

A BALLAD OF CHOOSING

Love brought a garland to my feet to-day
Offering to crown my head withal, and said :
‘The year is young, it is the time of May,
Autumn is distant, and the winter, dead’
And would therewith my brows have garlanded
But that I asked him ‘Is not this a fire
To burn the scorched brain through my maddened head?
Thou has a guerdon, is it not for hire?’

Fame brought a golden crown, bejewelled o’er
With precious rubies beyond price, and cried
‘The world is young, thy name shall evermore
Ring in men’s ears, stately and glorified’
But I, with shuddering lips, to him replied
‘Fame is the amaranth that fools desire
My soul’s price is beyond thy jewel’s pride
Thou has a guerdon, is it not for hire?’

‘Wealth brought to me a purse, whose glancing gold
Mocked the sun’s rays, grown dull as iron rust,
And pressed it in my hand, saying ‘Behold
The corner-stone of fame, the means of lust’
And I ‘In thee I put but little trust

Shameful, most vile, accursed of God's ire,
Dross of the dunghill's most detested dust,
Thou has a guerdon, is it not for hire ?'

Christ came to me, alone and sorrowful,
And offered me a cross, saying to me,
'I have great joys to give most bountiful.
Carry this through the world, and when the sea
Of death is past, then is prepared for thee
A house of many mansions.' My desire
Hid not from me the vileness of his plea :—
'Thou has a guerdon, is it not for hire ?'

ENVOI

Prince of the air, thou offerest nought to me
I serve thee, recompensed of hell-fire,
More nobly than these others, verily
Since none with impious word may mock at thee
'Thou has a guerdon, is it not for hire ?'