Classic Poetry Series

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

- poems -

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The Splendid Spur

NOT on the neck of prince or hound
Nor on a woman's finger twin'd,
May gold from the deriding ground
Keep sacred that we sacred bind:
Only the heel
Of splendid steel
Shall stand secure on sliding fate,
When golden navies weep their freight.

The scarlet hat, the laurell'd stave
Are measures, not the springs, of worth;
In a wife's lap, as in a grave,
Man's airy notions mix with earth.
Seek other spur
Bravely to stir
The dust in this loud world, and tread
Alp-high among the whisp'ring dead.

Trust in thyself,—then spur amain:
So shall Charybdis wear a grace,
Grim AEtna laugh, the Libyan plain
Take roses to her shrivell'd face.
This orb—this round
Of sight and sound—
Count it the lists that God hath built
For haughty hearts to ride a-tilt.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

The White Moth

IF a leaf rustled, she would start:
And yet she died, a year ago.
How had so frail a thing the heart
To journey where she trembled so?
And do they turn and turn in fright,
Those little feet, in so much night?

The light above the poet's head Streamed on the page and on the cloth, And twice and thrice there buffeted On the black pane a white-winged moth: 'T was Annie's soul that beat outside And "Open, open, open!" cried:

"I could not find the way to God;
There were too many flaming suns
For signposts, and the fearful road
Led over wastes where millions
Of tangled comets hissed and burned—
I was bewildered and I turned.

"O, it was easy then! I knew
Your window and no star beside.
Look up, and take me back to you!"
—He rose and thrust the window wide.
'T was but because his brain was hot
With rhyming; for he heard her not.

But poets polishing a phrase Show anger over trivial things; And as she blundered in the blaze Towards him, on ecstatic wings, He raised a hand and smote her dead; Then wrote "That I had died instead!"

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch