, too gravely looking at me. He seems to stand,
And looking at Him, if my forgotten spirit came
Unwillingly back, what could it claim
Of those calm eyes, that quiet speech,
Breaking like a slow tide upon the beach,
The scarred, not quite human hand ?—
Unwillingly back to the burden of old imaginings
When it has learned so long not to think, not to be,
Again, again it would speak as it has spoken to me of things
That I shall not see!

I cannot bear to look at this divinely bent and gracious head:
When I was small I never quite believed that He was dead:
And at the Convent school I used to lie awake in bed
Thinking about His hands. It did not matter what they said,
He was alive to me, so hurt, so hurt! And most of all in Holy Week
When there was no one else to see
I used to think it would not hurt me too, so terribly,
If He had ever seemed to notice me
Or, if, for once, He would only speak.

Charlotte Mary Mew

Monsieur Qui Passe

A purple blot against the dead white door
In my friend's rooms, bathed in their vile pink light,
I had not noticed her before
She snatched my eyes and threw them back to me:
She did not speak till we came out into the night,
Paused at this bench beside the klosk on the quay.

God knows precisely what she said--
I left to her the twisted skein,
Though here and there I caught a thread,--
Something, at first, about "the lamps along the Seine,
And Paris, with that witching card of Spring
Kept up her sleeve,--why you could see
The trick done on these freezing winter nights!
While half the kisses of the Quay--
Youth, hope,-the whole enchanted string
Of dreams hung on the Seine's long line of lights."

Then suddenly she stripped, the very skin
Came off her soul,-a mere girl clings
Longer to some last rag, however thin,
When she has shown you-well-all sorts of things:
"If it were daylight-oh! one keeps one's head--
But fourteen years!--No one has ever guessed--
The whole thing starts when one gets to bed--
Death?-If the dead would tell us they had rest!
But your eyes held it as I stood there by the door--
One speaks to Christ-one tries to catch His garment's hem--
One hardly says as much to Him--no more:
It was not you, it was your eyes--I spoke to them."

She stopped like a shot bird that flutters still,
And drops, and tries to run again, and swerves.
The tale should end in some walled house upon a hill.
My eyes, at least, won't play such havoc there,--
Or hers--But she had hair!--blood dipped in gold;
And there she left me throwing back the first odd stare.
Some sort of beauty once, but turning yellow, getting old.
Pouah! These women and their nerves!
God! but the night is cold!

Charlotte Mary Mew

Moorland Night

My face is against the grass - the moorland grass is wet -
My eyes are shut against the grass, against my lips there are the little blades,
Over my head the curlews call, And now there is the night wind in my hair;
My heart is against the grass and the sweet earth, - it has gone still, at last;
It does not want to beat any more,
And why should it beat?
This is the end of the journey.
The Thing is found.

This is the end of all the roads -
Over the grass there is the night-dew
And the wind that drives up from the sea along the moorland road,
I hear a curlew start out from the heath
And fly off calling through the dusk,
The wild, long, rippling call -:
The Thing is found and I am quiet with the earth;
Perhaps the earth will hold it or the wind, or that bird's cry,
But it is not for long in any life I know. This cannot stay,
Not now, not yet, not in a dying world, with me, for very long;
I leave it here:
And one day the wet grass may give it back -
One day the quiet earth may give it back -
The calling birds may give it back as they go by -
To someone walking on the moor who starves for love and will not know
Who gave it to all these to give away;
Or, if I come and ask for it again
Oh! then, to me.

Charlotte Mary Mew

My Heart is Lame

My heart is lame with running after yours so fast
Such a long way,
Shall we walk slowly home, looking at all the things we passed
Perhaps to-day?

Home down the quiet evening roads under the quiet skies,
Not saying much,
You for a moment giving me your eyes
When you could bear my touch.

But not to-morrow. This has taken all my breath;
Then, though you look the same,
There may be something lovelier in Love's face in death
As your heart sees it, running back the way we came;
My heart is lame.

Charlotte Mary Mew

Not For that City

Not for that city of the level sun,
    Its golden streets and glittering gates ablaze—
    The shadeless, sleepless city of white days,
White nights, or nights and days that are as one—
We weary, when all is said , all thought, all done.
    We strain our eyes beyond this dusk to see
    What, from the threshold of eternity
We shall step into. No, I think we shun
The splendour of that everlasting glare,
  The clamour of that never-ending song.
  And if for anything we greatly long,
It is for some remote and quiet stair
    Which winds to silence and a space for sleep
    Too sound for waking and for dreams too deep.

Charlotte Mary Mew

On the Road to the Sea

We passed each other, turned and stopped for half an hour, then went our way,
I who make other women smile did not make you--
But no man can move mountains in a day.
So this hard thing is yet to do.

But first I want your life:--before I die I want to see
The world that lies behind the strangeness of your eyes,
There is nothing gay or green there for my gathering, it may be,
Yet on brown fields there lies
A haunting purple bloom: is there not something in grey skies
And in grey sea?
I want what world there is behind your eyes,
I want your life and you will not give it me.

Now, if I look, I see you walking down the years,
Young, and through August fields--a face, a thought, a swinging dream
perched on a stile--;
I would have liked (so vile we are!) to have taught you tears
But most to have made you smile.
To-day is not enough or yesterday: God sees it all--
Your length on sunny lawns, the wakeful rainy nights--; tell me--;
(how vain to ask), but it is not a question--just a call--;
Show me then, only your notched inches climbing up the garden wall,
I like you best when you are small.

Is this a stupid thing to say
Not having spent with you one day?
No matter; I shall never touch your hair
Or hear the little tick behind your breast,
Still it is there,
And as a flying bird
Brushes the branches where it may not rest
I have brushed your hand and heard
The child in you: I like that best
So small, so dark, so sweet; and were you also then too grave and wise?
Always I think. Then put your far off little hand in mine;--
Oh! let it rest;
I will not stare into the early world beyond the opening eyes,
Or vex or scare what I love best.
But I want your life before mine bleeds away--
Here--not in heavenly hereafters--soon,--
I want your smile this very afternoon,
(The last of all my vices, pleasant people used to say,
I wanted and I sometimes got--the Moon!)

You know, at dusk, the last bird's cry,
And round the house the flap of the bat's low flight,
Trees that go black against the sky
And then--how soon the night!

No shadow of you on any bright road again,
And at the darkening end of this--what voice? whose kiss? As if you'd say!

It is not I who have walked with you, it will not be I who take away
Peace, peace, my little handful of the gleaner's grain
From your reaped fields at the shut of day.

Peace! Would you not rather die
Reeling,--with all the cannons at your ear?
So, at least, would I,
And I may not be here
To-night, to-morrow morning or next year.
Still I will let you keep your life a little while,
See dear?
I have made you smile.

Charlotte Mary Mew

Pêcheresse

Down the long quay the slow boats glide,
While here and there a house looms white
Against the gloom of the waterside,
And some high window throws a light
As they sail out into the night.

At dawn they will bring in again
To women knitting on the quay
Who wait for him, their man of men;
I stand with them, and watch the sea
Which may have taken mine from me.

Just so the long days come and go.
The nights, ma Doué! the nights are cold!
Our Lady's heart is as frozen snow,
Since this one sin I have not told;
And I shall die or perhaps grow old

Before he comes. The foreign ships
Bring many a one of face and name
As strange as his, to buy your lips,
A gold piece for a scarlet shame
Like mine. But mine was not the same.

One night was ours, one short grey day
Of sudden sin, unshrived, untold.
He found me, and I lost the way
To Paradise for him. I sold
My soul for love and not for gold

He bought my soul, but even so,
My face is all that he has seen,
His is the only face I know,
And in the dark church, like a screen.
It shuts God out; it comes between;

While in some narrow foreign street
Or loitering on the crowded quay,
Who knows what others he may meet
To turn his eyes away from me?
Many are fair to such as he!

There is but one for such as I
To love, to hate, to hunger for;
I shall, perhaps, grow old and die,
With one short day to spend and store,
One night, in all my life, no more.

Just so the long days come and go,
Yet this one sin I will not tell
Though Mary's heart is as frozen snow
And all nights are cold for one warmed too well.

But, oh! ma Doué! the nights of Hell!

Charlotte Mary Mew

Sea Love

Tide be runnin' the great world over:
'Twas only last June month I mind that we
Was thinkin' the toss and the call in the breast of the lover
So everlastin' as the sea.

Heer's the same little fishes that sputter an swim,
Wi' the moon's old glim on the grey, wet sand;
An' him no more to me mor me to him
Than the wind goin' over my hand.

Charlotte Mary Mew

Song

Love love to-day, my dear
Love is not always here
Wise maids know how soon grows sere
The greenest leaf of Spring.
But no man knoweth
Whither it goeth
When the wind bloweth
So frail a thing.

Love love, my dear, to-day
If the ship's in the bay
If the bird has come your way
That sings on summer trees.
When his song faileth
And the ship saileth
No voice availeth
To call back these.

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Cenotaph

Not yet will those measureless fields be green again
Where only yesterday the wild sweet blood of wonderful youth was shed;
There is a grave whose earth must hold too long, too deep a stain,
Though for ever over it we may speak as proudly as we may tread.
But here, where the watchers by lonely hearths from the thrust of an inward sword have more slowly bled,
We shall build the Cenotaph: Victory, winged, with Peace, winged too, at the column’s head.
And over the stairway, at the foot—oh! here, leave desolate, passionate hands to spread
Violets, roses, and laurel, with the small, sweet, tinkling country things
Speaking so wistfully of other Springs,
From the little gardens of little places where son or sweetheart was born and bred.
In splendid sleep, with a thousand brothers
To lovers—to mothers
Here, too, lies he:
Under the purple, the green, the red,
It is all young life: it must break some women's hearts to see
Such a brave, gay coverlet to such a bed!
Only, when all is done and said,
God is not mocked and neither are the dead
For this will stand in our Marketplace—
Who’ll sell, who’ll buy
(Will you or I
Lie each to each with the better grace)?
While looking into every busy whore's and huckster's face
As they drive their bargains, is the Face
Of God: and some young, piteous, murdered face.

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Changeling

Toll no bell for me, dear Father dear Mother,
Waste no sighs;
There are my sisters, there is my little brother
Who plays in the place called Paradise,
Your children all, your children for ever;
But I, so wild,
Your disgrace, with the queer brown face, was never,
Never, I know, but half your child!

In the garden at play, all day, last summer,
Far and away I heard
The sweet "tweet-tweet" of a strange new-comer,
The dearest, clearest call of a bird.
It lived down there in the deep green hollow,
My own old home, and the fairies say
The word of a bird is a thing to follow,
So I was away a night and a day.

One evening, too, by the nursery fire,
We snuggled close and sat roudn so still,
When suddenly as the wind blew higher,
Something scratched on the window-sill,
A pinched brown face peered in--I shivered;
No one listened or seemed to see;
The arms of it waved and the wings of it quivered,
Whoo--I knew it had come for me!
Some are as bad as bad can be!
All night long they danced in the rain,
Round and round in a dripping chain,
Threw their caps at the window-pane,
Tried to make me scream and shout
And fling the bedclothes all about:
I meant to stay in bed that night,
And if only you had left a light
They would never have got me out!

Sometimes I wouldn't speak, you see,
Or answer when you spoke to me,
Because in the long, still dusks of Spring
You can hear the whole world whispering;
The shy green grasses making love,
The feathers grow on the dear grey dove,
The tiny heart of the redstart beat,
The patter of the squirrel's feet,
The pebbles pushing in the silver streams,
The rushes talking in their dreams,
The swish-swish of the bat's black wings,
The wild-wood bluebell's sweet ting-tings,
Humming and hammering at your ear,
Everything there is to hear
In the heart of hidden things.
But not in the midst of the nursery riot,

That's why I wanted to be quiet,
Couldn't do my sums, or sing,
Or settle down to anything.
And when, for that, I was sent upstairs
I did kneel down to say my prayers;
But the King who sits on your high church steeple
Has nothing to do with us fairy people!

'Times I pleased you, dear Father, dear Mother,
Learned all my lessons and liked to play,
And dearly I loved the little pale brother
Whom some other bird must have called away.
Why did they bring me here to make me
Not quite bad and not quite good,
Why, unless They're wicked, do They want, in spite,
to take me
Back to Their wet, wild wood?
Now, every nithing I shall see the windows shining,
The gold lamp's glow, and the fire's red gleam,
While the best of us are twining twigs and the rest of us
are whining
In the hollow by the stream.
Black and chill are Their nights on the wold;
And They live so long and They feel no pain:
I shall grow up, but never grow old,
I shall always, always be very cold,
I shall never come back again!

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Farmer's Bride

Three summers since I chose a maid,
Too young maybe-but more's to do
At harvest-time that a bide and woo.
When us was wed she turned afraid
Of love and me and all things human;
Like the shut of winter's day
Her smile went out, and `twadn't a woman-
More like a little frightened fay.
One night, in the Fall, she runned away.

"Out 'mong the sheep, her be," they said,
Should properly have been abed;
But sureenough she wadn't there
Lying awake with her wide brown stare.
So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down
We chased her, flying like a hare
Before out lanterns. To Church-Town
All in a shiver and a scare
We caught her, fetched her home at last
And turned the key upon her, fast.

She does the work about the hosue
As well as most, but like a mouse:
Happy enough to cheat and play
With birds and rabbits and such as they,
So long as men-folk keep away
"Not near, not near!" her eyes beseech
When one of us comes within reach.
The woman say that beasts in stall
Look round like children at her call.
I've hardly heard her speak at all.
Shy as a leveret, swift as he,
Straight and slight as a young larch tree,
Sweet as the first wild violets, she,
To her wild self. But what to me?

The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,
The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,
One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,
A magpie's spotted feathers lie
An the black earth spread white with rime,
The berries redden up to Christmas-time.
What's Christmas-time without there be
Some other in the house than we!

She sleeps up in the attic there
Alone, poor maid. `Tis but a stair
Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,
The soft young down of her, the brown,
The brown of her-her eyes, her hair, her hair!

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Forest Road

The forest road,
The infinite straight road stretching away
World without end: the breathless road between the walls
Of the black listening trees: the hushed, grey road
Beyond the window that you shut to-night
Crying that you would look at it by day -
There is a shadow there that sings and calls
But not for you. Oh! hidden eyes that plead in sleep
Against the lonely dark, if I could touch the fear
And leave it kissed away on quiet lids -
If I could hush these hands that are half-awake,
Groping for me in sleep I could go free.
I wish that God would take them out of mine
And fold them like the wings of frightened birds
Shot cruelly down, but fluttering into quietness so soon.
Broken, forgotten things? there is no grief for them in the green Spring
When the new birds fly back to the old trees.
But it shall not be so with you. I will look back. I wish I knew that God would stand
Smiling and looking down on you when morning comes,
To hold you, when you wake, closer than I,
So gently though: and not with famished lips or hungry arms:
He does not hurt the frailest, dearest things
As we do in the dark. See, dear, your hair -
I must unloose this hair that sleeps and dreams
About my face, and clings like the brown weed
To drowned, delivered things, tossed by the tired sea
Back to the beaches. Oh! your hair! If you had lain
A long time dead on the rough, glistening ledge
Of some black cliff, forgotten by the tide,
The raving winds would tear, the dripping brine would rust away
Fold after fold of all the loveliness
That wraps you round, and makes you, lying here,
The passionate fragrance that the roses are.
But death would spare the glory of your head
In the long sweetness of the hair that does not die:
The spray would leap to it in every storm,
The scent of the unsilenced sea would linger on
In these dark waves, and round the silence that was you -
Only the nesting gulls would hear - but there would still be whispers in your hair;
Keep them for me; keep them for me. What is this singing on the road
That makes all other music like the music in a dream -
Dumb to the dancing and the marching feet; you know, in dreams, you see
Old pipers playing that you cannot hear,
And ghostly drums that only seem to beat. This seems to climb:
Is it the music of a larger place? It makes our room too small: it is like a stair,
A calling stair that climbs up to a smile you scarcely see,
Dim, but so waited for; and you know what a smile is, how it calls,
How if I smiled you always ran to me.
Now you must sleep forgetfully, as children do.
There is a Spirit sits by us in sleep
Nearer than those who walk with us in the bright day.
I think he has a tranquil, saving face: I think he came

Straight from the hills: he may have suffered there in time gone by,
And once, from those forsaken heights, looked down,
Lonely himself, on all the lonely sorrows of the earth.
It is his kingdom - Sleep. If I could leave you there -
If, without waking you, I could get up and reach the door -!
We used to go together. - Shut, scared eyes,
Poor, desolate, desperate hands, it is not I
Who thrust you off. No, take your hands away -
I cannot strike your lonely hands. Yes, I have struck your heart,
It did not come so near. Then lie you there
Dear and wild heart behind this quivering snow
With two red stains on it: and I will strike and tear
Mine out, and scatter it to yours. Oh! throbbing dust,
You that were life, our little wind-blown hearts!

The road! the road!

There is a shadow there: I see my soul,
I hear my soul, singing among the trees!

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Peddler

Lend me, a little while, the key
That locks your heavy heart, and I'll give you back--
Rarer than books and ribbons and beads bright to see,
This little Key of Dreams out of my pack.

The road, the road, beyond men's bolted doors,
There shall I walk and you go free of me,
For yours lies North across the moors,
And mine lies South. To what seas?

How if we stopped and let our solemn selves go by,
While my gay ghost caught and kissed yours, as ghosts don't do,
And by the wayside, this forgotten you and I
Sat, and were twenty-two?
Give me the key that locks your tired eyes,
And I will lend you this one from my pack,
Brighter than colored beads and painted books that make men wise:
Take it. No, give it back!

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Road to Kerity

Do you remember the two old people we passed
on the road to Kerity,
Resting their sack on the stones, by the drenched wayside,
Looking at us with their lightless eyes
through the driving rain, and then out again
To the rocks, and the long white line of the tide:
Frozen ghosts that were children once,
husband and wife, father, and mother,
Looking at us with those frozen eyes;
have you ever seen anything quite so chilled
or so old?
But we - with our arms about each other,
We did not feel the cold!

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Sunlit House

White, through the gate it gleamed and slept
In shattered sunshine. The parched garden flowers
Their scarlet petals from the beds unswept
Like children unloved and ill-kept
Dreamed through the hours Two blue hydrangeas by the blistered door burned brown
Watched there, and no one in the town
Cared to go past it night or day
Though why this was they wouldn't say

But I, the stranger, knew that I must stay.
Pace up the weed-grown paths and down -
Till one afternoon - there is just a doubt -
Bit I fancy I heard a tiny shout -
From an upper window a bird flew out -
And I went my way.

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Trees Are Down

and he cried with a loud voice: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees - Revelation

They are cutting down the great plane-trees at the end of
the gardens.
For days there has been the grate of the saw, the swish of
the branches as they fall,
The crash of the trunks, the rustle of trodden leaves,
With the 'Whoops' and the 'Whoa', the loud common talk,
the loud common laughs of the men, above it all.

I remember one evening of a long past Spring
Turning in at a gate, getting out of a cart, and finding
a large dead rat in the mud of the drive.
I remember thinking: alive or dead, a rat was a
god-forsaken thing,
But at least, in May, that even a rat should be alive.

The week's work here is as good as done. There is just
one bough
On the roped bole, in the fine grey rain,
Green and high
And lonely against the sky.
(Down now! -)
And but for that,
If an old dead rat
Did once, for a moment, unmake the Spring, I might never
have thought of him again.

It is not for a moment the Spring is unmade to-day;
These were great trees, it was in them from root to stem:
When the men with the 'Whoops' and the 'Whoas' have carted
the whole of the whispering loveliness away
Half the Spring, for me, will have gone with them.

It is going now, and my heart has been struck with the
hearts of the planes;
Half my life it has beat with these, in the sun, in the rains,
In the March wind, the May breeze,
In the great gales that came over to them across the roofs from the great seas.
There was only a quiet rain when they were dying;
They must have heard the sparrows flying,
And the small creeping creatures in the earth where they were lying -
But I, all day, I heard an angel crying:
'Hurt not the trees.'

Charlotte Mary Mew

The Voice

From our low seat beside the fire
Where we have dozed and dreamed, and watched the glow
Or raked the ashes, stooping so
We scarcely saw the sun and rain
Through the small curtained window-pane,
Or looked much higher
Than this same quiet red or burned-out fire,
Tonight we heard a call,
A voice on the sharp air,
And felt a breath stirring our hair,
A flame within us. Something swift and tall
Swept in and out and that was all.
Was it a bright or a dark angel? Who can know?
It made no mark upon the snow;
But suddenly, in passing, snapped the chain,
Unbarred, flung wide the door
Which will not shut again:
And so we cannot sit here any more.
We must arise and go.
The world is cold without
And dark and hedged about
With mystery and enmity and doubt,
But we must go,
Though yet we do not know
Who called, or what marks we shall leave upon the snow.

Charlotte Mary Mew