

THE LOST SHEPHERD

To Ethel Archer

I

SHE walks among the starry ways,
A crimson full-blown rose;
Her heart bears all the yesterdays
That love from love-dawn knows;
Her sunny feet are shod in gold,
She swings a censer rare and old—
Her heart the censer that she sways,
Our Lady of the Snows.

II

I passed the morning she was born
Within the heart of the day;
A shepherd with a twisted horn
I met upon the way.
The straying sheep that autumn-tide
Had wandered by the river-side;
And so I spent that gladsome morn,
And so I said my say.

III

She passes by, she passes still
The secret ways of earth;
She kissed Will Blake beneath the hill,
Robbed Shelley's heart of mirth.
But I have stopped with love her lips,
And as into my arms she slips,
I clip her close, and take my fill
Of joy to make new birth.

IV

Oh, holloa! holloa! the hills among,
And holloa! down the dale:
I bear a golden lyre full-strung
With heart-strings bright and pale.
I've lilies from the fountain-head,
And purple flags and roses red,
And all the songs of Pan have flung
Their fragrance in my tale.

V

And but as yesterday it seems
She tripped me as I ran,
And scattering all my half-fledged dreams,
Hailed me a foolish man.
Perchance my dreams shall wing their way
To some such other fool, perfay—
God stop his mouth to still his screams,
And help him if He can!

VI

Under the willows the stream runs strong
When the wind is shrill and high:
I wandered on, and I wandered long,
Under the fleecy sky.

A voice came out of a cloud to me,
Saying, "Hast thou brought thy heart with thee?"
And much I marvelled, and won a song,
And so the day passed by.

VII

I was a shepherd in other days,
Ere ever the earth was old;
I wandered far into the Northern ways
To bring back my sheep to the fold.
Heyday! but the time was drear and long,
For I lost my pipe and my mountain-song,
And all the others of my sweet lays
Lost all their wonted gold.

VIII

Greece and Rome and the Pagan lands
I knew ere the Christ was born;
I whistled songs between my hands,
And blew through an old ram's horn.
I was wise indeed! For I lost my way
Over the hills one summer day,
And near where Venus' statue stands
I lingered all forlorn.

IX

Laughing eyes and clear brown skin,
And dark locks rippling wide,
Where the sunbeams play and the eddies spin
I saw my face in the tide.
But I knew the trick Narcissus had done,
So I shook back my hair to stare at the sun;
My slim brown body I'd keep within
The shade of the green hillside.

X

I found the groves of Pan; I came
At length to a daisied field,
And the sun shone out with his yellow flame
That makes the harvest yield.
Yellow and purple are corn and grape,
But scarlet the god when he takes his shape
At the sound of the awful hidden name
In earth's eclipse revealed.

XI

And as he clasped me, slim and slight,
I roared with the pain he gave,
And he cried, "I will hold thee here all night,
My beautiful, dark-haired slave;
Kiss my lips and laugh in my eyes,
And I'll bring magic out of the skies,
And thy flame shall yield to my eyes' fierce light
Ere thine ashes are laid in the grave!"

XII

Then did I learn the lore of Earth,
For mine was the light of Pan;
The barren riddle unsolved by birth
Was solved as the hot fire ran.
The god's tongue flashed, and he roared with glee
At each spasm he drew from the breast of me,
And the mystery of Panic mirth
Lay bare in the sight of a man. . . .

XIII

And many a love long since I've known,
And many a city rare;
I have sung and harped, I have fought and flown,
I have wandered everywhere.
But the thought of that day by the water-side,
The god's hot breath and the hidden bride,
Makes me more shy as I wander alone,
Unknowing whither I fare. . . .

XIV

And in the morning Pan rose and fled,
And left me alone to sleep;
And long I lay in a slumber dead.
Then on hands and knees did I creep
Back to the shade of the sheltering trees;
And I found my sheep on the shady leas;
And my body was flushed, and my cheeks were red,
And my eyes too bright to weep.

XV

After long dreamless sleep I knew
The tale that had fled my tongue,
I found it far in the water blue,
In the song by the skylark sung,
In the melody slow of the waving corn,
In the rushing of wind through the vines re-born,
And wherever the water-lilies grew,
And the green, green willows swung.

XVI

And still the lady of my dream
As a light before me goes;
I see her in the sun's last gleam,
In the moonlight on the snows.
Ah! chiefly then her song is sung,
When the moon o'er the dark woods is hung;
She is born at midnight on the stream,
A starry, full-blown rose.