

Classic Poetry Series

William Cosmo Monkhouse

- poems -

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A Dead March

PLAY me a march, low-ton'd and slow—a march for a silent tread,
Fit for the wandering feet of one who dreams of the silent dead,
Lonely, between the bones below and the souls that are overhead.

Here for a while they smil'd and sang, alive in the interspace,
Here with the grass beneath the foot, and the stars above the face,
Now are their feet beneath the grass, and whither has flown their grace?

Who shall assure us whence they come, or tell us the way they go?
Verily, life with them was joy, and, now they have left us, woe,
Once they were not, and now they are not, and this is the sum we know.

Orderly range the seasons due, and orderly roll the stars.
How shall we deem the soldier brave who frets of his wounds and scars?
Are we as senseless brutes that we should dash at the well-seen bars?

No, we are here, with feet unfix'd, but ever as if with lead
Drawn from the orbs which shine above to the orb on which we tread,
Down to the dust from which we came and with which we shall mingle dead.

No, we are here to wait, and work, and strain our banish'd eyes,
Weary and sick of soil and toil, and hungry and fain for skies
Far from the reach of wingless men, and not to be scal'd with cries.

No, we are here to bend our necks to the yoke of tyrant Time,
Welcoming all the gifts he gives us—glories of youth and prime,
Patiently watching them all depart as our heads grow white as rime.

Why do we mourn the days that go—for the same sun shines each day,
Ever a spring her primrose hath, and ever a May her may;
Sweet as the rose that died last year is the rose that is born to-day.

Do we not too return, we men, as ever the round earth whirls?
Never a head is dimm'd with gray but another is sunn'd with curls;
She was a girl and he was a boy, but yet there are boys and girls.

Ah, but alas for the smile of smiles that never but one face wore;
Ah, for the voice that has flown away like a bird to an unseen shore;
Ah, for the face—the flower of flowers—that blossoms on earth no more.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

On A Young Poetess's Grave

UNDER her gentle seeing,
In her delicate little hand,
They placed the Book of Being,
To read and understand.

The Book was mighty and olden,
Yea, worn and eaten with age;
Though the letters look'd great and golden,
She could not read a page.

The letters flutter'd before her,
And all look'd sweetly wild:
Death saw her, and bent o'er her,
As she pouted her lips and smil'd.

And weary a little with tracing
The Book, she look'd aside,
And lightly smiling, and placing
A Flower in its leaves, she died.

She died, but her sweetness fled not,
As fly the things of power,—
For the Book wherein she read not
Is the sweeter for the Flower.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

Robert Buchanan

'T WAS the body of Judas Iscariot
Lay in the Field of Blood;
'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Beside the body stood.

Black was the earth by night
And black was the sky;
Black, black were the broken clouds,
Tho' the red Moon went by.

'T was the body of Judas Iscariot
Strangled and dead lay there;
'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Look'd on it in despair.

The breath of the World came and went
Like a sick man's in rest;
Drop by drop on the World's eyes
The dews fell cool and blest.

Then the soul of Judas Iscariot
Did make a gentle moan—
"I will bury underneath the ground
My flesh and blood and bone.

"I will bury deep beneath the soil,
Lest mortals look thereon,
And when the wolf and raven come
The body will be gone!

"The stones of the field are sharp as steel,
And hard and bold, God wot;
And I must bear my body hence
Until I find a spot!"

'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
So grim, and gaunt, and gray,
Rais'd the body of Judas Iscariot,
And carried it away.

And as he bare it from the field
Its touch was cold as ice,
And the ivory teeth within the jaw
Rattled aloud, like dice.

As the soul of Judas Iscariot
Carried its load with pain,
The Eye of Heaven, like a lanthorn's eye,
Open'd and shut again.

Half he walk'd, and half he seem'd
Lifted on the cold wind;

He did not turn, for chilly hands
Were pushing from behind.

The first place that he came unto
It was the open wold,
And underneath were prickly whins,
And a wind that blew so cold.

The next place that he came unto
It was a stagnant pool,
And when he threw the body in
It floated light as wool.

He drew the body on his back,
And it was dripping chill,
And the next place that he came unto
Was a Cross upon a hill.

A Cross upon the windy hill,
And a Cross on either side,
Three skeletons that swing thereon,
Who had been crucified.

And on the middle crossbar sat
A white Dove slumbering;
Dim it sat in the dim light,
With its head beneath its wing.

And underneath the middle Cross
A grave yawn'd wide and vast,
But the soul of Judas Iscariot
Shiver'd, and glided past.

The fourth place that he came unto
It was the Brig of Dread,
And the great torrents rushing down
Were deep, and swift, and red.

He dar'd not fling the body in
For fear of faces dim,
And arms were wav'd in the wild water
To thrust it back to him.

'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Turn'd from the Brig of Dread,
And the dreadful foam of the wild water
Had splash'd the body red.

For days and nights he wander'd on
Upon an open plain,
And the days went by like blinding mist,
And the nights like rushing rain.

For days and nights he wander'd on,
All thro' the Wood of Woe;
And the nights went by like moaning wind,
And the days like drifting snow.

'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Came with a weary face—
Alone, alone, and all alone,
Alone in a lonely place!

He wander'd east, he wander'd west,
And heard no human sound;
For months and years, in grief and tears,
He wander'd round and round.

For months and years, in grief and tears,
He walk'd the silent night;
Then the soul of Judas Iscariot
Perceiv'd a far-off light.

A far-off light across the waste,
As dim as dim might be,
That came and went like a lighthouse gleam
On a black night at sea.

'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Crawl'd to the distant gleam;
And the rain came down, and the rain was blown
Against him with a scream.

For days and nights he wander'd on,
Push'd on by hands behind;
And the days went by like black, black rain,
And the nights like rushing wind.

'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot,
Strange, and sad, and tall,
Stood all alone at dead of night
Before a lighted hall.

And the wold was white with snow,
And his footmarks black and damp,
And the ghost of the silver Moon arose,
Holding her yellow lamp.

And the icicles were on the eaves,
And the walls were deep with white,
And the shadows of the guests within
Pass'd on the window light.

The shadows of the wedding guests

Did strangely come and go,
And the body of Judas Iscariot
Lay stretch'd along the snow.

The body of Judas Iscariot
Lay stretch'd along the snow;
'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Ran swiftly to and fro.

To and fro, and up and down,
He ran so swiftly there,
As round and round the frozen Pole
Glideth the lean white bear.

'T was the Bridegroom sat at the tablehead,
And the lights burn'd bright and clear—
"Oh, who is that," the Bridegroom said,
"Whose weary feet I hear?"

'T was one look'd from the lighted hall,
And answer'd soft and slow,
"It is a wolf runs up and down
With a black track in the snow."

The Bridegroom in his robe of white
Sat at the tablehead—
"Oh, who is that who moans without?"
The blessed Bridegroom said.

'T was one look'd from the lighted hall,
And answer'd fierce and low,
"T is the soul of Judas Iscariot
Gliding to and fro."

'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Did hush itself and stand,
And saw the Bridegroom at the door
With a light in his hand.

The Bridegroom stood in the open door,
And he was clad in white,
And far within the Lord's Supper
Was spread so long and bright.

The Bridegroom shaded his eyes and look'd,
And his face was bright to see—
"What dost thou here at the Lord's Supper
With thy body's sins?" said he.

'T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Stood black, and sad, and bare—
"I have wander'd many nights and days;

There is no light elsewhere.”

’T was the wedding guests cried out within,
And their eyes were fierce and bright—
“Scourge the soul of Judas Iscariot
Away into the night!”

The Bridegroom stood in the open door,
And he wav’d hands still and slow,
And the third time that he wav’d his hands
The air was thick with snow.

And of every flake of falling snow,
Before it touch’d the ground,
There came a dove, and a thousand doves
Made sweet sound.

’T was the body of Judas Iscariot
Floated away full fleet,
And the wings of the doves that bare it off
Were like its winding-sheet.

’T was the Bridegroom stood at the open door,
And beckon’d, smiling sweet;
’T was the soul of Judas Iscariot
Stole in, and fell at his feet.

“The Holy Supper is spread within,
And the many candles shine,
And I have waited long for thee
Before I pour’d the wine!”

The supper wine is pour’d at last,
The lights burn bright and fair,
Iscariot washes the Bridegroom’s feet,
And dries them with his hair.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

Song

WHO calls me bold because I won my love,
And did not pine,
And waste my life with secret pain, but strove
To make him mine?

I us'd no arts; 't was Nature's self that taught
My eye to speak,
And bid the burning blush to paint unsought
My flashing cheek;

That made my voice to tremble when I bid
My love "Goodby,"
So weak that every other sound was hid,
Except a sigh.

Oh, was it wrong to use the truth I knew,
That hearts are mov'd,
And spring warm-struck with life and love anew,
By being lov'd?

One night there came a tear, that, big and loth,
Stole 'neath my brow.
'T was thus I won my heart's own heart, and both
Are happy now.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

Spring Song In The City

WHO remains in London,
In the streets with me,
Now that Spring is blowing
Warm winds from the sea;
Now that trees grow green and tall,
Now the sun shines mellow,
And with moist primroses all
English lanes are yellow?

Little barefoot maiden,
Selling violets blue,
Hast thou ever pictur'd
Where the sweetlings grew?
Oh, the warm wild woodland ways,
Deep in dewy grasses,
Where the windblown shadow strays,
Scented as it passes!

Pedlar breathing deeply,
Toiling into town,
With the dusty highway
You are dusky brown;
Hast thou seen by daisied leas,
And by rivers flowing,
Lilac-ringlets which the breeze
Loosens lightly blowing?

Out of yonder wagon
Pleasant hay-scents float,
He who drives it carries
A daisy in his coat:
Oh, the English meadows, fair
Far beyond all praises!
Freckled orchids everywhere
Mid the snow of daisies!

Now in busy silence
Broods the nightingale,
Choosing his love's dwelling
In a dimpled dale;
Round the leafy bower they raise
Rose-trees wild are springing;
Underneath, thro' the green haze,
Bounds the brooklet singing.

And his love is silent
As a bird can be,
For the red buds only
Fill the red rose-tree;
Just as buds and blossoms blow
He 'll begin his tune,
When all is green and roses glow

Underneath the moon.

Nowhere in the valleys
Will the wind be still,
Everything is waving,
Wagging at his will:
Blows the milkmaid's kirtle clean,
With her hand press'd on it;
Lightly o'er the hedge so green
Blows the ploughboy's bonnet.

Oh, to be a roaming
In an English dell!
Every nook is wealthy,
All the world looks well,
Tinted soft the Heavens glow,
Over Earth and Ocean,
Waters flow, breezes blow,
All is light and motion!

William Cosmo Monkhouse

The Christ upon the Hill

Part I.

A couple old sat o'er the fire,
And they were bent and gray;
They burned the charcoal for their Lord,
Who lived long leagues away.

Deep in the wood the old pair dwelt,
Far from the paths of men,
And saw no face but their poor son's,
And a wanderer's now and then.

The son, alas! Had grown apace,
And left his wits behind;
He was as helpless as the air,
As empty as the wind.

With puffing lips and shambling feet,
And eyes a-staring wide,
He whistled ever as he went,
And little did beside.

He whistled high, he whistled low,
He whistled sharp and sweet;
He brought the redbreast to his hand,
And the brown hare to his feet.

Without a fear of beast or bird,
He wandered all the day;
But when the light began to fail
His courage passed away.

He feared the werewolf in the wood,
The dragon in the dell,
And home he fled as if pursued
By all the hosts of hell.

"Ah! we are old," the woman said,
"And soon shall we be gone,
And what will our poor Michael do
When he is left alone?"

"We are forgotten of all men;
And he is dead, I fear,
That good old priest, who used to come
And shrive us thrice a year.

"We have no kin," the mother said,
"We have no friend," said she;
The father gazed upon the fire,
And not a word said he.

Again she spoke, "No friend or kin,
'Death, only Death,' is near;
And he will take us both away,
And leave our Michael here.

"And who shall give him bite or sup?
And who shall keep him neat?
Ah! what were Heaven if we must weep
Before God's mercy-seat!"

And when the woman ceased, the man
A little waited still,
And then he said, "We have one friend --
The Christ upon the Hill."

Part II.

The Christ upon the Hill --so gaunt
And lean and stark and drear;
It made the heart with pity start,
It smote the soul with fear.

High reared against a cliff it stood,
Just where the great roads met;
And many a knee had worn the stone
Wherein the Rood was set.

For deadly was the pass beyond,
And all men paused to pray
For courage, or to pour their thanks
For dangers passed away.

But not for fear of beast or fiend,
But boding deeper ill,
The charcoal-burner and his wife
Slow climbed the weary hill.

Before the Rood their simple son
Lay stretched upon the ground,
And crumbled black bread for the birds
That hopped and pecked around.

(For he had gone before with feet
As wild and light as air,
And borne the basket on his back
That held their frugal fare.)

And they were faint, and, ere they prayed,
They sat them down to eat;
And much they marvelled at their son,
Who never touched his meat,

But, now the birds were flown away,
Sat up, and only gazed
Upon the Christ upon the cross,
As one with wonder dazed.

Full long he sat and never moved;
But then he gave a cry,
And caught his mother by the wrist
And said, "I heard a sigh."

"It is an image made of wood,
It has no voice," she said;
"Twas but the wind you heard, my son,"
But Michael shook his head,

And gazed again, so earnestly
His face grew almost wise;
And now he cried again, and said,
"Look, how he closed his eyes!"

"'Tis but the shadow of a bird
That passed across his face,"
The mother said; "see, even now
It hovers near the place."

And then the father said, "My son,
The image is of wood;
And do you think a man could live
Without a taste of food?"

"No food?" the silly youth replied,
And pointed to a wren,
Who with a crumb upon Christ's lip
Had just alighted then.

And now the old man held his peace,
And the woman ceased to strive,
For still he shook his silly head,
And said, "The man's alive."

"It is God's will," they said, and knelt,
And knew not what to say;
But when they rose they felt as though
All fear had passed away.

And they could smile when Michael left
His dinner on the stone;
He said, "The birds will feed the Christ
When they are quite alone."

Part III.

The couple sat before the fire,
More old, and sad, and poor,
For there was winter at the heart,
And winter at the door.

It shook the roof with shocks of wind;
It caked the pane with snow;
The candle flickered on the sill,
Like a soul that longed to go.

'Twas Michael's beacon, -- gone to feed
The Christ upon the Hill;
And midnight long had passed and gone,
And he was absent still.

And now and then they turned a log,
And now they dropped a word:
"Twas all the wind," the mother said;
The father said, "The bird."

"I hoped that it was God himself,"
The mother muttered low;
"It must have been the fiend," he said,
"For to deceive him so."

And then the mother cried aloud,
"What matter it?" she said;
"Or wind, or bird, or fiend, or God,
For he is dead -- is dead!"

"Hark!" cried the man, and through the storm
A note came high and clear;
It was the whistle of their son,
That sound they longed to hear.

And then a cry for help, and out
Into the snow they ran;
And there was Michael. On his back
He bore a helpless man.

"He lives, he lives," he wildly cried;
"His wounds are dripping still;"
And surely, red from hand and side
There ran a tiny rill.

They brought Him in and laid Him down,
Upon the warm hearthstone;
It was the Christ, but not of wood,
But made of flesh and bone.

They washed His wounds, and at their touch
They turned to purple scars,
Like a young moon upon the breast,
On hands and feet like stars.

They brought to moisten His dry lips
They hoarded flask of wine;
They wrapped Him round with blankets warm,
And waited for a sign.

And soon without the help of hand
He rose upon His feet,
And like a friend beside the fire
He took the vacant seat.

He sat up in the chair then,
And straight began to shine,
Until His face and raiment poured
A glory most divine.

The thorns upon His forehead
Broke out in leaves of gold;
The blood-drops turned to berries,
Like rubies rich and bold.

The blankets that bewrapped Him
Flowed into folds of white,
Bestarred with gold and jewels
Which sparkled in the light.

The very chair He sat on
Became a crystal throne;
The oaken stool beneath His feet
Turned to a jasper stone.

He stretched an arm to Michael,
And touched him with His hand,
And he arose beside the throne
An angel, bright and grand.

And then His lips were opened,
And strong and sweet and clear,
Like water from a fountain,
His voice was good to hear.

"I am the King of Glory;
I am your brother too;
And even as you do to Me,
So do I unto you.

"You took Me in and clothed Me;
You washed My body pierced;

You gave me of your wine to drink
When I was sore athirst.

"And you have suffered also,
And you must suffer still;
I suffered upon Calvary;
I suffer on the Hill.

"But I am Prince of Sorrow,
And I am Lord of Care;
I come to bring you comfort,
And save you from despair.

"Your son, your only son, is safe
And beautiful to see;
And though you miss him for a while,
You know he is with Me.

"And I will give him peace and joy
As no man every knew --
A little grief, a little pain,
And I will come for you."

He rose, His arms around their son;
And through the open door
They only saw a whirl of snow,
And heard the tempest roar.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

The Churchyard

HOW slowly creeps the hand of Time
On the old clock's green-mantled face!
Yea, slowly as those ivies climb,
The hours roll round with patient pace;
The drowsy rooks caw on the tower,
The tame doves hover round and round;
Below, the slow grass hour by hour
Makes green God's sleeping-ground.

All moves, but nothing here is swift;
The grass grows deep, the green boughs shoot;
From east to west the shadows drift;
The earth feels heavenward underfoot;
The slow stream through the bridge doth stray
With water-lilies on its marge,
And slowly, pil'd with scented hay,
Creeps by the silent barge.

All stirs, but nothing here is loud:
The cushat broods, the cuckoo cries;
Faint, far up, under a white cloud,
The lark trills soft to earth and skies;
And underneath the green graves rest;
And through the place, with slow footfalls,
With snowy cambric on his breast,
The old gray Vicar crawls.

And close at hand, to see him come,
Clustering at the playground gate,
The urchins of the schoolhouse, dumb
And bashful, hang the head and wait;
The little maidens curtsey deep,
The boys their forelocks touch meanwhile,
The Vicar sees them, half asleep,
And smiles a sleepy smile.

Slow as the hand on the clock's face,
Slow as the white cloud in the sky,
He cometh now with tottering pace
To the old vicarage hard by:
Smother'd it stands in ivy leaves,
Laurels and yews make dark the ground;
The swifts that build beneath the eaves
Wheel in still circles round.

And from the portal, green and dark,
He glances at the church-clock old—
Gray soul! why seek his eyes to mark
The creeping of that finger cold?
He cannot see, but still as stone
He pauses, listening for the chime,
And hears from that green tower intone

The eternal voice of Time.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

The Dream Of The World Without Death

NOW, sitting by her side, worn out with weeping,
Behold, I fell to sleep, and had a vision,
Wherein I heard a wondrous Voice intoning:

Crying aloud, "The Master on His throne
Openeth now the seventh seal of wonder,
And beckoneth back the angel men name Death.

"And at His feet the mighty Angel kneeleth,
Breathing not; and the Lord doth look upon him,
Saying, 'Thy wanderings on earth are ended.'

"And lo! the mighty Shadow sitteth idle
Even at the silver gates of heaven,
Drowsily looking in on quiet waters,
And puts his silence among men no longer."

The world was very quiet. Men in traffic
Cast looks over their shoulders; pallid seamen
Shiver'd to walk upon the decks alone;

And women barr'd their doors with bars of iron,
In the silence of the night; and at the sunrise
Trembled behind the husbandmen afield.

I could not see a kirkyard near or far;
I thirsted for a green grave, and my vision
Was weary for the white gleam of a tombstone.

But harkening dumbly, ever and anon
I heard a cry out of a human dwelling,
And felt the cold wind of a lost one's going.

One struck a brother fiercely, and he fell,
And faded in a darkness; and that other
Tore his hair, and was afraid, and could not perish.

One struck his aged mother on the mouth,
And she vanish'd with a gray grief from his hearthstone.
One melted from her bairn, and on the ground

With sweet unconscious eyes the bairn lay smiling.
And many made a weeping among mountains,
And hid themselves in caverns, and were drunken.

I heard a voice from out the beauteous earth,
Whose side roll'd up from winter into summer,
Crying, "I am grievous for my children."

I heard a voice from out the hoary ocean,
Crying, "Burial in the breast of me were better,
Yea, burial in the salt flags and green crystals."

I heard a voice from out the hollow ether,
Saying, "The thing ye curs'd hath been abolish'd—
Corruption and decay, and dissolution!"

And the world shriek'd, and the summertime was bitter,
And men and women fear'd the air behind them;
And for lack of its green graves the world was hateful.

Now at the bottom of a snowy mountain
I came upon a woman thin with sorrow,
Whose voice was like the crying of a seagull:

Saying, "O Angel of the Lord, come hither,
And bring me him I seek for on thy bosom,
That I may close his eyelids and embrace him.

"I curse thee that I cannot look upon him!
I curse thee that I know not he is sleeping!
Yet know that he has vanish'd upon God!

"I laid my little girl upon a wood bier,
And very sweet she seem'd, and near unto me;
And slipping flowers into her shroud was comfort.

"I put my silver mother in the darkness,
And kiss'd her, and was solaced by her kisses,
And set a stone, to mark the place, above her.

"And green, green were their sleeping places,
So green that it was pleasant to remember
That I and my tall man would sleep beside them.

"The closing of dead eyelids is not dreadful,
For comfort comes upon us when we close them,
And tears fall, and our sorrow grows familiar;

"And we can sit above them where they slumber,
And spin a dreamy pain into a sweetness,
And know indeed that we are very near them.

"But to reach out empty arms is surely dreadful,
And to feel the hollow empty world is awful,
And bitter grows the silence and the distance.

"There is no space for grieving or for weeping;
No touch, no cold, no agony to strive with,
And nothing but a horror and a blankness!"

Now behold I saw a woman in a mud hut
Raking the white spent embers with her fingers,
And fouling her bright hair with the white ashes.

Her mouth was very bitter with the ashes;
Her eyes with dust were blinded; and her sorrow
Sobb'd in the throat of her like gurgling water.

And all around the voiceless hills were hoary,
But red lights scorch'd their edges; and above her
There was a soundless trouble of the vapors.

"Whither, and O whither," said the woman,
"O Spirit of the Lord, hast thou convey'd them,
My little ones, my little son and daughter?"

"For, lo! we wander'd forth at early morning,
And winds were blowing round us, and their mouths
Blew rosebuds to the rosebuds, and their eyes

"Look'd violets at the violets, and their hair
Made sunshine in the sunshine, and their passing
Left a pleasure in the dewy leaves behind them;

"And suddenly my little son look'd upward
And his eyes were dried like dewdrops; and his going
Was like a blow of fire upon my face;

"And my little son was gone. My little daughter
Look'd round me for him, clinging to my vesture;
But the Lord had drawn him from me, and I knew it

"By the sign He gives the stricken, that the lost one
Lingers nowhere on the earth, on the hill or valley,
Neither underneath the grasses nor the tree roots.

"And my shriek was like the splitting of an ice-reef,
And I sank among my hair, and all my palm
Was moist and warm where the little hand had fill'd it.

"Then I fled and sought him wildly, hither and thither—
Though I knew that he was stricken from me wholly
By the token that the Spirit gives the stricken.

"I sought him in the sunlight and the starlight,
I sought him in great forests, and in waters
Where I saw my own pale image looking at me.

"And I forgot my little bright-hair'd daughter,
Though her voice was like a wild-bird's far behind me,
Till the voice ceas'd, and the universe was silent.

"And stilly, in the starlight, came I backward
To the forest where I miss'd him; and no voices
Brake the stillness as I stoop'd down in the starlight,

"And saw two little shoes filled up with dew,
And no mark of little footsteps any farther,
And knew my little daughter had gone also."

But beasts died; yea, the cattle in the yoke,
The milk-cow in the meadow, and the sheep,
And the dog upon the doorstep: and men envied.

And birds died; yea, the eagle at the sun gate,
The swan upon the waters, and the farm fowl,
And the swallows on the housetops: and men envied.

And reptiles; yea, the toad upon the road-side,
The slimy, speckled snake among the grass,
The lizard on the ruin: and men envied.

The dog in lonely places cried not over
The body of his master; but it miss'd him,
And whin'd into the air, and died, and rotted.

The traveller's horse lay swollen in the pathway,
And the blue fly fed upon it; but no traveller
Was there; nay, not his footprint on the ground.

The cat mew'd in the midnight, and the blind
Gave a rustle, and the lamp burnt blue and faint,
And the father's bed was empty in the morning.

The mother fell to sleep beside the cradle,
Rocking it, while she slumber'd, with her foot,
And waken'd,—and the cradle there was empty.

I saw a two-years' child, and he was playing;
And he found a dead white bird upon the doorway,
And laugh'd, and ran to show it to his mother.

The mother moan'd, and clutch'd him, and was bitter,
And flung the dead white bird across the threshold;
And another white bird flitted round and round it,

And utter'd a sharp cry, and twitter'd and twitter'd,
And lit beside its dead mate, and grew busy,
Strewing it over with green leaves and yellow.
So far, so far to seek for were the limits
Of affliction; and men's terror grew a homeless
Terror, yea, and a fatal sense of blankness.

There was no little token of distraction,
There was no visible presence of bereavement,
Such as the mourner easeth out his heart on.

There was no comfort in the slow farewell,
No gentle shutting of beloved eyes,
Nor beautiful broodings over sleeping features.

There were no kisses on familiar faces,
No weaving of white grave-clothes, no last pondering
Over the still wax cheeks and folded fingers.

There was no putting tokens under pillows,
There was no dreadful beauty slowly fading,
Fading like moonlight softly into darkness.

There were no churchyard paths to walk on, thinking
How near the well-beloved ones are lying.
There were no sweet green graves to sit and muse on,

Till grief should grow a summer meditation,
The shadow of the passing of an angel,
And sleeping should seem easy, and not cruel.

Nothing but wondrous parting and a blankness.

But I woke, and, lo! the burthen was uplifted,
And I pray'd within the chamber where she slumber'd,
And my tears flow'd fast and free, but were not bitter.

I eas'd my heart three days by watching near her,
And made her pillow sweet with scent and flowers,
And could bear at last to put her in the darkness.

And I heard the kirk-bells ringing very slowly,
And the priests were in their vestments, and the earth
Dripp'd awful on the hard wood, yet I bore it.

And I cried, "O unseen Sender of Corruption,
I bless Thee for the wonder of Thy mercy,
Which softeneth the mystery and the parting:

"I bless thee for the change and for the comfort,
The bloomless face, shut eyes, and waxen fingers,—
For Sleeping, and for Silence, and Corruption."

William Cosmo Monkhouse

The Faery Foster-Mother

BRIGHT Eyes, Light Eyes! Daughter of a Fay!
I had not been a wedded wife a twelvemonth and a day,
I had not nurs'd my little one a month upon my knee,
When down among the blue-bell banks rose elfins three times three,
They gripp'd me by the raven hair, I could not cry for fear,
They put a hempen rope around my waist and dragg'd me here,
They made me sit and give thee suck as mortal mothers can,
Bright Eyes, Light Eyes! strange and weak and wan!

Dim Face, Grim Face! lie ye there so still?
Thy red, red lips are at my breast, and thou may'st suck thy fill;
But know ye, tho' I hold thee firm, and rock thee to and fro,
'T is not to soothe thee into sleep, but just to still my woe?
And know ye, when I lean so calm against the wall of stone,
'T is when I shut my eyes and try to think thou art mine own?
And know ye, tho' my milk be here, my heart is far away,
Dim Face, Grim Face! Daughter of a Fay!

Gold Hair, Cold Hair! Daughter to a King!
Wrapp'd in bands of snow-white silk with jewels glittering,
Tiny slippers of the gold upon thy feet so thin,
Silver cradle velvet-lin'd for thee to slumber in,
Pygmy pages, crimson-hair'd, to serve thee on their knees,
To fan thy face with ferns and bring thee honey bags of bees,—
I was but a peasant lass, my babe had but the milk,
Gold Hair, Cold Hair! raimented in silk!

Pale Thing, Frail Thing! dumb and weak and thin,
Altho' thou ne'er dost utter sigh thou 'rt shadow'd with a sin;
Thy minnie scorns to suckle thee, thy minnie is an elf,
Upon a bed of rose's-leaves she lies and fans herself;
And though my heart is aching so for one afar from me,
I often look into thy face and drop a tear for thee,
And I am but a peasant born, a lowly cotter's wife,
Pale Thing, Frail Thing! sucking at my life!

Weak Thing, Meek Thing! take no blame from me,
Altho' my babe may moan for lack of what I give to thee;
For though thou art a faery child, and though thou art my woe,
To feel thee sucking at my breast is all the bliss I know;
It soothes me, tho' afar away I hear my daughter call,
My heart were broken if I felt no little lips at all!
If I had none to tend at all, to be its nurse and slave,
Weak Thing, Meek Thing! I should shriek and rave!

Bright Eyes, Light Eyes! lying on my knee!
If soon I be not taken back unto mine own countree,
To feel my own babe's little lips, as I am feeling thine,
To smooth the golden threads of hair, to see the blue eyes shine,—
I 'll lean my head against the wall and close my weary eyes,
And think my own babe draws the milk with balmy pants and sighs,
And smile and bless my little one and sweetly pass away,

Bright Eyes, Light Eyes! Daughter of a Fay!

William Cosmo Monkhouse

The Secret

SHE passes in her beauty bright
Amongst the mean, amongst the gay,
And all are brighter for the sight,
And bless her as she goes her way.

And now a gleam of pity pours,
And now a spark of spirit flies,
Uncounted, from the unlock'd stores
Of her rich lips and precious eyes.

And all men look, and all men smile,
But no man looks on her as I:
They mark her for a little while,
But I will watch her till I die.

And if I wonder now and then
Why this so strange a thing should be—
That she be seen by wiser men
And only duly lov'd by me:

I only wait a little longer,
And watch her radiance in the room;
Here making light a little stronger,
And there obliterating gloom,

(Like one who, in a tangled way,
Watches the broken sun fall through,
Turning to gold the faded spray,
And making diamonds of dew).

Until at last, as my heart burns,
She gathers all her scatter'd light,
And undivided radiance turns
Upon me like a sea of light.

And then I know they see in part
That which God lets me worship whole:
He gives them glances of her heart,
But me, the sunshine of her soul.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

The Spectrum

HOW many colors here do we see set,
Like rings upon God's finger? Some say three,
Some four, some six, some seven. All agree
To left of red, to right of violet,
Waits darkness deep as night and black as jet.

And so we know what Noah saw we see,
Nor less nor more—of God's emblazonry
A shred—a sign of glory known not yet.
If red can glide to yellow, green to blue,
What joys may yet await our wider eyes
When we awake upon a wider shore!
What deep pulsations, exquisite and new!
What keener, swifter raptures may surprise
Men born to see the rainbow and no more!

William Cosmo Monkhouse

The Summer Pool

THERE is a singing in the summer air,
The blue and brown moths flutter o'er the grass,
The stubble bird is creaking in the wheat,
And perch'd upon the honeysuckle-hedge
Pipes the green linnet. Oh, the golden world!
The stir of life on every blade of grass,
The motion and the joy on every bough,
The glad feast everywhere, for things that love
The sunshine, and for things that love the shade!

Aimlessly wandering with weary feet,
Watching the wool white clouds that wander by,
I come upon a lonely place of shade,—
A still green Pool, where with soft sound and stir
The shadows of o'erhanging branches sleep,
Save where they leave one dreamy space of blue,
O'er whose soft stillness ever and anon
The feathery cirrus blows. Here unaware
I pause, and leaning on my staff I add
A shadow to the shadows; and behold!
Dim dreams steal down upon me, with a hum
Of little wings, a murmuring of boughs,
The dusky stir and motion dwelling here,
Within this small green world. O'ershadow'd
By dusky greenery, tho' all around
The sunshine throbs on fields of wheat and bean,
Downward I gaze into the dreamy blue,
And pass into a waking sleep, wherein
The green boughs rustle, feathery wreaths of cloud
Pass softly, piloted by golden airs:
The air is still,—no birds sing any more,—
And helpless as a tiny flying thing,
I am alone in all the world with God.

The wind dies—not a leaf stirs—on the Pool
The fly scarce moves; earth seems to hold her breath
Until her heart stops, listening silently
For the far footsteps of the coming rain!

While thus I pause, it seems that I have gain'd
New eyes to see; my brain grows sensitive
To trivial things that, at another hour,
Had pass'd unheeded. Suddenly the air
Shivers, the shadows in whose midst I stand
Tremble and blacken—the blue eye o' the Pool
Is clos'd and clouded; with a sudden gleam
Oiling its wings, a swallow darteth past,
And weedling flowers beneath my feet thrust up
Their leaves, to feel the fragrant shower. Oh, hark!
The thirsty leaves are troubled into sighs,
And up above me, on the glistening boughs,
Patters the summer rain!

Into a nook,
Screen'd by thick foliage of oak and beech,
I creep for shelter; and the summer shower
Murmurs around me. Oh, the drowsy sounds!
The pattering rain, the numerous sigh of leaves,
The deep, warm breathing of the scented air,
Sink sweet into my soul—until at last,
Comes the soft ceasing of the gentle fall,
And lo! the eye of blue within the Pool
Opens again, while with a silvern gleam
Dew diamonds twinkle moistly on the leaves,
Or, shaken downward by the summer wind,
Fall melting on the Pool in rings of light!

William Cosmo Monkhouse

The Wake Of Tim O'Hara

TO the Wake of O'Hara
Came company;
All St. Patrick's Alley
Was there to see,
With the friends and kinsmen
Of the family.
On the long deal table lay Tim in white,
And at his pillow the burning light.
Pale as himself, with the tears on her cheek,
The mother receiv'd us, too full to speak;
But she heap'd the fire, and on the board
Set the black bottle with never a word,
While the company gather'd, one and all,
Men and women, big and small:
Not one in the Alley but felt a call
To the Wake of Tim O'Hara.

At the face of O'Hara,
All white with sleep,
Not one of the women
But took a peep,
And the wives new-wedded
Began to weep.
The mothers gather'd round about,
And prais'd the linen and laying out,—
For white as snow was his winding-sheet,
And all was peaceful, and clean, and sweet;
And the old wives, praising the blessed dead,
Were thronging around the old press-bed,
Where O'Hara's widow, tatter'd and torn,
Held to her bosom the babe newborn,
And star'd all around her, with eyes forlorn,
At the Wake of Tim O'Hara.

For the heart of O'Hara
Was good as gold,
And the life of O'Hara
Was bright and bold,
And his smile was precious
To young and old!
Gay as a guinea, wet or dry,
With a smiling mouth, and a twinkling eye!
Had ever an answer for chaff and fun;
Would fight like a lion, with any one!
Not a neighbor of any trade
But knew some joke that the boy had made;
Not a neighbor, dull or bright,
But minded something—frolic or fight,
And whisper'd it round the fire that night,
At the Wake of Tim O'Hara.

"To God be glory

In death and life,
He's taken O'Hara
From trouble and strife!"
Said one-eyed Bidy,
The apple-wife.

"God bless old Ireland!" said Mistress Hart,
Mother to Mike of the donkey-cart;
"God bless old Ireland till all be done,
She never made wake for a better son!"
And all join'd chorus, and each one said
Something kind of the boy that was dead;
And the bottle went round from lip to lip,
And the weeping widow, for fellowship,
Took the glass of old Bidy and had a sip,
At the Wake of Tim O'Hara.

Then we drank to O'Hara
With drams to the brim,
While the face of O'Hara
Look'd on so grim,
In the corpse-light shining
Yellow and dim.

The cup of liquor went round again,
And the talk grew louder at every drain;
Louder the tongue of the women grew!
The lips of the boys were loosening too!
The widow her weary eyelids clos'd,
And, soothed by the drop o' drink, she doz'd;
The mother brighten'd and laugh'd to hear
Of O'Hara's fight with the grenadier,
And the hearts of all took better cheer,
At the Wake of Tim O'Hara.

Tho' the face of O'Hara
Look'd on so wan,
In the chimney-corner
The row began—
Lame Tony was in it,
The oyster-man;

For a dirty low thief from the North came near,
And whistled "Boyne Water" in his ear,
And Tony, with never a word of grace,
Flung out his fist in the blackguard's face;
And the girls and women scream'd out for fright,
And the men that were drunkest began to fight:
Over the tables and chairs they threw,—
The corpse-light tumbled,—the trouble grew,—
The newborn join'd in the hullabaloo,—
At the Wake of Tim O'Hara.

"Be still! be silent!
Ye do a sin!

Shame be his portion
Who dares begin!"
'T was Father O'Connor
Just enter'd in!

All look'd down, and the row was done,
And sham'd and sorry was every one;
But the Priest just smil'd quite easy and free—
"Would ye wake the poor boy from his sleep?" said he:
And he said a prayer, with a shining face,
Till a kind of brightness fill'd the place;
The women lit up the dim corpse-light,
The men were quieter at the sight,
And the peace of the Lord fell on all that night
At the Wake of Tim O'Hara.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

There Once Was a Girl of Lahore

There once was a girl of Lahore,
The same shape behind as before;
As no one knew where
To offer a chair,
She had to sit down on the floor.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

There Once Was an Old Man of Lyme

There once was an old man of Lyme
Who married three wives at a time,
When asked, "Why a third?"
He replied, "One's absurd!
And bigamy, sir, is a crime.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

There Once Was an Old Monk of Basing

There once was an old monk of Basing,
Whose salads were something amazing;
But he told his confessor
That Nebuchadnezzar
Had given him hints upon grazing.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

There Was a Young Lady Named Laura

There was a young lady named Laura,
Who went to the wilds of Angora,
She came back on a goat
With a beautiful coat,
And notes of the fauna and flora.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

There Was a Young Lady of Wilts

There was a young lady of Wilts,
Who walked up to Scotland on stilts;
When they said it was shocking
To show so much stocking
She answered: "Then what about kilts?"

William Cosmo Monkhouse

Twin-Growth

I would not wish thee other than thou art;
I love thee, love, so well in every part,
That had I power to change thee
In form or face or mind,
I could not find
The heart to re-arrange thee.

For we were made to suit each other, sweet,
Apart, uneven, but when join'd, complete,
With powers and failings matching
In each as strictly well
As in some shell
The sharp teeth interlatching.

And so I would not have thee change, for fear
The valves might ope and gape a little, dear.
But we are like the weather
A-changing every day,
And so I pray
That we may change together --

Change like twin shells, that nothing can estrange,
But ever changing never feel a change:
So grow for one another
That each may aye present
The complement
That doth fulfil the other.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

Two Sons

I HAVE two sons, wife—

Two, and yet the same;
One his wild way runs, wife,
Bringing us to shame.

The one is bearded, sunburnt, grim, and fights across the sea,
The other is a little child who sits upon your knee.

One is fierce and cold, wife,
As the wayward deep;
Him no arms could hold, wife,
Him no breast could keep.

He has tried our hearts for many a year, not broken them; for he
Is still the sinless little one that sits upon your knee.

One may fall in fight, wife—
Is he not our son?
Pray with all your might, wife,
For the wayward one;

Pray for the dark, rough soldier, who fights across the sea,
Because you love the little shade who smiles upon your knee.

One across the foam, wife,
As I speak may fall;
But this one at home, wife,
Cannot die at all.

They both are only one; and how thankful should we be,
We cannot lose the darling son who sits upon your knee!

William Cosmo Monkhouse

We Are Children

CHILDREN indeed are we—children that wait
Within a wondrous dwelling, while on high
Stretch the sad vapors and the voiceless sky;
The house is fair, yet all is desolate
Because our Father comes not; clouds of fate
Sadden above us—shivering we espy
The passing rain, the cloud before the gate,
And cry to one another, "He is nigh!"
At early morning, with a shining Face,
He left us innocent and lily-crown'd;
And now this late—night cometh on apace—
We hold each other's hands and look around,
Frighted at our own shades! Heaven send us grace!
When He returns, all will be sleeping sound.

William Cosmo Monkhouse

When We Are All Asleep

WHEN He returns, and finds the world so drear,
All sleeping, young and old, unfair and fair,
Will he stoop down and whisper in each ear,
"Awaken!" or for pity's sake forbear,
Saying, "How shall I meet their frozen stare
Of wonder, and their eyes so full of fear?
How shall I comfort them in their despair,
If they cry out, 'Too late! let us sleep here?'"
Perchance He will not wake us up, but when
He sees us look so happy in our rest,
Will murmur, "Poor dead women and dead men!
Dire was their doom, and weary was their quest.
Wherefore awake them into life again?
Let them sleep on untroubled—it is best."

William Cosmo Monkhouse