

Rice Cale Young

Song-Surf



Cale Rice

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FOREWORD

These poems, first published as "Song-Surf" in 1900, by a firm which failed before the book, left the press, were republished with additions as the "lyrics" of "Plays & Lyrics," by Hodder & Stoughton, of London, in 1905. Revision and omissions have been made for this volume of a uniform edition in which they now appear.

WITH OMAR

I sat with Omar by the Tavern door,
Musing the mystery of mortals o'er,
And soon with answers alternate we strove
Whether, beyond death, Life hath any shore.

*"Come, fill the cup," said he. "In the fire of Spring
Your Winter-garment of Repentance fling.
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter – and the Bird is on the Wing."*

"The Bird of Time?" I answered. "Then have I
No heart for Wine. Must we not cross the Sky
Unto Eternity upon his wings – Or,
failing, fall into the Gulf and die?"

*"Ay; so, for the Glories of this World sigh some,
And some for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
But you, Friend, take the Cash – the Credit leave,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!"*

"What! take the Cash and let the Credit go?
Spend all upon the Wine the while I know
A possible To-morrow may bring thirst
For Drink but Credit then shall cause to flow?"

*"Yea, make the most of what you yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and – sans End!"*

"Into the Dust we shall descend – we must.
But can the soul not break the crumbling Crust
In which he is encaged? To hope or to
Despair he will – which is more wise or just?"

*"The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns Ashes – or it prospers: and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,
Lighting a little hour or two – is gone."*

"Like Snow it comes – to cool one burning Day;
And like it goes – for all our plea or sway.
But flooding tears nor Wine can ever purge
The Vision it has brought to us away."

*"But to this world we come and Why not knowing,
Nor Whence, like water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the waste,
We know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing."*

*"True, little do we know of Why or Whence.
But is forsooth our Darkness evidence
There is no Light? – the worm may see no star
Tho' heaven with myriad multitudes be dense."*

*"But, all unasked, we're hither hurried Whence?
And, all unasked, we're Whither hurried hence?
O, many a cup of this forbidden Wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence."*

*"Yet can not – ever! For it is forbid
Still by that quenchless Soul within us hid,
Which cries, 'Feed – feed me not on Wine alone,
For to Immortal Banquets I am bid.'"*

*"Well oft I think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Cæsar bled:
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in her lap from some once lovely Head."*

*"Then if, from the dull Clay thro' with Life's throes,
More beautiful spring Hyacinth and Rose,
Will the great Gardener for the uprooted soul
Find Use no sweeter than – useless Repose?"*

*"We cannot know – so fill the cup that clears
To-day of past regret and future fears:
To-morrow! – Why, To-morrow we may be
Ourselves with Yesterday's sev'n thousand Years."*

*"No Cup there is to bring oblivion
More during than Regret and Fear – no, none!
For Wine that's Wine to-day may change and be
Marah before to-morrow's Sands have run."*

*"Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same Door where in I went."*

*"The doors of Argument may lead Nowhither,
Reason become a Prison where may wither
From sunless eyes the Infinite, from hearts
All Hope, when their sojourn too long is thither."*

*"Up from Earth's Centre thro' the Seventh Gate
I rose, and on the throne of Saturn sate,
And many a Knot unravelled by the Road —
But not the Master-knot of Human fate."*

"The Master-knot knows but the Master-hand
That scattered Saturn and his countless Band
Like seeds upon the unplanted heaven's Air:
The Truth we reap from them is Chaff thrice fanned."

*"Yet if the Soul can fling the Dust aside
And naked on the air of Heaven ride,
Wer't not a shame – wer't not a shame for him
In this clay carcase crippled to abide?"*

"No, for a day bound in this Dust may teach
More of the Sáki's Mind than we can reach
Through æons mounting still from Sky to Sky —
May open through all Mystery a breach."

*"You speak as if Existence closing your
Account, and mine, should know the like no more;
The Eternal Sáki from that Bowl has poured
Millions of bubbles like us, and will pour."*

"Bubbles we are, pricked by the point of Death.
But, in each bubble, may there be no Breath
That lifts it and at last to Freedom flies,
And o'er all heights of Heaven wandereth?"

*"A moment's halt – a momentary taste
Of Being from the Well amid the Waste —
And Lo – the phantom Caravan has reached
The Nothing it set out from – Oh, make haste!"*

"And yet it should be – it should be that we
Who drink shall drink of Immortality.
The Master of the Well has much to spare:
Will He say, 'Taste' – then shall we no more be?"

*"The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on; nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."*

"And were it other, might we not erase
The Letter of some Sorrow in whose place
No truer sounding, we should fail to spell

The Heart which yearns behind the mock-world's Face?"

*"Well, this I know; whether the one True Light
Kindle to Love, or Wrath-consume me, quite,
One flash of it within the Tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost outright."*

"In Temple or in Tavern 't may be lost.
And everywhere that Love hath any Cost
It may be found; the Wrath it seems is but
A Cloud whose Dew should make its power most."

*"But see His Presence thro' Creation's veins
Running Quicksilver-like eludes your pains;
Taking all shapes from Máh to Máhi; and
They change and perish all – but He remains."*

"All – it may be. Yet lie to sleep, and lo,
The soul seems quenched in Darkness – is it so?
Rather believe what seemeth not than seems
Of Death – until we know —*until we know.*"

*"So wastes the Hour – gone in the vain pursuit
Of This and That we strive o'er and dispute.
Better be jocund with the fruitful Grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter, Fruit."*

"Better – unless we hope that grief is thrown
Across our Path by urgency of the Unknown,
Lest we may think we have no more to live
And bide content with dim-lit Earth alone."

*"Then, strange, is't not? that of the myriads who
Before us passed the door of Darkness through
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too?"*

"Such is the Ban! but even though we heard
Love in Life's All we still should crave the word
Of one returned. Yet none is *sure*, we know,
Though they lie deep, they are by Death deterred."

*"Send then thy Soul through the Invisible
Some letter of the After-life to spell:
And by and by thy Soul returned to thee
But answers, 'I myself am Heaven and Hell.'"*

"From the Invisible, he does. But sent
Thro' Earth, where living Goodness tho' 'tis blent

With Evil dures, may he not read the Voice,
'To make thee but for Death were toil ill spent?'"

*"Well, when the Angel of the darker drink
At last shall find us by the river-brink
And offering his Cup invite our souls
Forth to our lips to quaff, we shall not shrink."*

"No. But if in the sable Cup we knew
Death without waking were the wilful brew,
Nobler it were to curse as Coward Him
Who roused us into light – then light withdrew."

*"Then Thou who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my fall to sin."*

"He will not. If one evil we endure
To ultimate Debasing, oh, be sure
'Tis not of Him predestined, and the sin
Not His nor ours – but Fate's He could not cure."

*"Yet, ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close!
The Nightingale that on the branches sang,
Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows?"*

"So does it seem – no other joys like these!
Yet Summer comes, and Autumn's honoured ease;
And wintry Age, is't ever whisperless
Of that Last Spring, whose Verdure may not cease?"

*"Still, would some winged Angel ere too late
Arrest the yet unfolded roll of Fate,
And make the stern Recorder otherwise
Enregister, or quite obliterate!"*

"To otherwise enregister believe
He toils eternally, nor asks Reprieve.
And could Creation perfect from his hands
Have come at Dawn, none overmuch should grieve."

So till the wan and early scent of day
We strove, and silent turned at last away,
Thinking how men in ages yet unborn
Would ask and answer – trust and doubt and pray.

Jael

Jehovah! Jehovah! art Thou not stronger than gods of the heathen?
I slew him, that Sisera, prince of the host Thou dost hate.
But fear of his blood is upon me, about me is breathen
His spirit – by night and by day come voices that wait.

Athirst and affrightened he fled from the star-wrought waters of
Kishon.

His face was as wool when he swooned at the door of my tent.
The Lord hath given him into the hand of perdition,
I smiled – but he saw not the face of my cunning intent.

He thirsted for water: I fed him the curdless milk of the cattle.
He lay in the tent under purple and crimson of Tyre.
He slept and he dreamt of the surge and storming of battle.
Ah ha! but he woke not to waken Jehovah's ire.

He slept as he were a chosen of Israel's God Almighty.
A dog out of Canaan! – thought he I was woman alone?
I slapt like an asp to his ear and laughed for the sight he
Would give when the carrion kites should tear to his bone.

I smote thro' his temple the nail, to the dust, a worm, did I bind him.
My heart was a-leap with rage and a-quiver with scorn.
And I danced with a holy delight before and behind him —
I that am called blessed o'er all unto Judah born.

"Aye, come, I will show thee, O Barak, a woman is more than a
warrior,"

I cried as I lifted the door wherein Sisera lay.

"To me did he fly and I shall be called his destroyer —
I, Jael, who am subtle to find for the Lord a way!"

"Above all the daughters of men be blest – of Gilead or Asshur,"

Sang Deborah, prophetess, then, from her waving palm.

"Behold her, ye people, behold her the heathen's abasher;
Behold her the Lord hath uplifted – behold and be calm!

"The mother of him at the window looks out thro' the lattice to listen
—

Why roll not the wheels of his chariot? why does he stay?
Shall he not return with the booty of battle, and glisten
In songs of his triumph – ye women, why do ye not say?"

And I was as she who danced when the Seas were rended asunder
And stood, until Egypt pressed in to be drowned unto death.

My breasts were as fire with the glory, the rocks that were under
My feet grew quick with the gloating that beat in my breath.

At night I stole out where they cast him, a sop to the jackal and raven.
But his bones stood up in the moon and I shook with affright.
The strength shrank out of my limbs and I fell, a craven,
Before him – the nail in his temple gleamed bloodily bright.

Jehovah! Jehovah! art Thou not stronger than gods of the heathen?
I slew him, that Sisera, prince of the host Thou dost hate.
But fear of his blood is upon me, about me is breathe
His spirit – by day and by night come voices that wait.

I fly to the desert, I fly to the mountain – but they will not hide me.
His gods haunt the winds and the caves with vengeance that cries
For judgment upon me; the stars in their courses deride me —
The stars Thou hast hung with a breath in the wandering skies.

Jehovah! Jehovah! I slew him, the scourge and sting of Thy Nation.
Take from me his spirit, take from me the voice of his blood.
With madness I rave – by day and by night, defamation!
Jehovah, release me! Jehovah! if still Thou art God!

TO THE SEA

Art thou enraged, O sea, with the blue peace
Of heaven, so to uplift thine armèd waves,
Thy billowing rebellion 'gainst its ease,
And with Tartarean mutter from cold caves,
From shuddering profundities where shapes
Of awe glide thro' entangled leagues of ooze,
To hoot thy watery omens evermore,
And evermore thy moanings interfuse
With seething necromancy and mad lore?

Or, dost thou labour with the drifting bones
Of countless dead, thou mighty Alchemist,
Within whose stormy crucible the stones
Of sunk primordial shores, granite and schist,
Are crumbled by thine all-abrasive beat?
With immemorial chanting to the moon,
And cosmic incantation, dost thou crave
Rest to be found not till thy wild be strewn
Frigid and desert over earth's last grave?

Thou seemest with immensity mad, blind —
With raving deaf, with wandering forlorn;
Parent of Demogorgon whose dire mind
Is night and earthquake, shapeless shame and scorn
Of the o'ermounting birth of Harmony.
Bound in thy briny bed and gnawing earth
With foamy writhing and fierce-panted tides,
Thou art as Fate in torment of a dearth
Of black disaster and destruction's strides.

And how thou dost drive silence from the world,
Incarnate Motion of all mystery!
Whose waves are fury-wings, whose winds are hurled
Whither thy Ghost tempestuous can see
A desolate apocalypse of death.
Oh, how thou dost drive silence from the world,
With emerald overflowing, waste on waste
Of flashing susurrations, dashed and swirled
O'er isles and continents that shrink abased!

Nay, frustrate Hope art thou, of the Unknown,
Gathered from primal mist and firmament;
A surging shape of Life's unfathomed moan,
Whelming humanity with fears unmeant.
Yet do I love thee, O, above all fear,

And loving thee unconquerably trust
The runes that from thy ageless surfing start
Would read, were they revealed, gust upon gust,
That Immortality is might of heart!

THE DAY-MOON

So wan, so unavailing,
Across the vacant day-blue dimly trailing!

Last night, sphered in thy shining,
A Circe – mystic destinies divining;

To-day but as a feather
Torn from a seraph's wing in sinful weather,

Down-drifting from the portals
Of Paradise, unto the land of mortals.

Yet do I feel thee awing
My heart with mystery, as thy updrawing

Moves thro' the tides of Ocean
And leaves lorn beaches barren of its motion;

Or strands upon near shallows
The wreck whose weirded form at night unhallows

The fisher maiden's prayers —
"For *him!* – that storms may take not unawares!"

So wan, so unavailing,
Across the vacant day-blue dimly trailing!

But Night shall come atoning
Thy phantom life thro' day, and high enthroning

Thee in her chambers arrased
With star-hieroglyphs, leave thee unharassed

To glide with silvery passion,
Till in earth's shadow swept thy glowings ashen.

A SEA-GHOST

Oh, fisher-fleet, go in from the sea
And furl your wings.
The bay is gray with the twilit spray
And the loud surf springs.

The chill buoy-bell is rung by the hands
Of all the drowned,
Who know the woe of the wind and tow
Of the tides around.

Go in, go in! Oh, haste from the sea,
And let them rest —
A son and one who was wed and one
Who went down unblest.

Aye, even as I, whose hands at the bell
Now labour most.
The tomb has gloom, but Oh, the doom
Of the drear sea-ghost!

He evermore must wander the ooze
Beneath the wave,
Forlorn – to warn of the tempest born,
And to save – to save!

Then go, go in! and leave us the sea,
For only so
Can peace release us and give us ease
Of our salty woe.

ON THE MOOR

1

I met a child upon the moor
A-wading down the heather;
She put her hand into my own,
We crossed the fields together.

I led her to her father's door —
A cottage mid the clover.
I left her – and the world grew poor
To me, a childless rover.

2

I met a maid upon the moor,
The morrow was her wedding.
Love lit her eyes with lovelier hues
Than the eve-star was shedding.

She looked a sweet good-bye to me,
And o'er the stile went singing.
Down all the lonely night I heard
But bridal bells a-ringing.

3

I met a mother on the moor,
By a new grave a-praying.
The happy swallows in the blue
Upon the winds were playing.

"Would I were in his grave," I said,
"And he beside her standing!"
There was no heart to break if death
For me had made demanding.

THE CRY OF EVE

Down the palm-way from Eden in the mid-night
Lay dreaming Eve by her outdriven mate,
Pillowed on lilies that still told the sweet
Of birth within the Garden's ecstasy.
Pitiful round her face that could not lose
Its memory of God's perfecting was strewn
Her troubled hair, and sigh grieved after sigh
Along her loveliness in the white moon.
Then sudden her dream, too cruelly impent
With pain, broke and a cry fled shuddering
Into the wounded stillness from her lips —
As, cold, she fearfully felt for his hand,
And tears, that had before ne'er visited
Her lids with anguish, drew from her the moan:

"Oh, Adam! What have I dreamed?
Now do I understand His words, so dim
To creatures that had quivered but with bliss!
Since at the dusk thy kiss to me, and I
Wept at caresses that were once all joy,
I have slept, seeing through Futurity
The uncreated ages visibly!
Foresuffering phantoms crowded in the womb
Of Time, and all with lamentable mien
Accusing without mercy, thee and me!
And without pity! for tho' some were far
From birth, and without name, others were near —
Sodom and dark Gomorrah – from whose flames
Fleeing one turned ... how like her look to mine
When the tree's horror trembled on my taste!
And Babylon upbuilt on our sin;
And Nineveh, a city sinking slow
Under a shroud of sandy centuries
That hid me not from the buried cursing eyes
Of women who e'er-bitterly gave birth!
Ah, to be mother of all misery!
To be first-called out of the earth and fail
For a whole world! To shame maternity
For women evermore – women whose tears
Flooding the night, no hope can wipe away!
To see the wings of Death, as, Adam, thou
Hast not, endlessly beating, and to hear
The swooning ages suffer up to God!
And Oh, that birth-cry of a guiltless child
In it are sounding of our sin and woe,

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