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Title: Sea Garden

Author: H. D.

Release date: May 2, 2009 [eBook #28665]

Most recently updated: January 5, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Meredith Bach and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <https://www.pgdp.net> (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive/American Libraries.)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SEA GARDEN ***

Transcriber's Note

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected in this text. For a complete list, please see [the bottom of this document](#).

SEA GARDEN

The editors and publishers concerned have kindly given me permission to reprint some of the poems in this book which appeared originally in "Poetry" (Chicago), "The Egoist" (London), "The Little Review" (Chicago), "Greenwich Village" (New York), the first Imagist anthology (New York: A. and C. Boni. London: Poetry Bookshop), the second Imagist anthology ("Some Imagist Poets," London: Constable and Co. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.).

SEA GARDEN

BY

H. D.

LONDON
CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LTD.
1916

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN.
CHISWICK PRESS: CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO.
TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON.

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SEA GARDEN

[1]

SEA ROSE

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meagre flower, thin,

sparse of leaf,

more precious
than a wet rose
single on a stem—
you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small leaf,
you are flung on the sand,
you are lifted
in the crisp sand
that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf?

THE HELMSMAN

[2]

O be swift—
we have always known you wanted us.

We fled inland with our flocks,
we pastured them in hollows,
cut off from the wind
and the salt track of the marsh.

We worshipped inland—
we stepped past wood-flowers,
we forgot your tang,
we brushed wood-grass.

We wandered from pine-hills
through oak and scrub-oak tangles,
we broke hyssop and bramble,
we caught flower and new bramble-fruit
in our hair: we laughed
as each branch whipped back,
we tore our feet in half buried rocks
and knotted roots and acorn-cups.

We forgot—we worshipped,
we parted green from green,
we sought further thickets,
we dipped our ankles
through leaf-mould and earth,
and wood and wood-bank enchanted us—

and the feel of the clefts in the bark,
and the slope between tree and tree—
and a slender path strung field to field
and wood to wood
and hill to hill
and the forest after it.

[3]

We forgot—for a moment

tree-resin, tree-bark,
sweat of a torn branch
were sweet to the taste.

We were enchanted with the fields,
the tufts of coarse grass
in the shorter grass—
we loved all this.

But now, our boat climbs—hesitates—drops
—
climbs—hesitates—crawls back—
climbs—hesitates—
O be swift—
we have always known you wanted us.

THE SHRINE

[4]

("SHE WATCHES OVER THE SEA")

I

Are your rocks shelter for ships—
have you sent galleys from your beach,
are you graded—a safe crescent—
where the tide lifts them back to port—
are you full and sweet,
tempting the quiet
to depart in their trading ships?

Nay, you are great, fierce, evil—
you are the land-blight—
you have tempted men
but they perished on your cliffs.

Your lights are but dank shoals,
slate and pebble and wet shells
and seaweed fastened to the rocks.

It was evil—evil
when they found you,
when the quiet men looked at you—
they sought a headland
shaded with ledge of cliff
from the wind-blast.

But you—you are unsheltered,
cut with the weight of wind—
you shudder when it strikes,
then lift, swelled with the blast—
you sink as the tide sinks,
you shrill under hail, and sound
thunder when thunder sounds.
You are useless—
when the tides swirl

[5]

your boulders cut and wreck
the staggering ships.

II

You are useless,
O grave, O beautiful,
the landsmen tell it—I have heard—
you are useless.

And the wind sounds with this
and the sea
where rollers shot with blue
cut under deeper blue.

O but stay tender, enchanted
where wave-lengths cut you
apart from all the rest—
for we have found you,
we watch the splendour of you,
we thread throat on throat of freesia
for your shelf.

You are not forgot,
O plunder of lilies,
honey is not more sweet
than the salt stretch of your beach.

III

Stay—stay—
but terror has caught us now,
we passed the men in ships,
we dared deeper than the fisher-folk
and you strike us with terror
O bright shaft.

[6]

Flame passes under us
and sparks that unknot the flesh,
sorrow, splitting bone from bone,
splendour athwart our eyes
and rifts in the splendour,
sparks and scattered light.

Many warned of this,
men said:
there are wrecks on the fore-beach,
wind will beat your ship,
there is no shelter in that headland,
it is useless waste, that edge,
that front of rock—
sea-gulls clang beyond the breakers,
none venture to that spot.

IV

But hail—

as the tide slackens,
as the wind beats out,
we hail this shore—
we sing to you,
spirit between the headlands
and the further rocks.

Though oak-beams split,
though boats and sea-men flounder,
and the strait grind sand with sand
and cut boulders to sand and drift—

your eyes have pardoned our faults,
your hands have touched us—
you have leaned forward a little
and the waves can never thrust us back
from the splendour of your ragged coast.

MID-DAY

[7]

The light beats upon me.
I am startled—
a split leaf crackles on the paved floor—
I am anguished—defeated.

A slight wind shakes the seed-pods—
my thoughts are spent
as the black seeds.
My thoughts tear me,
I dread their fever.
I am scattered in its whirl.
I am scattered like
the hot shrivelled seeds.

The shrivelled seeds
are spilt on the path—
the grass bends with dust,
the grape slips
under its crackled leaf:
yet far beyond the spent seed-pods,
and the blackened stalks of mint,
the poplar is bright on the hill,
the poplar spreads out,
deep-rooted among trees.

O poplar, you are great
among the hill-stones,
while I perish on the path
among the crevices of the rocks.

PURSUIT

[8]

What do I care

that the stream is trampled,
the sand on the stream-bank
still holds the print of your foot:
the heel is cut deep.
I see another mark
on the grass ridge of the bank—
it points toward the wood-path.
I have lost the third
in the packed earth.

But here
a wild-hyacinth stalk is snapped:
the purple buds—half ripe—
show deep purple
where your heel pressed.

A patch of flowering grass,
low, trailing—
you brushed this:
the green stems show yellow-green
where you lifted—turned the earth-side
to the light:
this and a dead leaf-spine,
split across,
show where you passed.

You were swift, swift!
here the forest ledge slopes—
rain has furrowed the roots.
Your hand caught at this;
the root snapped under your weight.

[9]

I can almost follow the note
where it touched this slender tree
and the next answered—
and the next.

And you climbed yet further!
you stopped by the dwarf-cornel—
whirled on your heels,
doubled on your track.

This is clear—
you fell on the downward slope,
you dragged a bruised thigh—you limped—
you clutched this larch.

Did your head, bent back,
search further—
clear through the green leaf-moss
of the larch branches?

Did you clutch,
stammer with short breath and gasp:
*wood-daemons grant life—
give life—I am almost lost.*

For some wood-daemon
has lightened your steps.

I can find no trace of you
in the larch-cones and the underbrush.

THE CONTEST

[10]

I

Your stature is modelled
with straight tool-edge:
you are chiselled like rocks
that are eaten into by the sea.

With the turn and grasp of your wrist
and the chords' stretch,
there is a glint like worn brass.

The ridge of your breast is taut,
and under each the shadow is sharp,
and between the clenched muscles
of your slender hips.

From the circle of your cropped hair
there is light,
and about your male torse
and the foot-arch and the straight ankle.

II

You stand rigid and mighty—
granite and the ore in rocks;
a great band clasps your forehead
and its heavy twists of gold.

You are white—a limb of cypress
bent under a weight of snow.

You are splendid,
your arms are fire;
you have entered the hill-straits—
a sea treads upon the hill-slopes.

[11]

III

Myrtle is about your head,
you have bent and caught the spray:
each leaf is sharp
against the lift and furrow
of your bound hair.

The narcissus has copied the arch
of your slight breast:
your feet are citron-flowers,
your knees, cut from white-ash,
your thighs are rock-cistus.

Your chin lifts straight
from the hollow of your curved throat.
Your shoulders are level—
they have melted rare silver
for their breadth.

SEA LILY

[12]

Reed,
slashed and torn
but doubly rich—
such great heads as yours
drift upon temple-steps,
but you are shattered
in the wind.

Myrtle-bark
is flecked from you,
scales are dashed
from your stem,
sand cuts your petal,
furrows it with hard edge,
like flint
on a bright stone.

Yet though the whole wind
slash at your bark,
you are lifted up,
aye—though it hiss
to cover you with froth.

THE WIND SLEEPERS

[13]

Whiter
than the crust
left by the tide,
we are stung by the hurled sand
and the broken shells.

We no longer sleep
in the wind—
we awoke and fled
through the city gate.

Tear—
tear us an altar,
tug at the cliff-boulders,
pile them with the rough stones—
we no longer
sleep in the wind,
propitiate us.

Chant in a wail

that never halts,
pace a circle and pay tribute
with a song.

When the roar of a dropped wave
breaks into it,
pour meted words
of sea-hawks and gulls
and sea-birds that cry
discords.

THE GIFT

[14]

Instead of pearls—a wrought clasp—
a bracelet—will you accept this?

You know the script—
you will start, wonder:
what is left, what phrase
after last night? This:

The world is yet unspoiled for you,
you wait, expectant—
you are like the children
who haunt your own steps
for chance bits—a comb
that may have slipped,
a gold tassel, unravelled,
plucked from your scarf,
twirled by your slight fingers
into the street—
a flower dropped.

Do not think me unaware,
I who have snatched at you
as the street-child clutched
at the seed-pearls you spilt
that hot day
when your necklace snapped.

Do not dream that I speak
as one defrauded of delight,
sick, shaken by each heart-beat
or paralyzed, stretched at length,
who gasps:
these ripe pears
are bitter to the taste,
this spiced wine, poison, corrupt.
I cannot walk—
who would walk?
Life is a scavenger's pit—I escape—
I only, rejecting it,
lying here on this couch.

[15]

Your garden sloped to the beach,
myrtle overran the paths,

honey and amber flecked each leaf,
the citron-lily head—
one among many—
weighed there, over-sweet.

The myrrh-hyacinth
spread across low slopes,
violets streaked black ridges
through the grass.

The house, too, was like this,
over painted, over lovely—
the world is like this.

Sleepless nights,
I remember the initiates,
their gesture, their calm glance.
I have heard how in rapt thought,
in vision, they speak
with another race,
more beautiful, more intense than this.
I could laugh—
more beautiful, more intense?

Perhaps that other life
is contrast always to this.
I reason:
I have lived as they
in their inmost rites—
they endure the tense nerves
through the moment of ritual.
I endure from moment to moment—
days pass all alike,
tortured, intense.

[16]

This I forgot last night:
you must not be blamed,
it is not your fault;
as a child, a flower—any flower
tore my breast—
meadow-chicory, a common grass-tip,
a leaf shadow, a flower tint
unexpected on a winter-branch.

I reason:
another life holds what this lacks,
a sea, unmoving, quiet—
not forcing our strength
to rise to it, beat on beat—
stretch of sand,
no garden beyond, strangling
with its myrrh-lilies—
a hill, not set with black violets
but stones, stones, bare rocks,
dwarf-trees, twisted, no beauty
to distract—to crowd
madness upon madness.

Only a still place

and perhaps some outer horror
some hideousness to stamp beauty,
a mark—no changing it now—
on our hearts.

I send no string of pearls,
no bracelet—accept this.

EVENING

[17]

The light passes
from ridge to ridge,
from flower to flower—
the hypaticas, wide-spread
under the light
grow faint—
the petals reach inward,
the blue tips bend
toward the bluer heart
and the flowers are lost.

The cornel-buds are still white,
but shadows dart
from the cornel-roots—
black creeps from root to root,
each leaf
cuts another leaf on the grass,
shadow seeks shadow,
then both leaf
and leaf-shadow are lost.

SHELTERED GARDEN

[18]

I have had enough.
I gasp for breath.

Every way ends, every road,
every foot-path leads at last
to the hill-crest—
then you retrace your steps,
or find the same slope on the other side,
precipitate.

I have had enough—
border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,
herbs, sweet-cress.

O for some sharp swish of a branch—
there is no scent of resin
in this place,
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,
aromatic, astringent—
only border on border of scented pinks.

Have you seen fruit under cover
that wanted light—
pears wadded in cloth,
protected from the frost,
melons, almost ripe,
smothered in straw?

Why not let the pears cling
to the empty branch?
All your coaxing will only make
a bitter fruit—
let them cling, ripen of themselves,
test their own worth,
nipped, shrivelled by the frost,
to fall at last but fair
with a russet coat.

[19]

Or the melon—
let it bleach yellow
in the winter light,
even tart to the taste—
it is better to taste of frost—
the exquisite frost—
than of wadding and of dead grass.

For this beauty,
beauty without strength,
chokes out life.
I want wind to break,
scatter these pink-stalks,
snap off their spiced heads,
fling them about with dead leaves—
spread the paths with twigs,
limbs broken off,
trail great pine branches,
hurled from some far wood
right across the melon-patch,
break pear and quince—
leave half-trees, torn, twisted
but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden
to forget, to find a new beauty
in some terrible
wind-tortured place.

SEA POPPIES

[20]

Amber husk
fluted with gold,
fruit on the sand
marked with a rich grain,

treasure
spilled near the shrub-pines
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root
among wet pebbles
and drift flung by the sea
and grated shells
and split conch-shells.

Beautiful, wide-spread,
fire upon leaf,
what meadow yields
so fragrant a leaf
as your bright leaf?

LOSS

[21]

The sea called—
you faced the estuary,
you were drowned as the tide passed.—
I am glad of this—
at least you have escaped.

The heavy sea-mist stifles me.
I choke with each breath—
a curious peril, this—
the gods have invented
curious torture for us.

One of us, pierced in the flank,
dragged himself across the marsh,
he tore at the bay-roots,
lost hold on the crumbling bank—

Another crawled—too late—
for shelter under the cliffs.

I am glad the tide swept you out,
O beloved,
you of all this ghastly host
alone untouched,
your white flesh covered with salt
as with myrrh and burnt iris.

We were hemmed in this place,
so few of us, so few of us to fight
their sure lances,
the straight thrust—effortless
with slight life of muscle and shoulder.

So straight—only we were left,
the four of us—somehow shut off.

[22]

And the marsh dragged one back,
and another perished under the cliff,
and the tide swept you out.

Your feet cut steel on the paths,
I followed for the strength

of life and grasp.
I have seen beautiful feet
but never beauty welded with strength.
I marvelled at your height.

You stood almost level
with the lance-bearers
and so slight.

And I wondered as you clasped
your shoulder-strap
at the strength of your wrist
and the turn of your young fingers,
and the lift of your shorn locks,
and the bronze
of your sun-burnt neck.

All of this,
and the curious knee-cap,
fitted above the wrought greaves,
and the sharp muscles of your back
which the tunic could not cover—
the outline
no garment could deface.

I wonder if you knew how I watched,
how I crowded before the spearsmen—
but the gods wanted you,
the gods wanted you back.

HUNTRESS

[23]

Come, blunt your spear with us,
our pace is hot
and our bare heels
in the heel-prints—
we stand tense—do you see—
are you already beaten
by the chase?

We lead the pace
for the wind on the hills,
the low hill is spattered
with loose earth—
our feet cut into the crust
as with spears.

We climbed the ploughed land,
dragged the seed from the clefts,
broke the clods with our heels,
whirled with a parched cry
into the woods:

*Can you come,
can you come,
can you follow the hound trail,*

can you trample the hot froth?

Spring up—sway forward—
follow the quickest one,
aye, though you leave the trail
and drop exhausted at our feet.

GARDEN

[24]

I

You are clear
O rose, cut in rock,
hard as the descent of hail.

I could scrape the colour
from the petals
like spilt dye from a rock.

If I could break you
I could break a tree.

If I could stir
I could break a tree—
I could break you.

II

O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
through this thick air—
fruit cannot fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the points of pears
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat—
plough through it,
turning it on either side
of your path.

SEA VIOLET

[25]

The white violet
is scented on its stalk,
the sea-violet
fragile as agate,
lies fronting all the wind
among the torn shells
on the sand-bank.

The greater blue violets
flutter on the hill,
but who would change for these
who would change for these
one root of the white sort?

Violet
your grasp is frail
on the edge of the sand-hill,
but you catch the light—
frost, a star edges with its fire.

THE CLIFF TEMPLE

[26]

I

Great, bright portal,
shelf of rock,
rocks fitted in long ledges,
rocks fitted to dark, to silver granite,
to lighter rock—
clean cut, white against white.

High—high—and no hill-goat
tramples—no mountain-sheep
has set foot on your fine grass;
you lift, you are the world-edge,
pillar for the sky-arch.

The world heaved—
we are next to the sky:
over us, sea-hawks shout,
gulls sweep past—
the terrible breakers are silent
from this place.

Below us, on the rock-edge,
where earth is caught in the fissures
of the jagged cliff,
a small tree stiffens in the gale,
it bends—but its white flowers
are fragrant at this height.

And under and under,
the wind booms:
it whistles, it thunders,
it growls—it presses the grass
beneath its great feet.

[27]

II

I said:
for ever and for ever, must I follow you
through the stones?
I catch at you—you lurch:

you are quicker than my hand-grasp.

I wondered at you.
I shouted—dear—mysterious—beautiful—
white myrtle-flesh.

I was splintered and torn:
the hill-path mounted
swifter than my feet.

Could a daemon avenge this hurt,
I would cry to him—could a ghost,
I would shout—O evil,
follow this god,
taunt him with his evil and his vice.

III

Shall I hurl myself from here,
shall I leap and be nearer you?
Shall I drop, beloved, beloved,
ankle against ankle?
Would you pity me, O white breast?

If I woke, would you pity me,
would our eyes meet?

Have you heard,
do you know how I climbed this rock?
My breath caught, I lurched forward—
stumbled in the ground-myrtle.

[28]

Have you heard, O god seated on the cliff,
how far toward the ledges of your house,
how far I had to walk?

IV

Over me the wind swirls.
I have stood on your portal
and I know—
you are further than this,
still further on another cliff.

ORCHARD

[29]

I saw the first pear
as it fell—
the honey-seeking, golden-banded,
the yellow swarm
was not more fleet than I,
(spare us from loveliness)
and I fell prostrate
crying:
you have flayed us

with your blossoms,
spare us the beauty
of fruit-trees.

The honey-seeking
paused not,
the air thundered their song,
and I alone was prostrate.

O rough-hewn
god of the orchard,
I bring you an offering —
do you, alone unbeautiful,
son of the god,
spare us from loveliness:

these fallen hazel-nuts,
stripped late of their green sheaths,
grapes, red-purple,
their berries
dripping with wine,
pomegranates already broken,
and shrunken figs
and quinces untouched,
I bring you as offering.

SEA GODS

[30]

I

They say there is no hope —
sand — drift — rocks — rubble of the sea —
the broken hulk of a ship,
hung with shreds of rope,
pallid under the cracked pitch.

They say there is no hope
to conjure you —
no whip of the tongue to anger you —
no hate of words
you must rise to refute.

They say you are twisted by the sea,
you are cut apart
by wave-break upon wave-break,
that you are misshapen by the sharp rocks,
broken by the rasp and after-rasp.

That you are cut, torn, mangled,
torn by the stress and beat,
no stronger than the strips of sand
along your ragged beach.

II

But we bring violets,
great masses—single, sweet,
wood-violets, stream-violets,
violets from a wet marsh.

[31]

Violets in clumps from hills,
tufts with earth at the roots,
violets tugged from rocks,
blue violets, moss, cliff, river-violets.

Yellow violets' gold,
burnt with a rare tint—
violets like red ash
among tufts of grass.

We bring deep-purple
bird-foot violets.

We bring the hyacinth-violet,
sweet, bare, chill to the touch—
and violets whiter than the in-rush
of your own white surf.

III

For you will come,
you will yet haunt men in ships,
you will trail across the fringe of strait
and circle the jagged rocks.

You will trail across the rocks
and wash them with your salt,
you will curl between sand-hills—
you will thunder along the cliff—
break—retreat—get fresh strength—
gather and pour weight upon the beach.

You will draw back,
and the ripple on the sand-shelf
will be witness of your track.
O privet-white, you will paint
the lintel of wet sand with froth.

[32]

You will bring myrrh-bark
and drift laurel-wood from hot coasts!
when you hurl high—high—
we will answer with a shout.

For you will come,
you will come,
you will answer our taut hearts,
you will break the lie of men's thoughts,
and cherish and shelter us.

ACON

[33]

I

Bear me to Dictaeus,
and to the steep slopes;
to the river Erymanthus.

I choose spray of dittany,
cyperum, frail of flower,
buds of myrrh,
all-healing herbs,
close pressed in calathes.

For she lies panting,
drawing sharp breath,
broken with harsh sobs,
she, Hyella,
whom no god pities.

II

Dryads
haunting the groves,
nereids
who dwell in wet caves,
for all the white leaves of olive-branch,
and early roses,
and ivy wreaths, woven gold berries,
which she once brought to your altars,
bear now ripe fruits from Arcadia,
and Assyrian wine
to shatter her fever.

[34]

The light of her face falls from its flower,
as a hyacinth,
hidden in a far valley,
perishes upon burnt grass.

Pales,
bring gifts,
bring your Phoenician stuffs,
and do you, fleet-footed nymphs,
bring offerings,
Illyrian iris,
and a branch of shrub,
and frail-headed poppies.

NIGHT

[35]

The night has cut
each from each
and curled the petals
back from the stalk
and under it in crisp rows;

under at an unfaltering pace,

under till the rinds break,
back till each bent leaf
is parted from its stalk;

under at a grave pace,
under till the leaves
are bent back
till they drop upon earth,
back till they are all broken.

O night,
you take the petals
of the roses in your hand,
but leave the stark core
of the rose
to perish on the branch.

PRISONERS

[36]

It is strange that I should want
this sight of your face—
we have had so much:
at any moment now I may pass,
stand near the gate,
do not speak—
only reach if you can, your face
half-fronting the passage
toward the light.

Fate—God sends this as a mark,
a last token that we are not forgot,
lost in this turmoil,
about to be crushed out,
burned or stamped out
at best with sudden death.

The spearsman who brings this
will ask for the gold clasp
you wear under your coat.
I gave all I had left.

Press close to the portal,
my gate will soon clang
and your fellow wretches
will crowd to the entrance—
be first at the gate.

Ah beloved, do not speak.
I write this in great haste—
do not speak,
you may yet be released.
I am glad enough to depart
though I have never tasted life
as in these last weeks.

[37]

It is a strange life,

patterned in fire and letters
on the prison pavement.
If I glance up
it is written on the walls,
it is cut on the floor,
it is patterned across
the slope of the roof.

I am weak — weak —
last night if the guard
had left the gate unlocked
I could not have ventured to escape,
but one thought serves me now
with strength.

As I pass down the corridor
past desperate faces at each cell,
your eyes and my eyes may meet.

You will be dark, unkempt,
but I pray for one glimpse of your face —
why do I want this?
I who have seen you at the banquet
each flower of your hyacinth-circlet
white against your hair.

Why do I want this,
when even last night
you startled me from sleep?
You stood against the dark rock,
you grasped an elder staff.

[38]

So many nights
you have distracted me from terror.
Once you lifted a spear-flower.
I remember how you stooped
to gather it —
and it flamed, the leaf and shoot
and the threads, yellow, yellow —
sheer till they burnt
to red-purple in the cup.

As I pass your cell-door
do not speak.
I was first on the list —
They may forget you tried to shield me
as the horsemen passed.

STORM

[39]

You crash over the trees,
you crack the live branch —
the branch is white,
the green crushed,
each leaf is rent like split wood.

You burden the trees
with black drops,
you swirl and crash—
you have broken off a weighted leaf
in the wind,
it is hurled out,
whirls up and sinks,
a green stone.

SEA IRIS

[40]

I

Weed, moss-weed,
root tangled in sand,
sea-iris, brittle flower,
one petal like a shell
is broken,
and you print a shadow
like a thin twig.

Fortunate one,
scented and stinging,
rigid myrrh-bud,
camphor-flower,
sweet and salt—you are wind
in our nostrils.

II

Do the murex-fishers
drench you as they pass?
Do your roots drag up colour
from the sand?
Have they slipped gold under you—
rivets of gold?

Band of iris-flowers
above the waves,
you are painted blue,
painted like a fresh prow
stained among the salt weeds.

HERMES OF THE WAYS

[41]

The hard sand breaks,
and the grains of it
are clear as wine.

Far off over the leagues of it,
the wind,
playing on the wide shore,
piles little ridges,

and the great waves
break over it.

But more than the many-foamed ways
of the sea,
I know him
of the triple path-ways,
Hermes,
who awaits.

Dubious,
facing three ways,
welcoming wayfarers,
he whom the sea-orchard
shelters from the west,
from the east
weathers sea-wind;
fronts the great dunes.

Wind rushes
over the dunes,
and the coarse, salt-crusted grass
answers.

Heu,
it whips round my ankles!

[42]

II

Small is
this white stream,
flowing below ground
from the poplar-shaded hill,
but the water is sweet.

Apples on the small trees
are hard,
too small,
too late ripened
by a desperate sun
that struggles through sea-mist.

The boughs of the trees
are twisted
by many bafflings;
twisted are
the small-leafed boughs.

But the shadow of them
is not the shadow of the mast head
nor of the torn sails.

Hermes, Hermes,
the great sea foamed,
gnashed its teeth about me;
but you have waited,
were sea-grass tangles with
shore-grass.

PEAR TREE

[43]

Silver dust
lifted from the earth,
higher than my arms reach,
you have mounted,
O silver,
higher than my arms reach
you front us with great mass;

no flower ever opened
so staunch a white leaf,
no flower ever parted silver
from such rare silver;

O white pear,
your flower-tufts
thick on the branch
bring summer and ripe fruits
in their purple hearts.

CITIES

[44]

Can we believe—by an effort
comfort our hearts:
it is not waste all this,
not placed here in disgust,
street after street,
each patterned alike,
no grace to lighten
a single house of the hundred
crowded into one garden-space.

Crowded—can we believe,
not in utter disgust,
in ironical play—
but the maker of cities grew faint
with the beauty of temple
and space before temple,
arch upon perfect arch,
of pillars and corridors that led out
to strange court-yards and porches
where sun-light stamped
hyacinth-shadows
black on the pavement.

That the maker of cities grew faint
with the splendour of palaces,
paused while the incense-flowers
from the incense-trees
dropped on the marble-walk,
thought anew, fashioned this—
street after street alike.

[45]

For alas,
he had crowded the city so full
that men could not grasp beauty,
beauty was over them,
through them, about them,
no crevice unpacked with the honey,
rare, measureless.

So he built a new city,
ah can we believe, not ironically
but for new splendour
constructed new people
to lift through slow growth
to a beauty unrivalled yet—
and created new cells,
hideous first, hideous now—
spread larve across them,
not honey but seething life.

And in these dark cells,
packed street after street,
souls live, hideous yet—
O disfigured, defaced,
with no trace of the beauty
men once held so light.

Can we think a few old cells
were left—we are left—
grains of honey,
old dust of stray pollen
dull on our torn wings,
we are left to recall the old streets?

Is our task the less sweet
that the larve still sleep in their cells?
Or crawl out to attack our frail strength:
You are useless. We live.
We await great events.
We are spread through this earth.
We protect our strong race.
You are useless.
Your cell takes the place
of our young future strength.

[46]

Though they sleep or wake to torment
and wish to displace our old cells—
thin rare gold—
that their larve grow fat—
is our task the less sweet?

Though we wander about,
find no honey of flowers in this waste,
is our task the less sweet—
who recall the old splendour,
await the new beauty of cities?

[47]

with spirits, not ghosts, O my love:

*Though they crowded between
and usurped the kiss of my mouth
their breath was your gift,
their beauty, your life.*

CHISWICK PRESS: CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO.
TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON.

Transcriber's Notes

Page [10](#): torse *sic*

Page [11](#): lower case amended to title case ("your shoulders are level" amended to "Your shoulders are level").

Page [14](#): tassle amended to tassel

Page [15](#): scavanger's amended to scavenger's

Page [16](#): chickory amended to chicory

Page [26](#): fragant amended to fragrant

Page [30](#): lower case amended to title case ("they say there is no hope" amended to "They say there is no hope").

Page [46](#): larve *sic*

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