

SELECTED POEMS OF CLARENCE THOMAS URMY

From *The Overland Monthly* (1883)

ONE EVENING

The bell sweet tolled the vesper hour,
The yellow turned to blue,
The night unfolded like a flower,
And dripped its starry dew;
The clouds that lately draped the west
Went down in sunset seas,
And all was peaceful as the light
That glimmered through the trees.

As gleamed the silver drops of dew
Upon the moonlit meads,
She sat and told them, as a nun,
Might tell her amber beads;
While I, unmindful of the charms
Of silver air or skies,
Sat calmly 'neath a holier gleam—
The star light of her eyes.

Why should I watch the distant stars?
They shone o'er all the earth,
O'er scenes of sadness and unrest,
O'er times of joy and mirth;
O'er cot, and palace, hut and hall,
O'er distant land and sea—
Two stars shone in my firmament,
And shone alone for me.

But O, that stars should ever fade,
That I should sit alone,
And she lie 'neath the quiet grass
With lips as cold as stone;
Dark will my sky forever be,
And life one long regret,
For O, the stars that shone for me
For evermore have set.

June 1883

From A Rosary of Rhyme (1884)

INSIDE THE CONVENT WALLS

Ah, here is peace! The world is far away—
 (Walk three short steps and lo, the busy street!)
 Only an echo of the wheels and feet
Reaches this spot where noise has turned to clay.
Across the graveled walks the gray nuns glide,
 The grass grows greenly 'neath the summer heat,
 And golden butterflies the warm air beat,
Then upward float and pass the other side.
I wonder if the wings invisible
 Beat hard against the windows of the soul,
If worldless life and routine e'er seem dull,
 And other pathways beckon toward the goal;
Far in some nave the vesper soundeth sweet—
(Walk three short steps and lo, the busy street!)

Appeared in SF Chronicle, Sunday, November 12, 1882.
Location identified in Urmy's notebook as Notre Dame, San Jose
(Clarence Urmy Collection, Special Collections, Stanford, Box 1, Folder 4).

OFF POINT PINOLE

To north, the winding stream that downward flows
 Through tangled tule, specked with here and there
 A white sail, bearing south a cargo rare,
From nestling valleys filled with vine and rose.
To south, the city, shrouded in a pall,
 Wound in and out through tapering tower and mast,
 To east, the straits through which men fiercely passed
When life and love were nought, and gold was all!
To west, the cottage lights of San Rafael
 Gleam 'neath the shadowy slopes of Tamalpais—
Hark! Softly sounds a sweet-toned vesper bell,
 (San Pablo just beyond yon hill-top lies,)
And o'er my head the shrieking sea-gulls flock,
Seeking a chill night's rest on cold Red Rock.

SEA AND STAR

O Star, that leanest from thy lattice height,
How leap the waves in lover-like unrest!
They fain would kiss thy brow so silver white
And find their long-sought haven on thy breast.
Sweet songs from distant shores of rose and palm
Are wafted skyward from their trembling lips,
The burden of their song is rest, for balm,
Such as they give the coral-caverned ships.
O Star that shinest o'er Life's troubled waves!
Rest is the burden of our song to-day,
Ah, the sweet quiet of the mossy graves,
The tranquil sleep of those that are away!
O, while 'mid tears we softly say "Thy will,"
Speak Thou unto the waters, "Peace, be still!"

From A Vintage of Verse (1897)

AS I CAME DOWN MOUNT TAMALPAIS

As I came down Mount Tamalpais,
To south the city brightly shone,
Touched by the sunset's good-night kiss
Across the golden ocean blown;
I saw its hills, its tapering masts,
I almost heard its tramp and tread,
And saw against the sky the cross
Which marks the City of the Dead.

As I came down Mount Tamalpais
To east San Pablo's water lay,
Touched with holy purple light,
The benediction of the day;
No ripple on its twilight tide,
No parting of its evening veil,
Save dimly in the far-off haze
One dreamy, yellow sunset sail.

As I came down Mount Tamalpais,
To west Heaven's gateway opened wide,
And through it, freighted with day-cares,
The cloud-ships floated with the tide;

Then, silently through stilly air,
 Starlight flew down from Paradise,
Folded her silver wings and slept
 Upon the slopes of Tamalpais.

Reprinted in Edmund Clarence Stedman's *American Anthology, 1787-1899 (1900)*
and on *Bartleby.com*.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

The heaviness of earth and air,
 The force of passing breeze,
The weight of crowns, and ships, and worlds—
 I wonder not at these.
I see the awful griefs and pains
 That faint souls undergo,
And wonder how the human heart
 Can bear such weight of woe.

The measurement of time and space,
 The depth of deepest seas,
The distance of the faintest star—
 I marvel not at these.
The measure that I marvel at,
 All measurement above,
Is this—the wondrous height and depth
 And Length and breadth of Love!

Appeared in *Munseys Magazine*, September 1895.

From A California Troubadour (1912)

THE THINGS THAT COUNT

Not what we have, but what we use;
Not what we see, but what we choose—
These are the things that mar or bless
The sum of human happiness.

The things near by, not things afar;
Not what we seem, but what we are—
These are the things that make or break,
That give the heart its joy or ache.

Not what seems fair, but what is true;
Not what we dream, but good we do—
These are the things that shine like gems,
Like stars, in Fortune's diadems.

Not as we take, but as we give;
Not as we pray, but as we live—
These are the things that make for peace,
Both now and after Time shall cease.

BLONDEL

Within my heart I long have kept
A little chamber cleanly swept,
Embroidered with a *Fleur-de-lis*,
And lintel boughs of redwood tree;
A bed, a book, a crucifix,
Two little copper candlesticks
With tapers ready for the match
The moment I his footfall catch,
That when in thought he comes to me
He straightway at his ease may be.
This guest I love so to allure—
Blondel, King Richard's troubadour!

He often comes, but sings no more
(He says his singing days are o'er!);
Still, sweet of tongue and filled with tales
Of knights and ladies, bowers and vales,
He caps our frugal meal with talk
Of *langue d'oïl* and *langue d'oc*,
Of Picardy and Aquitaine,
Blanche of Castile and Charlemagne,
Of *minstrel*, *trouvere*, *conteur*,
Mime, *histrion*, and old *harpeur*—
Small wonder that I love him well,
King Richard's troubadour, Blondel!

Still, as he comes at candle-light
And goes before the east is bright,
I have no heart to beg him keep
Late hour with me when wooed by sleep;
But one request I ever make,
And ever no for answer take;

He will not make the secret mine,
What song he sang at Durrenstein!
Sleep, troubadour! Enough that thou
With that sweet lay didst keep they vow
And link they name by deathless art
With Richard of the Lion Heart!

Printed in Edmund Clarence Stedman's *American Anthology, 1787-1899 (1900)*
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BY THE GUADALOUPE

From happy haunts in hills afar,
The sparkling water dances,
Attuned to song and gay guitar
Of olden-day romances.

A *caballero*'s serenade,
A *senorita*'s laughter,
With gleams of chillies fair arrayed
On smoky wall and rafter.

Beneath this turquoise-tinted sky,
Here in this green pavilion,
At peace with all the world I lie
Enwrapped in dreams Castilian;

Blue lie the hills of Santa Cruz;
Low in the sky hangs Hesper;
And Santa Clara's bells diffuse
The holy balm of vespers.

It falls on dreamful eye and ear,
Bids care depart and bliss come;
A ghostly *padre* passes near—
How sweet his "*Pax vobiscum!*"

A CALIFORNIA PSALM

I lifted up mine eyes unto the hills
Where fair Los Gatos like a lovely gem
Is set in California's diadem;
The sky was wreathed with sunset daffodils,

And honey-dew that twilight-hour distils
Lay on the poppy fields and wet the hem
Of Evening's robe, who softly sang to them
A slumber song of Dreamland vales and rills.

Unto the hills I lifted up mine eyes
As one who seeks some guerdon or reward,
And lo! Into my heart of hearts there crept
The grateful balm that weary mortals prize—
The help that cometh even from the Lord,—
And, gazing long, I ceased to gaze, and slept.

Appeared in *Putnam's* magazine, February 1909

THE CAMEO-CUTTER

Worker in that most venerable art
 So much esteemed in medieval days,
 And now brought forth for fresher, brighter bays,
What talismanic dreams must crowd thy heart,
Of brilliant booths in Greek and Roman mart,
 Where careful, cunning workmen deftly raise
 On jasper, onyx, bloodstone, chrysoprase,
The life and scenes of which they form a part.
O patient lapidary! In the stone
 What wondrous arabesques of shine and shade
 Abide their time thy tracing to adorn—
Imprisoned beams, perchance, that one day shone
 In primal Eden-bower, glen or glade,
 Waiting they touch—their resurrection morn!

A LEGEND OF THE MADONNA

Out of holy Bethlehem
 Into Egypt flying,
Herod's hate pursuing them,
 Dangers multiplying,
Hastened through the country wild
Joseph, Mary and The Child.

When some distance they had passed,
 Worn and weary growing,
Came they to a field at last
 Where a man was sowing
Seed of corn in fertile ground—

Mary's heart gave sudden bound,

To the husbandman she said:

 "If men bid you aid them,
Asking if this way we fled,
 With yur tongue persuade them,
Saying: 'Yes, they passed at morn
On the day I sowed this corn.'"

Then, a miracle, behold!

 While the man was sleeping,
All the field was turned to gold
 Ready for the reaping,
Stalk and blade and ear were there
Gleaming in the sunlit air!

Came the men by Herod sent,

 Spied the man, and roughly
Riding through the corn, they went,
 Calling to him gruffy:
"Has an old man passed this way
With a wife and child?" "Come, say?"

And the man, o'erwhelmed with awe,

 Viewed his fiend and wondered . . .
"Yes," he said, "those three I saw."
 "'"How long since?" they thundered—
"When I sowed this corn"—and then,
Homeward rode King Herod's men.

Last poems

A VALE

Vanishing towers and chimes of Flanders—
Shades of the heel-grind, mad commanders,
Attilas, Caesars, Alexanders,
 Why all this havoc and ruin?
Forms that were fair as men might make them,
Sounds that were sweet as angels wake them,
Why should the peace of God forsake them?
 What words shall we say our adieu in?

Pressed against skies proud of their presence,
Wonderful stalks of stone floescence,
Poetry wrapped in iridescence,
 Dust trodden, bereft, and beseechless;
Lone the places that made skies fairer,
Tears of the moon their vigil-sharer,
Naught may amend—Time, the repairer,
 Now shakes his drooped head, and is speechless.

1918

The last poem in “Wild Willow” manuscript, Special Collections,
Green Library, Stanford University, Box 1 Folder 10.

THE POET AND HIS LUTE

The Poet’s lute placed in his hands at birth,
Is tuned to overtones unknown to Earth.
Tones that take wing from deftly fingered frets
As perfume steals from bed of violets.

The Poet draws from wire spun in a star
The music of a mighty avatar,
Like song of humming birds—through tin throats—
To high for human ear, supernal notes.

He wakes with magic touch his instrument
To heavenly harmonies rapt eloquent—
Dream-haunted strings that hear from far-off spheres
Strange chords to glad for smiles, too sad for tears.

He echoes airs that seraph tongues rehearse,
And strives to blend them with his blissful verse,
Elysian lyrics born of Flame and Dew,
The faultless, ever-older, ever new.

Thus round the Poet’s lute fond Fancies throng
Awaiting dulcet trysting-time with Song,
Till smiling Death at his worn portal stands
To sever strings, seal lips, and still his hands.