

THE THIEF OF TIME

To Wilfred Merton

THE aureate earth brings gold enow,
To flood the veins of spring;
The wordy lilt of mating birds
Makes all the woodlands blithely bring
To earth fulfilment of the vow
Unuttered in my words.

I came out of the tents of Shem,
A warrior clad and mailed:
In burnished armour clearly dight.
And ere the harvest grew and failed
I found my sparkling diadem,
My body, pure and bright.

The lips of Time held wonder-song
Betwixt them; I was fain
To stay awhile and list to them.
My horse tugged at his bridle-rein
And urged me on, so, young and strong,
I passed, a barren stem.

The lips of time were parched and sore
 With wild, uneasy breath;
I hastened on to reach the road
Where, as I heard, the Lost One saith:
This is the passage to the shore
 Of Time's most fierce abode.

Barren and gray the water fell
 In bleak and bare cascades;
There was no wind, nor any sun.
The sheaths of spring were swung; the blades
Clashed each 'gainst each; a silent dell
 Is where the waters run.

O Mother of the Triune God,
 Whose feet are lapped by hell,
Whither away, so fast and sure?
Whence cometh thy most primal spell
That falls when thou hast waved thy rod,
 A never-failing lure?

*I was a fairy-man, meseemed,
 And garlanded, a fool
Of fluttering fancy's royal court:
I was a godling gray at school,
And so the way was long: I dreamed,
 And this is what I wrought.*