

Classic Poetry Series

# **Sydney Wheeler Jephcott**

## **- poems -**

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# Sydney Wheeler Jephcott()

# A Ballad Of The Last King Of Thule

There was a King of Thule  
Whom a Witch-wife stole at birth;  
In a country known but newly,  
All under the dumb, huge Earth.

That King's in a Forest toiling;  
And he never the green sward delves  
But he sees all his green waves boiling  
Over his sands and shelves;

In these sunsets vast and fiery,  
In these dawns divine he sees  
Hy-Brasil, Mannan and Eire,  
And the Isle of Appletrees;

He watches, heart-still and breathless,  
The clouds through the deep day trailing,  
As the white-winged vessels gathered,  
Into his harbours sailing;

Ranked Ibis and lazy Eagles  
In the great blue flame may rise,  
But ne'er Sea-mew or Solan beating  
Up through their grey low skies;

When the storm-led fires are breaking,  
Great waves of the molten night,  
Deep in his eyes comes aching  
The icy Boreal Light.

O, lost King, and O, people perished,  
Your Thule has grown one grave!  
Unvisited as uncherished,  
Save by the wandering wave!

The billows burst in his doorways,  
The spray swoops over his walls! --  
O, his banners that throb dishonoured  
O'er arms that hide in his halls --

Deserved is your desolation! --  
Why could you not stir and save  
The last-born heir of your nation? --  
Sold into the South, a slave

Till he dies, and is buried duly  
In the hot Australian earth --  
The lorn, lost King of Thule,  
Whom a Witch-wife stole at birth

Sydney Wheeler Jephcott

# A Fragment

But, under all, my heart believes the day  
Was not diviner over Athens, nor  
The West wind sweeter thro' the Cyclades  
Than here and now; and from the altar of To-day  
The eloquent, quick tongues of flame uprise  
As fervid, if not unfaltering as of old,  
And life atones with speed and plenitude  
For coarser texture. Our poor present will,  
Far in the brooding future, make a past  
Full of the morning's music still, and starred  
With great tears shining on the eyelids' eaves  
Of our immortal faces yearning t'wards the sun.

Sydney Wheeler Jephcott

# Chaucer

O gracious morning eglantine,  
Making the far old English ways divine!  
Though from thy stock our mateless rose was bred,  
Staining the world's skies with its red,  
Our garden gives no scent so fresh as thine,  
Sweet, thorny-seeming eglantine.

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# Home-Woe

The wreckage of some name-forgotten barque,  
Half-buried by the dolorous shore;  
Whereto the living waters never more  
Their urgent billows pour;  
But the salt spray can reach and cark --

So lies my spirit, lonely and forlorn,  
On Being's strange and perilous strand.  
And rusted sword and fleshless hand  
Point from the smothering sand;  
And anchor chainless and out-worn.

But o'er what Deep, unconquered and uncharted,  
And steering by what vanished star;  
And where my dim-imagined consorts are,  
Or hidden harbour far,  
From whence my sails, unblessed, departed,

Can memory, nor still intuition teach.  
And so I watch with alien eyes  
This World's remote and unremembered skies;  
While around me weary rise  
The babblings of a foreign speech.

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# Splitting

Morning.

Out from the hut at break of day,  
And up the hills in the dawning grey;  
With the young wind flowing  
From the blue east, growing  
Red with the white sun's ray!

Lone and clear as a deep-bright dream  
Under mid-night's and mid-slumber's stream,  
Up rises the mount against the sunrise shower,  
Vast as a kingdom, fair as a flower:  
O'er it doth the foam of foliage ream

In vivid softness serene,  
Pearly-purple and marble green;  
Clear in their mingling tinges,  
Up away to the crest that fringes  
Skies studded with cloud-crag's sheen.

Day.

Like birds frayed from their lurking-shaw,  
Like ripples fleet 'neath a furious flaw,  
The echoes re-echo, flying  
Down from the mauls hot-plying;  
Clatter the axes, grides the saw.

Ruddy and white the chips out-spring,  
Like money sown by a pageant king;  
The free wood yields to the driven wedges,  
With its white sap-edges,  
And heart in the sunshine glistening.

Broadly the ice-clear azure floods down,  
Where the great tree-tops are overthrown;  
As on through the endless day we labour;  
The sun for our nearest neighbour,  
Up o'er the mountains lone.



And so intensely it doth illume,  
That it shuts by times to gloom;  
In the open spaces thrilling;  
From the dead leaves distilling  
A hot and harsh perfume.

Evening.

Give over! All the valleys in sight  
Fill, fill with the rising tide of night;  
While the sunset with gold-dust bridges  
The black-ravined ridges,  
Whose mighty muscles curve in its light.

In our weary climb, while night dyes deep,  
Down the broken and stony steep,  
How our jaded bodies are shaken  
By each step in half-blindness taken --  
One's thoughts lie heaped like brutes asleep.

Open the door of the dismal hut,  
Silence and darkness lone were shut  
In it, as a tidal pool, until returning  
Night drowns the land, -- no ember's burning, --  
One is too weary the food to cut.

Body and soul with every blow,  
Wasted for ever, and who will know,  
Where, past this mountained night of toiling,  
Red life in its thousand veins is boiling,  
Of chips scattered on the mountain's brow?

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# The Dreamers

HAVE courage, O my comradry of dreamers!  
All things, except mere Earth, are ours.  
We pluck its passions for our flowers.  
Dawn-dyed our great cloud-banners toss their streamers  
Above its quaking tyrant-towers!  
Making this stern grey planet shine with jewel-showers.

Our lives are mantled in forgotten glory,  
Like trees that fringe yon dark hill-crest  
Alight against the molten west.  
The great night shuddering yields her stress of story—  
The dreams that stir the past's long rest—  
Strange, scented night-winds sighing on our naked breast.

Through all the spirit's spacious, secret regions—  
By pathways we believed unknown—  
Still thoughts immortal meet our own.  
Ideas!—In innumerable legions!  
Like summer's stir in forests lone  
Their various music merges in time's monotone.

The dreamer sees the deep-drawn ore-veins brightening  
Through all the huge blind bulk of Earth;  
He led the ship around its girth;  
He plays, as on the pulses of the lightning,  
The song that gives its workings worth,  
The song foredained to bring man's morrow to the birth.

Base, base mere doers, blind and dreamless;  
Whose bodies engines are of toil!  
Greasy with greed and lust they moil;  
They cast lots for the dreamer's garment seamless,  
To rot among their useless spoil;  
The fathomless infinity their breath does soil.

Hail to the dream that roused the sleeping savage,  
And let him from his bloody lair,  
Across light's bridge, that single hair,  
Above th' unpurposed, eyeless hell of ravage

That, beasts and men, the soulless share,  
And left him, waking in thought's temple, Heaven's heir!

Our souls, in these vast Heavens un beholden  
Of eyes, our angel-hopes embrace;  
Or being's shining trail retrace,  
Through pregnant skies about our forms enfolden  
In rapture of our kindred race,  
Until the gaze of God consume us, face to face.

Ah, God! In what undying dream of beauty  
Wrought Thou our world, so strange and fair,  
Afloat in Thy illusive air?—  
Aye me! We know that dreaming is our duty!  
These dreams more intimate than prayer;  
For in Thy dream divine our laureate spirits share.

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# White Paper

SNOWY-SMOOTH beneath the pen—  
Richest field that iron ploughs,  
Germinating thoughts of men,  
Tho' no heaven its rain allows.

There they ripen, thousand-fold;  
And our spirits reap the corn,  
In a day-long dream of gold—  
Food for all the souls unborn.

Like the murmur of the earth,  
When we listen stooping low,  
Like sap singing nature's mirth  
Foaming up the trees that grow.

Evermore a subtle song  
Sings the pen unto it, while  
Fluid idea flows along,  
Each new Era's mother-Nile.

Greater than ensphering Sea,  
For it holds the sea and land;  
Seed of every deed to be  
Down its current borne like sand.

I caress thy surface sheer,  
Holding thee the Absolute;  
Where the things to be inhere,  
Waiting their material bruit.

How I love thee! my heart's blood  
Were too dull to smutch thy white!  
I'll aver: no lily's bud  
Lays such unction on my sight.

Suave of maiden's throat or arm,  
Bliss embodied to the touch,  
Has not such ambrosial charm—  
Not a marble Goddess such!

Dear White Paper! All To-day  
Palpitates with spirit-heat—  
Only on thy whiteness may  
Seers translate its rhythms sweet!

Holy Paper! all the Past  
Were a rack of ruined cloud  
Stripping from our orbit vast,  
But thou Eternity endowed

With an actual soul of speech—  
Life of life by death distilled—  
That all dateless days shall reach,  
As life's vine of veins is filled.

O, the glorious Heavens wrought  
By Cadmean souls of yore  
From pure element of Thought!  
And thy leaves their silvern door!

Light they open, and we stand  
Past the sovereignty of Fate;  
Glad among Them, still and grand,  
The Creators and Create

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