

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Edith Nesbit**  
**- poems -**

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# Edith Nesbit(15 August 1858 – 4 May 1924)

Edith Nesbit (married name Edith Bland) was an English author and poet whose children's works were published under the name of E. Nesbit. She wrote or collaborated on over 60 books of fiction for children, several of which have been adapted for film and television. She was also a political activist and co-founded the Fabian Society, a precursor to the modern Labour Party.

## <b>Biography</b>

Nesbit was born in 1858 at 38 Lower Kennington Lane in Kennington, Surrey (now part of Greater London), the daughter of an agricultural chemist, John Collis Nesbit, who died in March 1862, before her fourth birthday. Her sister Mary's ill health meant that the family moved around constantly for some years, living variously in Brighton, Buckinghamshire, France (Dieppe, Rouen, Paris, Tours, Poitiers, Angoulême, Bordeaux, Arcachon, Pau, Bagnères-de-Bigorre, and Dinan in Brittany), Spain and Germany, before settling for three years at Halstead Hall in Halstead in north-west Kent, a location which later inspired *The Railway Children* (this distinction has also been claimed by the Derbyshire town of New Mills).

When Nesbit was 17, the family moved again, this time back to London, living variously in South East London at Eltham, Lewisham, Grove Park and Lee.

A follower of William Morris, 19-year-old Nesbit met bank clerk Hubert Bland in 1877. Seven months pregnant, she married Bland on 22 April 1880, though she did not immediately live with him, as Bland initially continued to live with his mother. Their marriage was a stormy one. Early on Edith discovered another woman believed she was Hubert's fiancée and had also borne him a child. A more serious blow came later when Edith discovered that her good friend, Alice Hoatson, was pregnant with Hubert's child. Edith had already agreed to adopt Hoatson's child and allow Hoatson to live with her as their housekeeper. When she discovered the truth, Edith quarreled violently with her husband and suggested that Hoatson and the baby should leave; Hubert threatened to leave Edith if she disowned the baby and its mother. Hoatson remained with them as a housekeeper and secretary and became pregnant by Hubert again 13 years later. Edith again adopted Hoatson's child.

Nesbit's children were Paul Bland (1880–1940), to whom *The Railway Children* was dedicated; Iris Bland (1881–1950s); Fabian Bland (1885–1900); Rosamund Bland (1886–?) , to whom *The Book of Dragons* was dedicated; and John Bland

(1899 -?) to whom The House of Arden was dedicated. Her son Fabian died aged 15 after a tonsil operation, and Nesbit dedicated a number of books to him: Five Children And It and its sequels, as well as The Story of the Treasure Seekers and its sequels. Nesbit's daughter Rosamund collaborated with her on the book Cat Tales.

Nesbit and Bland were among the founders of the Fabian Society in 1884. Their son Fabian was named after the society. They also jointly edited the Society's journal Today; Hoatson was the Society's assistant secretary. Nesbit and Bland also dallied briefly with the Social Democratic Federation, but rejected it as too radical. Nesbit was an active lecturer and prolific writer on socialism during the 1880s. Nesbit also wrote with her husband under the name "Fabian Bland", though this activity dwindled as her success as a children's author grew.

Nesbit lived from 1899 to 1920 in Well Hall House, Eltham, Kent (now in south-east Greater London), which appears in fictional guise in several of her books, especially The Red House. She and her husband entertained a large circle of friends, colleagues and admirers at their grand "Well Hall House".

On 20 February 1917, some three years after Bland died, Nesbit married Thomas "the Skipper" Tucker, a ship's engineer on the Woolwich Ferry. She was a guest speaker at the London School of Economics, which had been founded by other Fabian Society members.

Towards the end of her life she moved to a house called "Crowlink" in Friston, East Sussex, and later to St Mary's Bay in Romney Marsh, East Kent. Suffering from lung cancer, she died in 1924 at New Romney, Kent, and was buried in the churchyard of St Mary in the Marsh.

<b>Literature</b>

Nesbit published approximately 40 books for children, including novels, collections of stories and picture books. Collaborating with others, she published almost as many more.

According to her biographer Julia Briggs, Nesbit was "the first modern writer for children": "(Nesbit) helped to reverse the great tradition of children's literature inaugurated by [Lewis] Carroll, [George] MacDonald and Kenneth Grahame, in turning away from their secondary worlds to the tough truths to be won from encounters with things-as-they-are, previously the province of adult novels." Briggs also credits Nesbit with having invented the children's adventure story. Noël Coward was a great admirer of hers and, in a letter to an early biographer

Noel Streatfeild, wrote "she had an economy of phrase, and an unparalleled talent for evoking hot summer days in the English countryside."

Among Nesbit's best-known books are *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1898) and *The Wouldbegoods* (1899), which both recount stories about the Bastables, a middle class family that has fallen on relatively hard times. Her children's writing also included numerous plays and collections of verse.

She created an innovative body of work that combined realistic, contemporary children in real-world settings with magical objects - what would now be classed as contemporary fantasy - and adventures and sometimes travel to fantastic worlds. In doing so, she was a direct or indirect influence on many subsequent writers, including P. L. Travers (author of *Mary Poppins*), Edward Eager, Diana Wynne Jones and J. K. Rowling. C. S. Lewis wrote of her influence on his *Narnia* series and mentions the Bastable children in *The Magician's Nephew*. Michael Moorcock would go on to write a series of steampunk novels with an adult Oswald Bastable (of *The Treasure Seekers*) as the lead character.

Nesbit also wrote for adults, including eleven novels, short stories, and four collections of horror stories.

# A Brown Study

LET them sing of their primrose and cowslip,  
Their daffodil-gold-coloured hair,  
Their bluebells, blue eyes, and white violets,  
All the pale dreamy things they find fair;  
Give me stir of brown leaves in the sunshine,  
The whir of brown wings through the wheat,  
The rush of brown hares through the clover,  
And the light in brown eyes of my sweet!

Gold hair? Well, I never could love it,  
Yet gold, I suppose, has its worth;  
The head that I love is as dusky  
As the breast of our mother, the earth;  
With a gleam like the shine of wet seaweed,  
Round pools that the tide has left clear,  
And warm like the breast of a linnet,  
And as brown, is the hair of my dear.

From the edge of the cliff we look downwards  
On the shore, and the bay, and the town,  
And brown is the short turf we lean on,  
The fishing-boats' sails are all brown:  
The sky may be blue--that's the background,--  
But the picture itself, to be fair,  
However it's shaded and varied,  
Should be brown as the dress that you wear.

A lark bursts to sudden sweet singing--  
That tuft of brown grass is his home--  
And now, a brown speck, he is rising  
Against the clear windy sky-dome;  
And he sings--how I know? Love instructs me  
To know all his notes, what they mean--  
That it isn't the colour I care for,  
But yourself, oh, my gipsy, my queen!

Ah! the lark knows my heart--I his language;  
It's my heart he sings out to the skies;  
It is you that I love, and what matter  
The colour of hair or of eyes?  
No doubt I should love you as dearly  
Were your hair like an apricot's down,  
And your eyes like the grey of the morning;  
But I'm glad, all the same, that they're brown.

Edith Nesbit

# A Choice

THE flood of utter change is loosed. A space  
Is ours yet, for its coming to prepare.  
Shall we build dams with cautious, clumsy care,  
Or stand with idle hands and frightened face,  
And so be whirled all broken from our place,  
And perish with the dams we builded there?  
Or shall we dig a broad, deep channel, where  
Most fields may feel the flood's benign embrace?

Thus turned 'twill be a calm majestic flood  
Of plenty, peace, and fertilising power,  
Whose banks fresh flowers of love and joy shall deck.  
Oppose it: at the inevitable hour,  
Tumultuous, black with ruin, red with blood,  
'Twill come--and you shall have no chance but wreck!

Edith Nesbit

# A Comedy

MADAM, you bade me act a part,  
A comedy of your devising--  
Forbade me to consult my heart,  
To be sincere--or compromising.

The play was not my own device,  
My stage-struck youth lies far behind me;  
And yet--I thought it would be nice  
To play the part that you assigned me.

Thus have I learned my rôle so well  
That, as I play, you question whether  
Fate has not taught your jest a spell  
To bind me to you altogether.

The truth is this: so ill I wrought  
In mastering the part you gave me,  
That now 'tis tyrant of my thought,  
And nothing in the world can save me!

Between me and my work, your face,  
In haunting fashion, daily lingers;  
Your eyes make mine their dwelling place  
Your dream-hand thrills my idle fingers.

Through death-white nights I dream of you--  
Of what might move, and what has moved you--  
Ah! no! There's nothing you can do!...  
...It's not as though I really loved you.

Edith Nesbit



# A Dirge

LET Summer go  
To other gardens; here we have no need of her.  
She smiles and beckons, but we take no heed of her,  
Who love not Summer, but bare boughs and snow,

Set the snow free  
To choke the insolent triumph of the year,  
With birds that sing as though he still were here,  
And flowers that blow as if he still could see.

Let the rose die--  
What ailed the rose to blow? she is not dear to us,  
Nor all the summer pageant that draws near to us;  
Let it be over soon, let it go by!

Let winter come,  
With the wild mourning of the wind-tossed boughs  
To drown the stillness of the empty house  
To which no more the little feet come home.

Edith Nesbit

# A Farewell

Good-bye, good-bye; it is not hard to part!  
You have my heart--the heart that leaps to hear  
Your name called by an echo in a dream;  
You have my soul that, like an untroubled stream,  
Reflects your soul that leans so dear, so near -  
Your heartbeats set the rhythm for my heart.

What more could Life give if we gave her leave  
To give, and Life should give us leave to take?  
Only each other's arms, each other's eyes,  
Each other's lips, the clinging secrecies  
That are but as the written words to make  
Records of what the heart and soul achieve.

This, only this we yield, my love, my friend,  
To Fate's implacable eyes and withering breath.  
We still are yours and mine, though, by Time's theft,  
My arms are empty and your arms bereft.  
It is not hard to part--not harder than Death;  
And each of us must face Death in the end!

Edith Nesbit

# A Garden Of Girls

KATE is like a violet, Gertrude's like a rose,  
Jane is like a gillyflower smart;  
But Laura's like a lily, the purest bud that blows,  
Whose white, white petals veil the golden heart.  
Girls in the garden--one and two and three--  
One for song and one for play and one--ah, one for me!  
Gillyflowers and violets and roses fair and fine,  
But only one a lily, and that one lily mine!

Bertha is a hollyhock, stately, tall, and fair,  
Mabel has the daisy's dainty grace,  
Edith has the gold of the sunflower on her hair,  
But Laura wears the lily in her face.  
Girls in the garden--five and six and seven--  
Three to take, and three to give, but one--ah! one is given--  
Hollyhocks and daisies, and sunflowers like the sun,  
But only one a lily, and that one lily won.

Edith Nesbit

# A Good-Bye

FAREWELL! How soon unmeasured distance rolls  
Its leaden clouds between our parted souls!  
How little to each other now are we--  
And once how much I dreamed we two might be!  
I, who now stand with eyes undimmed and dry  
To say good-bye--

To say good-bye to all sweet memories,  
Good-bye to tender questions, soft replies;  
Good bye to hope, good-bye to dreaming too,  
Good-bye to all things dear--good-bye to you,  
Without a kiss, a tear, a prayer, a sigh--  
Our last good-bye.

I had no chain to bind you with at all;  
No grace to charm, no beauty to enthrall;  
No power to hold your eyes with mine, and make  
Your heart on fire with longing for my sake,  
Till all the yearning passed into one cry:  
'Love, not good-bye!'

Ah, no--I had no strength like that, you know;  
Yet my worst weakness was to love you so!  
So much too well--so much too well--or ill--  
Yet even that might have been pardoned still--  
It would have been had I been you--you I!  
But now--good-bye!

How soon the bitter follows on the sweet!  
Could I not chain your fancy's flying feet?  
Could I not hold your soul--to make you play  
To-morrow in the key of yesterday--?  
Dear--do you dream that I would stoop to try?  
Ah, no--Good-bye!



# A Kentish Garden

THERE is a grey-walled garden, far away  
From noise and smoke of cities, where the hours  
Pass with soft wings among the happy flowers,  
And lovely leisure blossoms every day.

There, tall and white, the sceptral lily blows;  
There grow the pansy, pink, and columbine,  
Brave hollyhocks, and star-white jessamine,  
And the red glory of the royal rose.

There greeny glow-worms gem the dusky lawn,  
The lime-trees breathe their fragrance to the night,  
Pink roses sleep, and dream that they are white,  
Until they wake to colour with the dawn.

There, in the splendour of the sultry noon,  
The sunshine sleeps upon the garden bed  
Where the white poppy droops a drowsy head  
And dreams of kisses from the white full moon.

And there, some days, all wild with wind and rain,  
The tossed trees show the white side of their leaves,  
While the great drops drip from the ivied eaves,  
And birds are still--till the sun shines again.

And there, all days, my heart goes wandering,  
Because there, first, my heart began to know  
The glories of the summer and the snow,  
The loveliness of harvest and of spring.

There may be fairer gardens; but I know  
There is no other garden half so dear;  
Because 'tis there, this many, many a year,

The sacred, sweet, white flowers of memory grow!

Edith Nesbit

# A Last Appeal

KNOWING our needs, hardly knowing our powers,  
Hear how we cry to you, brothers of ours!--  
Brothers in nature, pulse, passions, and pains,  
Our sins in you, and your blood in our veins.  
First in your palace, or last in our den,  
Basest or best, we are all of us men!  
Justice eternal cries out in our name,  
What is the least common manhood can claim?  
'Food that we make for you,  
Money we earn:  
Give us our share of them--  
Give us our turn.'

Landowners, bankers, and merchants, we make  
Out of our lives this new wealth that you take.  
Have we earned only such pitiful dole  
As just holds worn body to desolate soul?  
When that soul is bewildered each day and perplexed  
With the problem of how to get bread for the next,  
Is it better to end it, as some of us do,  
Or to fight it out bravely, still calling to you--  
'Food that we make for you,  
Money we earn:  
Give us our share of them--  
Give us our turn'?

Ever more passionate grows our demand--  
Give us our share of our food and our land:  
Give us our rights, make us equal and free--  
Let us be all we are not, but might be.  
Our sons would be honest, our daughters be pure,  
If our wage were more certain, your vices less sure--  
Oh, you who are forging the fetters we feel,  
Hear our wild protest, our maddened appeal--  
'Food that we make for you,  
Money we earn:  
Give us our share of them--



Give us our turn.'

Hear us, and answer, while Time is your friend,  
Lest we be answered by God in the end;  
Lest, when the flame of His patience burns low,  
We be the weapon He shapes for His blow--  
Lest with His foot on your necks He shall stand,  
And appeal that you spurned be new-born as command,  
And thunder your doom, as you die by the rod  
Of the vengeance of man through the justice of God.  
'Food that we make for you,  
Money we earn:  
Give us our share of them--  
Give us our turn.'

Edith Nesbit

# A Life's Story

THE morning broke in a pearly haze,  
Then the east grew duskly red:  
'Oh, my only day, oh, my day of days,  
To-day he will come,' I said.

As the sun climbed up in the clearer sky,  
The mists fell down at his feet;  
'There is sunshine too in my heart,' said I,  
'For to-day is the day we meet;

Perhaps even now he is journeying fast--  
Perhaps he is almost here.'  
And my heart leaped up at each foot that passed,  
With the thought that he might be near.

In my garden the fairest flowers that grew  
I plucked for him, sweet, dew-wet,  
And held them ready, the whole day through,  
To gladden him when we met.

The sun shone warm on the longing earth,  
That thrilled to his fervent kiss;  
But what to me was the sun's smile worth,  
When I longed for that smile of his?

The hours in their flight seemed strangely slow  
For the sake of the hour to be;  
'Go swiftly now--and more slowly go  
When he shall be here with me.'

But the level light of late afternoon  
Fell cold on me, still alone;  
My flowers were dying, gathered too soon,

And my whole day's work undone.

With empty heart and unsatisfied  
I turned from the red sunset:  
'Short time for his coming is left,' I cried,  
'It shall not be evening yet.'

But the sky grows pale, and a weak wind wakes,  
And long flights of birds go home,  
And slowly and surely the day's spell breaks,  
And I know that he will not come.

Perhaps he has never turned my way,  
Nor known how my heart would wait;  
Perhaps he has sought me the whole long day,  
And has failed at my very gate;

Perhaps all these hours of increasing pain  
Have been only a dream of a day,  
And after the night I shall wake again,  
And 'To-day he comes,' I shall say.

Edith Nesbit

# A Parting

So good-bye!  
This is where we end it, you and I.  
Life's to live, you know, and death's to die;  
So good-bye!

I was yours  
For the love in life that loves while life endures,  
For the earth-path that the Heaven-flight ensures  
I was yours.

You were mine  
For the moment that a garland takes to twine,  
For the human hour that sorcery shews divine  
You were mine.

All is over.  
You and I no more are love and lover;  
Nought's to seek now, gain, attain, discover.  
All is over.

Edith Nesbit

## A Parting II

I WILL not wake you, dear; no tears shall creep  
To chill the still bed where you lie asleep;  
No cry, no word, shall break the sanctity  
Of the great silence where God lets you lie.  
I will not tease your grave with flower or stone;  
You are tired, my heart; you shall be left alone.  
And even the kisses that my lips must lay  
Upon the mould of the triumphant clay  
Shall be so soft--like those a mother lays  
Upon her sleeping baby's little face--  
You will not feel my kisses, will not hear;  
You are tired: sleep on, I will not wake you, dear!  
But when the good day comes, you will hear me cry,  
'Ah, make a little place where I can lie!'  
And half awakened, you will feel me creep  
Into the folds of your familiar sleep,  
And draw them round us, with a tender moan,  
'How could you let me sleep so long alone?'

Edith Nesbit

## A Portrait

LIKE the sway of the silver birch in the breeze of dawn  
Is her dainty way;  
Like the gray of a twilight sky or a starlit lawn  
Are her eyes of gray;  
Like the clouds in their moving white  
Is her breast's soft stir;  
And white as the moon and bright  
Is the soul of her.

Like murmur of woods in spring ere the leaves be green,  
Like the voice of a bird  
That sings by a stream that sings through the night unseen,  
So her voice is heard.  
And the secret her eyes withhold  
In my soul abides,  
For white as the moon and cold  
Is the heart she hides.

Edith Nesbit

# A Prayer For The King's Majesty

22nd January, 1901.

THE Queen is dead. God save the King,  
In this his hour of grief,  
When sorrow gathers memories in a sheaf  
To lay them on his shoulders as he stands  
Inheriting her glories and her lands--  
First gain of his at which his Mother's voice  
Has not been first to bless and to rejoice--  
A man, set lonely between gain and loss.  
(O words of love the heart remembereth,  
O mighty loss outweighing every gain!)  
A Son whose kingdom Death's arm lies across,  
A King whose Mother lies alone with Death  
Wrapped in the folds of white implacable sleep.  
O God, who seest the tears Thy children weep,  
O God, who countest each sad heart-beat, see  
How our King needs the grace we ask of Thee!  
Thou knowest how little and how vain a thing  
Is Empire, when the heart is sick with pain--  
God, save the King!  
The Queen is dead. The splendour of her days,  
The sorrow of them both alike merge now  
In the new aureole that lights her brow.  
The clamour of her people's voice in praise  
Must hush itself to the still voice that prays  
In the holy chamber of Death. Tread softly here,  
A mighty Queen lies dead.  
Her people's heart wears black,  
The black bells toll unceasing in their ear,  
And on the gold sun's track  
The great world round  
Like a black ring the voice of mourning goes,  
Till even our ancient foes  
With eyes downbent, and brotherly bared head,  
Keep mourning watch with us. This is the hour  
When Love lends all his power  
To speed grief's arrows from the bow of Death,  
When sighs are idle breath,

When tears are fountains vain.  
She will not wake again,  
Not now, not here.  
O great and good and infinitely dear,  
O Mother of your people, sleep is sweet,  
No more Life's thorny ways will wound your feet.

O Mother dear, sleep sound!  
When you shall wake,  
Your brows freed from the crown that made them ache  
So many a time, and wear the heavenly crown,  
Then, then you will look down  
On us who love you, and, remembering,  
The love of earth will breathe with us our prayer,  
Our prayer prayed here, joined to your prayer prayed there:  
Who knows what radiant answer it may bring?  
'God save the King!'

The Queen is dead. God save the King!  
From all ill thought and deed,  
From heartless service and from selfish sway,  
From treason, and the vain imagining  
Of evil counsellors, and the noisome breed  
Of flatterers who eat the soul away,  
God save the King!

From loss and pain and tears  
Such as her many years  
Brought her; from battle and strife,  
And the inmost hurt of life,  
The wounds that no crown can heal,  
No ermine robes conceal,  
God save the King!

God, by our memories of his Mother's face,  
By the love that makes our heart her dwelling-place,  
Grant to our sorrow this desired grace:  
God save the King!

\* \* \* \* \*

The Queen is dead. God save the King.



This is no hour when joy has leave to sing;  
Only, amid our tears, we are bold to pray,  
More boldly, in that we pray sorrowing,  
In this most sorrowful day.  
God, who wast of a mortal Mother born,  
Who driest the tears with which Thy children mourn,  
God, save the King!

Look down on him whose crown is wet with tears  
In which its splendour fades and disappears--  
His tears, our tears, tears out of all her lands.  
The Queen is dead.  
God! strengthen the King's hands!  
God, save the King!

Edith Nesbit

# A Song For Peace And Honour

TO THE QUEEN

LADY and Queen, for whom our laurels twine,  
Upon whose head the glories of our land  
In one immortal diadem are met,  
Embodied England, in whose woman-hand  
The sceptre of Imperial sway is set,  
Receive this song of mine!  
For you are England, and her bays grow green  
To deck your brow, your goodness lends her grace,  
And in our hearts your face is as Her face;  
The Mother-Country is the Mother-Queen.

We, men of England, children of her might,  
With all our Mother's record-roll of glory,  
Great with her greatness, noble by her name,  
Drank with our mothers' milk our Mother's story,  
And in our veins the splendour of her fame  
Made strong our blood and bright;  
And to her absent sons her name has been  
Familiar music heard in distant lands,  
Heart of our heart and sinews of our hands,  
England, our Mother, our Mistress and our Queen!

Out of the thunderous echoes of the past  
Through the gold-dust of centuries we hear  
Her voice, 'O children of a royal line,  
Sons of her heart, whom England holdeth dear,  
Mine was the Past--make ye the future mine  
All glorious to the last!'  
And, as we hear her, cowards grow to men,  
And men to heroes, and the voice of fear  
Is as a whisper in a deaf man's ear,  
And the dead past is quick in us again.

Her robe is woven of glory and renown,

Hers are the golden-laden Argosies,  
And lordship of the wild and watery ways,  
Her flag is blown across the utmost seas:  
Dead nations built her throne, and kingdoms blaze  
For jewels in her crown.  
Her Empire like a girdle doth enfold  
The world; her feet upon her foes are set;  
She wears the steel-wrought, blood-bright amulet  
Won by her children in the days of old.

Yet in a treasury of such gems as these  
Which power and sovereignty and kingship fill  
To the vast limit of the circling sun,  
England, our Mother, in her heart holds still,  
As her most precious jewel, save only one,  
The priceless pearl of peace--  
Peace plucked from out the very heart of war  
Through the long agony of strenuous years,  
Made pure by blood and sanctified by tears,  
A pearl to lie where England's treasures are.

O peaceful English lanes all white with may,  
O English meadows where the grass grows tall,  
O red-roofed village, field and farm and fold  
Where the long shadows of the elm-trees fall  
On the wide pastures which the sun calls gold  
And twilit dew calls gray;--  
These are the home, the happy cradle-place  
Of every man who has our English tongue,  
Sprung from those loins from which our sires have sprung,  
Heirs of the glory of our mighty race!

Brothers, we hold the pearl of priceless worth:  
Shall Peace, our pearl, by us be cast aside?  
Is it not more to us than all things are?  
Nay, Peace is precious as the world is wide,  
But England's honour is more precious far  
Than all the heavens and earth.  
Were honour outcast from her supreme place

Our pearl of Peace no more a pearl would shine,  
But, trampled under-foot of cowards and swine,  
Rot in the mire of a deserved disgrace.

Know then, O ye our brothers over sea,  
We will not cast our pearl of Peace away,  
But, holding it, we wait; and if, at last,  
The whole world came against us in array,  
If all our glory into darkness passed,  
Our Empire ceased to be,  
Yet should we still have chosen the better part  
Though in the dust our kingdoms were cast down,  
Though lost were every jewel in our crown  
We still should wear our jewel in our heart.

So, for our Mother's honour, if it must  
Let Peace be lost, but lost the worthier way;  
Not trampled down, but given, for her sake  
Who forged of many an iron yesterday  
The golden song that gold-tongued fame shall wake  
When we are dust, in dust:  
For brotherhood and strife and praise and blame  
And all the world, even to our very land,  
Weighed in the balance, are as a grain of sand  
Against the honour of our English name!

Edith Nesbit

# A Song Of Parting

## DEDICATION

QUEEN of my Life, who gave me for my song  
The richest crown a poet ever wore,  
Since I have given you songs a whole year long,  
Stoop, of your grace, and take this one song more.

## I

It was upon a golden first June day  
I chanced to take the quiet meadow way  
The flowers and grasses met across my feet--  
Red sorrel, daisies, and pale meadow-sweet,  
With buttercup that set the field ablaze--  
The fields have no such flowers now-a-days--  
The hedges all along were pearly white;  
And there I met with Chloris, all alone,  
I drew her face to lean against my own.  
The branch of May that hid her maiden eyes  
Was scented like the rose of Paradise--  
The May-bough fell: I knew what youth was worth,  
And sunshine and the pleasant green-gowned earth,  
When first love rhymed to summer and delight.  
Yet, since my ship must sail away that day,  
Despair new-born met new-born joy half-way.  
And I, 'mid rapture and tears, found voice to say  
'Farewell--my Love--to leave you is to die,  
I never shall forget you, dear!--Good-bye!'

## II

At parting from Clarinda life was gray,  
With the cold haze of mutual weariness;  
The treasure our souls were bartered to possess,  
We saw as ashes in the cold new day,  
And only longed for leave to steal away  
And wash remembrance from our tired eyes,

To cleanse our lips of kisses and of lies,  
And to forget the barren fairy gold  
For which we had journeyed such a weary road,  
Had borne so hard a chain, so great a load,  
Yet none the less was the old story told;  
The old refrain re-iterate none the less,  
'My life's one love,' we said, with sigh for sigh,  
'I never can forget you, dear!--Good-bye!'

### III

You were so innocent, so sure, so shy,  
Life was a chart well-marked for you, you knew--  
With rocks and quicksands plainly set in view,  
And, fitly beacons by a heavenly star,  
The port you sought marked unmistakeably  
Attainable, and not so very far.  
So of your charity you chose to try  
To take a pirate bark to haven with you.  
Ah! child, I had learned to steer on other seas,  
Through other shoals--by other stars than these.  
My chart had other ports you knew not of,  
And so, one day, my black sails took the breeze,  
And, ere you knew it, I was leagues away:  
Yet not so far but you could hear me cry  
Across the waters of your sheltered bay--  
'Farewell, my child! Farewell, my only love!  
I never can forget you, dear!--Good-bye!'

### IV

When I had courted Chloe half a year  
She bade me go--she could not hold me dear,  
We parted in the orchard, very late:  
The dew lay on the white sweet clover flowers  
The moon shone through the pear-tree by the gate,  
And on the grass the blossoms fell in showers.  
'Pray Heaven,' I cried, 'to bless you--none the less  
That you have cursed my life eternally!'  
She laughed--my pretty china shepherdess,

Kissed her white hand towards the white full moon.  
'Up there,' she said, 'the folk who say farewell  
Never intone it to a funeral bell,  
But sing it to the sweet old-fashioned tune!  
Go there and learn!'--'I have learned that tune,' quoth I  
'I never can forget you, dear!--Good-bye!'

## V

In that far land where myrtles dream of love,  
Where soft winds whisper through the orange grove;  
And, 'twixt the sapphire of the seas and skies,  
The sunshine of perpetual summer lies,  
I brought white flowers to lie where Clemence lay.  
The shutters, closed, strove with the radiant day,  
And in her villa all was still and chill.  
Flowers die, they say, but these flowers never will,--  
Whenever I see a rose I smell them still;  
I laid them by her on the strait white bed:  
There were no kisses given, no tears were shed,  
And never a whisper of farewell was said;  
Yet, when they had laid her underneath the clay,  
And paid their prayers and tears, and gone their way,  
My heart stirred, and I found the old word to say--  
This time--this one time--and this last time--true:  
'White lady, my white flowers touch you where you lie,  
I never shall forget you! Dear, good-bye!'

## Envoy.

Queen of my life, and of the songs I sing,  
Whose love sets life to such a royal tune;  
This song of parting to your hands I bring,  
As I bring honour and faith and everything:  
Because I know our parting shall be soon--  
Since violets hardly live one happy moon,  
And love, full-fledged, is ready to take wing;  
But, when he flies, part we the silent way,  
And, if you ever loved me, do not say:

'Farewell, my only love--I love you still,  
I never will forget you!--For you will!

Edith Nesbit



# A Song Of Trafalgar

LIKE an angry sun, like a splendid star,  
War gleams down the long years' track;  
They strain at the leash, the dogs of war,  
And who shall hold them back?  
'Let loose the pack: we are English bred,  
We will meet them full and fair  
With the flag of England over our head,  
And his hand to keep it there!'

So spake our fathers. Our flag, unfurled,  
Blew brave to the north and south;  
An iron answer we gave the world,  
For we spoke by the cannon's mouth.  
But he who taught us the word to say  
Grew dumb as his Victory sang,  
And England mourned on her triumph day,  
And wept while her joy-bells rang.

Long hour by hour, and long day by day,  
The swift years crept apace,  
The patient, the coral-insect way,  
To cover the dear dead face.  
O foolish rabble of envious years,  
Who wist not the dead must rise,  
His name is music still in our ears,  
His face a light to our eyes!

Bring hither your laurels, the fading sign  
Of a deathless love and pride;  
These cling more close than the laurels twine,  
They are strong as the world is wide:  
At the feet of Virtue in Valour clad  
Shall glory and love be laid,  
While Glory sings to an English lad,  
Or Love to an English maid.

Wherever the gleams of an English fire  
On an English roof-tree shine,  
Wherever the fire of a youth's desire  
Is laid upon Honour's shrine,  
Wherever brave deeds are treasured and told,  
In the tale of the deeds of yore  
Like jewels of price in a chain of gold  
Are the name and the fame he bore.

Wherever the track of our English ships  
Lies white on the ocean foam,  
His name is sweet to our English lips  
As the names of the flowers at home;  
Wherever the heart of an English boy  
Grows big with a deed of worth,  
Such names as his name have begot the same,  
Such hearts will bring it to birth.

They say that his England, grown tired and old,  
Lies drunk by her heavy hoard;  
They say her hands have the grasp of the gold  
But not the grip of the sword,  
That her robe of glory is rent and shred,  
And that winds of shame blow through:  
Speak for your England, O mighty Dead,  
In the deeds you would have her do!

Small skill have we to fight with the pen  
Who fought with the sword of old,  
For the sword that is wielded of Englishmen  
Is as much as one hand can hold.  
Yet the pen and the tongue are safe to use,  
And the coward and the wise choose these;  
But fools and brave were our English crews  
When Nelson swept the seas.

'Tis the way of a statesman to fear and fret,

To ponder and pause and plan,  
But the way of Nelson was better yet,  
For that was the way of a man;  
They would teach us smoothness, who once were rough,  
They have bidden us palter and pray,  
But the way of Nelson was good enough,  
For that was the fighting way.

If Nelson's England must stoop to bear  
What never honour should brook,  
In vain does the tomb of her hero wear  
The laurel his brow forsook;  
In vain was the speech from the lips of her guns,  
If now must her lips refrain;  
In vain has she made us, her living sons,  
Her dead have made her in vain.

So here with your bays be the dear head crowned,  
Lay flowers where the dear dust lies,  
And wreath his column with laurel round  
To point his fame to the skies;  
But the greenest laurel that ever grew  
Is the laurel that's yet to win;  
Crowned with his laurels he waits for You  
To bring Your laurels in!

Edith Nesbit

# A Star In The East

FOR THE ART EXHIBITION AT ST. JUDE'S, WHITECHAPEL

LIKE a fair flower springing fresh, sweet, and bright,  
Through prison stones; or like one perfect song  
Heard in a dream on one remembered night,  
When waking worlds were dumb with grief and wrong;  
Like the one kiss that links--first kiss and last--  
The inevitable future spent apart  
With the immutable divided past:  
So in the east shines out this star of Art.

The narrow-shouldered, pale-faced girl and boy  
Nestle against Art's new-found, love-warm breast,  
And feel vague stirrings of a far-off joy,  
Which life has never for themselves possessed,  
And dimly guess at wonders hardly known--  
Even as dreams--and weep glad tears to see  
A loveliness that is at once life's own,  
And yet is something life can never be.

Not worse will work the flying busy hand  
Because the soul has drunk a cup of pleasure,  
Has picked up on its leaden-coloured strand  
Some little jewel of Art's splendid treasure,  
Nor will less work be done because men see  
That work is not the only thing in life,  
Because they have been glad at heart and free  
A little space 'mid sorrow, sin, and strife.

And this sweet draught may banish men's content?  
For this we pray and strive--not all in vain--  
That men may reach such heights of discontent  
As never to fall back to peace again  
Where no peace is--nor rest from strife and prayers,  
But tread firm-footed up the thorny way,  
Till all that spring of art and joy is theirs  
Whereof they taste so small a draught to-day.



# A Tragedy

Among his books he sits all day  
To think and read and write;  
He does not smell the new-mown hay,  
The roses red and white.

I walk among them all alone,  
His silly, stupid wife;  
The world seems tasteless, dead and done -  
An empty thing is life.

At night his window casts a square  
Of light upon the lawn;  
I sometimes walk and watch it there  
Until the chill of dawn.

I have no brain to understand  
The books he loves to read;  
I only have a heart and hand  
He does not seem to need.

He calls me "Child" - lays on my hair  
Thin fingers, cold and mild;  
Oh! God of Love, who answers prayer,  
I wish I were a child!

And no one sees and no one knows  
(He least would know or see),  
That ere Love gathers next year's rose  
Death will have gathered me.

Edith Nesbit

# Absolution

THREE months had passed since she had knelt before  
The grate of the confessional, and he,  
--The priest--had wondered why she came no more  
To tell her sinless sins--the vanity  
Whose valid reason graced her simple dress--  
The prayers forgotten, or the untold beads--  
The little thoughtless words, the slight misdeeds,  
Which made the sum of her unrighteousness.

She was the fairest maiden in his fold,  
With her sweet mouth and musical pure voice,  
Her deep grey eyes, her hair's tempestuous gold,  
Her gracious graceful figure's perfect poise.  
Her happy laugh, her wild unconscious grace,  
Her gentle ways to old, or sick, or sad,  
The comprehending sympathy she had,  
Had made of her the idol of the place.

And when she grew so silent and so sad,  
So thin and quiet, pale and hollow-eyed,  
And cared no more to laugh and to be glad  
With other maidens by the waterside--  
All wondered, kindly grieved the elders were,  
And some few girls went whispering about,  
'She loves--who is it? Let us find it out!'  
But never dared to speak of it to her.

But the priest's duty bade him seek her out  
And say, 'My child, why dost thou sit apart?  
Hast thou some grief? Hast thou some secret doubt?  
Come and unfold to me thine inmost heart.  
God's absolution can assuage all grief  
And all remorse and woe beneath the sun.  
Whatever thou hast said, or thought, or done,  
The Holy Church can give thy soul relief.'

He stood beside her, young and strong, and swayed  
With pity for the sorrow in her eyes--  
Which, as she raised them to his own, conveyed  
Into his soul a sort of sad surprise--

For in those grey eyes had a new light grown,  
The light that only bitter love can bring,  
And he had fancied her too pure a thing  
For even happy love to dare to own.

Yet all the more he urged on her--'Confess,  
And do not doubt some comfort will be lent  
By Holy Church thy penitence to bless.  
Trust her, my child.' With unconvinced consent  
She answered, 'I will come;' and so at last  
Out of the summer evening's crimson glow,  
With heart reluctant and with footsteps slow  
Into the cool great empty church she passed.

'By my own fault, my own most grievous fault,  
I cannot say, for it is not!' she said,  
Kneeling within the grey stone chapel's vault;  
And on the ledge her golden hair was spread  
Over the clasping hands that still increased  
Their nervous pressure, poor white hands and thin,  
While with hot lips she poured her tale of sin  
Into the cold ear of the patient priest.

'Love broke upon me in a dream; it came  
Without beginning, for to me it seemed  
That all my life this thing had been the same,  
And never otherwise than as I dreamed.  
I only knew my heart, entire, complete,  
Was given to my other self, my love--  
That I through all the world would gladly move  
So I might follow his adorèd feet.



'I dreamed my soul saw suddenly appear  
Immense abysses, infinite heights unknown;  
Possessed new worlds, new earths, sphere after sphere,  
New sceptres, kingdoms, crowns, became my own.  
When I had all, all earth, all time, all space,  
And every blessing, human and divine,  
I hated the possessions that were mine,  
And only cared for his beloved face.

'I dreamed that in unmeasured harmony,  
Rain of sweet sounds fell on my ravished sense,  
And thrilled my soul with swelling ecstasy,  
And rose to unimagined excellence.

And while the music bade my heart rejoice,  
And on my senses thrust delicious sway,  
I wished the perfect melody away,  
And in its place longed for his worshipped voice.

'And at the last I felt his arms enfold,  
His kisses crown my life--his whispered sighs  
Echo my own unrest--his spirit hold  
My spirit powerless underneath his eyes,  
My face flushed with new joy, and felt more fair:  
He clasped me close, and cried, 'My own, my own!'  
And then I woke in dawn's chill light, alone,  
With empty arms held out to empty air.

'I never knew I loved him till that dream  
Drew from my eyes the veil and left me wise.  
What I had thought was reverence grew to seem  
Only my lifelong love in thin disguise.  
And in my dream it looked so sinless too,  
So beautiful, harmonious, and right;  
The vision faded with the morning light,  
The love will last as long as I shall do.

'But in the world where I have wept my tears,  
My love is sinful and a bitter shame.  
How can I bear the never-ending years,  
When every night I hear him call my name?  
For though that first dream's dear delight is past,  
Yet since that night each night I dream him there  
With lips caressing on my brow and hair,  
And in my arms I hold my heaven fast!'

'Child, have you prayed against it?' 'Have I prayed?  
Have I not clogged my very soul with prayer;  
Stopped up my ears with sound of praying, made  
My very body faint with kneeling there  
Before the sculptured Christ, and all for this,  
That when my lips can pray no more, and sleep  
Shuts my unwilling eyes, my love will leap  
To dreamland's bounds, to meet me with his kiss?

'Strive against this?--what profit is the strife?  
If through the day a little strength I gain,  
At night he comes and calls me 'love' and 'wife,'  
And straightway I am all his own again.

And if from love's besieging force my fight  
Some little victory have hardly won,  
What do I gain? As soon as day is done,  
I yield once more to love's delicious might.'

'Avoid him!' 'Ay, in dewy garden walk  
How often have I strayed, avoiding him.  
And heard his voice mix with the common talk,  
Yet never turned his way. My eyes grow dim  
With weeping over what I lose by day  
And find by night, yet never have to call  
My own. O God! is there no help at all--  
No hope, no chance, and no escapeful way?'

'And who is he to whom thy love is given?'  
'What? Holy Church demands to know his name?  
No rest for me on earth, no hope of heaven  
Unless I tell it? Ah, for very shame  
I cannot--yet why not?--I will--I can!  
I have grown mad with brooding on my curse.  
Here! Take the name, no better and no worse  
My case will be. Father, thou art the man!'

An icy shock shivered through all his frame--  
An overwhelming cold astonishment;  
But on the instant the revulsion came,  
His blood felt what her revelation meant,  
And madly rushed along his veins and cried:  
'For you too life is possible, and love  
No more a word you miss the meaning of,  
But all your life's desire unsatisfied.'

Then through his being crept a new strange fear--  
Fear of himself, and through himself, for her;  
His every fibre felt her presence near,  
Disquiet in his breast began to stir.  
'Lord Christ,' his soul cried, while his heart beat fast,  
'Give strength in this, my hour of utmost need.'  
And with the prayer strength came to him indeed,  
And with calm voice he answered her at last.

'Child, go in peace! Wrestle, and watch, and pray,  
And I will spend this night in prayer for thee,  
That God will take thy strange great grief away.  
Thou hast confessed thy sin. Absolvo te.'

Silence most absolute a little while,  
Then passed the whisper of her trailing gown  
Over the knee-worn stones, and soft died down  
The dim deserted incense-memorial aisle.

She passed away, and yet, when she was gone,  
His heart still echoed her remembered sighs:  
What sin unpardonable had he done  
That evermore those grey unquiet eyes  
Floated between him and the dying day?  
How had she grown so desperately dear?  
Why did her love-words echo in his ear  
Through all the prayers he forced his lips to say?

All night he lay upon the chancel floor,  
And coiled his heart in tears and prayers, and new  
Strange longings he had never known before.  
Her very memory so thrilled him through,  
That to his being's core a shiver stole  
Of utter, boundless, measureless delight,  
Even while with unceasing desperate might  
His lips prayed for God's armour for his soul!

The moon had bathed the chancel with her light,  
But now she crept into a cloud. No ray  
Was left to break the funeral black of night  
That closely hung around the form that lay  
So tempest-tossed within, so still without.  
'God! I love her, love her, love her so!  
Oh, for one spark of heaven's fire to show  
Some way to cast this devil's passion out!

'I cannot choose but love--Thou knowest, Lord--  
Yet is my spirit strong to fly from sin,  
But oh, my flesh is weak, too weak the word  
I have to clothe its utter weakness in!  
I am Thy priest, vowed to be Thine alone,  
Yet if she came here with those love-dimmed eyes,  
How could I turn away from Paradise?  
Should I not wreck her soul, and blast my own?

'Christ, by Thy passion, by Thy death for men,

Oh, save me from myself, save her from me!  
And at the word the moon came out again  
From her cloud-palace, and threw suddenly

A shadow from the great cross overhead  
Upon the priest; and with it came a sense  
Of strength renewed, of perfect confidence  
In Him who on that cross for men hung dead.

Beneath that shadow safety seemed to lie;  
And as he knelt before the altar there,  
Beside the King of Heaven's agony  
Light seemed all pangs His priest might have to bear--  
His grief, his love, his bitter wild regret,  
Would they not be a fitting sacrifice,  
A well-loved offering, blessed in the eyes  
That never scorned a sad heart's offering yet?

But as the ghostly moon began to fade,  
And moonlight glimmered into ghostlier dawn,  
The shadow that the crucifix had made  
With twilight mixed; and with it seemed withdrawn  
The peace that with its shadowy shape began,  
And as the dim east brightened, slowly ceased  
The wild devotion that had filled the priest--  
And with full sunlight he sprang up--a man!

'Ten thousand curses on my priestly vow--  
The hated vow that held me back from thee!  
Down with the cross! no death-dark emblems now!  
I have done with death: life wakes for thee and me!  
He tore the cross from out his breast, and trod  
The sacred symbol underfoot and cried,  
'I am set free, unbound, unsanctified!  
I am thy lover--not the priest of God!'

He strode straight down the church and passed along

The grave-set garden's dewy grass-grown slope:  
The woods about were musical with song,  
The world was bright with youth, and love, and hope;  
The flowers were sweet, and sweet his visions were,  
The sunlight glittered on the lily's head  
And on the royal roses, rich and red,  
And never had the earth seemed half so fair.

Soon would he see her--soon would kneel before  
Her worshipped feet, and cry, 'I am thine own,  
As thou art mine, now, and for evermore!'  
And she should kiss the lips that had not known

The kiss of love in any vanished year.  
And as he dreamed of his secured delight,  
Round the curved road there slowly came in sight  
A mourning band, and in their midst a bier.

He hastened to pass on. Why should he heed  
A bier--a blot on earth's awakened face?  
For to his love-warm heart it seemed indeed  
That in sweet summer's bloom death had no place.  
Yet still he glanced--a pale concealing fold  
Veiled the dead, quiet face--and yet--and yet--  
Did he not know that hand, so white and wet?  
Did he not know those dripping curls of gold?

'We came to you to know what we should do,  
Father: we found her body in the stream,  
And how it happed, God knows!' One other knew--  
Knew that of him had been her last wild dream--  
Knew the full reason of that life-disdain--  
Knew how the shame of hopeless love confessed  
And unreturned had seemed to stain her breast,  
Till only death could make her clean again.

They left her in the church where sunbeams bright

Gilded the wreathèd oak and carven stone  
With golden floods of consecrating light;  
And here at last, together and alone,  
The lovers met, and here upon her hair  
He set his lips, and dry-eyed kissed her face,  
And in the stillness of the holy place  
He spoke in tones of bitter blank despair:

'Oh, lips so quiet, eyes that will not see!  
Oh, clinging hands that not again will cling!  
This last poor sin may well be pardoned thee,  
Since for the right's sake thou hast done this thing.  
Oh, poor weak heart, for ever laid to rest,  
That could no longer strive against its fate,  
For thee high heaven will unbar its gate,  
And thou shalt enter in and shalt be blessed.

'The chances were the same for us,' he said,  
'Yet thou hast won, and I have lost, the whole;  
Thou wouldst not live in sin, and thou art dead--  
But I--against thee I have weighed my soul,

And, losing thee, have lost my soul as well.  
I have cursed God, and trampled on His cross;  
Earth has no measurement for all my loss,  
But I shall learn to measure it in hell!'

Edith Nesbit

## Absolution II

UNBIND thine eyes, with thine own soul confer,  
Look on the sins that made thy life unclean,  
Behold how poor thy vaunted virtues were,  
How weak thy faith, thy deeds how small and mean,  
How far from thy high dreams thy life hath been,  
How poor thy use of all thou hast received,  
How little of all God's glory thou hast seen,  
How misconstrued that which thou hast perceived.

Turn not thine eyes away from thine unworth,  
The cup of shame drink to the bitter lees;  
And when thou art lowered to the least on earth,  
And in the dust makest common cause with these,  
Then shall kind arms enfold thee, bringing peace,  
The Earth, thy Mother, shall assuage thy pain,  
Her woods and fields, Her quiet streams and seas  
Shall touch thy soul, and make thee whole again.

But if thy heart holds fast one secret sin,  
If one vile script thy soul shrinks to erase,  
The mighty Mother cannot bring thee in  
Unto the happy, holy, healing place;  
But thou shalt weep in darkness, out of grace,  
And miss the light of beauty undefiled;  
For he who would behold Her, face to face,  
Must be in spirit as a little child.

Edith Nesbit



# Accession

ONCE I loved, and my heart bowed down,  
Subject and slave, for Love was a King;  
He sat above with sceptre and crown,  
Turning his eyes from my sorrowing.  
The laugh of a god on his lips lay light--  
His lips victorious that mocked my pain,  
And I mourned in the cold and the outer night,  
And my tears and my prayers were vain.

Now the old spell is over and done,  
Myself I wear the ermine and gold,  
My brows are crowned, I ascend the throne,  
I have taken the sceptre and orb to hold.  
I smile victorious, set far above  
The music of voices that moan and pray,  
My feet are wet with the tears of love,  
And I turn my eyes away.

Edith Nesbit

## After Death

IF we must part, this parting is the best:  
How would you bear to lay  
Your head on some warm pillow far away--  
Your head, so used to lying on my breast?

But now your pillow is cold;  
Your hands have flowers, and not my hands, to hold;  
Upon our bed the worn bride-linen lies.  
I have put the death-money upon your eyes,  
So that you should not wake up in the night.  
I have bound your face with white;  
I have washed you, yes, with water and not with tears,--  
Those arms wherein I have slept so many years,  
Those feet that hastened when they came to me,  
And all your body that belonged to me.  
I have smoothed your dear dull hair,  
And there is nothing left to say for you  
And nothing left to fear or pray for you;  
And I have got the rest of life to bear:  
Thank God it is you, not I, who are lying there.

If I had died  
And you had stood beside  
This still white bed  
Where the white, scented, horrible flowers are spread,--  
I know the thing it is,  
And I thank God that He has spared you this.  
If one must bear it, thank God it was I  
Who had to live and bear to see you die,  
Who have to live, and bear to see you dead.

You will have nothing of it all to bear:  
You will not even know that in your bed  
You lie alone. You will not miss my head  
Beside you on the pillow: you will rest  
So soft in the grave you will not miss my breast.  
But I--but I--Your pillow and your place--  
And only the darkness laid against my face,  
And only my anguish pressed against my side--

Thank God, thank God, that it was you who died!

Edith Nesbit

# After Sixty Years

RING, bells! flags, fly! and let the great crowd roar  
Its ecstasy. Let the hid heart in prayer  
Lift up your name. God bless you evermore,  
Lady, who have the noblest crown to wear  
That ever woman wore.  
A jewel, in the front of time, shall blaze  
This day, of all your days commemorate;  
With Time's white bays your brows are laureate,  
And England's love shall garland all your days.

When England's crown, to Love's acclaim, was laid  
On the soft brightness of a maiden's hair,  
Amid delight, Love trembled, half afraid,  
To give that little head such weight to bear,--  
Bind on so slight a maid  
A kingdom's purple--bid her hands hold high  
The sceptre and the heavy orb of power,  
To give to youth and beauty for a dower  
Care and a crown, sorrow and sovereignty.

But from our hearts sprang an intenser flame  
When loyal Love met tender Love half way,  
And, in love's script, wrote on the scroll of fame,  
Entwined with all the splendour of that day,  
The letters of her name.  
Then as fair roses grow 'mid leaves of green,  
Love amid loyalty grew strong and close,  
To hedge a pleasance round our Royal rose,  
Our sovereign maiden flower, our child, our Queen.

The trumpets spake--in sonorous triumph shout,  
Their speech found echo in the hundred guns;  
From countless towers the answering bells rang out,  
And England's heart spoke clamorous, through her sons,  
The exulting land throughout.  
Down streets ablaze with light the flags unfurled,

Along dark, lonely hills the joy-fires crept,  
And eager swords within their scabbards leapt  
To guard our Lady and Queen against the world.

Those swords are rusted now. Good men and true  
Dust in the dust are laid who held her dear;  
But from their grave the bright flower springs anew,  
Which for her festival we bring her here,  
The long years' meed and due;  
The bud of homage grafted on chivalry.  
God took the souls that shrined the jewel of love,  
But made their sons inheritors thereof,  
In endless gold entail of loyalty.

Time, compensating life, the fruit bestowed  
When in spent perfume passed the flower of youth;  
Her feet were set upon the upward road,  
Her face was turned towards the star of truth  
That in her soul abode.  
With youth the maid's bright brow was garlanded  
But richer crowns adorn the dear white hair;  
The gathered love of all the years lies there,  
In coronal benediction on her head.

She is of our blood, for hath not she, too, met  
The angels of delight and of despair?  
Does not she, too, remember and forget  
How bitter or how bright the lost days were?  
Her eyes have tears made wet;  
She has seen joy unveilèd even as we,  
Has laid upon cold clay the heart-warm kiss,  
She has known Sorrow for the king he is;  
She has held little children on her knee.

Mother, dear Mother, these your children rise  
And call you blessèd, and shall we not, too,  
Who are your children in the greater wise,  
And love you for our land and her for you?

The blessing sanctifies  
Your children as they breathe it at your knees,  
And, bringing little gifts from very far,  
Where the great nurseries of your Empire are,  
Your children's blessings throng from over seas.

On Love's spread wings, and over leagues of space,  
Homage is borne from far-off sun-steeped lands;  
From many a domed mysterious Eastern place,  
Where Secresy holds Time between her hands,  
The children of your race  
Reach English hands towards your English throne;  
And from the far South turn blue English eyes,  
That never saw the blue of English skies,  
Yet call you Mother, and your land their own.

Where 'mid great trees the mighty waters flow  
In arrogant submission to your sway,  
In fur of price your northern hunters go,  
And shafts of ardent greeting fly your way  
Across the splendid snow;  
And isles that with their coral, safe and small,  
Rock in the cradle of the tropic seas,  
In soft, strange speech join in the litanies  
That pride and prayer breathe at your festival.

All round the world, on every far-off sea,  
In wind-ploughed oceans and in sun-kissed bays,  
By every busy wharf and chattering quay,  
Some cantle of your Empire sails or stays--  
Flaunts your supremacy  
Against the winds of all the world, and flies  
Your flag triumphant between blue and blue,  
Blazons to sun and star the name of you,  
And spreads your glory between seas and skies,

There is no cottage garden, sunny-sweet,  
There is no pasture where our shepherds tend

Their quiet flocks, no red-roofed village street,  
But holds for you the love-wish of a friend,  
Blent with high homage meet;  
No little farm among the cornfields lone,  
No little cot upon the uplands bare,  
But hears to-day in blessing and in prayer  
One name, Victoria, and that name your own.

From the vast cities where the giant's might,  
Pauseless, resistless, moves by night and day,  
From hidden mines where day is one with night,  
From weary lives whose days and nights are grey  
And empty of delight,  
From lives that rhyme to sunshine and the spring,  
From happiness at flood and hope at ebb,  
Rose the magnificent and mingled web  
That floats, your banner, at your thanksgiving.

Throned on the surety of a splendid past,  
With present glory clothed as with the sun,  
Crowned with the future's hopes, you know at last  
What treasure from the years your life has won;  
Behold, your hands hold fast  
The moon of Empire, and its sway controls  
The tides of war and peace, while in those hands  
Lies tender homage out of all the lands  
Against whose feet your furthest ocean rolls.

How seems your life, looked back at through the years?  
Much love, much sorrow, dead desires, lost dreams,  
A great life lived out greatly; hidden tears,  
And smiles for daily wear; strong plans and schemes,  
And mighty hopes and fears;  
War in the South and murder in the East,  
And England's heart-throbs echoed by your heart  
When loss, and labour, and sorrow were her part,  
Or when Fate bade her to some flower-crowned feast.

Red battle-fields whereon your soldiers died,  
Green pastoral fields saved by the blood of these,  
Duty that bade mere sorrow stand aside,  
And love transforming anguish into ease;  
Long longing satisfied,  
Great secrets wrenched from Nature's grudging breast,  
The fruit of knowledge plucked for all to eat,--  
These have you known, Life's circle is complete,  
And, knowing these, you know what is Life's best:

The dear small secrets of our common life,  
The English woods and hills, the English home,  
The common joys and griefs of Mother and wife,  
Joy coming, going--griefs that go and come,  
Soul's peace amid world's strife;  
Hours when the Queen's cares leave the woman free;  
Dear friendships, where the friend forgets the Queen  
And stoops to wear a dearer, homelier mien,  
And be more loved than mere Queens rise to be.

And, in your hour of triumph, when you shine  
The centre of our triumph's blazing star,  
And, gazing down your long life's lustrous line,  
Behold how great your life-long glories are,  
Yet, in your heart's veiled shrine,  
No splendour of all splendours that have been  
Will brim your eyes with tremulous thanksgivings,  
But little memories of little things--  
The treasures of the woman, not the Queen.

Yet, Queen, because the love of you hath wound  
A golden girdle all about the earth,  
Because your name is as a trumpet sound  
To call toward you men of English birth  
From the world's outmost bound,  
Because old kinsmen, long estranged from home,  
Come, with old foes, to greet you, friend and kin,  
With kindly eyes behold your guests come in,  
See from afar the long procession come!



No Emperor in Rome's Imperial days  
Knew ever such a triumph day as this,  
Though captive kings bore chains along his ways,  
Though tribute from the furthest isles was his,  
With pageant and with praise.  
For you--free kings and free republics grace  
Your triumph, and across the conquered waves  
Come gifts from friends, not tributes wrung from slaves,  
And praise kneels, clothed in love, before your face.

Ring, bells! flags, fly! and let the great crowd roar  
Its ecstasy! Let the hid heart in prayer  
Lift up your name! God bless you evermore,  
Lady, who have the noblest crown to wear  
That ever monarch wore.  
For, 'mid this day's triumphal voluntaries,  
Your name shines like the splendour of the sun,  
Because your name with England's name is one,  
As Hers, thank God! is one with Liberty's.

Edith Nesbit

# Age To Youth

Sunrise is in your eyes, and in your heart  
The hope and bright desire of morn and May.  
My eyes are full of shadow, and my part  
Of life is yesterday.

Yet lend my hand your hand, and let us sit  
And see your life unfolding like a scroll,  
Rich with illuminated blazon, fit  
For your arm-bearing soul.

My soul bears arms too, but the scroll's rolled tight,  
Yet the one strip of faded brightness shown  
Proclaims that when 'twas splendid in the light  
Its blazon matched your own.

Edith Nesbit

# And The Rains Descended And The Floods Came

NOW the far waves roll nearer and more near,  
The wind's awake, the pitiless wind's awake,  
It shrieks the menace that I dare not hear,  
Soon at my feet the angry waves will break  
In desolating wrath--and here I stand  
Helpless my house is built upon the sand.

O you, whose house upon a rock is set,  
Laugh, safe and sure, at threatening wave and wind.  
You chose the better part and yet--and yet,  
There was no other ground that I could find,  
And I was weary and I longed to raise  
A house to guard my shivering nights and days.

And it was pleasant in the house I made,  
While still the floods and winds were held asleep.  
I blessed it at the dawn, at night I prayed  
As though its dear foundations had been deep  
Sunk in the rock. I whispered in surmise,  
'What if winds never wake, floods never rise?'

And now the waves are near and very near,  
And here I wait and wonder which may be  
The wave in which my house will disappear,  
My little house that loved and sheltered me,  
Where joy still sings, her garland in her hand,  
Built on the sand, oh God, built on the sand!

Edith Nesbit

# Appeal

Daphnis dearest, wherefore weave me  
Webs of lies lest truth should grieve me?  
I could pardon much, believe me:  
Dower me, Daphnis, or bereave me,  
Kiss me, kill me, love me, leave me,-  
Damn me, dear, but don't deceive me!

Edith Nesbit

# As It Is

If you and I  
Had wings to fly -  
Great wings like seagulls' wings -  
How would we soar  
Above the roar  
Of loud unneeded things!

We two would rise  
Through changing skies  
To blue unclouded space,  
And undismayed  
And unafraid  
Meet the sun face to face.

But wings we know not;  
The feathers grow not  
To carry us so high;  
And low in the gloom  
Of a little room  
We weep and say good-bye.

Edith Nesbit

# At Evening Time There Shall Be Light

THE day was wild with wind and rain,  
One grey wrapped sky and sea and shore,  
It seemed our marsh would never again  
Wear the rich robes that once it wore.  
The scattered farms looked sad and chill,  
Their sheltering trees writhed all awry,  
And waves of mist broke on the hill  
Where once the great sea thundered by.

Then God remembered this His land,  
This little land that is our own,  
He caught the rain up in His hand,  
He hid the winds behind His throne,  
He soothed the fretful waves to rest,  
He called the clouds to come away,  
And, by blue pathways, to the west,  
They went, like children tired of play.

And then God bade our marsh put on  
Its holy vestment of fine gold;  
From marge to marge the glory shone  
On lichened farm and fence and fold;  
In the gold sky that walled the west,  
In each transfigured stone and tree,  
The glory of God was manifest,  
Plain for a little child to see!

Edith Nesbit

## At Parting

Go, since you must, but, Dearest, know  
That, Honour having bid you go,  
Your honour, if your life be spent,  
Shall have a costly monument.

This heart, that fire and roses is  
Beneath the magic of your kiss,  
Shall turn to marble if you die  
And be your deathless effigy.

Edith Nesbit

## At Parting II

AND you could leave me now--  
After the first remembered whispered vow  
Which sings for ever and ever in my ears--  
The vow which God among His Angels hears--  
After the long-drawn years,  
The slow hard tears,  
Could break new ground, and wake  
A new strange garden to blossom for your sake,  
And leave me here alone,  
In the old garden that was once our own?

How should I learn to bear  
Our garden's pleasant ways and pleasant air,  
Her flowers, her fruits, her lily, her rose and thorn,  
When only in a picture these appear--  
These, once alive, and always over-dear?  
Ah--think again: the rose you used to wear  
Must still be more than other roses be  
The flower of flowers. Ah, pity, pity me!

For in my acres is no plot of ground  
Whereon could any garden site be found,  
I have but little skill  
To water weed and till  
And make the desert blossom like the rose;  
Yet our old garden knows  
If I have loved its ways and walks and kept  
The garden watered, and the pleasance swept.

Yet--if you must--go now:  
Go, with my blessing filling both your hands,  
And, mid the desert sands  
Which life drifts deep round every garden wall,  
Make your new festival  
Of bud and blossom--red rose and green leaf.  
No blight born of my grief  
Shall touch your garden, love; but my heart's prayer  
Shall draw down blessings on you from the air,  
And all we learned of leaf and plant and tree



Shall serve you when you walk no more with me  
In garden ways; and when with her you tread  
The pleasant ways with blossoms overhead  
And when she asks, 'How did you come to know  
The secrets of the ways these green things grow?'  
Then you will answer--and I, please God, hear,  
'I had another garden once, my dear'.

Edith Nesbit

# At The Feast

EVOLVING, changing, onwards still we press--  
We must advance, invent, construct, possess;  
No matter what a price we have to pay,  
We must obtain perfection, and no less--

Perfection in our luxuries, the hours,  
Fulfilled of sweetness, must be slaves of ours;  
Our air be rich with music and soft light,  
And all our halls be odorous with flowers.

How our least want may best be satisfied,  
How not a pleasure may be left untried;  
How to appease each longing and desire,  
This we have learned, and something else beside.

Yes, we have learned to know, and not to shrink  
From knowing, to what depths our brothers sink;  
And we have learned the lesson 'not to feel,'  
And we have learned the lesson 'not to think.'

We must have learned it; otherwise, to-night,  
When, sped by wine and feasting, time takes flight,  
When perfect music searches for our soul,  
And all these flowers unfold for our delight,

We should not hear the music, but, instead,  
Hear that wild, bitter, heart-sick cry for bread,  
And in the lamps that light our lavish feast,  
Should see but tapers burning for the dead.

We should not see the myriad blossoms waste,  
The bloom of them would be thrust back, displaced  
By the white faces of the starving children--

Wasted and wan, who might have been flower-faced.

Oh, not to think! To think and not to care!  
Oh, woman hearts, still do these flowers seem fair?  
Can music drown the little piteous voices?  
Can you not see the little faces there?

For 'faring sumptuously every day,'  
For raiment soft and music on our way,  
We give--the tortured lives of little children:  
For such a purchase, what a price to pay!

Edith Nesbit

# At The Gate

THE monastery towers, as pure and fair  
As virgin vows, reached up white hands to Heaven;  
The walls, to guard the hidden heart of prayer,  
Were strong as sin, and white as sin forgiven;  
And there came holy men, by world's woe driven;  
And all about the gold-green meadows lay  
Flower-decked, like children dear that keep May-holiday.

'Here,' said the Abbot, 'let us spend our days,  
Days sweetened by the lilies of pure prayer,  
Hung with white garlands of the rose of praise;  
And, lest the World should enter with her snare--  
Enter and laugh and take us unaware  
With her red rose, her purple and her gold--  
Choose we a stranger's hand the porter's keys to hold.'

They chose a beggar from the world outside  
To keep their worldward door for them, and he,  
Filled with a humble and adoring pride,  
Built up a wall of proud humility  
Between the monastery's sanctity  
And the poor, foolish, humble folk who came  
To ask for love and care, in the dear Saviour's name.

For when the poor crept to the guarded gate  
To ask for succour, when the tired asked rest,  
When weary souls, bereft and desolate,  
Craved comfort, when the murmur of the oppressed  
Surged round the grove where prayer had made her nest,  
The porter bade such take their griefs away,  
And at some other door their bane and burden lay.

'For this,' he said, 'is the white house of prayer,  
Where day and night the holy voices rise  
Through the chill trouble of our earthly air,  
And enter at the gate of Paradise.  
Trample no more our flower-fields in such wise,  
Nor crave the alms of our deep-laden bough;  
The prayers of holy men are alms enough, I trow.'

So, seeing that no sick or sorrowing folk  
Came ever to be healed or comforted,  
The Abbot to his brothers gladly spoke:  
'God has accepted our poor prayers,' he said;  
'Over our land His answering smile is spread.  
He has put forth His strong and loving hand,  
And sorrow and sin and pain have ceased in all the land.

'So make we yet more rich our hymns of praise,  
Warm we our prayers against our happy heart.  
Since God hath taken the gift of all our days  
To make a spell that bids all wrong depart,  
Has turned our praise to balm for the world's smart,  
Fulfilled of prayer and praise be every hour,  
For God transfigures praise, and transmutes prayer, to power.'

So went the years. The flowers blossomed now  
Untrampled by the dusty, weary feet;  
Unbroken hung the green and golden bough,  
For none came now to ask for fruit or meat,  
For ghostly food, or common bread to eat;  
And dreaming, praying, the monks were satisfied,  
Till, God remembering him, the beggar-porter died.

When they had covered up the foolish head,  
And on the foolish loving heart heaped clay,  
'Which of us, brothers, now,' the Abbot said,  
'Will face the world, to keep the world away?'  
But all their hearts were hard with prayer, and 'Nay,'  
They cried, 'ah, bid us not our prayers to leave;  
Ah, father, not to-day, for this is Easter Eve'.

And, while they murmured, to their midst there came  
A beggar saying, 'Brothers, peace, be still!  
I am your Brother, in our Father's name,  
And I will be your porter, if ye will,  
Guarding your gate with what I have of skill'.  
So all they welcomed him and closed the door,  
And gat them gladly back unto their prayers once more.

But, lo! no sooner did the prayer arise,

A golden flame athwart the chancel dim,  
Then came the porter crying, 'Haste, arise!  
A sick old man waits you to tend on him;  
And many wait--a knight whose wound gapes grim,  
A red-stained man, with red sins to confess,  
A mother pale, who brings her child for you to bless'.

The brothers hastened to the gate, and there  
With unaccustomed hand and voice they tried  
To ease the body's pain, the spirit's care;  
But ere the task was done, the porter cried:  
'Behold, the Lord sets your gate open wide,  
For here be starving folk who must be fed,  
And little ones that cry for love and daily bread!'

And, with each slow-foot hour, came ever a throng  
Of piteous wanderers, sinful folk and sad,  
And still the brothers ministered, but long  
The day seemed, with no prayer to make them glad;  
No holy, meditative joys they had,  
No moment's brooding-place could poor prayer find,  
Mid all those heart to heal and all those wounds to bind.

And when the crowded, sunlit day at last  
Left the field lonely with its trampled flowers,  
Into the chapel's peace the brothers passed  
To quell the memory of those hurrying hours.  
'Our holy time,' they said, 'once more is ours!  
Come, let us pay our debt of prayer and praise,  
Forgetting in God's light the darkness of man's ways!'

But, ere their voices reached the first psalm's end,  
They heard a new, strange rustling round their house;  
Then came the porter: 'Here comes many a friend,  
Pushing aside your budding orchard boughs;  
Come, brothers, justify your holy vows.  
Here be God's patient, poor, four-footed things  
Seek healing at God's well, whence loving-kindness springs.'

Then cried the Abbot in a vexed amaze,  
'Our brethren we must aid, if 'tis God's will;  
But the wild creatures of the forest ways

Himself God heals with His Almighty skill.  
And charity is good, and love--but still  
God shall not look in vain for the white prayers  
We send on silver feet to climb the starry stairs;

'For, of all worthy things, prayer has most worth,  
It rises like sweet incense up to heaven,  
And from God's hand falls back upon the earth,  
Being of heavenly bread the accepted leaven.  
Through prayer is virtue saved and sin forgiven;  
In prayer the impulse and the force are found  
That bring in purple and gold the fruitful seasons round.

'For prayer comes down from heaven in the sun  
That giveth life and joy to all things made;  
Prayer falls in rain to make broad rivers run  
And quickens the seeds in earth's brown bosom laid;  
By prayer the red-hung branch is earthward weighed,  
By prayer the barn grows full, and full the fold,  
For by man's prayer God works his wonders manifold.'

The porter seemed to bow to the reproof;  
But when the echo of the night's last prayer  
Died in the mystery of the vaulted roof,  
A whispered memory in the hallowed air,  
The Abbot turned to find him standing there.  
'Brother,' he said, 'I have healed the woodland things  
And they go happy and whole--blessing Love's ministerings,

'And, having healed them, I shall crave your leave  
To leave you--for to-night I journey far.  
But I have kept your gate this Easter Eve,  
And now your house to heaven shines like a star  
To show the Angels where God's children are;  
And in this day your house has served God more  
Than in the praise and prayer of all its years before.

'Yet I must leave you, though I fain would stay,  
For there are other gates I go to keep  
Of houses round whose walls, long day by day,  
Shut out of hope and love, poor sinners weep--  
Barred folds that keep out God's poor wandering sheep--

I must teach these that gates where God comes in  
Must not be shut at all to pain, or want, or sin.

'The voice of prayer is very soft and weak,  
And sorrow and sin have voices very strong;  
Prayer is not heard in heaven when those twain speak,  
The voice of prayer faints in the voice of wrong  
By the just man endured--oh, Lord, how long?--  
If ye would have your prayers in heaven be heard,  
Look that wrong clamour not with too intense a word.

'But when true love is shed on want and sin,  
Their cry is changed, and grows to such a voice  
As clamours sweetly at heaven to be let in--  
Such sound as makes the saints in heaven rejoice;  
Pure gold of prayer, purged of the vain alloys  
Of idleness--that is the sound most dear  
Of all the earthly sounds God leans from heaven to hear.

'Oh, brother, I must leave thee, and for me  
The work is heavy, and the burden great.  
Thine be this charge I lay upon thee: See  
That never again stands barred thy abbey gate;  
Look that God's poor be not left desolate;  
Ah me! that chidden my shepherds needs must be  
When my poor wandering sheep have so great need of me.

'Brother, forgive thy Brother if he chide,  
Thy Brother loves thee--and has loved--for see  
The nails are in my hands, and in my side  
The spear-wound; and the thorns weigh heavily  
Upon my brow--brother, I died for thee--  
For thee, and for my sheep that are astray,  
And rose to live for thee, and them, on Easter Day!'

'My Master and my Lord!' the Abbot cried.  
But, where that face had been, shone the new day;  
Only on the marble by the Abbot's side,  
Where those dear feet had stood, a lily lay--  
A lily white for the white Easter Day.  
He sought the gate--no sorrow clamoured there--  
And, not till then, he dared to sink his soul in prayer.



And from that day himself he kept the gate  
Wide open; and the poor from far and wide,  
The weary, and wicked, and disconsolate,  
Came there for succour and were not denied;  
The sick were healed, the repentant sanctified;  
And from their hearts rises more prayer and praise  
Than ever the abbey knew in all its prayer-filled days.

And there the Heavenly vision comes no more,  
Only, each Easter now, a lily sweet  
Lies white and dewy on the chancel floor  
Where once had stood the beloved wounded feet;  
And the old Abbot feels the nearing beat  
Of wings that bring him leave at last to go  
And meet his Master, where the immortal lilies grow.

Edith Nesbit

# At The Last

Where are you--you whose loving breath  
Alone can stay my soul from death?  
The world's so wide, I seek it through,  
Yet--dare I dream to win to you?  
Perhaps your dear desired feet  
Pass me in this grey muddy street.  
Your face, it may be, has its shrine  
In that dull house that's next to mine.  
But I believe, O Life, O Fate,  
That when I call on Death and wait  
One moment at the unclosing gate  
I shall turn back for one last gaze  
Along the trampled, sordid ways,  
And in the sunset see at last,  
Just as the barred gate holds me fast,  
Your face, your face, too late.

Edith Nesbit

# At The Sound Of The Drum

ARE you going for a soldier with your curly yellow hair,  
And a scarlet coat instead of the smock you used to wear?  
Are you going to drive the foe as you used to drive the plough?  
Are you going for a soldier now?

I am going for a soldier, and my tunic is of red  
And I'm tired of woman's chatter, and I'll hear the drum instead;  
I will break the fighting line as you broke your plighted vow,  
For I'm going for a soldier now.

For a soldier, for a soldier are you sure that you will go,  
To hear the drums a-beating and to hear the bugles blow?  
I'll make you sweeter music, for I'll swear another vow--  
Are you going for a soldier now?

I am going for a soldier if you'd twenty vows to make;  
You must get another sweetheart, with another heart to break,  
For I'm sick of lies and women and the harrow and the plough,  
And I'm going for a soldier now!

Edith Nesbit

# August

LEAVE me alone, for August's sleepy charm  
Is on me, and I will not break the spell;  
My head is on the mighty Mother's arm:  
I will not ask if life goes ill or well.  
There is no world!--I do not care to know  
Whence aught has come, nor whither it shall go.

I want to wander over pastures still,  
Where sheared white sheep and mild-eyed cattle graze;  
To climb the thymy, clover-covered hill,  
To look down on the valley's hot blue haze;  
And on the short brown turf for hours to lie  
Gazing straight up into the clear, deep sky,

I want to walk through crisp gold harvest fields,  
Through meadows yellowed by the August heat;  
To loiter through the cool dim wood, that yields  
Such perfect flowers and quiet so complete--  
The happy woods, where every bud and leaf  
Is full of dreams as life is full of grief.

I want to think no more of all the pain  
That in the city thrives, a poison flower--  
The eternal loss, the never-coming gain,  
The lifelong woe--the joy that lives an hour,  
Bright, evanescent as the dew that dawn  
Shows on this silent, wood-encircled lawn.

I want to pull the honey-bud that twines  
About the blackberries and gold-leaf sloes;  
To part the boughs where the rare water shines,  
Tread the soft bank whereby the bulrush grows--  
I want to be no more myself, but be  
Made one with all the beauty that I see.

Oh, happy country, myriad voiced and dear,  
I have no heart, no eyes, except for you;  
Yours are the only voices I will hear,  
Yours is the only bidding I will do:  
You bid me be at peace, and let alone  
That loud, rough world where peace is never known.

Yet through your voices comes a sterner cry,  
A voice I cannot silence if I would;  
It mars the song the lark sings to the sky,  
It breaks the changeful music of the wood.  
'Back to your post--a charge you have to keep--  
Freedom is bleeding while her soldiers sleep.'

Oh, heart of mine I have to carry here,  
Will you not let me rest a little while?--  
A space 'mid doubtful fight and doubtful fear--  
A little space to see the Mother's smile,  
To stretch my hands out to her, and possess  
No sense of aught but of her loveliness?

Ah, just this power to feel how she is fair  
Means just the power to see how foul life is.  
How can I linger in the sacred air  
And taste the pure wine of the dear sun's kiss  
When in the outer dark my brothers moan,  
Nor even guess the joys that I have known?

Back the least soldier goes! To jar and fret,  
To hope uncrowned--faith tried--love wounded sore--  
To prayers that never have been answered yet,  
To dreams that must be dreams for evermore;  
To all that, after all, is far more dear  
Than all the joys of all the changing year.

Edith Nesbit

# Autumn Song

'WILL you not walk the woods with me?  
The shafts of sunlight burn  
On many a golden-crested tree  
And many a russet fern.  
The Summer's robe is dyed anew,  
And Autumn's veil of mist  
Is gemmed with little pearls of dew  
Where first we met and kissed.'

'I will not walk the woodlands brown  
Where ghosts and mists are blown,  
But I will walk the lonely down  
And I will walk alone.

Where Night spreads out her mighty wing  
And dead days keep their tryst,  
There will I weep the woods of Spring  
Where first we met and kissed.'

Edith Nesbit

# Baby's Birthday

G.T.A.

BEFORE your life that is to come,  
Love stands with eager eyes, that vainly  
Seek to discern what gift may fit  
The slow unfolding years of it;  
And still Time's lips are sealed and dumb,  
And still Love sees no future plainly.

We cannot guess what flowers will spring  
Best in your garden, bloom most brightly;  
But some fair flowers in any plot  
Will spring and grow, and wither not;  
And such wish-flowers we gladly bring,  
And in that small hand lay them lightly.

Baby, we wish that those dear eyes  
May see fulfilment of our dreaming,  
Those little feet may turn from wrong,  
Those hands to hold the right be strong,  
That heart be pure, that mind be wise  
To know the true from the true-seeming.

We wish that all your life may be  
A life of selfless brave endeavour--  
That for reward the fates allow  
Such love as lines your soft nest now  
To warm the years for you, when we,  
Who wish you this, are cold for ever.

Edith Nesbit

# Before Winter

The wind is crying in the night,  
Like a lost child;  
The waves break wonderful and white  
And wild.  
The drenched sea-poppies swoon along  
The drenched sea-wall,  
And there's an end of summer and of song -  
An end of all.

The fingers of the tortured boughs  
Gripped by the blast  
Clutch at the windows of your house  
Closed fast.  
And the lost child of love, despair,  
Cries in the night,  
Remembering how once those windows were  
Open and bright.

Edith Nesbit



# Betrayed

I WENT back to our home to-day  
That still its robe of roses wore;  
My feet took the old easy way,  
And led me to our door.

And you are gone and never more  
Those little feet of yours will come  
To meet me at the open door,  
The threshold of our home.

The door unlatched did not protest:  
I entered, and the silence drew  
My steps towards the little nest  
That once I shared with you.

There lay your fan, your open book,  
Your seam half-sewn, and I could see  
The window whence you used to look--  
Yes, once you looked--for me.

Print of your little head caressed  
Our pillow still, and on the floor  
Still lay, dropped there when last you dressed,  
The scarf and rose you wore.

All should have spoken of you plain,  
Yet, when I bade the silence tell  
Of you, my bidding was in vain,  
I could not break its spell.

The silence would not speak, my dear,  
Till the last level light grew dim;  
Then, in the twilight I could hear;

The silence spoke--of him.

Edith Nesbit

# Birthday Talk For A Child

(IRIS.)

DADDY dear, I'm only four  
And I'd rather not be more:  
Four's the nicest age to be--  
Two and two, or one and three.

All I love is two and two,  
Mother, Fabian, Paul and you;  
All you love is one and three,  
Mother, Fabian, Paul and me.

Give your little girl a kiss  
Because she learned and told you this.

Edith Nesbit

# Bridal Eve

GOOD-NIGHT, my Heart, my Heart, good-night--  
Oh, good and dear and fair,  
With lips of life and eyes of light  
And roses in your hair.

To-morrow brings the other crown,  
The orange blossoms, Sweet,  
And then the rose will be cast down  
With lilies at your feet.

But in your soul a garden stands  
Where fair the white rose blows--  
God, teach my foolish clumsy hands  
The way to tend my rose.

That in the white-rose garden still  
The lily may bloom fair  
God help my heart and soul and will  
To keep the lily there.

Edith Nesbit

# By Faith With Thanksgiving

LOVE is no bird that nests and flies,  
No rose that buds and blooms and dies,  
No star that shines and disappears,  
No fire whose ashes strew the years:  
Love is the god who lights the star,  
Makes music of the lark's desire,  
Love tells the rose what perfumes are,  
And lights and feeds the deathless fire.

Love is no joy that dies apace  
With the delight of dear embrace--  
Love is no feast of wine and bread,  
Red-vintaged and gold-harvested:  
Love is the god whose touch divine  
On hands that clung and lips that kissed,  
Has turned life's common bread and wine  
Into the Holy Eucharist.

Edith Nesbit

# Chagrin D'Amour

IF Love and I were all alone  
I might forget to grieve,  
And for his pleasure and my own  
Might happier garlands weave;  
But you sit there, and watch us wear  
The mourning wreaths you wove:  
And while such mocking eyes you bear  
I am not friends with Love.

Withdraw those cruel eyes, and let  
Me search the garden through  
That I may weave, ere Love be set,  
The wreath of Love for you;  
Till you, whom Love so well adorns,  
Its hidden thorns discover,  
And know at last what crown of thorns  
It was you gave your lover.

Edith Nesbit

# Chains Invisible

THE lilies in my garden grow,  
Wide meadows ring my garden round,  
In that green copse wild violets blow,  
And pale, frail cuckoo flowers are found.  
For all you see and all you hear,  
The city might be miles away,  
And yet you feel the city near  
Through all the quiet of the day.

Sweet smells the earth--wet with sweet rain--  
Sweet lilac waves in moonlight pale,  
And from the wood beyond the lane  
I hear the hidden nightingale.  
Though field and wood about me lie,  
Hushed soft in dew and deep delight,  
Yet can I hear the city's sigh  
Through all the silence of the night.

For me the skylark builds and sings,  
For me the vine her garland weaves;  
The swallow folds her glossy wings  
To build beneath my cottage eaves.  
But I can feel the giant near,  
Can hear his slaves by daylight weep,  
And when at last the night is here,  
I hear him moaning in his sleep.

Oh! for a little space of ground,  
Though not a flower should make it gay,  
Where miles of meadows wrapped me round,  
And leagues and leagues of silence lay.  
Oh! for a wind-lashed, treeless down,  
A black night and a rising sea,  
And never a thought of London town,  
To steal the world's delight from me.





# Children's Playground In The City

THIS is a place where men laid their dead,  
Each with his life-tale of good or ill;  
Here prayers were murmured and hot tears shed,  
And passionate anguish moaned its fill.  
Silent now is each voice that cried,  
And the tears that were wept have all been dried  
In the dust; and dust are the hearts that bled  
With hopeless longing for hearts grown still.

Dead and forgotten! for Death, requiter  
Of love, taught Memory how to forget!  
The love that remembered them died. Grow brighter,  
Oh, dim grave-garden, with dead hearts set!  
Room for the small flying feet to pass,  
The feet of the children over the grass!  
The dead, if they knew it, would feel them lighter  
Than the weight of a stone that no tears make wet.

We must die too, and the grief that will live  
Must die as surely--death comes to all;  
But you who come after--let Nature give  
To our graves her tears, to our dust her pall:  
Let her hide us away in her cold broad breast,  
Let us be forgotten, and be at rest,  
And over our heads let the great world strive,  
And the children's voices carol and call.

If your heart on the flower of remembrance is set,  
There is one way to pluck it--and only one:  
Dare you ask your country not to forget  
A name that needs to be graved on stone?  
By grief, strife, sacrifice, scorn of fame,  
You may grave on the people's hearts your name,  
Or your name may die, and your soul live yet  
In the cause you died for--the work you have done.



# Child's Song In Spring

The Silver Birch is a dainty lady,  
She wears a satin gown;  
The elm tree makes the old churchyard shady,  
She will not live in town.

The English oak is a sturdy fellow,  
He gets his green coat late;  
The willow is smart in a suit of yellow  
While brown the beech trees wait.

Such a gay green gown God gives the larches-  
As green as he is good!  
The hazels hold up their arms for arches,  
When spring rides through the wood.

The chestnut's proud, and the lilac's pretty,  
The poplar's gentle and tall,  
But the plane tree's kind to the poor dull city-  
I love him best of all!

Edith Nesbit

# Chloe

NIGHT wind sighing through the poplar leaves,  
Trembling of the aspen, shivering of the willow,  
Every leafy voice of all the night-time grieves,  
Mourning, weeping over Chloe's pillow.

Chloe, fresher than the breeze of dawn,  
Fairer than the larches in their young spring glory,  
Brighter than the glow-worms on the dewy lawn,  
Hear the dirge the green trees sing to end your story:--

'Chloe lived and Chloe loved: she brought new gladness,  
Hope and life and all things good to all who met her;  
Only, dying, wept to know the lifelong sadness  
Willed, against her will, to those who can't forget her.'

Edith Nesbit

# Christmas

WITH garlands to grace it, with laughter to greet it,  
Christmas is here, holly-red and snow-white,  
Hung round with quaint legends, and old-as-life stories  
Of mystical beauty and lifelong delight;  
With dreams of the Christ-child, with Santa Claus fables,  
Without doubts to trouble or questions to break  
The absolute faith in the triumph of goodness,  
In God and in nature on guard for its sake;  
Without fear of death, with no memories of grief,  
Believing life clear as our cloudless belief;  
What wonder if rose-coloured Christmas appear  
As the happiest day of our happy child year?

With the swiftness of thought, with the spring's incompleteness,  
Childhood has passed, and its place is filled up;  
Hope suns our youth into midsummer sweetness,  
And the roses of love wreath our life's golden cup.  
We shall do--we shall dare--and our faith has no limit,  
Wrong must go down 'neath the sword of the right  
And life is so joyous, and may be so glorious,  
And day looks so long, and so distant the night.  
We love--there are chances--and if we should meet  
The woman who holds all our heart at her feet  
At Christmas--would that not make Christmas more dear  
Than all other days of our love-lightened year?

With the sadness of tears, with the speed of the swallow,  
Youth has gone by, and its hope and its faith;  
Love has grown into grief, and remembrance is anguish,  
And down the dim years sound the footsteps of death.  
There sit at our feast (for we still hold our revels)  
The phantom of hope and the spectre of truth.  
This life we believed in--how has it rewarded  
The passionate faith of our long-ago youth?  
Our hearth is deserted--our Christmas Day seems  
But the ghost of a day from a lifetime of dreams.  
Oh, lost voices that call us--we hear you--we hear!

Oh, most desolate day of our desolate year!

Edith Nesbit

# Christmas Hymn

O CHRIST, born on the holy day,  
I have no gift to give my King;  
No flowers grow by my weary way;  
I have no birthday song to sing.

How can I sing Thy name and praise,  
Who never saw Thy face divine;  
Who walk in darkness all my days,  
And see no Eastern stars a-shine?

Yet, when their Christmas gifts they bring,  
How can I leave Thy praise unsung?  
How stay from homage to the King,  
And hold a silent, grudging tongue?

Lord, I found many a song to sing,  
And many a humble hymn of praise  
For Thy great Miracle of Spring,  
The wonder of the waxing days.

When I beheld Thy days and years,  
Did I not sing Thy pleasant earth?  
The moons of love, the years of tears,  
The mysteries of death and birth?

Have I not sung with all my soul  
While soul and song were mine to yield,  
Thy lightning crown, Thy cloud-control,  
The dewy clover of Thy field?

Have I not loved Thy birds and beasts,  
Thy streams and woods, Thy sun and shade;  
Have I not made me holy feasts

Of all the beauty Thou hast made?

What though my tear-tired eyes, alas!  
Won never grace Thy face to see?  
I heard Thy footstep on the grass,  
Thy voice in every wind-blown tree.

No music now I make or win,  
Yet, Lord, remember I have been  
The lover of Thy world, wherein  
I found nought common or unclean.

Grown old and blind, I sing no more,  
Thy saints in heaven sing sweet and strong,  
Yet take the songs I made of yore  
For echoes to Thy birthday song.

Edith Nesbit



# Christmas Roses

THE summer roses all are gone--  
Dead, laid in shroud of rain-wet mould;  
And passion's lightning time is done,  
And Love is laid out white and cold.  
Summer and youth for us are dead,  
What do old age and winter bring instead?

They bring us memories of old years,  
And Christmas roses, cold and sweet,  
Which, washed by not unhappy tears,  
I bring and lay beside your feet,  
With gifts that come with flowers like these--  
Friendship, remembrance of our past, and peace!

Edith Nesbit

# Compensation

LADY, I see you every day--  
More than your other lovers do;  
I sit beside you at the Play,  
And in the Park I ride with you.

Through picture shows with you I roam  
With you I shop and dance and dine;  
I know the hours when you're 'at home'  
To no one else's knock but mine.

And yet so near and yet so far,  
I scarce dare look at you, for fear  
I should remark, 'How sweet you are,  
How charming, and how very dear!'

I dare not touch that hand of yours,  
Or lend my voice a tender tone;  
I know my state of grace endures  
By fasting and by prayer alone.

But, in my lonely dreamlit nights,  
I kiss your hands, your lips, your eyes;  
For absence grants me all the rights  
Your presence evermore denies.

Edith Nesbit

# Cul-De-Sac

COULD I hope that when the brain,  
Tired of questions answerless,  
Shall slip off the bonds of pain  
That enslave it and possess,  
I should know how little worth  
Were the little things of earth.

'Does it matter,' could I say,  
'Whether she were false or true?  
Whether life was gold or grey?  
Whether skies were grey or blue?  
All this matters less, it seems,  
Than the threads of broken dreams.'

We may long to rest from strife,  
Cease to question or to grieve;  
But the sharpest ills of life  
Nothing will reverse, retrieve;  
For when we at last have rest,  
We shall know not we are blest.

While we know, we have the ache;  
Consciousness with pain will cease.  
Sleep's joy comes not while we wake--  
Night of life means dawn of peace,  
But of peace which cannot be  
Ever known by her or me.

Bow the back beneath the cross,  
Stagger on a few steps more,  
Bear the doubt, the strain, the loss,  
As we had to do before!  
When at last the burdens fall,  
We shall know it not at all.



# Day And Night

NIGHT, ambushed in the darkling wood,  
Waited to seize the sleeping field,  
His sentinels the pine trees stood  
Till the sun fell beneath his shield.  
Then when the day at last was dead,  
Night, in his might, marched conquering  
Across the land his banner spread  
And reigned as victor and as King.

And you and I--all days apart  
Rejoiced to see Night's victory,  
Because he has a kindlier heart  
Than Day wears with his sovereignty:  
Day keeps us prisoned close, but Night  
Lifts off Day's chains, and all night through  
You dream of me, my life's delight,  
And all night through I dream of you.

Edith Nesbit

# De Profundis

NOW I am cast into the serpent pit  
And, catching difficult breath  
From the writhing, loathsome, ceaseless stir of it,  
The venomous whispers of curling, clasping Death,  
I lift my soul out of the pit to Thee  
And reaching with my soul to where Thou art  
Look down, seeing with free heart  
The beast God gave my soul for company  
Lie with companions fit;  
And bid, with a good will,  
The serpent-fangs of ill  
Take their foul fill  
Of the foul fell it wore.  
Though a thousand serpent heads were raised to slay,  
A thousand twisting coils writhed where it lay,  
There lies the beast, there let it lie for me  
And agonize and rave;  
For Thou has raised my soul, Thy soul, to Thee!  
Thy soul, dear Lord, Thou hast been strong to save!

Edith Nesbit

# Death

NEVER again:

No child shall stir the inmost heart of her  
And teach her heaven by that first faint stir;  
No little lips shall lie against her breast  
Save the cold lips that now lie there at rest;  
No little voice shall rouse her from her sleep  
And bid her wake to pain:  
Her sleep is calm and deep,  
Call not! refrain.

Close in her arm  
As though even death drew back before the face  
Of Motherhood in this white stilly place,  
The gathered bud lies waxen white and cold,  
As ever a flower your winter gardens hold.  
She bore the pain, she never wore the crown,  
She worked the bitter charm,  
But all she won thereby is here laid down  
Renounced--for good or harm.

Dream? Feed your soul  
With dreams, while we must starve our hearts on clay,  
Dream of a glorious white-winged sun-crowned day  
When you shall see her once more face to face  
Beside Christ's Mother in the blessed place!  
But while you dream, they carry her from here,  
The black bells toll and toll.  
Oh God! if only she cannot see or hear,  
Not hear those ghoulish bells that crowd so near,  
Not see that cold clay hole.

Edith Nesbit

# Despair

SMILE on me, mouth of red--so much too red,  
Shine on me, eyes which darkened lashes shade,  
Turn, turn my way, oh glorious golden head,  
My soul is lost, then let the price be paid!  
Amid rich flowers your rosy lamplight gleams,  
Amid rich hangings pass your scented hours,  
And woods and fields are green but in my dreams,  
And only in my dreams grow meadow-flowers.

I have forgotten everything but you--  
The apple orchard where the whitethroat sings,  
The quiet fields, the moonlight, and the dew,  
The virgin's bower that in wet hedgerow clings.  
I have forgotten how the cool grass waves  
Where clean winds blow, and where good women pray  
For happy, honest men, safe in their graves;  
And--oh, my God! I would I were as they!

Edith Nesbit



# Discretion

AH, turn your pretty eyes away!  
You would not have me love again?  
Love's pleasure does not live a day,  
Immortal is Love's pain,  
And I am tired of pain.

I have loved once--aye, once or twice;  
The pleasure died, the pain lives here;  
I will not look in your sweet eyes,  
I will not love you, Dear,  
Lest you should grow too dear.

For I am weary and afraid.  
Have I not seen why life was fair,  
And known how good a world God made,  
How sweet the blossoms were,  
How dear the green fields were?

And I have found how life was gray,  
A mist-hung road, a quest in vain,  
Until once more Love smiled my way  
And fooled me once again,  
And taught me grief again.

Now I will gather no more grief;  
I only ask to see the sky,  
The budding flower, the budding leaf,  
And put old dreamings by,  
The dreams Love tortures by.

For, being wise, I love no more;  
You, if you will, snare with those eyes  
Some fool who never loved before,  
And teach him to be wise!

For why should you be wise?

Edith Nesbit

## Dream-Dew

WHITE bird of love, lie warm upon my breast,  
White flower of love, lie cool against my face!  
Teach me to dream again a little space  
Ere this dream, too, sink earthward with the rest.

Teach me to dream my heart still pure as snow,  
Teach me to dream my lips deserve this grace:  
Then let me wake in some forgotten place,  
And know you gone, but never see you go.

Edith Nesbit

# Ebb-Tide

NOW the vexed clouds, wind-driven, spread wings of white,  
Long leaning wings across the sea and land.  
The waves creep back bequeathing to our sight  
The treasure-house of their deserted sand,  
And where the nearer waves curl white and low,  
Knee-deep in swirling brine the slow-foot shrimpers go.

Pale breadth of sand, where clamorous gulls confer,  
Marked with broad arrows by their planted feet;  
White rippled pools, where late deep waters were  
And ever the white waves marshalled in retreat  
And the grey wind in sole supremacy  
O'er opal and amber cold of darkening sky and sea.

Edith Nesbit

# En Tout Cas

WHEN I am glad I need your eyes  
To be the stars of Paradise;  
Your lips to be the seal of all  
The joy life grants, and dreams recall;  
Your hand, to lie my hands between  
What time we walk the garden green.

But most in grief I need your face  
To lean to mine in the desert place;  
Your lips to mock the evil years,  
To sweeten me my cup of tears,  
Your eyes to shine, in cloud's despite,  
Your hands to hold mine through the night.

Edith Nesbit

# England

Shoulders of upland brown laid dark to the sunset's bosom,  
Living amber of wheat, and copper of new-ploughed loam,  
Downs where the white sheep wander, little gardens in blossom,  
Roads that wind through the twilight up to the lights of home.

Lanes that are white with hawthorn, dykes where the sedges shiver,  
Hollows where caged winds slumber, moorlands where winds wake free,  
Sowing and reaping and gleaning, spring and torrent and river,  
Are they not more, by worlds, than the whole of the world can be?

Is there a corner of land, a furze-fringed rag of a by-way,  
Coign of your foam-white cliffs or swirl of your grass-green waves,  
Leaf of your peaceful copse, or dust of your strenuous highway,  
But in our hearts is sacred, dear as our cradles, our graves?  
Is not each bough in your orchards, each cloud in the skies above you,  
Is not each byre or homestead, furrow or farm or fold,  
Dear as the last dear drops of the blood in the hearts that love you,  
Filling those hearts till the love is more than the heart can hold?

Edith Nesbit

# Entreaty

O LOVE, let us part now!  
Ours is the tremulous, low-spoken vow,  
Ours is the spell of meeting hands and eyes.  
The first, involuntary, sacred kiss  
Still on our lips in benediction lies.  
O Love, be wise!  
Love at its best is worth no more than this--  
Let us part now!

O Love, let us part now!  
Ere yet the roses wither on my brow,  
Ere yet the lilies wither in your breast,  
Ere the implacable hour shall flower to bear  
The seeds of deathless anguish and unrest.  
To part is best.  
Between us still the drawn sword flameth fair--  
Let us part now!

Edith Nesbit

## Envoys

BROWN leaves forget the green of May,  
The earth forgets the kiss of Spring;  
And down our happy woodland way  
Gray mists go wandering.

You have forgotten too, they say;  
Yet, does no stealthy memory creep  
Among the mist wreaths, ghostly gray,  
Where spell-bound violets sleep?

Ah, send your thought sometimes to stray  
By paths that knew our lingering feet.  
My thought walks there this many a day,  
And they, at least, may meet.

Edith Nesbit



## Evening Prayer

NOT to the terrible God, avenging, bright,  
Whose altars struck their roots in flame and blood,  
Not to the jealous God, whose merciless might  
The infamy of unclean years withstood;  
But to the God who lit the evening star,  
Who taught the flower to blossom in delight,  
Who taught His world what love and worship are  
We pray, we two, to-night.

To no vast Presence too immense to love,  
To no enthronèd King too great to care,  
To no strange Spirit human needs above  
We bring our little, intimate, heart-warm prayer;  
But to the God who is a Father too,  
The Father who loved and gave His only Son  
We pray across the cradle, I and you,  
For ours, our little one!

Edith Nesbit

# Evening Song

WHEN all the weary flowers,  
Worn out with sunlit hours,  
Droop o'er the garden beds  
Their little sleepy heads,  
The dewy dusk on quiet wings comes stealing;  
And, as the night descends,  
The shadows troop like friends  
To bring them healing.

So, weary of the light  
Of life too full and bright,  
We long for night to fall  
To wrap us from it all;  
Then death on dewy wings draws near and holds us,  
And like a kind friend come  
To children far from home,  
With love enfolds us.

But when the night is done,  
Fresh to the morning sun,  
Their little faces yet  
With night's sweet dewdrops wet,  
The flowers awake to the new day's new graces;  
And we, ah! shall we too  
Turn to the daydawn new  
Our tear-wet faces?

Edith Nesbit

# Faith

A wall  
Gray and tall,  
And a sky of gray,  
And a twilight cold;  
And that is all  
That my eyes behold.  
But I know that unseen,  
Beyond the wall,  
On a lawn of green  
White blossoms fall  
In the waning light;  
And beyond the lawn  
Curtains are drawn  
From windows bright.  
And within she moves with her gracious hands  
And the heart that loves and that understands,  
Waiting to succour poor souls in need,  
And to bind with her blessing the hearts that bleed.

I know it all, though I cannot see;  
But the tired-out tramp,  
Dirty and ill,  
In the evening's damp,  
In the Spring's clean chill,  
Knows not that there  
Is the heart to care  
For such as I and for such as he.  
He slouches along, and sees alone  
The gray of the sky and the gray of the stone.

Lord, when my eyes see nothing but grey  
In all Thy world that is now so green,  
I will bethink me of this spring day  
And the house of welcome, known yet unseen;  
The wall that conceals  
And the faith that reveals.

Edith Nesbit

## Faith II

THROUGH the long night, the deathlong night,  
Along the dark and haunted way,  
I knew your hidden face was bright--  
More bright than any day.

And when the faint, insistent moan  
Rose from some weed-grown wayside grave,  
I said, 'I do not walk alone;  
'Tis easy to be brave.

I never turned to speak with you,  
For all the way was dark and long,  
But all the shadows' menace through  
Your silence was my song.

I never sought to take your hand,  
For all the way was long and rough;  
I taught my soul to understand  
That love was strength enough.

Then, suddenly, the ghosts drew near,  
A ghastly, gliding, tomb-white band;  
I called aloud for you to hear,  
My hand besought your hand.

No voice, no touch--the thin ghosts glide  
Where in my dream I dreamed you were--  
Night, night, you are not by my side,  
You never have been there!

Edith Nesbit

## Faute De Mieux

WHEN the corn is green and the poppies red  
And the fields are crimson with love-lies-bleeding,  
When the elms are black deep overhead  
And the shade lies cool where the calves are feeding,  
When the blackbird whistles the song of June,  
When kine knee-deep in the pond are drowsing,  
Leave pastoral peace--come up through the noon  
To the high chalk downs where the sheep are browsing.

Oh! sweet to dream in the noontide heat,  
On the scented bed of thyme and clover,  
With the air from the sea, blown keen and sweet,  
And the wings of the wide sky folded over,  
While, far in the blue, the skylark sings,  
Renounce desire and renounce endeavour,  
Forget life's little unworthy things  
And dream that the dream will last for ever.

The love of your life, in your heart's hid shrine,  
With its gifts and its torments, leave it sighing,  
And I will bury the pain of mine  
In the selfsame grave where its joy is lying.  
Let me hold your hand for a quiet hour  
In the wild thyme's scent and the clear blue weather,  
Then come what may, we have plucked one flower,  
This hour on the downs alone together.

Edith Nesbit

# Fear

If you were here,  
Hopes, dreams, ambitions, faith would disappear,  
Drowned in your eyes; and I should touch your hand,  
Forgetting all that now I understand.  
For you confuse my life with memories  
Of unrememberable ecstasies  
Which were, and are not, and can never be; . . .  
Ah! keep the whole earth between you and me.

Edith Nesbit

# February

THE trees stand brown against the gray,  
The shivering gray of field and sky;  
The mists wrapt round the dying day  
The shroud poor days wear as they die:  
Poor day, die soon, who lived in vain,  
Who could not bring my Love again!

Down in the garden breezes cold  
Dead rustling stalks blow chill between;  
Only, above the sodden mould,  
The wallflower wears his heartless green  
As though still reigned the rose-crowned year  
And summer and my Love were here.

The mists creep close about the house,  
The empty house, all still and chill;  
The desolate and trembling boughs  
Scratch at the dripping window sill:  
Poor day lies drowned in floods of rain,  
And ghosts knock at the window pane.

Edith Nesbit

# Flower Of Aloe

HOW can I tell you how I love you, dear?  
There is no music now the world is old;  
The songs have all been sung, the tales all told  
Broken the vows are all this many a year.

Had we but met when all the world was new,  
When virgin blossoms decked untrodden fields,  
I had plucked all the buds that summer yields  
And woven a garland, worthy even of you.

Or had I sung when rhymes were yet unwed,  
And crowned their marriage in the songs I made,  
I had laid them down before you unafraid,  
Meet offering to your grace and goodlihead.

But all the dreams are dreamed, and no new heat  
Touches life's altars, all the scents are burnt,  
The truths all taught and all the lessons learnt,  
And no new stars lead kings to kiss Love's feet.

For now in this grey world, of youth bereft,  
Love has no throne, no sceptre and no crown;  
His groves are hushed, his altars are cast down,  
And we who worship--we have nothing left.

And yet--your lips ! The God has built him there  
An altar which has known nor flower nor flame:  
There may we burn the incense to Love's name,  
There the immortal virgin rose be fair.

So--since my lips have known but one desire,  
And all my flowers of life are vowed to you--  
For us, at least, the old world has something new:  
For me the altar--and for you the fire!





## For Dolly -- Who Does Not Learn Her Lessons

You see the fairies dancing in the fountain,  
Laughing, leaping, sparkling with the spray;  
You see the gnomes, at work beneath the mountain,  
Make gold and silver and diamonds every day;  
You see the angels, sliding down the moonbeams,  
Bring white dreams like sheaves of lilies fair;  
You see the imps, scarce seen against the moonbeams,  
Rise from the bonfire's blue and liquid air.

All the enchantment, all the magic there is  
Hid in trees and blossoms, to you is plain and true.  
Dewdrops in lupin leaves are jewels for the fairies;  
Every flower that blows is a miracle for you.  
Air, earth, water, fire, spread their splendid wares for you.  
Millions of magics beseech your little looks;  
Every soul your winged soul meets, loves you and cares for you.  
Ah! why must we clip those wings and dim those eyes with books?

Soon, soon enough the magic lights grow dimmer,  
Marsh mists arise to cloud the radiant sky,  
Dust of hard highways will veil the starry glimmer,  
Tired hands will lay the folded magic by.  
Storm winds will blow through those enchanted closes,  
Fairies be crushed where weed and briar grow strong . . .  
Leave her her crown of magic stars and roses,  
Leave her her kingdom--she will not keep it long!

Edith Nesbit

# For The New Year

FLUSHED with a crimson sunrise beauty,  
The fair new year its promise gave;  
Such dreams we had of love, of duty,  
Of heights to scale, of foes to brave!  
Oh, how hope's fire our future lighted--  
How much to do, how much to know,  
Yet on its brink we shrank affrighted  
A year ago.

And now the year is done--its pleasure  
So brief, so bright--its hours of pain;  
Some moments' memories we treasure,  
Some recollections loathe in vain.  
Oh, for a brain where could not waken  
Remembrances of purpose crossed,  
Of trusts abandoned, aims forsaken,  
And chances lost!

The changing seasons thrust upon us  
Another year, fair-faced and new;  
What evil have the old years done us  
That this in its turn will not do?  
This, too, will die, and leave us grieving  
For all the ills its arms enfold--  
For faiths betrayed, for friends deceiving,  
And love grown cold.

We have been fooled. The hopes that fooled us--  
We know them now--have been a lie;  
The star that led, the light that ruled us--  
We scorn them, and we pass them by.  
Shut out hope's light; past is the season  
When rose-red glow seemed good to see.  
Look--by the cold white light of reason,  
These things shall be:

A long, dim vista, blank and dreary--  
The same hard failure, small success;  
The same tired heart, the brain still weary  
Of its intense self-consciousness;  
The old despair, the old repining,  
And, through the future's deepest night,  
Down life's untrodden ways still shining,  
The old hope's light!

Edith Nesbit

## From The Italian

AS a little child whom his mother has chidden,  
Wrecked in the dark in a storm of weeping,  
Sleeps with his tear-stained eyes closed hidden  
And, with fists clenched, sobs still in his sleeping,

So in my breast sleeps Love, O white lady,  
What does he care though the rest are playing,  
With rattles and drums in the woodlands shady,  
Happy children, whom Joy takes maying!

Ah, do not wake him, lest you should hear him  
Scolding the others, breaking their rattles,  
Smashing their drums, when their play comes near him--  
Love who, for me, is a god of battles!

Edith Nesbit

# From The Portuguese

I

When I lived in the village of youth  
There were lilies in all the orchards,  
Flowers in the orange-gardens  
For brides to wear in their hair.  
It was always sunshine and summer,  
Roses at every lattice,  
Dreams in the eyes of maidens,  
Love in the eyes of men.

When I lived in the village of youth  
The doors, all the doors, stood open;  
We went in and out of them laughing,  
Laughing and calling each other  
To shew each other our fairings,  
The new shawl, the new comb, the new fan,  
The new rose, the new lover.

Now I live in the town of age  
Where are no orchards, no gardens.  
Here, too, all the doors stand open,  
But no one goes in or goes out.  
We sit alone by the hearthstone  
Where memories lie like ashes  
Upon a hearth that is cold;

And they from the village of youth  
Run by our doorsteps laughing,  
Calling, to shew each other  
The new shawl, the new comb, the new fan,  
The new rose, the new lover.

Once we had all these things -  
We kept them from the old people,  
And now the young people have them  
And will not shew them to us -  
To us who are old and have nothing  
But the white, still, heaped-up ashes

On the hearth where the fire went out  
A very long time ago.

## II

I had a mistress; I loved her.  
She left me with memories bitter,  
Corroding, eating my heart  
As the acid eats into the steel  
Etching the portrait triumphant.  
Intolerable, indelible,  
Never to be effaced.

A wife was mine to my heart,  
Beautiful flower of my garden,  
Lily I worshipped by day,  
Scented rose of my nights.  
Now the night wind sighing  
Blows white rose petals only  
Over the bed where she sleeps  
Dreamless alone.

I had a son; I loved him.  
Mother of God, bear witness  
How all my manhood loved him  
As thy womanhood loved thy Son!  
When he was grown to his manhood  
He crucified my heart,  
And even as it hung bleeding  
He laughed with his bold companions,  
Mocked and turned away  
With laughter into the night.

Those three I loved and lost;  
But there was one who loved me  
With all the fire of her heart.  
Mine was the sacred altar  
Where she burnt her life for my worship.  
She was my slave, my servant;  
Mine all she had, all she was,  
All she could suffer, could be.  
That was the love of my life,

I did not say, 'She loves me';  
I was so used to her love  
I never asked its name,  
Till, feeling the wind blow cold  
Where all the doors were left open,  
And seeing a fireless hearth  
And the garden deserted and weed-grown  
That once was full of flowers for me,  
I said, 'What has changed? What is it  
That has made all the clocks stop?'  
Thus I asked and they answered:  
'It is thy mother who is dead.'

And now I am alone.  
My son, too, some day will stand  
Here, where I stand and weep.  
He too will weep, knowing too late  
The love that wrapped round his life.  
Dear God spare him this:  
Let him never know how I loved him,  
For he was always weak.  
He could not endure as I can.  
Mother, my dear, ask God  
To grant me this, for my son!

Edith Nesbit



## From The Tuscan

WHEN in the west the red sun sank in glory,  
The cypress trees stood up like gold, fine gold;  
The mother told her little child the story  
Of the gold trees the heavenly gardens hold.

In golden dreams the child sees golden rivers,  
Gold trees, gold blossoms, golden boughs and leaves,  
Without, the cypress in the night wind shivers,  
Weeps with the rain and with the darkness grieves.

Edith Nesbit

# Ghosts

YES--kiss my forehead where the pain  
Is grinding outwards from my brain!  
But will not pity teach you, too,  
To kiss these lips no fire burns through--  
These cheeks, made colourless and thin  
By years you had no portion in--  
These weary eyes that wake and ache  
Not for your sake--not for your sake:  
Kiss, child, and let your kisses see  
If they can find the heart in me!  
There is a heart--or used to be!

I think the pain is growing less  
Under your passionless caress--  
Ah! could you teach my lips to crave  
But just such kisses as you gave,  
And could you, treading my life's ways,  
But lay these ghosts of dear dead days  
That walk my world by day and night,  
And bar the way of all delight--  
If at your touch should waken--.. . . Vain!  
From heaven itself my soul would plain:  
'Give me my ghosts, my ghosts again!'

Edith Nesbit

# Gratitude

I found a starving cat in the street:  
It cried for food and a place by the fire.  
I carried it home, and I strove to meet  
The claims of its desire.

And since its desire was a little fish,  
A little hay and a little milk,  
I gave it cream in a silver dish  
And a basket lined with silk.

And when we came to the grateful pause  
When it should have fawned on the hand that fed,  
It turned to a devil all teeth and claws,  
Scratched me and bit me and fled.

To pay for the fish and the milk and the hay  
With a purr had been an easy task:  
But its hate and my blood were required to pay  
For the gifts that it did not ask.

Edith Nesbit

# Gretna Green

Last night when I kissed you,  
My soul caught alight;  
And oh! how I missed you  
The rest of the night -  
Till Love in derision  
Smote sleep with his wings,  
And gave me in vision  
Impossible things.

A night that was clouded,  
Long windows asleep;  
Dark avenues crowded  
With secrets to keep.  
A terrace, a lover,  
A foot on the stair;  
The waiting was over,  
The lady was there.

What a flight, what a night!  
The hoofs splashed and pounded.  
Dark fainted in light  
And the first bird-notes sounded.  
You slept on my shoulder,  
Shy night hid your face;  
But dawn, bolder, colder,  
Beheld our embrace.

Your lips of vermilion,  
Your ravishing shape,  
The flogging postillion,  
The village agape,  
The rattle and thunder  
Of postchaise a-speed . . .  
My woman, my wonder,  
My ultimate need!

We two matched for mating  
Came, handclasped, at last,  
Where the blacksmith was waiting

To fetter us fast . . .  
At the touch of the fetter  
The dream snapped and fell -  
And I woke to your letter  
That bade me farewell.

Edith Nesbit

# Haunted

THE house is haunted; when the little feet  
Go pattering about it in their play,  
I tremble lest the little one should meet  
The ghosts that haunt the happy night and day.

And yet I think they only come to me;  
They come through night of ease and pleasant day  
To whisper of the torment that must be  
If I some day should be, alas! as they.

And when the child is lying warm asleep,  
The ghosts draw back the curtain of my bed,  
And past them through the dreadful dark I creep,  
Clasp close the child, and so am comforted.

Cling close, cling close, my darling, my delight,  
Sad voices on the wind come thin and wild,  
Ghosts of poor mothers crying in the night--  
'Father, have pity--once I had a child!'

Edith Nesbit

# Hope

O thrush, is it true?  
Your song tells  
Of a world born anew,  
Of fields gold with buttercups, woodlands all blue  
With hyacinth bells;  
Of primroses deep  
In the moss of the lane,  
Of a Princess asleep  
And dear magic to do.  
Will the sun wake the princess? O thrush, is it true?  
Will Spring come again?

Will Spring come again?  
Now at last  
With soft shine and rain  
Will the violet be sweet where the dead leaves have lain?  
Will Winter be past?  
In the brown of the copse  
Will white wind-flowers star through  
Where the last oak-leaf drops?  
Will the daisies come too,  
And the may and the lilac? Will Spring come again?  
O thrush, is it true?

Edith Nesbit

# Hopes

A PRINCESS, sleeping in enchanted bowers,  
Earth springs to waking at Spring's voice and kiss,  
And after winter's cold, unlovely hours,  
Laughs out to find how beautiful she is.

Spring flings a song across the field and fold,  
And sighs it through the glad wood's tangled ways;  
And million, million tales of love are told,  
And dreams are dreamed of undivided days.

In hollows where so late but dead leaves lay,  
Through the dead leaves the primroses push up;  
And wind-flowers fleck the copse, and fields are gay  
With daisies and the budding buttercup.

So in our hearts, though thick the dead leaves lie  
Of grief--heaped up by winds of old despair--  
May there not be a spring-time by-and-by,  
When flowers of joy shall blossom even there?

So long has Winter held our hearts in his,  
We dare not dream of Spring and all her flowers?  
Ah! the undreamed-of happiness it is  
That comes--the dreamed-of joy is never ours!

When late the trees were brown and hedges bare,  
And keen east wind cut sharp as human pain,  
Did the Earth guess how soon she would be fair  
With Spring's dear dainty loveliness again?

We do not guess of joy, but hope alone--  
Like life's mysterious force that thrills the earth--  
Lives in our souls, unrecognised, unknown,



Till time shall bring unhoped-for joy to birth.

Edith Nesbit

# In Absence

WAKE, do you wake in the dark in the strange far place,  
Window and door not set like the ones we knew,  
Leaning your face through the dark for another face,  
Stretching your arms to the arms that are far from you,  
Even as I, through the depth of this darkness, do?

Sleep, do you sleep in the house in the lonely land?  
In the lonely room do you hear no steps draw near?  
Do you miss in the darkness the hand that implores your hand,  
See through the darkness your last dream disappear,  
And weep, as I weep, in the outer darkness here?

Dream, do you dream? Nay, never a dream will stay,  
Never a phantom is fond, or a vision kind.  
Your dreams elude you and fly through the dark my way,  
My dreams fly forth to you whom they may not find;  
And we in the darkness weep, we weep and are left behind.

Edith Nesbit

# In Age

The wine of life was rough and new,  
But sweet beyond belief,  
And wrong was false, and right was true -  
The rose was in the leaf.

In that good sunlight well we knew  
The hues of wrong and right;  
We slept among the roses through  
The long enchanted night.

Now to our eyes, made dim with years,  
Right intertwines with wrong.  
How can we hear, with these tired ears,  
The old, the magic song?

But this we know--wine once was red,  
Roses were red and dear;  
Once in our ears the truths were said  
That now the young men hear!

Edith Nesbit

# In Eclipse

PALE veil of mist bound round the trees  
Pale fringe of rain upon the hills,  
Cold earth, cold sky and biting breeze  
That mock the withered daffodils.  
And yet so short a while ago,  
The sunlight on the quickened land  
Laughed at the memory of the snow,  
And we went hand in hand.

Pale veil of doubt wound round my heart,  
Pale fringe of tears upon your eyes;  
Why did we choose the evil part?  
Why did we leave our Paradise?  
There were such green and pleasant ways  
Where you and I with happy heart  
Laughed at the old unhappy days,  
And now--we are apart.

Will the sun shine again some day?  
Will you forgive me and forget?  
Chill is the east, the west is gray,  
And all our world with tears is wet.  
Ah! love, the world is wide and cold,  
The weary skies are wild with rain;  
Give me at least your hand to hold  
Till the sun shines again.

Edith Nesbit

# In Hospital

Under the shadow of a hawthorn brake,  
Where bluebells draw the sky down to the wood,  
Where, 'mid brown leaves, the primroses awake  
And hidden violets smell of solitude;  
Beneath green leaves bright-fluttered by the wing  
Of fleeting, beautiful, immortal Spring,  
I should have said, 'I love you,' and your eyes  
Have said, 'I, too . . . ' The gods saw otherwise.

For this is winter, and the London streets  
Are full of soldiers from that far, fierce fray  
Where life knows death, and where poor glory meets  
Full-face with shame, and weeps and turns away.  
And in the broken, trampled foreign wood  
Is horror, and the terrible scent of blood,  
And love shines tremulous, like a drowning star,  
Under the shadow of the wings of war.

Edith Nesbit

# In Memoryt Of Saretta Deakin

\_Who Died on October 25th\_, 1899.

THERE was a day,  
A horrible Autumn day,  
When from her home, the home she made for ours  
And that day made a nightmare of white flowers  
And folk in black who whispered pityingly,  
They carried her away;  
And left our hearts all cold  
And empty, yet with such a store to hold  
Of sodden grief the slow drops still ooze out,  
And, falling on all fair things, they wither these.  
Tears came with time--but not with time went by.

And still we wander desolate about  
The poor changed house, the garden and the croft,  
Warm kitchen, sunny parlour, with the soft  
Intolerable pervading memories  
Of her whose face and voice made melodies,  
Sweet unforgotten songs of mother-love--  
Dear songs of all the little joys that were.  
We see the sun, and have no joy thereof,  
Because she gathered in her dying hands  
And carried with her to the fair far lands  
The flower of all our joy, because she went  
Out of the garden where her days were spent,  
And took the very sun away with her.

The cross stands at her head.  
Over her breast, that loving mother-breast,  
Close buds of pansies purple and white are pressed.  
It seems a place for rest,  
For happy folded sleep; but ah, not there,  
Not there, not there, our hardest tears are shed,  
But in the house made empty for her sake.  
Here, in the night intolerable, wake  
The hungry passionate pains of Love still strong  
To fight with death the bitter slow night long.  
Then the rich price that poor Love has to pay

Is paid, slow drop by drop, till the new day  
With thin cold fingers pushes back night's wings,  
And drags us out to common cruel things  
That sting, and barb their stings with memory.  
O Love--and is the price too hard to give?  
Thine is the splendour of all things that live,  
And this thy pain the price of life to thee--  
The sacrament that binds to the beloved,  
The chain that holds though mountains be removed,  
The portent of thine immortality.

So, in the house of pain imprisoned, we  
Endure our bondage, and work out our time,  
Nor seek from out our dungeon walls to climb--  
Bondsmen, who would not, if we could, be free.  
Thank God, our hands still hold Love's cord--and she--  
Do not her hands still clasp the cord we hold,  
Drawing us near, coiling bright fold on fold,  
Till the far day when it shall draw us near  
To the sight of her--her living hands, her dear  
Tired face, grown weary of watching for our face?  
And we shall hold her, in the happy place,  
And hear her voice, the old same voice we knew--  
'Ah! children, I am tired of wanting you!'

Or, in some world more beautiful and dear  
Than any she ever even dreamed of here,  
Where time is changed, does she await the day  
She longed for, and so little a while away,  
When all the love we watered with our tears  
Shall bloom, transplanted by the kindly years?  
Dreaming through her new garden does she go,  
Remembering the old garden, long ago,  
Tending new flowers more fair than those that grow  
In this sad garden where such sad flowers blow;  
And, fondly touching bud and leaf and shoot,  
Training her flowers to perfect branch and root,  
Does she sometimes entreat some darling flower  
To wait a little for its opening hour?  
Can you not hear her voice: 'Ah, not to-day,  
While my dear flowers, my own, are far away.  
Be patient, bud! to-morrow soon will come:

Ah! blossom when my little girl comes home!'

But now. But here.

The empty house, the always empty place--

The black remembrance that no night blots out,

The memories, white, unbearable, and dear

That no white sunlight makes less cruel and clear?

The resistless riotous rout

Of cruel conquering thoughts, the night, the day?

Love is immortal: this the price to pay.

Worse than all pain it would be to forget--

On Love's brave brow the crown of thorns is set.

Love is no niggard: though the price be high

Into God's market Love goes forth to buy

With royal meed God's greatest gifts and gain,

Love offers up his whole rich store of pain,

And buys of God Love's immortality.

Edith Nesbit



# In Sanctuary

THE young Spring air was strong like wine,  
The sky reflected in your eyes  
Was of a blue as deep-divine  
As ever glowed in southern skies.

We passed from out the sunny lane  
Into the green wood's shadowing;  
And, sudden, all Love's words seemed vain  
In that calm temple of the Spring.

Our god hears fair and tuneful words,  
And splendid flowers his altars bear;  
With choric song of leaves and birds,  
Another god was worshipped there.

Silent, we passed the woodland, through  
The coloured maze that Springtime weaves--  
The light leaves dancing to the blue,  
The sunlight dancing to the leaves;

I could not speak. I touched your hand  
At the green arch that ends the wood:  
'Ah--if she should not understand!'  
Ah--if you had not understood!

Edith Nesbit

# In The Enchanted Tower

THE waves in thunderous menace break  
Upon the rocks below my tower,  
And none will dare the Sea-king's power  
And venture shipwreck for my sake.

Yet once,--my lamp a path of light  
Across the darkling sea had cast--  
I saw a sail; at last, at last,  
It came towards me through the night.

My lamp had been the beacon set  
To lead the ship through mist and foam,  
The ship that came to take me home,  
To that far land I half forget.

But since my tower is built so high,  
And surf-robed rocks curl hid below,  
I quenched my lamp--and, weeping low  
I saw my ship go safely by!

Edith Nesbit

## In The People's Park

Many's the time I've found your face  
Fresh as a bunch of flowers in May,  
Waiting for me at our own old place  
At the end of the working day.  
Many's the time I've held your hand  
On the shady seat in the People's Park,  
And blessed the blaring row of the band  
And kissed you there in the dark.

Many's the time you promised true,  
Swore it with kisses, swore it with tears:  
'I'll marry no one without it's you -  
If we have to wait for years.'  
And now it's another chap in the Park  
That holds your hand like I used to do;  
And I kiss another girl in the dark,  
And try to fancy it's you!

Edith Nesbit

# In The Rose Garden

RED roses bright, pink roses and white  
That bud and blossom and fall;  
The very sight of my heart's delight  
Is more than worth them all!  
Is worth far more than the whole sweet store  
That ever a garden grew--  
She plucked the best to die at her breast,  
But it laughed and it bloomed anew!

The red rose lay at her lips to-day,  
And flushed with the joy thereof;  
She said a word that the white rose heard,  
And the white rose paled with love.  
But the west wind blows, and my lady goes,  
And she leaves the world forlorn;  
And every rose that the garden grows,  
Might just as well be a thorn!

Edith Nesbit

## In The Shallows

AMONG the shallows where the sand  
Is golden and the waves are small,  
I love to lie, and to my hand  
How many little treasures fall!  
What shells and seaweed grace the shore,  
What happy birds on happy wings,  
And for companions, what a store  
Of humble, happy, living things!

Yet the sea's depths are also mine,  
And in the old days I used to dive  
Into the caves, where corals shine  
And where the shimmering mer-folk live.  
I am the master of the sea  
In deeps where fairy flowers uncurl;  
That treasure-house belongs to me,  
Those amber halls, those stairs of pearl.

But now thereto I go no more,  
Because of all the argosies,  
Deep sunk upon the ocean floor,  
Where all the world's lost treasure lies.  
Where loveless laughter curls the lips  
Of wild sea creatures at their sport  
About the bones of noble ships,  
My ships, that never came to port.

Edith Nesbit

# In Trouble

1 It's all for nothing: I've lost im now.  
2 I suppose it ad to be:  
3 But oh I never thought it of im,  
4 Nor e never thought it of me.  
5 And all for a kiss on your evening out  
6 An a field where the grass was down ...  
7 And e as gone to God-knows-where,  
8 And I may go on the town.

9 The worst of all was the thing e said  
10 The night that e went away:  
11 He said e'd a married me right enough  
12 If I adn't a been so gay.  
13 Me, gay! When I'd cried, and I'd asked him not,  
14 But e said e loved me so;  
15 An whatever e wanted seemed right to me ...  
16 An how was a girl to know?

17 Well, the river is deep, and drowned folk sleep sound,  
18 An it might be the best to do;  
19 But when he made me a light-o-love  
20 He made me a mother too.  
21 I've ad enough sin to last my time,  
22 If twas sin as I got it by,  
23 But it aint no sin to stand by his kid  
24 An work for it till I die.

25 But oh the long days and the death-long nights  
26 When I feel it move and turn,  
27 And cry alone in my single bed  
28 And count what a girl can earn  
29 To buy the baby the bits of things  
30 He ought to a bought, by rights;  
31 And wonder whether e thinks of Us ...  
32 And if e sleeps sound o' nights.

Edith Nesbit

## Inasmuch As Ye Did It Not . . .

If Jesus came to London,  
Came to London to-day,  
He would not go to the West End,  
He would come down our way;  
He'd talk with the children dancing  
To the organ out in the street,  
And say he was their big Brother,  
And give them something to eat.

He wouldn't go to the mansions  
Where the charitable live;  
He'd come to the tenement houses  
Where we ain't got nothing to give.  
He'd come so kind and so homely,  
And treat us to beer and bread,  
And tell us how we ought to behave;  
And we'd try to mind what He said.

In the warm bright West End churches  
They sing and preach and pray,  
They call us 'Beloved brethren,'  
But they do not act that way.  
And when He came to the church door  
He'd call out loud and free,  
You stop that preaching and praying  
And show what you've done for Me.'

Then they'd say, 'O Lord, we have given  
To the poor both blankets and tracts,  
And we've tried to make them sober,  
And we've tried to teach them facts.  
But they will sneak round to the drink-shop,  
And pawn the blankets for beer,  
And we find them very ungrateful,  
But still we persevere.'

Then He would say, 'I told you  
The time I was here before,  
That you were all of you brothers,

All you that I suffered for.  
I won't go into your churches,  
I'll stop in the sun outside.  
You bring out the men your brothers,  
The men for whom I died!

Out of our beastly lodgings,  
From arches and doorways about,  
They'd have to do as He told them,  
They'd have to call us out.  
Millions and millions and millions,  
Thick and crawling like flies,  
We should creep out to the sunshine  
And not be afraid of His eyes.

He'd see what God's image looks like  
When men have dealt with the same,  
Wrinkled with work that is never done,  
Swollen and dirty with shame.  
He'd see on the children's forehead  
The branded gutter-sign  
That marks the girls to be harlots,  
That dooms the boys to be swine.

Then He'd say, 'What's the good of churches  
When these have nowhere to sleep?  
And how can I hear you praying  
When they are cursing so deep?  
I gave My Blood and My Body  
That they might have bread and wine,  
And you have taken your share and theirs  
Of these good gifts of mine!'

Then some of the rich would be sorry,  
And all would be very scared,  
And they'd say, 'But we never knew, Lord!'  
And He'd say, 'You never cared!'  
And some would be sick and shameful  
Because they'd know that they knew,  
And the best would say, 'We were wrong, Lord.  
Now tell us what to do!'



I think He'd be sitting, likely,  
For someone 'ud bring Him a chair,  
With a common kid cuddled up on His knee  
And the common sun on His hair;  
And they'd be standing before Him,  
And He'd say, 'You know that you knew.  
Why haven't you worked for your brothers  
The same as I worked for you?

'For since you're all of you brothers  
It's clear as God's blessed sun  
That each must work for the others,  
Not thousands work for one.  
And the ones that have lived bone-idle  
If they want Me to hear them pray,  
Let them go and work for their livings  
The only honest way!

'I've got nothing new to tell you,  
You know what I always said -  
But you've built their bones into churches  
And stolen their wine and bread;  
You with My Name on your foreheads,  
Liar, and traitor, and knave,  
You have lived by the death of your brothers,  
These whom I died to save!

I wish He would come and say it;  
Perhaps they'd believe it then,  
And work like men for their livings  
And let us work like men.  
Brothers? They don't believe it,  
The lie on their lips is red.  
They'll never believe till He comes again,  
Or till we rise from the dead!

Edith Nesbit

## Incompatibilities

If you loved me I could trust you to your fancy's furthest bound  
While the sun shone and the wind blew, and the world went round,  
To the utmost of the meshes of the devil's strongest net . . .  
If you loved me, if you loved me--but you do not love me yet!

I love you--and I cannot trust you further than the door!  
But winds and worlds and seasons change, and you will love me more  
And more--until I trust you, dear, as women do trust men -  
I shall trust you, I shall trust you, but I shall not love you then!

Edith Nesbit

# Indiscretion

RED tulip-buds last night caressed  
The sacred ivory of her breast.  
She met me, eager to divine  
What gold-heart bud of hope was mine.

Nor eyes nor lips were strong to part  
The close-curved petals round my heart;  
The joy I knew no monarch knows,  
Yet not a petal would unclove.

But, ah!--the tulip-buds, unwise,  
Warmed with the sunshine of her eyes,  
And by her soft breath glorified  
Went mad with love and opened wide.

She saw their hearts, all golden-gay,  
Laughed, frowned, and flung the flowers away.  
Poor flowers, in Heaven as you were,  
Why did you show your hearts to her?

Edith Nesbit

# Inspiration

I WANDERED in the enchanted wood,  
And as I wandered there, I sang  
A song I never understood,  
Though sweet the music rang.

I held a lily white and fair,  
Its perfume was a song divine,  
A song like moonlight and clear air,  
No rose-hued cloud like mine.

Beneath pale moon and wind-winged skies  
My lips were dumb as one drew near,  
Folded warm wings across my eyes  
And whispered in my ear.

He left a flame-flower in my hand,  
And bade me sing as heretofore  
The song I could not understand;  
But I can sing no more.

His secret seals my dumb lips fast,  
My lily withered 'neath his wing;  
But now I understand at last  
The song I used to sing.

Edith Nesbit

# Invocation

The Spirit of Darkness, the Prince of the Power of the Air,  
The terror that walketh by night, and the horror by day,  
The legions of Evil, alert and awake and aware,  
Press round him each hour; and I pray here alone, far away.

God! call up Thy legions to fight on the side of my love,  
Let the seats of the mighty be cast down before him, O Lord,  
Send strong wings of angels to shield him beneath and above,  
Let glorious Michael unsheath his implacable sword.

Let the whole host of Heaven take part with my dear in his fight,  
That the armies of Hell may be scattered like chaff in the blast,  
And the trumpets of Heaven blow fair for the triumph of Right.  
Inspire him, protect him, and bring him home victor at last.

But if--ah, dear God, give me strength to withhold nothing now! -  
If the life of my life be required for Thy splendid design,  
Give his country the laurels, though cold and uncrowned be his brow

. . .

Thou gavest Thy Son for the world, and shall I not give mine?

Edith Nesbit

## Invocation II

COME to-night in a dream to-night,  
Come as you used to do,  
Come in the gown, in the gown of white,  
Come in the ribbon of blue;  
Come in the virgin's colours you wear,  
Come through the dark and the dew,  
Come with the scent of the night in your hair,  
Come as you used to do.

Blue and white of your eyes and your face,  
White of your gown and blue,  
Will you not come from the happy place,  
Come as you used to do?  
Tears so many, so many tears  
Where there were once so few--  
Can they not wash the gray of the years  
From the white of your gown and blue?

Edith Nesbit

# January

WHILE yet the air is keen, and no bird sings,  
Nor any vaguest thrills of heart declare  
The presence of the springtime in the air,  
Through the raw dawn the shepherd homeward brings  
The wee white lambs--the little helpless things--  
For shelter, warmth, and comfortable care.  
Without his help how hardly lambs would fare--  
How hardly live through winter's hours to spring's!

So let me tend and minister apart  
To my new hope, which some day you shall know:  
It could not live in January wind  
Of your disdain; but when within your heart  
The bud and bloom of tenderness shall grow,  
Amid the flowers my hope may welcome find.

Edith Nesbit

## La Derniere Robe De Soi

OH, silken gown, all pink and pretty,  
Bought, quite a bargain, in the City,  
Your ill-trained soul full false has played me--  
No Paris gown would have betrayed me.

You knew, my pretty silken treasure,  
I must not wed for love or pleasure,  
But for a settlement and title;  
Yet you encouraged his recital!

He said--oh, faithless gown, you listened  
While on your sheen two tear drops glistened--  
He said . . . let love to music set it,  
I'll never speak it--nor forget it!

'No, no!' I cried, I tried to save you--  
False gown, you showed the tears I gave you!  
You looked discreet when first I found you.  
How could you let his arm go round you?

You darling dress--I'll smooth your creases,  
I'll wear you till you drop to pieces;  
But poor men's wives wear cotton only--  
Dear gown--I hope you won't feel lonely!

Edith Nesbit



# Love And Knowledge

THOUGH you and I so long have been so near--  
Have felt each other's heart-beats hour by hour,  
Have watered, plucked, and trampled passion's flower,  
Have known so many days so very dear--  
Yet still through every hour of every year  
We have sought to win and failed to win the dower  
Of perfect insight, and to gain the power  
To see what we are, and not what we appear.

Yet you desire such knowledge--would possess,  
You say, completion of love; if that were won  
--Ah! by it might not haply be undone  
The little measure of joy we knew before?  
Though we should swear we loved each other more,  
How surely we should love each other less!

Edith Nesbit

## Love And Life

LOVE only sings when Love is young,  
When Love is young and still at play,  
How shall we count the sweet songs sung  
When Love and Joy kept holiday?  
But now Love has to earn his bread  
By lifelong stress and toil of tears,  
He finds his nest of song-birds dead  
That sang so sweet in other years.

For Love's a man now, strong and brave,  
To fight for you, for you to live,  
And Love, that once such bright songs gave,  
Has better things than songs to give;  
He gives you now a lifelong faith,  
A hand to help in joy or pain,  
And he will sing no more, till Death  
Shall come to make him young again!

Edith Nesbit

# Love Guerçons

DEAREST, if I almost cease to weep for you,  
Do not doubt I love you just the same;  
'Tis because my life has grown to keep for you  
All the hours that sorrow does not claim.

All the hours when I may steal away to you,  
Where you lie alone through the long day,  
Lean my face against your turf and say to you  
All that there is no one else to say.

Do they let you listen--do you lean to me?  
Know now what in life you never knew,  
When I whisper all that you have been to me,  
All that I might never be to you?

Dear, lie still. No tears but mine are shed for you,  
No one else leaves kisses day by day,  
No one's heart but mine has beat and bled for you,  
No one else's flowers push mine away.

No one else remembers--do not call to her,  
Not alone she treads the churchyard grass;  
You are nothing now who once were all to her,  
Do not call her--let the strangers pass!

Edith Nesbit

# Love Well The Hour

HEART of my heart, my life and light,  
If you were lost what should I do?  
I dare not let you from my sight,  
Lest Death should fall in love with you.

Such countless terrors lie in wait.  
The gods know well how dear you are:  
What if they left me desolate  
And plucked and set you for their star?

So hold my hand--the gods are strong,  
And perfect joy so rare a flower  
No man may hope to keep it long,  
And I might lose it any hour.

So, kiss me close, my star, my flower,  
Thus shall the future spare me this:  
The thought that there was ever an hour  
We might have kissed and did not kiss.

Edith Nesbit

# Lover's Quarrels

JOIN hands, my dear, clasp long and close and fast,  
Even this present we shall soon call past,  
And lay among the unforgotten days,  
Not the less loved because they could not last.

Make haste to put our hasty words away,  
And hide them with dead leaves of yesterday,  
Cast them aside among forgotten things,  
Keep the love warm that turns to green life's grey.

Each little thorn that pricks these present hours  
Is sure to hide under our memories' flowers,  
Till we shall say, turning the dry wreath over,  
'How sweet they were--these dear dead days of ours!'

Edith Nesbit

# Love's Suicide

Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.

THIS treasure of love, these passion-flowers,  
Dear as desire, are dearly bought:  
The sweet unrest of seeing you  
For some too-happy hour or two,  
Is paid by such a wealth of tears,  
Such grief, such bitterness, such fears,  
Such wild remorse, such weak regret,  
Such tide of longing towards you set,  
As poison all my other hours,  
And murder every other thought.

I cannot drink joy steeped in fears,  
I choose the cold unhurtful days;  
The roses you hold out to me  
Are red and sweet enough to be  
A crown one would so gladly wear  
If but one's brows were strong to bear  
The weight, and did not ache and ache  
For the fair coronation's sake,  
And dread of coming crownless years  
When tired feet shall tread thorny ways.

There is a peace in sombre skies  
Where no sun even tries to shine,  
But not in these where transient glow,  
And passionate bursts of sunshine show  
Only life's dull fields drenched with rain,  
And then the clouds set fast again  
Into a leaden sky like this is,  
Lit by no lightnings of warm kisses,  
Whence, while I look into your eyes,  
A thunderbolt may fall on mine.

I give you back the rose I stole,

Pluck but pale leaves that near me grow.  
I cannot love with half a heart,  
'Tis all or nothing for my part;  
And since the all may not be ours,  
Since we may only pluck Love's flowers,  
But may not in his temple stay,  
I choose the grey and lonely way--  
And you--be thankful from your soul  
That, loving you, I let you go.

Edith Nesbit

# Lullaby

SLEEP, sleep, my treasure,  
The long day's pleasure  
Has tired the birds, to their nests they creep;  
The garden still is  
Alight with lilies,  
But all the daisies are fast asleep.

Sleep, sleep, my darling,  
Dawn wakes the starling,  
The sparrow stirs when he sees day break;  
But all the meadow  
Is wrapped in shadow,  
And you must sleep till the daisies wake!

Edith Nesbit



# Magic

What was the spell she wove for me?  
Life was a common useful thing,  
An eligible building site  
To hold a house to shelter me.  
There were no woodlands whispering;  
No unimagined dreams at night  
About that house had folded wing,  
Disordering my life for me.

I was so safe until she came  
With starry secrets in her eyes,  
And on her lips the word of power.  
- Like to the moon of May she came,  
That makes men mad who were born wise -  
Within her hand the only flower  
Man ever plucked from Paradise;  
So to my half-built house she came.

She turned my useful plot of land  
Into a garden wild and fair,  
Where stars in garlands hung like flowers:  
A moonlit, lonely, lovely land.  
Dim groves and glimmering fountains there  
Embraced a secret bower of bowers,  
And in its rose-ringed heart we were  
Alone in that enchanted land.

What was the spell I wove for her,  
Her mad dear magic to undo?  
The red rose dies, the white rose dies,  
The garden spits me forth with her  
On the old suburban road I knew.  
My house is gone, and by my side  
A stranger stands with angry eyes  
And lips that swear I ruined her.

Edith Nesbit

# Magnificat

THIS is Christ's birthday: long ago  
He lay upon His Mother's knee,  
Who kissed and blessed Him soft and low--  
God's gift to her, as you to me.

My baby dear, my little one,  
The love that rocks this cradling breast  
Is such as Mary gave her Son:  
She was more honoured, not more blest.

He smiled as you smile: not more sweet  
Than your eyes were those eyes of His,  
And just such little hands and feet  
As yours Our Lady used to kiss.

The world's desire that Mother bore:  
She held a King upon her knee:  
O King of all my world, and more  
Than all the world's desire to me!

I thank God on the Christmas morn,  
For He has given me all things good:  
This body which a child has borne,  
This breast, made holy for his food.

High in high heaven Our Lady's throne  
Beside her Son's stands up apart:  
I sit on heaven's steps alone  
And hold my king against my heart.

Across dark depths she hears your cry;  
She sees your smile, through worlds of blue  
Who was a mother, even as I,

And loved her Child, as I love you.

And to her heart my babe is dear,  
Because she bore the Babe Divine,  
And all my soul to hers draws near,  
And loves Him for the sake of mine!

Edith Nesbit

# Maidenhood

THROUGH her fair world of blossoms fresh and bright,  
Veiled with her maiden innocence, she goes;  
Not all the splendour of the waxing light  
She sees, nor all the colour of the rose;  
And yet who knows what finer hues she sees,  
Hid by our wisdom from our longing eyes?  
Who knows what light she sees in skies and seas  
Which is withholden from our seas and skies?

Shod with her youth the thorny paths she treads  
And feels not yet the treachery of the thorn,  
Her crown of lilies still its perfume sheds  
Where Love, the thorny crown, not yet is borne.  
Yet in the mystery of her peaceful way  
Who knows what fears beset her innocence,  
Who, trembling, learns that thorns will wound some day,  
And wonders what thorns are, and why, and whence?

Edith Nesbit

# Margaret

I KNOW a garden where white lilies grow,  
Under the grey sweet-laden apple boughs;  
It is a garden where the roses blow,  
And honeysuckle covers half the house.  
O happy garden, do you keep the vows  
Breathed in your quiet ear beneath the rose,  
Or do you tell the tale to each soft wind that blows?

Across your grassy paths she used to stray,  
She moved among you like a living flower,  
Her beauty drank your beauty every day,  
Your beauty decked her beauty every hour.  
You gave her rose and lily for a dower,  
With all sweet flowers and fruits your bosom bore--  
She took them all--and now she comes not any more.

O garden, if you breathe such secret things  
To the south wind who loves you, tell him this:  
To spread the scented softness of his wings,  
And seek that other garden where she is,  
And bid him bear no blossom and no kiss;  
Only, dear garden, tell the wind to say  
How grey the world is grown since Margaret went away!

Edith Nesbit

# Mary Of Magdala

Mary of Magdala came to bed;  
There were no soft curtains round her head;  
She had no mother to hold of worth  
The little baby she brought to birth.

Mary of Magdala groaned and prayed:  
'O God, I am very much afraid;  
For out of my body, by sin defiled,  
Thou biddest me make a little child.

'O God, I have turned my face from Thee  
To that which the angels may not see;  
How can I make, from my deep disgrace,  
A child whose angel shall see Thy face?

'O God, I have sinned, and I know well  
That the pains I bear are the pains of hell;  
But the thought of the child that sin has given  
Is like the thought of the airs of Heaven.'

Mary of Magdala held her breath  
In the clutch of pain like the pains of Death,  
And through her heart, like the mortal knife,  
Went the pang of joy and the pang of life.

'We two are two alone,' said she,  
'And we are two who should be three;  
Now who will clothe my baby fair  
In the little garments that babies wear?'

There came two angels with quiet wings  
And hands that were full of baby things;  
And the new-born child was bathed and dressed  
And laid again on his mother's breast.

'Now who will sign on his brow the mark  
To keep him safe from the Powers of the Dark?  
Who will my baby's sponsor be?'  
'I, the Lord God, who died for thee.'

'Now who will comfort him if he cry;  
And who will suckle him by and bye?  
For my hands are cold and my breasts are dry,  
And I think that my time has come to die.'

'I will dandle thy son as a mother may;  
And his lips shall lie where my own Son's lay.  
Come, dear little one, come to me;  
The Mother of God shall suckle thee.'

Mary of Magdala laughed and sighed;  
'I never deserved a child,' she cried.  
'Dear God, I am ready to go to hell,  
Since with my little one all is well.'

Then the Son of Mary did o'er her lean.  
'Poor mother, thy tears have washed thee clean.  
Thy last poor pains, they will soon be done,  
And My Mother shall give thee back thy son.'

Frozen grass for a bearing bed,  
A halo of frost round a woman's head,  
And pious folks who looked and said:  
'A drab and her brat that are better dead.'

Edith Nesbit

# May Day

Will you go a-maying, a-maying, a-maying,  
Come and be my Queen of May and pluck the may with me?  
The fields are full of daisy buds and new lambs playing,  
The bird is on the nest, dear, the blossom's on the tree.'

'If I go with you, if I go a-maying,  
To be your Queen and wear my crown this May-day bright,  
Hand in hand straying, it must be only playing,  
And playtime ends at sunset, and then good-night.

'For I have heard of maidens who laughed and went a-maying,  
Went out queens and lost their crowns and came back slaves.  
I will be no young man's slave, submitting and obeying,  
Bearing chains as those did, even to their graves.'

'If you come a-maying, a-straying, a-playing,  
We will pluck the little flowers, enough for you and me;  
And when the day dies, end our one day's playing,  
Give a kiss and take a kiss and go home free.'

Edith Nesbit



# May Song

BIRDS in the green of my garden  
Blackbirds and throstle and wren,  
Wet your dear wings in the tears that are Spring's  
And so to your singing again!  
Birds in my blossoming orchard,  
Chaffinch and goldfinch and lark,  
Preen your bright wings, little happy live things;  
The May trees grow white in the park!

Birds in the leafy wet woodlands,  
Cuckoo and nightingale brown,  
Sing to the sound of the rain on green ground--  
The rain on green leaves dripping down!  
Fresh with the rain of the May-time,  
Rich with the promise of June,  
Deep in her heart, where the little leaves part,  
Love, like a bird, sings in tune!

Edith Nesbit

# Medway Song

(Air: Carnaval de Venise)

LET Housman sing of Severn shore,  
Of Thames let Arnold sing,  
But we will sing no river more  
Save this where crowbars ring.  
Let others sing of Henley,  
Of fashion and renown,  
But we will sing the thirteen locks  
That lead to Tonbridge town!  
Then sing the Kentish river,  
The Kentish fields and flowers,  
We waste no dreams on other streams  
Who call the Medway ours.

When on the level golden meads  
The evening sunshine lies,  
The little voles among the reeds  
Look out with wondering eyes.  
The patient anglers linger  
The placid stream beside,  
Where still with towering tarry prow  
The stately barges glide.  
Then sing the Kentish river,  
The Kentish fields and flowers,  
We waste no dreams on other streams  
Who call the Medway ours.

On Medway banks the May droops white,  
The wild rose blossoms fair,  
O'er meadow-sweet and loosestrife bright,  
For water nymphs to wear.  
And mid the blowing rushes  
Pan pipes a joyous song,  
And woodland things peep from the shade  
As soft we glide along.  
Then sing the Kentish river,

The Kentish fields and flowers,  
We waste no dreams on other streams  
Who call the Medway ours.

You see no freight on Medway boats  
Of fashions fine and rare,  
But happy men in shabby coats,  
And girls with wind-kissed hair.  
The world's a pain forgotten,  
And very far away,  
The stream that flows, the boat that goes--  
These are our world to-day.  
Then sing the Kentish river,  
The Kentish fields and flowers,  
We waste no dreams on other streams  
Who call the Medway ours.

Edith Nesbit

# Microcosm

SHE and I--we kissed and vowed  
That should be which could not be;  
Just as if mere vows endowed  
Love with immortality!  
Ah, had vows but kept us true,  
As we thought them sure to do!

She and I--such tiny parts  
Of the Evolution-plan--  
Yet can hold within our hearts  
All the misery of man:  
All the ages did prepare,  
All we are and all we bear.

She and I--mere counters, toys  
Nature uses for her game--  
Pity that we long for joys,  
And feel sorrows all the same!  
Just as though our wills were free,  
As we dreamed them--I and she!

Edith Nesbit

# Morning

DAWN in the east, and chill dew falling--  
Tears of the new-born day;  
Dew on the lawn, and blackbirds calling,  
Music and mild mid-May.  
The lilac, see, wins back the colour  
Lost on the field of Night  
See, the spent stars grow dimmer, duller!  
Look forth, my life's delight!

Open your window, lean above me,  
Rose, my white rose, my song!  
Leave your white nest, love, if you love me--  
Night is so lonely-long.  
Day is our own, and day's a-breaking;  
Sweet sleepy eyes of grey,  
You shall not chide an early waking  
When Night grows kind as Day!

Edith Nesbit

# Mother Song

\_From the Portuguese.\_

HEAVY my heart is, heavy to carry,  
Full of soft foldings, of downy enwrapments--  
And the outer fold of all is love,  
And the next soft fold is love,  
And the next, finer and softer, is love again;  
And were they unwound before the eyes  
More folds and more folds and more folds would unroll  
Of love--always love,  
And, quite at the last,  
Deep in the nest, in the soft-packed nest,  
One last fold, turned back, would disclose  
You, little heart of my heart,  
Laid there so warm, so soft, so soft,  
Not knowing where you lie, nor how softly,  
Nor why your nest is so soft,  
Nor how your nest is so warm.  
You, little heart of my heart,  
You lie in my heart,  
Warm, safe and soft as this body of yours,  
This dear kissed body of yours that lies  
Here in my arms and sucks the strength from my breast,  
The strength you will break my heart with one of these days.

Edith Nesbit

# Mummy Wheat

LAIID close to Death, these many thousand years,  
In this small seed Life hid herself and smiled;  
So well she hid, Death was at least beguiled,  
Set free the grain--and lo! the sevenfold ears!

Warmed by the sun, wooed by the wind's soft word,  
Under blue canopy they hold their state:  
For this, ah, was it not worth while to wait  
Through all the centuries of hope deferred?

What could they know who laid the seed with Death  
Of this Divine fruition fixed and planned?  
Love--since Life parts us--lend my hand your hand  
And look with me into the eyes of faith.

For here between your hand and mine there lies  
A little seed we trust to Death to keep  
Through unimagined centuries of sleep  
Until the day when Life shall bid it rise.

Our harvest waits us. Who knows where or how,  
What worlds away, wrapped in what coil of pain?  
But Life shall bid us pluck gold sevenfold grain  
Grown from the love she bids us bury now.

Edith Nesbit

# New College Gardens, Oxford

ON this old lawn, where lost hours pass  
Across the shadows dark with dew,  
Where autumn on the thick sweet grass  
Has laid a weary leaf or two,  
When the young morning, keenly sweet,  
Breathes secrets to the silent air,  
Happy is he whose lingering feet  
May wander lonely there.

The enchantment of the dreaming limes,  
The magic of the quiet hours,  
Breathe unheard tales of other times  
And other destinies than ours;

The feet that long ago walked here  
Still, noiseless, walk beside our feet,  
Poor ghosts, who found this garden dear,  
And found the morning sweet!

Age weeps that it no more may hold  
The heart-ache that youth clasps so close,  
Pain finely shaped in pleasure's mould,  
A thorn deep hidden in a rose.  
Here is the immortal thorny rose  
That may in no new garden grow--  
Its root is in the hearts of those  
Who walked here long ago.

Edith Nesbit



# New Year

IN the coming year enfolded  
Bright and sad hours lie,  
Waiting till you reach and live them  
As the year rolls by.

In the happy hours and radiant  
I would like to be  
Somewhere out of sight, forgotten,  
Your delight to see.

But when you are tired and saddened,  
Vexed with life, dismayed,  
I would steal your grief, and lay it  
Where my own is laid--

Bleed my heart out in your service  
If, set free from pain,  
You, through me, found life worth living,  
Glad and fair again.

Edith Nesbit

# New Year Snow

THE white snow falls on hill and dale,  
The snow falls white by square and street,  
Falls on the town, a bridal veil,  
And on the fields a winding-sheet.

A winding-sheet for last year's flowers,  
For last year's love, and last year's tear,  
A bridal veil for the New Hours,  
For the New Love and the New Year.

Soft snow, spread out his winding-sheet!  
Spin fine her veil, O bridal snow!  
Cover the print of her dancing feet,  
And the place where he lies low.

Edith Nesbit

# New Year Song

WE climb the hill; the mist conceals  
That valley where we could not stay;  
Surely this hill's crest, gained, reveals  
The glory of the sunlit day.  
The hill is climbed. Still shadow-land--  
Still darkling looms another hill.  
Oh, weary feet!--climb that to find  
A new ascent, 'mid shadows still!  
We dare not stop or think of rest,  
This one hill may be all that lies  
Between us and our souls' desire--  
The splendour of the eastern skies.

Through long long lives we till and tend,  
Sow, weed, and water, all in vain;  
Without the flower we looked to find,  
Each year springs blooms and dies again.  
Bowed down with our unanswered prayers,  
Our face averted from our past,  
We watch each year grow green, and cry,  
'Surely this brings our flower at last!  
Failure on failure! What! tired out?  
Too tired to live? Heart, dare you die  
When this new year may bud and bear  
Your longed-for flower of Liberty?

Edith Nesbit

# Not Now, When Skies Are Gold And Blue

And you have me and I have you,  
When there are roses all the way,  
And April days and nights of May,  
And life is joy the whole day long--  
Not now can passion flower in song.

But in the dark days by-and-by,  
When, deep divided, you and I,  
Shivering among the rose-thorns bare,  
At last confess what fools we were;  
Then, neatly wired, a nosegay fine  
Shall deck your heart--O heart of mine!

Edith Nesbit

# On The Downs

THE little moon is dead,  
Drowned in the flood of rain  
That drips from roof of byre and shed,  
And splashes in the lane:  
The leafless lean-flanked lane where last year's leaves are spread.

The sheep cower in the fold,  
Where the rain beats them blind,  
Where scarce the rotten hurdles hold  
Against the weary wind  
That moans with angry tears across the pathless wold.

Dim lights across the down  
Show where the lone farms lie,  
The twisted trees have lost their brown,  
Are black against the sky,  
And far below blink lights, gay lights of Brighton town.

Ah, was the moon once bright?  
And did the thyme smell sweet  
Where, between dewy dusk and light,  
The warm turf felt our feet,  
And bean-flowers scented all the enchanted summer night?

Did sheep-bells tinkle clear  
Across the golden haze?  
Were the woods ever leafy-dear,  
In those forgotten days?  
The wet wind shrieks denial: no other voice speaks here.

Edith Nesbit

# Out Of Hope

IF through the rain and wind along the street,  
Where the wet stone reflects the flickering gas,  
Some weeping autumn night your wandering feet,  
Lost in a lonely world, should chance to pass;  
If, passing many doors that welcomed you  
When robes of good renown your dear name wore,  
Your feet again, as once they used to do,  
Paused at my door,--

Should I shut fast my heart for the old ill,  
The old wrong done, the sorrow and the sin?  
Or--only knowing that I love you still--  
Should I throw wide the door and let you in?  
Come--with your sins--my tears shall wash them all,  
The heart you broke still waits to be your home.  
Yet if you came. . . . Oh! lost beyond recall  
You never more will come.

Edith Nesbit

# Out Of The Fulness Of The Heart The Mouth Speaketh

In answer to those who have said that English Poets  
give no personal love to their country.

ENGLAND, my country, austere in the clamorous council of nations,  
Set in the seat of the mighty, wielding the sword of the strong,  
Have we but sung of your glory, firm in eternal foundations?  
Are not your woods and your meadows the core of our heart and our song?  
O dear fields of my country, grass growing green, glowing golden,  
Green in the patience of winter, gold in the pageant of spring,  
Oaks and young larches awaking, wind-flowers and violets blowing,  
What, if God sets us to singing, what save you shall we sing?  
Who but our England is fair through the veil of her poets' praises,  
What but the pastoral face, the fruitful, beautiful breast?  
Are not your poets' meadows starred with the English daisies?  
Were not the wings of their song-birds fledged in an English nest?  
Songs of the leaves in the sunlight, songs of the fern-brake in shadow,  
Songs of the world of the woods and songs of the marsh and the mere,  
Are they not English woods, dear English marshland and meadow?  
Have not your poets loved you? England, are you not dear?

Shoulders of upland brown laid dark to the sunset's bosom,  
Living amber of wheat, and copper of new-ploughed loam,  
Downs where the white sheep wander, little gardens in blossom,  
Roads that wind through the twilight up to the lights of home.  
Lanes that are white with hawthorn, dykes where the sedges shiver,  
Hollows where caged winds slumber, moorlands where winds wake free,  
Sowing and reaping and gleaning, spring and torrent and river,  
Are they not more, by worlds, than the whole of the world can be?

Is there a corner of land, a furze-fringed rag of a by-way,  
Coign of your foam-white cliffs or swirl of your grass-green waves,  
Leaf of your peaceful copse, or dust of your strenuous highway,  
But in our hearts is sacred, dear as our cradles, our graves?  
Is not each bough in your orchards, each cloud in the skies above you,  
Is not each byre or homestead, furrow or farm or fold,  
Dear as the last dear drops of the blood in the hearts that love you,  
Filling those hearts till the love is more than the heart can hold?  
Therefore the song breaks forth from the depths of the hidden fountain  
Singing your least frail flower, your raiment of seas and skies,

Singing your pasture and cornfield, fen and valley and mountain,  
England, desire of my heart, England, delight of mine eyes!  
Take my song too, my country: many a son and debtor  
Pays you in praise and homage out of your gifts' full store;  
Life of my life, my England, many will praise you better,  
None, by the God that made you, ever can love you more!

Edith Nesbit



## Over And Done

WE might have held back from Love's draught divine  
For many a wistful sad-and-happy day,  
Tasting the voluntary sweet delay  
Of lips that at the cup's edge touch the wine,  
Yet will not drink, knowing that when the fine  
Eagerly tasted thirst grows pain, they may  
Drink deep. We might have missed Love's only way,  
And thou and I been never mine and thine.

Instead, we sprang straight to the hidden shrine,  
Nor lingered in the temple's outer part;  
We plucked our rose to die upon our heart,  
Nor left it on its tree to slowly pine:  
It dies more quickly, for our heart is hot;  
But, oh, if we had seen, yet plucked it not!

Edith Nesbit

## Over And Undone

IF one might hope that when we say farewell  
To life, we two might but be one at last!  
But we look back on a divided past,  
And a divided future must foretell.  
Apart we sowed the seed that flowers in hell,  
The seed that blooms in heaven apart we cast:  
See what remembrances my heart holds fast--  
Ask your own heart what deeds you deem done well!

The memory I find my heaven in  
Is that one hand-touch you regret as sin;  
Your goodness, dear, that stood between us two  
And made my hell, may make a heaven for you;  
So evermore must lie our souls between  
The kiss unkissed, the infinite might-have-been!

Edith Nesbit

# Parting

WHEN hides the sun behind a bank of cloud,  
Though well we know the sun is shining still,  
No less the shadow falls on down and hill,  
And the bright hues grow dull as brows grief-bowed.  
So, when thou goest from me into the crowd,  
Though well I know thy love through good and ill  
Shines steadfastly, thy going seems to fill  
The world with shade--turn sunshine to a shroud.

But when through clouds the sun returns to bless  
Hill, field, and wood with his divine caress,  
Ah, how the colours start to life again!  
So after absence, when thou comest back  
Bright grows the whole thought-world that was so black,  
And my heart sings to feel the sunshine then.

Edith Nesbit

# Pessimism

## I

WHILE baby Spring sticks daisies in her hair,  
Or Summer laughs with flushed triumphant face  
We crush our heart rebellious at earth's grace,  
And smile 'How, like the season, life is fair!'  
But when the last leaf falls in the dull air,  
And skies grow pale, and fields lie lost a space,  
Ere their first furrow ploughs begin to trace,  
And pastures shiver desolate and bare--

Oh, then one breathes; at last free from the sway  
Of selfish spring--from summer's insolent reign,  
One dares to speak the truth--how all life's way  
Is blank as autumn skies made grey with rain,  
Most blank when most the glad year bade forbear  
To mar her grace with our unveiled despair.

## II

NOT Spring--too lavish of her bud and leaf--  
But Autumn, with sad eyes and brow austere,  
When fields are bare, and woods are brown and sere,  
And leaden skies weep their exhaustless grief.  
Spring is so much too bright, since Spring is brief.  
And in our hearts is autumn all the year,  
Least sad when the wide pastures are most drear,  
And fields grieve most robbed of the last gold sheaf.

For when the plough goes down the brown wet field,  
A delicate doubtful throb of hope is ours--  
What if this coming Spring at last should yield  
Joy, with her too profuse unasked-for flowers?  
Not all our Springs of commonplace and pain  
Have taught us now that autumn hope is vain.

Edith Nesbit

# Philosophy

The sulky sage scarce condescends to see  
This pretty world of sun and grass and leaves;  
To him 'tis all illusion--only he  
Is real amid the visions he perceives.

No sage am I, and yet, by Love's decree,  
To me the world's a masque of shadows too,  
And I a shadow also--since to me  
The only real thing in life is--you.

Edith Nesbit

# Possession

THE child was yours and none of mine,  
And yet you gave it me to keep,  
And bade me sew it raiment fine,  
And wrap my kisses round its sleep.

I carried it upon my breast,  
I fed it in a world apart,  
I wrapped my kisses round its rest,  
I rocked its cradle with my heart.

When in mad nights of rain and storm  
You turned us homeless from your door,  
I wrapped it close, I kept it warm,  
And brought it safe to you once more.

But the last time you drove us forth,  
The snow was wrapped about its head,  
That night the wind blew from the North,  
And on my heart the child was dead.

The child is mine and none of yours,  
My life was his while he had breath,  
What of your claim to him endures,  
Who only gave him birth and death?

Edith Nesbit

# Prayer In Time Of War

Now Death is near, and very near,  
In this wild whirl of horror and fear,  
When round the vessel of our State  
Roll the great mountain waves of hate.  
God! We have but one prayer to-day -  
O Father, teach us how to pray.

For prayer is strong, and very strong;  
But we have turned from Thee so long  
To follow gods that have no power  
Save in the safe and sordid hour,  
That to Thy feet we have lost the way . . .  
O Father, teach us how to pray.

We have done ill, and very ill,  
Set up our will against Thy will.  
That our soft lives might gorge, full-fed,  
We stole our brothers' daily bread.  
Lord, we are sorry we went astray -  
O Father, teach us how to pray.

Now in this hour of desperate strife  
For England's life, her very life,  
Teach us to pray that life may be  
A new life, beautiful to Thee,  
And in Thy hands that life to lay.  
O Father, teach us how to pray.

Edith Nesbit



# Prelude

OUT of the west when the sun was dying  
Clouds of white wings came flying, flying,  
Wheeling and whirling they swept away  
Into the heart of the eastern gray;  
But one white dove came straight to my breast  
Out of the west.

Into the west when the dawn was pearly  
Clouds of white wings went, dewy-early,  
Straight from the world of the waning stars;  
O beating pinions! O prison bars!  
My dove flies free no more with the rest  
Into the west.

Edith Nesbit

## Quand Meme

AGE pauses on his toilsome way  
To let youth pluck her flowers of play;  
Flowers are not always, but we may  
Cut thorns and thistles any day.

Would Fate but hold her hand one hour,  
Then might we pluck love's perfect flower;  
Yet full security might miss  
The perfume of one hour like this.

For all our joys are snatched from Fate,  
Through years her ban makes desolate;  
We wrest our love from doubt and fear,  
And find it so more sweet, more dear.

Edith Nesbit

# Questions

What do the roses do, mother,  
Now that the summer's done?  
They lie in the bed that is hung with red  
And dream about the sun.

What do the lilies do, mother,  
Now that there's no more June?  
Each one lies down in her white nightgown  
And dreams about the moon.

What can I dream of, mother,  
With the moon and the sun away?  
Of a rose unborn, of an untried thorn,  
And a lily that lives a day!

Edith Nesbit

## Quieta Ne Movete

DEAR, if I told you, made your sorrow certain,  
Showed you the ghosts that o'er my pillow lean,  
What joy were mine--to cast aside the curtain  
And clasp you close with no base lies between!

You have given all, and still would find to give me  
More love, more tenderness than ever yet:  
You would forgive me--ah, you would forgive me,  
But all your life you never would forget.

And I, thank God, can still in your embraces  
Forget the past, with all its strife and stain,  
--But if you, too, beheld the evil faces,  
I should forget them never, never again!

Edith Nesbit

## Quieta Ne Movete II

IF one should wake one's frozen faith  
In sunlight of her radiant eyes,  
Bid it forget its dream of death,  
In this new dream of Paradise,  
Bid it forget the long, slow pain,  
The agony when, all in vain,  
It fought for life, and how one swore,  
Once cold, it should not waken more;

If hope one buried long ago  
Should thrill beneath those smiles of hers,  
Should in one's sere life stir and grow,  
As in brown woods the young spring stirs;  
If, breaking icy bonds of grief,  
One's soul should start to bud and leaf,  
It might forget in that springtide  
How last year's leaves fell off and died.

If from warm faith and hope set high  
A lovely living child was born,  
With lips more pure than starlit sky,  
And eyes as clear as summer morn,  
Child-love might grow till one forgot  
Old love, that was and now is not--  
Forgot that far-off time of tears,  
And all these desolated years.

And yet of faith, hope, love, one knows  
So well what end the years will make,  
If one should dig beneath Time's snows  
And wake them now for her sweet sake.  
New life may mean new joy; but then,  
What lives again may die again,  
And to that second death there may  
Be no new resurrection-day.



# Raison D'Etre

O WEARY night, O weary day,  
When heart's delight is far away!

What is the day? A frame of blue  
The vacant-glaring sun grins through.  
What is the night? A sable veil  
Through which the moon peers tired and pale.

O weary day! O weary night!  
How far away is heart's delight!

Love hung the sun in his high place  
To give me light to see her face,  
And love spread out the veil of night  
To hide us two from all men's sight.

O kindly night, O pleasant day,  
Your use is gone--why should ye stay?  
My heart's delight is far away,  
O weary night, O weary day.

Edith Nesbit

# Rejected

WE wandered down the meadow way--  
The path beside the hedge is shady,--  
You did not see the silver may,  
You talked of Art, my sweet blind Lady.

You talked of values and of tone,  
Of square touch and New English crazes;  
Could you not see we were alone,  
Where God's hand paints the world with daisies?

You spoke of Paris and of Rome  
And in the hedgerow's thorny shadows  
A white-throat sang a song of home,  
Of English lanes and English meadows.

You talked about the aims of Art  
And how all Art must needs be moral;  
I heard you with a sinking heart  
And watched the waving crimson sorrel.

For when I found you had not heard  
The song--nor seen the dewy clover,  
I cared no more to find the word  
Should make you hear and see a lover!

Edith Nesbit



# Renunciation

ROSE of the desert of my heart,  
Moon of the night that is my soul,  
Thou can'st not know how sweet thou art,  
Nor what wild tides thy beams control.

For all thy heart a garden is,  
Thy soul is like a dawn of May.  
And garden and dawn might both be his,  
Who from them both must turn away.

Oh, garden of the Spring's delight!  
Oh, dewy dawn of perfect noon!  
I will not pluck thy roses white  
Or warm thy May-time into June.

I can but bless thee, moon and rose,  
And journey far and very far  
To where the night no moonbeam shows,  
To where no happy roses are!

Edith Nesbit

# Requiem

NOW veiled in the inviolable past  
Love lies asleep, who never more will wake;  
Nor would you wake him, even for my sake  
Who for your sake pray he sleep sound at last.

What good thing had we of him--we who bore  
So long his yoke? what pleasant thing had we  
That we should weep his deathlong sleep to see,  
Or call on Life to waken him once more?

A little joy he gave, and much of pain,  
A little pleasure, and enduring grief,  
One flower of joy, and pain piled sheaf on sheaf,  
Harvests of loss, for every bud of gain.

Yet where he lies in this deserted place  
Divided by his narrow grave we sit,  
Welded together by the depths of it,  
Watching the years pass, with averted face.

We do not mourn for him, for here is peace;  
The old unrest frets not these empty years;  
With him went smiles a few, and many tears,  
And peace is sweeter far than those or these.

Only--we owe him nothing. If he gave,  
We too gave gifts--his gifts were less than ours:  
We gave the world, that held so many flowers  
For this--the world that only holds his grave.

Edith Nesbit

## Retro Santhanas

'REFUSE, refrain: for this is not the love  
The Annunciation Angel warned you of;  
This is the little candle, not the sun;  
It burns, but will not warm, unhappy one!'

'But ah! suppose the sun should never shine,  
Then what an anguish of regret were mine  
To know that even from this I turned away!  
Candles may serve, if there should be no day.'

'Nay, better to go cold your whole life long  
Than do the sun, than do your soul such wrong:  
And if the sun shine not, be life's the blame  
And yours the pride, who scorned the meaner flame.'

Edith Nesbit

# Richborough Castle

THESE three grey walls are still stout and strong,  
Though the fourth wide wall has crumbled away  
Where the sea swept by when the land was young,  
And the great waves thundered along the bay,  
Under the sailing seagull's feather,  
Wildly white in the stormy weather,  
And, murmuring ever a restless song,  
Shone, crumpled green, on a sunny day.

Through eighteen hundred years of our time,  
With their storms and sieges, these walls have stood,  
Till the cliff that the waves once strove to climb  
Is left in a meadow solitude;  
And now no sea-gulls' nests are there,  
But ash-trees and thorns make the cliff-side fair,  
And the green of the leaves, and the white of the lime,  
And the red of the berries is sweet and good.

Over the walls, whence eagle-eyed  
The Romans looked for the coming foes,  
Swift keen-tongued snakes now curl and glide  
Where the heavy weight of the ivy grows.  
Oh, hand that builded, oh, scheming brain,  
So long made one with the dust again,  
Your old cement and your walls abide,  
But stronger than they are the ivy and rose!

How the whole dear world is golden and green  
With the marshy meadows, the dimpled wheat,  
The hot strong sunshine, the ivy's sheen,  
And the high white lights on the shiny beet.  
See the far blue line--the retreating sea!  
It is good to be here, it is good to be;  
Whatever life is, or whatever has been,  
To be now--to be here, is nothing but sweet!

There's an underground passage here, they say,  
Here is the entrance with green set round;  
You must stoop your head in this low-roofed way,  
Leave day, light candles--pass underground.  
Here, under the fields, it is damp and cold,  
And whatever secret the place may hold  
It has held it closely for many a day,  
And will hold it for more in its hush profound.

Down here, last year, so the gossips tell,  
Some archæological learned bore  
Went chipping with hammer and chisel as well  
To chip his way to the secret's core--  
Shut away from the sun and the browning wheat,  
The whitening barley, the purple beet--  
In the dark with the damp, the earthy smell,  
While the days burned through that return no more.

Oh, fool! not to see that the green of the trees,  
The blue of the sky and the blue of the sea,  
The placid pasture, the baby breeze,  
And the outspread meadows' tranquillity,  
With eyes to see them, are more than worth  
The whole of the secrets of musty earth.  
What secret outweighs such delights as these,  
Or pays one lost moment's felicity?

Are we wise, we two, when we try to pierce  
To the heart of things, to our own hearts' heart,  
To learn the secret springs of the years,  
And what that is of which we are part?  
Free will--the Absolute--matter--mind--  
Ah, we came like the wind and we go like the wind!  
Would solving life's mysteries dry our tears,  
Or absolute knowledge heal souls that smart?

And meantime one might lose what I'd die to keep--

The power to delight in a day like this,  
In the brown wings' whir, and the faint-bell'd sheep,  
In the million things that the millions miss.  
And, think, had it happened one's in-turned eyes  
Had missed the gateway of Paradise,  
Had one questioned of dreams till one fell asleep,  
Having never dreamed, oh, my Dream, of your kiss!

Edith Nesbit

# Saturday Song

They talk about gardens of roses,  
And moonlight over the sea,  
And mountains and snow  
And sunsetty glow,  
But I know what is best for me.  
The prettiest sight I know,  
Worth all your roses and snow,  
Is the blaze of light on a Saturday night,  
When the barrows are set in a row.

I've heard of bazaars in India  
All glitter and spices and smells,  
But they don't compare  
With the naphtha flare  
And the herrings the coster sells;  
And the oranges piled like gold,  
The cucumbers lean and cold,  
And the red and white block-trimmings  
And the strawberries fresh and ripe,  
And the peas and beans,  
And the sprouts and greens,  
And the 'taters and trotters and tripe.

And the shops where they sell the chairs,  
The mangles and tables and bedding,  
And the lovers go by in pairs,  
And look--and think of the wedding.  
And your girl has her arm in yours,  
And you whisper and make her blush.  
Oh! the snap in her eyes--and her smiles and her sighs  
As she fancies the purple plush!

And you haven't a penny to spend,  
But you dream that you've pounds and pounds;  
And arm in arm with your only friend  
You make your Saturday rounds:  
And you see the cradle bright  
With ribbon--lace--pink and white;  
And she stops her laugh

And you drop your chaff  
In the light of the Saturday night.  
And the world is new  
For her and you -  
A little bit of all-right.

Edith Nesbit



# Sea-Shells

I gathered shells upon the sand,  
Each shell a little perfect thing,  
So frail, yet potent to withstand  
The mountain-waves' wild buffeting.  
Through storms no ship could dare to brave  
The little shells float lightly, save  
All that they might have lost of fine  
Shape and soft colour crystalline.

Yet I amid the world's wild surge  
Doubt if my soul can face the strife,  
The waves of circumstance that urge  
That slight ship on the rocks of life.  
O soul, be brave, for He who saves  
The frail shell in the giant waves,  
Will bring thy puny bark to land  
Safe in the hollow of His hand.

Edith Nesbit

## Second Nature

WHEN I was young how fair the skies,  
Such folly of cloud, such blue depths wise,  
Such dews of morn, such calms of eve,  
So many the lure and the reprieve--  
Life seemed a toy to break and mend  
And make a charm of in the end.

Then slowly all the dew dried up  
And only dust lay in the cup;  
And since, to slake his thirst, man must,  
I sought a cup that had no dust,  
And found it at the Goat and Vine--  
Mingled of brandy, beer and wine.

The goat-cup, straight, drew down the skies  
And lit them in lunatick wise:  
What had been rose went scarlet red,  
And the pearl tints grew like the dead.  
And the fresh primrose of the morn  
Was the wet red of rain-spoiled corn.

Now, with a head that aches and nods  
I hold weak hands out to the gods;  
And oh! forgiving gods and kind,  
They give me healing to my mind,  
And show me once again the lawn  
Green and clear-gemmed with dews of dawn.

O gods, who look down from above  
Upon our tangle of lust and love,  
And, in your purity, perceive  
The worth of what our follies leave:  
Give us but this, and sink the rest--  
To know that dew and dawn are best.

Edith Nesbit

## Seed-Time And Harvest

MY hollyhocks are all awake,  
And not a single rose is lost;  
My wallflowers, for dear pity's sake,  
Have fought the winter's cruel frost;  
Pink peony buds begin to peer,  
And flags push up their sword-blades fine:  
I know there will not be this year  
A brighter garden plot than mine.

I'll sow the seeds of mignonette,  
Of snapdragon and sunflowers tall,  
And scarlet poppies I will set  
To flower against the southern wall;  
Already all my lilies show  
The green crowns baby lilies wear,  
And all my flowers will grow and blow,  
Because Love's hand has set them there.

I'll plant and water, sow and weed,  
Till not an inch of earth shows brown,  
And take a vow of each small seed  
To grow to greenness and renown:  
And then some day you'll pass my way,  
See gold and crimson, bell and star,  
And catch my garden's soul, and say:  
'How sweet these cottage gardens are!'

Edith Nesbit

# Shepherds All And Maidens Fair

PIPE, shepherds, pipe, the summer's ripe;  
So wreath your crooks with flowers;  
The world's in tune to Love and June,  
The days are rich in hours,  
In rosy hours, in golden hours--  
Love's crown and fortune fair,  
So gather gold for Love to hold,  
And flowers for Love to wear!

Sing, maidens, sing! A dancing ring  
Of pleasures speed your way;  
Too harsh and dry is fierce July,  
Too maiden-meech was May;  
But Love and June their old sweet tune  
Are singing at your ear:  
So learn the song and troop along  
To meet your shepherds dear!

Oh, Chloris fair, a rose to wear,  
And gold to spend have I--  
When all are gay on this June day  
You would not bid me sigh?  
You would not scorn a swain forlorn--  
Each shepherd far and near  
Hastes to his sweet, with flying feet,  
As I towards my dear.

No maids there be in Arcady  
But have their shepherds true;  
Must you alone despise the one  
Who only pipes for you?  
You have no ear my pipe to hear  
Though all for you it be;  
And I no eyes for her who sighs  
And only sings for me!

Edith Nesbit

# Silence

So silent is the world to-night  
The lamp gives silence out like light,  
The latticed windows open wide  
Show silence, like the night, outside:  
The nightingale's faint song draws near  
Like musical silence to mine ear.

The empty house calls not to me,  
'Here, but for fate, were thou and she--'  
Its gibe for once is checked. To-night  
Silence is queen in grief's despite,  
And even the longing of my soul  
Is silent 'neath this hour's control.

Edith Nesbit

# Song

Now the Spring is waking,  
Very shy as yet,  
Busy mending, making  
Grass and violet.  
Frowsy Winter's over:  
See the budding lane!  
Go and meet your lover:  
Spring is here again!

Every day is longer  
Than the day before;  
Lambs are whiter, stronger,  
Birds sing more and more;  
Woods are less than shady,  
Griefs are more than vain -  
Go and kiss your lady:  
Spring is here again!

Edith Nesbit

## Song II

A MONTH of green and tender May,  
All woods and walks awake with flowers,  
Wide sunlit meadows for the day,  
And moon-bathed paths for evening hours;  
A bright brief dream that had no past,  
And of the future knew no fear;  
A kiss at first, a sigh at last--  
Only last year.

Another spring, dim soulless woods;  
No farewell kiss, no parting tear;  
No stone to mark where silence broods  
O'er the dead love we found so dear.  
But, oh, to me the green seems grey,  
The budding branches all are sere,  
For sweet love's sake, that died one day,  
Only last year.

Edith Nesbit

## Song Iii

WE loved, my love, and now it seems  
Our love has brought to birth  
Friendship, the fairest child of dreams,  
The rarest gift of earth.

Soon die love's roses fresh and frail,  
And when their bloom is o'er,  
Not all our heart-wrung tears avail  
To give them life once more.

But when true love with friendship lives,  
As now, for thee and me,  
Love brings the roses--Friendship gives  
Them immortality.

Edith Nesbit



## Song Iv

I HEAR the waves to-night  
Piteously calling, calling  
Though the light  
Of the kind moon is falling,  
Like kisses, on the sea  
That calls for sunshine, dear, as my soul calls for thee.

I see the sea lie gray  
Wrinkling her brows in sorrow,  
Hear her say:--  
'Bright love of yesterday, return to-morrow,  
Sun, I am thine, am thine!'  
Oh sea, thy love will come again, but what of mine?

Edith Nesbit

# Song Of Long Ago

LONG ago, long ago,  
When the hawthorn buds were pearly  
And the birds sang, late and early,  
All the songs that lovers know,  
How we lingered in the lane,  
Kissed and parted, kissed again,  
Parted, laggard foot and slow!  
What a pretty world we knew  
Dressed in moonlight, dreams and dew,  
Long ago, my first sweet sweetheart,  
Long ago!

Long ago, long ago,  
When the wind was on the river  
Where the lights and shadows shiver,  
And the streets were all aglow.  
In the gaudy gas-lit street  
We two parted, sweet, my sweet,  
And the crowd went to and fro,  
And your veil was wet with tears  
For the inevitable years--  
Long ago, my last sweet sweetheart,  
Long ago!

Edith Nesbit

# Song Of The Rose

THE lilac-time is over,  
Laburnum's day is past,  
The red may-blossoms cover  
The white ones, fallen too fast.  
And guelder-roses hang like snow,  
Where purple flag-flowers grow.

And still the tulip lingers,  
The wall-flower's red like blood  
The ivy spreads pale fingers,  
The rose is in the bud.  
Good-bye, sweet lilac, and sweet may!  
The Rose is on the way.

You were but heralds sent us--  
All April's buds, and May's--  
But painted missals lent us  
That we might learn her praise,  
Might cast down every bud that blows  
Before our Queen, the Rose!

Edith Nesbit

## Song V

THE sunshine of your presence lies  
On the glad garden of my heart  
And bids the leaves of silence part  
To show the flowers to your dear eyes,  
And flower on flower blooms there and dies  
And still new buds awakened spring,  
For sunshine makes the garden wise,  
To know the time for blossoming.

Night is no time for blossoming,  
Your garden then dreams otherwise,  
Of vanished Summer, vanished Spring,  
And how the dearest flower first dies.  
Yet from your ministering eyes  
Though night hath drawn me far apart  
On the still garden of my heart  
The moonlight of your memory lies.

Edith Nesbit

## Song Vi

'LOVE me little, love me long,'  
Is the burden of my song,  
And if nothing more may be  
Little shall suffice for me.

But if you could crown with flowers  
All my radiant, festal hours,  
And console for hours of sorrow  
Love me more with each to-morrow.

And if you would turn my days  
To one splendid hymn of praise,  
And set hopes like stars above me  
Love me much, and always love me!

Edith Nesbit

## Song VII

THE summer down the garden walks  
Swept in her garments bright;  
She touched the pale still lily stalks  
And crowned them with delight;  
She breathed upon the rose's head  
And filled its heart with fire,  
And with a golden carpet spread  
The path of my desire.

The larkspurs stood like sentinels  
To greet her as she came,  
Soft rang the Canterbury bells  
The music of her name.  
She passed across the happy land  
Where all dear dreams flower free;  
She took my true love by the hand  
And led her out to me.

Edith Nesbit

## Special Pleading

THE world's a path all fresh and sweet,  
A sky all fresh and fair,  
With daisies underneath your feet  
And roses for your hair;  
Red roses for your pretty hair,  
Green trees to shade your way,  
And lavish blossoms everywhere,  
Because the time is May.

How gold the sun shines through the green!  
How soft the turf is spread!  
How richly falls the shimmering sheen  
About your darling head!  
How in the dawn of Paradise  
Should you foresee the night?  
How, with the sunlight in your eyes,  
See aught beyond the light?

The world's a path all rough and wild,  
A sky all black with fears,  
Among the ghosts, unhappy child,  
You stumble, blind with tears;  
The track is faint, and far the fold,  
And very far the day:  
Unless you have a hand to hold,  
How will you find the way?

Edith Nesbit

# Spring In War-Time

Now the sprinkled blackthorn snow  
Lies along the lover's lane  
Where last year we used to go-  
Where we shall not go again.

In the hedge the buds are new,  
By our wood the violets peer-  
Just like last year's violets too,  
But they have no scent this year.

Every bird has heart to sing  
Of its nest, warmed by its breast;  
We had heart to sing last spring,  
But we never built our nest.

Presently red roses blown  
Will make all the garden gay..  
Not yet have the daisies grown  
On your clay.

Edith Nesbit



# Spring Song

ALL winter through I sat alone,  
Doors barred and windows shuttered fast,  
And listened to the wind's faint moan,  
And ghostly mutterings of the past;  
And in the pauses of the rain,  
'Mid whispers of dead sorrow and sin,  
Love tapped upon the window pane:  
I had no heart to let him in.

But now, with spring, my doors stand wide;  
My windows let delight creep through;  
I hear the skylark sing outside;  
I see the crocus, golden new.  
The pigeons on my window-sill,  
Winging and wooing, flirt and flout,--  
Now Love must enter if he will,  
I have no heart to keep him out.

Edith Nesbit

## Spring Song II

THE spring is here, and the long nights grow  
Less bitterly cold than awhile ago;  
Our rags serve their purpose now, and keep  
Warmth enough in us to let us sleep.  
The rain that trickles down our walls  
No longer seems to freeze as it falls;  
There was dust, not mud, on our feet to-day;  
There's some green in a flower-pot over the way;  
The sky-strip over the court's changed hue,  
From dull yellow-grey to clear grey-blue;  
Through our broken windows no more the storm  
Laughs and shrieks as we try to keep warm,  
But through dusty panes the long sunbeams peer,  
For the spring is here.

Small joy the greenness and grace of spring  
To grey hard lives like our own can bring.  
A drowning man cares little to think  
Of the lights on the waves where he soon must sink.

The greenest garments the spring can wear  
Are black already with our despair:  
Earth will be one with us soon--shall we care  
If snow or sunshine be over us there,  
Or if wintry the world be we found so drear,  
Or if spring be here?

In the western half of our Christian town  
The Winter only pretends to frown,  
And when his undreaded rage is done,  
The 'London season' they say is begun.  
With wine, feast, revelling, laugh and song,  
The hours rose-garlanded dance along,  
The whirl of wickedness wilder grows  
In this western camp of our bitter foes;  
They fight with each other--the victors take

The largest share of the wealth we make;  
They spend on their horses, their women, their wives,  
The money wrung from our blasted lives:  
It is theirs to enjoy--it is ours to pay.  
Do they never dream of a reckoning day,  
When the lives they have wrecked shall be counted up,  
And measured the blood that has brightened their cup,  
When we who have worked shall take payment due,  
And they for their work shall have payment too?

Do they dream of that coming hour? Not they!  
Their feet flit fast down the smooth steep way,  
They see not the waiting snakes that hide  
In the hothouse flowers at their life-path's side,  
They know no justice, no pity, no fear--  
But the spring is here!

Yes--here! In the hope we had almost lost,  
That has sprung to bud after long years' frost;  
In this fire in our veins that cries, 'Give youth,  
Love, manhood, life, for the Right and the Truth;'  
In our steady purpose, for Freedom's sake,  
Through custom, privilege, 'fate,' to break;  
In the brains of the thinkers, the arms of the men  
Who will strike, and strike, and still strike again,  
Till they cut our way to the land of flowers,  
And the summer of freedom at last is ours--  
In these is the spring. The winter was sore--  
It is over and done, and will come no more.  
The fruit will grow with the changing year,  
Though only the blossoms now appear;  
For the sake of the fruit the blossoms are dear,  
And the spring is here--the spring is here.

Edith Nesbit

## Spring Song Iii

HERE'S the Spring-time, Sweet!  
Earth's green gown is new,  
Lambs begin to bleat,  
Doves begin to coo,  
Birds begin to woo  
In the wood and lane;  
Sweet, the tale is true  
Spring is here again!

I have been discreet  
All the winter through;  
Now, before your feet,  
Blossoms let me strew.  
Flowers, as yet, are few;  
Will my lady deign  
Take this flower or two?  
Spring is here again

Make the year complete,  
Give the Spring her due!  
All the flowers entreat,  
All the song-birds sue.  
'Twixt the green and blue  
Let Love wake and reign,  
Let me worship you--  
Spring is here again!

Edith Nesbit

# St. Valentine's Day

The South is a dream of flowers  
With a jewel for sky and sea,  
Rose-crowns for the dancing hours,  
Gold fruits upon every tree;  
But cold from the North The wind blows forth  
That blows my love to me.  
The stars in the South are gold  
Like lamps between sky and sea;  
The flowers that the forests hold.  
Like stars between tree and tree;  
But little and white Is the pale moon's light  
That lights my love to me.  
In the South the orange grove  
Makes dusk by the dusky sea,  
White palaces wrought for love  
Gleam white between tree and tree,  
But under bare boughs Is the little house  
Warm-lit for my love and me.

Edith Nesbit

# Summer Song

THERE are white moon daisies in the mist of the meadow  
Where the flowered grass scatters its seeds like spray,  
There are purple orchis by the wood-ways' shadow,  
There are pale dog-roses by the white highway;  
And the grass, the grass is tall, the grass is up for hay,  
With daisies white like silver and buttercups like gold,  
And it's oh! for once to play thro' the long, the lovely day,  
To laugh before the year grows old!

There is silver moonlight on the breast of the river  
Where the willows tremble to the kiss of night,  
Where the nine tall aspens in the meadow shiver,  
Shiver in the night wind that turns them white.  
And the lamps, the lamps are lit, the lamps are glow-worms light,  
Between the silver aspens and the west's last gold.  
And it's oh! to drink delight in the lovely lonely night,  
To be young before the heart grows old!

Edith Nesbit

# Surrender

Oh, the nights were dark and cold,  
When my love was gone.  
And life was hard to hold  
When my love was gone.  
I was wise, I never gave  
What they teach a girl to save,  
But I wished myself his slave  
When my love was gone.

I was all alone at night  
When my love came home.  
Oh, what thought of wrong or right  
When my love came home?  
I flung the door back wide  
And I pulled my love inside;  
There was no more shame or pride  
When my love came home.

Edith Nesbit

# Surrender Ii

THE wild wind wails in the poplar tree,  
I sit here alone.  
O heart of my heart, come hither to me!  
Come to me straight over land and sea,  
My soul--my own!

Not now--the clock's slow tick I hear,  
And nothing more.  
The year is dying, the leaves are sere,  
No ghost of the beautiful young crowned year  
Knocks at my door.

But one of these nights, a wild, late night,  
I, waiting within,  
Shall hear your hand on the latch--and spite  
Of prudence and folly and wrong and right,  
I shall let you in.

Edith Nesbit



## Teint Neutre

WIDE downs all gray, with gray of clouds roofed over,  
Chill fields stripped naked of their gown of grain,  
Small fields of rain-wet grass and close-grown clover,  
Wet, wind-blown trees--and, over all, the rain.

Does memory lie? For Hope her missal closes  
So far away the may and roses seem;  
Ah! was there ever a garden red with roses?  
Ah! were you ever mine save in a dream?

So long it is since Spring, the skylark waking  
Heard her own praises in his perfect strain;  
Low hang the clouds, the sad year's heart is breaking,  
And mine, my heart--and, over all, the rain.

Edith Nesbit

# Tekel

WHEN on the West broke light from out the East,  
Then from the splendour and the shame of Rome--  
Renouncing wealth and pleasure, game and feast,  
And all the joys of his polluted home,  
Desiring not the gifts his world could give,  
If haply he might save his soul and live--  
Into the desert's heart a man had come.

His God had died for love of him, and he  
For love of God would die to all of these  
Sweet sins he had not known for sins, and be  
Estranged for evermore from rest and ease;  
His days in penance spent might half atone  
For the iniquity of days bygone,  
And in the desert might his soul find peace.

Crossing wide seas, he reached an alien land:  
By mighty harbours and broad streams he passed  
Into an arid, trackless waste of sand,  
And journeying ever faster and more fast,  
Left men behind, and onward still did press  
To a ruined city in the wilderness,  
And there he stayed his restless feet at last.

There stood long lines of columns richly wrought,  
Colossal statues of forgotten kings,  
Vast shadowy temples, court within dim court,  
Great shapes of man-faced beasts with wide firm wings;  
And in and out each broken colonnade  
The bright-eyed, swift, green-gleaming lizards played,  
In that still place the only living things.

But when the moon unveiled her still, white face,  
And over sand and stone her glory shed--  
Another life awoke within the place,

And great beasts stalked, with silent heavy tread,  
Through pillared vista, over marble floor,  
And the stern menace of the lion's roar  
Made horrible the city of the dead.

Like a great bird soft sinking on its nest,  
Too lightly to disturb its tender brood,  
The night, with dark spread wings and cloudy breast,  
Sank on the desert city's solitude  
As he drew near. The shadows grew more dense,  
The silence stronger; weariness intense  
Fell on him then, and only rest seemed good.

He passed between tall pillars' sculptured gloom,  
And entered a deserted, lightless fane,  
And knew not if it temple were, or tomb,  
But slept and slept, till over all the plain  
The level sunbeams spread, and earth was bright  
With morning's radiant resurrection-light;  
Then he awoke, refreshed and strong again.

Through empty courts he passed, and lo! a wall  
Whereon was imaged all the languid grace  
Of fairest women, and among them all  
Shone like a star one lovely Eastern face:  
Undimmed by centuries the colours were,  
Bright as when first the painter found her fair,  
And set her there to glorify the place.

All he had fled from suddenly drew near,  
And from her eyes a challenge seemed down-thrown;  
'Ah, fool!' she seemed to say, 'what dost thou here?  
How canst thou bear this stern, sad life alone,  
When I--not just this face that copies me,  
But I myself--stretch arms and lips to thee,  
From that same world whose joys thou hast foregone?'

His heart leaped up like flame--she was so fair;  
Then with a start he hid his eyes and fled  
Into the hotness of the outer air.  
His pulse beat quickly. 'Oh, my God!' he said,  
'These be the heart made pure, and cleansèd brain!  
I vow to Thee to never look again  
On women, real or painted, quick or dead!'

So lest within the city he should find,  
To tempt his soul, still some accursèd thing,  
He left the palaces and courts behind,  
Found a green spot, with date-palms and a spring  
And built himself a rough stone shelter there  
And saw no more the face, so strange and fair  
That had begot such vain imagining.

He tilled the patch of land, and planted seeds  
Which from his own far country he had brought;  
And, caring little for his body's needs,  
Strove still by blind belief to strangle thought,  
By ceaseless penance to deny desire,  
To quench in prayer and fast all human fire,  
And wrest from Heaven the blessings that he sought.

And there peace found him, and he dwelt alone,  
And gladly gave his life to God. Behind  
Lay the long dim arcades of graven stone;  
Before him lay the desert, burning blind  
Sometimes with the dread dance of its own sand,  
That wildly whirled in shadowy columns, fanned  
By the hot breath of the fierce desert wind.

Each day passed by as had passed other days,  
And days gone by were as the days to come,  
Save that on some days he was wild with praise,  
And weak with vigil and with fast on some;  
And no man saw he for long months and years,  
But ever did he penance with hot tears,

And but for prayer and praise his lips were dumb.

Sometimes at first, when spent with watch and prayer,  
He saw again the Imperial City's towers,  
Where, in a mist of music and sweet air,  
Thais and Phryne crowned his cup with flowers--  
He saw the easeful day, the festal night,  
The life that was one dream of long delight,  
One rose-red glow of rapture and fair hours.

He heard old well-remembered voices cry,  
'Come back to us! Think of the joys you miss;  
Each moment floats some foregone rapture by,  
A cup, a crown, a song, a laugh, a kiss!  
Cast down that crown of thorns, return, and be  
Once more flower-crowned, love-thrilled, wine-warmed, and see  
The old sweet life--how good a thing it is!'

But his soul answered, 'Nay, I am content;  
Ye call in vain; the desert shuts me in.  
Your flowers are sere, your wine with gall is blent,  
Your sweets have all the sickening taste of sin;  
Such sin I expiate with ceaseless pain,  
And world and flesh and devil strive in vain  
Back from its sanctuary my soul to win.

'Fair are the Imperial City's towers to see?  
I seek the City with the streets of gold.  
Beside the lilies God has grown for me  
Faint are the roses that your fingers hold.  
Ear hath not heard the music I shall hear,  
Eye hath not seen the joys that shall appear,  
Nor heart conceived the things I shall behold.'

After long days a stranger halted there,  
For some far distant monastery bound.  
The hermit fed and lodged, nor could forbear

To tell his guest what rest his soul had found  
How with the world he long ago had done,  
How the hard battle had been fought and won,  
And he found peace, pure, perfect and profound.

The stranger answered, 'Thou hast watched an hour,  
But many hours go to make up our day,  
And some of these are dark with fateful power,  
And Satan watches for our souls away;  
The spirit may be willing, but indeed  
The flesh is weak, and so much more the need  
To pray and watch, my brother, watch and pray.'

The Roman bowed his head in mute assent,  
And, having served the stranger with his best,  
Bade him God-speed, and down the way he went--  
Gazed sadly after, but within his breast  
A pale fire of resentment sprang to flame  
Was he not holy now, and void of blame,  
And certain of himself, and pure, and blest?

That night a new-born desolation grew  
Within his heart as he made fast the stone  
Against the doorway of his hut, and knew  
How more than ever he was now alone.  
He was in darkness, but the moon without  
Made a new tender daylight round about  
The hut, the palms, the plot with millet sown.

Hark!--what was that?--For many months and years  
He had not heard that faint uncertain noise,  
Broken, and weak, and indistinct with tears--  
A voice--a human voice--a woman's voice.  
'Oh, let me in,' it wailed, 'before I die!  
Oh, let me in, for Holy Charity!  
For see--my life or death is at thy choice!'

Unthinking, swift he rolled the stone away:  
There stood a woman, trembling, shrinking, thin;  
Her pale hair by the moon's white light looked grey,  
And grey her hands and grey her withered skin.  
'Oh, save me--lest I die among the beasts  
Who roam, and roar, and hold their fearful feasts!  
Oh, save me,' she besought him, 'let me in!'

Troubled, he answered, 'Nay, I have a vow  
Never again a woman's face to see!'  
'But, ah,' she cried, 'thy vow is broken now,  
For at this moment thou beholdest me.  
I cannot journey farther. Help!' she said,  
'Or I before the dawning shall be dead,  
And thou repent to all eternity!'

His soul was gentle and compassionate.  
'Thou shalt not perish--enter here,' he said;  
'My vow is broken, and thy need is great.'  
She staggered forward to the dry leaf bed,  
And sank upon it, cold and still and white.  
'Perhaps she may not live until the light,'  
He thought, and lifted up her drooping head,

And gave her wine from out a little store  
Which he had kept untouched since first he came;  
He rolled the stone again before his door  
To keep the night air from her wasted frame;  
And, though his vow was broken, somehow knew  
That he was doing what was right to do,  
Yet felt a weight of unacknowledged blame.

And many a day he tended her and fed;  
But ever after that first night's surprise  
With earnest vigilance he held his head  
Averted, and downcast he kept his eyes.  
His vow, though broken once, was still his law;  
He looked upon her face no more, nor saw

Her whom he cared for in such kindly wise.

She never spoke to him, nor he to her--  
That she was sick and sad was all he knew;  
He never asked her what her past days were,  
Nor of the future, what she meant to do.  
So dwelt they, till the full moon's yellow light  
Flooded the world once more. Then came the night  
Which all his life had been a prelude to.

The stone was moved a little from the door,  
And near it he was kneeling rapt in prayer  
Upon the cold uneven earthen floor;  
The moonbeams passed him by, and rested where  
The woman slept--her breathing soft and slow,  
With rhythmic cadence even, restful, low,  
Stirring the stillness of the cool night air

His prayer being ended, as he turned to rest,  
He chanced to let his eyes fall carelessly  
Upon the figure that the moon caressed,  
The woman that his care had not let die.  
And now no more he turned his face aside,  
But gazed, and gazed, and still unsatisfied  
His eager look fed on her, hungrily.

On her? On whom? The suppliant he had saved,  
Thin, hollow-cheeked and sunken-eyed had been,  
With shrunken brow whereon care-lines were graved,  
With withered arms, dull hair, and fingers lean.  
'Has my blind care transformed her so?' he said;  
For she was gone, and there lay in her stead  
The loveliest woman he had ever seen.

The rags she wore but made her seem more sweet,  
Since in despite of them she was so fair;  
The rough brown leaves quite covered up her feet,



But left one ivory arm and shoulder bare,  
The other lay beneath the little head,  
And over all the moonlit couch was spread  
The sunlight-coloured wonder of her hair.

He could not move, nor turn away his gaze:  
How long he stood and looked he could not guess.  
At last she faintly sighed, and in her face  
Trembled the dawn of coming consciousness;  
The eyelids quivered, and the red lips stirred,  
As if they tried to find some sweet lost wo

And then her eyelids lifted, and he met  
Full in his dazzled eyes the glorious light  
Of eyes that he had struggled to forget  
Since he had broken from their spells of might--  
The Eastern eyes that from the painted wall  
Had lightened down upon him, to enthral  
Senses and soul with fetters of delight.

He knew her now, his love without a name,  
Who in his dreams had looked on him and smiled,  
And almost back to his old world of shame  
His unconsenting manhood had beguiled!  
There was no world now any more. At last  
He knew that all--his future, present, past--  
In her sole self was fused and reconciled.

The moments fled as in a dream divine:  
Fire filled his veins--there beat within his brain  
The madness that is born of love or wine;  
And her eyes gleamed--softened and gleamed again,  
And in those stormy seas he gazed, until  
Her beauty seemed the whole vast night to fill,  
And all, save her, seemed valueless and vain.

Then, with her eyes still deep in his, she rose

And moved towards him, and a wave of bliss  
Flooded his sense with the wild joy that goes  
Before a longed-for, almost granted kiss,  
And slowly she drew nearer to his side--  
Then, with a smile like mid-June's dawn, she sighed,  
And turned to him, and laid her hand on his.

And at the touch, all he had deemed effaced--  
All the heart-searing passions of his past--  
Surged up, and their destroying wave laid waste  
The ordered garden of his soul. At last  
The spell of silence broke, and suddenly  
The man's whole heart found voice in one low cry,  
As round her perfect head his arms he cast--

And did not clasp her, for his foiled arms crossed  
Only upon his own tumultuous breast!  
His wrecked heart, tempest driven, passion tossed,  
Beat fierce against his own hand on it pressed.  
As on June fields might fall December frost,  
In one cold breath he knew that she was lost--  
Eternally foregone and unpossessed.

For even as he clasped she had seemed to melt,  
And fade into the misty moonlit air;  
His arms were empty, yet his hand still felt  
The touch of her hand that had rested there:  
But she was gone, with all her maddening grace--  
The solitude and silence, in her place,  
Like a chill searching wind crept everywhere.

Silence--at first. Then suddenly outbroke  
A little laugh. And then, above, around,  
A hideous peal of laughter, shout on shout,  
Re-echoing from sky, and air, and ground;  
And in his devastated soul had birth  
A horrid echo of that demon mirth,  
And with his human voice he swelled its sound.

'Tricked, fooled!' he laughed. 'We laugh, the fiends and I,  
They for their triumph, I to feel my fall!  
From snares like these is no security,  
In desert wild or close-built city wall:  
And since I must be tempted, let me go  
And brave the old temptations that I know;  
Not these, that are but phantoms after all--

'Phantoms, not living women, warm and real,  
As the fair Roman women were. And yet  
The phantom only is my soul's ideal,  
Longed for through all the years and never met  
Till now; and only now to make hell worse--  
To fan my fires of infinite remorse  
With the cold wind of infinite regret.

'Back to the world, the world of love and sin!  
For since my soul is lost, I claim its price!  
Prayers are not heard. The God I trusted in  
Has failed me once--He shall not fail me twice!  
No more of that wild striving and intense  
For irrecoverable innocence--  
No more of useless, vain self-sacrifice!

'Life is too potent and too passionate,  
Against whose force I all these years have striven  
In vain, in vain! Our own lives make our Fate;  
And by our Fate our lives are blindly driven!  
There is no refuge in the hermit's cell  
From memories enough to make a hell--  
Of chances lost that might have made a heaven!'

Back to his world he went, and plunged anew  
Into the old foul life's polluted tide;  
But ever in his sweetest feast he knew  
A longing never to be satisfied:

This strange wild wickedness, that new mad sin,  
Might be the frame to find her picture in;  
And if that failed, some other must be tried.

And in the search, soul, body, heart, and brain  
Were blasted and destroyed, and still his prize,  
Ever untouched, seemed always just to gain,  
And just beyond his reach shone Paradise.  
So followed he, too faithfully, too well,  
Through death, into the very gate of hell,  
The love-light of those unforgotten eyes!

Edith Nesbit

# The Adventurer

THE land of gold was far away,  
The sea a challenge roared between;  
I left my throne, my crown, my queen,  
And sailed out of the quiet bay.

I met the challenge of the wave,  
The curses of the winds I mocked:  
The conquered wave my galley rocked,  
The wind became my envious slave.

I brought much treasure from afar,  
Spices, and shells, and rich attire;  
Red rubies, fed with living fire,  
To lie where all my longings are.

Heavy with spoil my keel ploughed low  
As slow we sailed into the bay,  
And long ago seemed yesterday  
And yesterday looked long ago.

I came in triumph from the sea;  
Bent was my crown, my courts grown mean,  
And on my throne a faded queen  
Raised alien eyes, and looked at me.

'My queen! These rubies let me lay  
Upon thy heart, as once my head . . .'  
She smiled pale scorn: 'My heart!' she said,  
And turned her weary eyes away.

Edith Nesbit

# The Appeal

ALL summer-time you said:

'Love has no need of shelter nor of kindness,  
For all the flowers take pity on his blindness,  
And lead him to his scented rose-soft bed.'

'He is a king,' you said.

'That I bow not the knee will never grieve him,  
For all the summer-palaces receive him.'  
But now Love has not where to lay his head.

'He is a god,' you said.

'His altars are wherever roses blossom.'  
And summer made his altar of her bosom,  
But now the altar is ungarlanded.

Take back the words you said:

Out in the rain he shivers broken-hearted;  
Summer who bore him has with tears departed,  
And o'er her grave he weeps un comforted.

And you, for all you said,  
Would weep too, if when dawn stills the wind's riot,  
You found him on your threshold, pale and quiet,  
Clasped him at last, and found the child was dead.

Edith Nesbit

# The Ballad Of The White Lady

SIR GEOFFREY met the white lady  
Upon his marriage morn,  
Her eyes were blue as cornflowers are,  
Her hair was gold like corn.

Sir Geoffrey gave the white lady  
A posy of roses seven,  
'You are the fairest May,' said he,  
'That ever strayed from Heaven.'

Sir Geoffrey by the white lady  
Was lured away to shame,  
For seven long years of prayers and tears  
No tidings of him came.

Then she who should have been his bride  
A mighty oath she swore,  
'For seven long years I have wept and prayed,  
Now I will pray no more.

'Since God and all the saints of Heaven  
Bring not my lord to me,  
I will go down myself to hell  
And bring him back,' said she.

She crept to the white lady's bower,  
The taper's flame was dim,  
And there Sir Geoffrey lay asleep,  
And the white witch sat by him.

Her arm was laid across his neck,  
Her gold hair on his face,  
And there was silence in the room

As in a burial-place.

And there were gems and carven cups,  
And 'broidered bridal gear--  
'Whose bridal is this?' the lady said,  
'And what knight have ye here?'

'The good knight here ye know full well,  
He was your lord, I trow,  
But I have taken him from your side,  
And I am his lady now.

'This seven year with right good cheer  
We twain our bridal keep,  
So take for your mate another knight  
And let my dear lord sleep.'

Then up and spake Sir Geoffrey's bride,  
'What bridal cheer is this?  
I would think scorn to have the lips  
Who could not have the kiss!

'I would think scorn to take the half  
Who could not have the whole;  
I would think scorn to steal the body  
Who could not take the soul!

'For, though ye hold his body fast  
This seven weary year,  
His soul walks ever at my side  
And whispers in my ear.

'I would think scorn to hold in sleep  
What, if it waked, would flee,  
So let his body join his soul



And both fare forth with me;

'For I have learned a spell more strong  
Than yours that laid him low,  
And I will speak it for his sake  
Because I love him so!'

The white lady threw back her hair,  
Her eyes began to shine--  
'His soul is thine these seven years?--  
To-night it shall be mine!

'I have been brave to hold him here  
While seven long years befell,  
Rather than let a bridal be  
Whose seed should flower in hell.

'I have not looked into his eyes  
Nor joined my lips to his,  
For fear his soul should spring to flame  
And shrivel at my kiss.

'I have been brave to watch his sleep  
While the long hours come and go,  
To hold the body without the soul,  
Because I love him so.

'But since his soul this seven year  
Has sat by thee,' she said,  
'His body and soul to-night shall lie  
Upon my golden bed.

'Thou hast no need to speak the spell  
That thou hast learned,' said she,  
'For I will wake him from his sleep

And take his soul from thee.'

She stooped above him where he lay,  
She laid her lips on his;  
He stirred, he spake: 'These seven long years  
I have waited for thy kiss.

'My soul has hung upon thy lips  
And trembled at thy breath,  
Thou hast given me life in a cup to drink,  
As God will give me death.

'Why didst thou fear to kill my soul  
Which only lives for thee?  
Thou hast put seven wasted years,  
O love, 'twixt thee and me.'

Edith Nesbit

# The Beatific Vision

OH God! if I do my duty  
And walk in the thorny way,  
Will you pay me with heavens of beauty,  
Millions of lives away?  
Will you give me the music of heaven,  
And the joy that none understands,  
In place of what life would have given  
If I had held out my hands?

I have lived in a narrow prison,  
I have writhed 'neath a bitter creed,  
And I dare to say that no heaven can pay  
The renounced dream and deed,  
But when my life's portal closes,  
If you have no heaven to spare  
God! give me a garden of roses,  
And some one to walk with there.

Edith Nesbit

# The Beech Tree

MY beautiful beech, your smooth grey coat is trimmed  
With letters. Once, each stood for all things dear  
To foolish lovers, dead this many a year,  
Whose lamp of lighted love so soon was dimmed.  
You have seen them come and go,  
And heard their kisses and vows  
Under your boughs,  
The pitiful vows they swore,  
Have seen their poor tears flow,  
Have seen them part; to meet, and to return, no more!

And in old winters, through your branches bare,  
The north wind drove the blue home-scented smoke  
That on the glowing Christmas hearth awoke  
Where the old logs, with eager flicker and flare,  
Sang their low crackling song  
Of peace and of good will.  
The old song is still,  
The old voices have died away,  
The hearth has been cold so long,  
And the bright faces dimmed and covered up with clay.

And summer after summer wakes to glow  
The ordered pleasance with the clipped box-hedge,  
The drooping lilac by the old moat's edge,  
The roses, that throw you kisses from below,  
The orchard pink and white,  
The sedge's whispered words,  
The nesting birds,  
All these return to revel round your feet.  
And in the untroubled night  
The nightingale still sings, the jasmine still is sweet.

My beautiful beech, I carve upon you here  
The master-letter which begins her name  
Through whom, to me, the royal summer came,  
And nightingale and rose, and all things dear.  
And, in some far-off time,  
I shall come here, weary and old,

When the hearth in my heart is cold  
And the birds that nest there flown;  
I will remember this summer in all its prime  
And say, 'There was a day--  
Thank God, the Giver, an unforgotten day,  
When I walked here, not alone,  
--O God of pity and sorrow, not alone!'

Edith Nesbit

## The Better Part

THERE'S a grey old church on a wind-swept hill  
Where three bent yew trees cower,  
The gipsy roses grow there still,  
And the thyme and Saint John's gold flower,  
The pale blue violets that love the chalk  
Cling light round the lichened stone,  
And starlings chatter and grey owls talk  
In the belfry o' nights alone.

It's a thousand leagues and a thousand years  
From the brick-built, gas-lit town  
To the little church where the wild thyme hears  
The bees and the breeze of the down.  
The town is crowded and hard and rough;  
Let those fight in its press who will--  
But the little churchyard is quiet enough,  
And there's room in the churchyard still.

Edith Nesbit

# The Champion

Young and a conqueror, once on a day,  
Wild white Winter rode out this way;  
With his sword of ice and his banner of snow  
Vanquished the Summer and laid her low.

Winter was young then, young and strong;  
Now he is old, he has reigned too long.  
He shall be routed, he shall be slain;  
Summer shall come to her own again!

See the champion of Summer wake  
Little armies in field and brake:  
'Cruel and cold has King Winter been;  
Fight for the Summer, fight for the Queen!'

First the aconite dots the mould  
With little round cannon-balls of gold;  
Then, to help in the winter's rout,  
Regiments of crocuses march out.

See the swords of the flag-leaves shine;  
See the shield of the celandine,  
And daffodil lances green and keen,  
To fight for the Summer, fight for the Queen.

Silver triumphant the snowdrop swings  
Banners that mock at defeated kings;  
And wherever the green of the new grass peers,  
See the array of victorious spears.

Daffodil trumpets soon shall sound  
Over the garden's battle-ground,  
And lovely ladies crowd out to see  
The long procession of victory.

Little daisies with snowy frills,  
Courtly tulips and sweet jonquils,  
Primrose and cowslip, friends well met  
With white wood-sorrel and violet.

Hundreds of milkmaids by field and fold;  
Thousands of buttercups licked with gold;  
Budding hedges and woods and trees -  
Spring brings freedom and life to these.

Then the triumphant Spring shall ride  
Over the happy countryside;  
Deep in the woods the birds shall sing:  
'The King is dead--long live the King!'

But Spring is no king, but a faithful knight;  
He will ride on through the meadows bright  
Till at Summer's feet he shall light him down  
And lay at her feet the royal crown.

She will lean down where the roses twine  
Between the may-trees' silver shine,  
And look in the eyes of the dying knight  
Who led his army and won her fight.

She will stoop to his lips and say,  
'Oh, live, O love! O my true love, stay!'  
While he smiles and sighs her arms between  
And dies for the Summer, dies for the Queen.

Edith Nesbit



# The Charm

LIKE crimson lamps the tulips swing,  
The lily flowers their incense bring,  
The daisies votive garlands fling  
Before the altar of the Spring.

And you and I in this green May,  
When thrushes sing, and white lambs play,  
Go glad at heart--so glad and gay,  
No word seems good enough to say.

Yet there's a charm, it would appear,  
Which, if I spoke it in your ear,  
Would fix the spring for ever here;  
Pass on--I will not speak it, dear.

Edith Nesbit

# The Choice

PLAGUE take the dull and dusty town,  
Its paved and sordid mazes,  
Now Spring has trimmed her pretty gown  
With buttercups and daisies!

With half my heart I long to lie  
Among the flowered grasses,  
And hear the loving leaves that sigh  
As their sweet Mistress passes.

Through picture-shows I make my way  
While flower-crowned maids go maying,  
And all the cultured things I say  
That cultured folk are saying.

For I renounce Spring's darling face,  
With may-bloom fresh upon it:  
My Mistress lives in Grosvenor-place  
And wears a Bond-street bonnet!

Edith Nesbit

# The Claim

OH! I admit I'm dull and poor,  
And plain and gloomy, as you tell me;  
And dozens flock around your door  
Who in all points but one excel me.

You smile on them, on me you frown,  
They worship for the wage you pay;  
I lay life, love, and honour down  
For you to walk on every day.

I am the only one who sees  
That though such gifts can never move you,  
A meagre price are gifts like these  
For life's high privilege--to love you.

I am the one among your train  
Who sees that loving you is worth  
A thousand times the certain gain  
Of all the heaped-up joys of earth.

And you, who know as well as I,  
What your glass tells you every morning--  
A kindred soul you should descry,  
Dilute with sympathy your scorning.

At least you should approve the intense  
Love that gives all for you to waste;  
Your other lovers have more sense,  
Admit that I have better taste.

Edith Nesbit

# The Confession

I HAVEN'T always acted good:  
I've taken things not meant for me;  
Not other people's drink and food,  
But things they never seemed to see.  
I haven't done the way I ought  
If all they say in church is true,  
But all I've had I've fairly bought,  
And paid for pretty heavy too.

For days and weeks are very long  
If you get nothing new and bright,  
And if you never do no wrong  
Somehow you never do no right.  
The chap that daresent go a yard  
For fear the path should lead astray  
May be a saint--though that seems hard,  
But he's no traveller, any way.

Some things I can't be sorry for,  
The things that silly people hate:  
But some I did I do deplore,  
I knew, inside, they wasn't straight.  
And when my last account is filed,  
And stuck-up angels stop their song,  
I'll ask God's pardon like a child  
For what I really knew was wrong.

If you've a child, you'd rather see  
A bit of temper, off and on,  
A greedy grab, a silly spree--  
And then a brave thing said or done  
Than hear your boy whine all day long  
About the things he musn't do:  
Just doing nothing, right or wrong:  
And God may feel the same as you.

For God's our Father, so they say,  
He made His laws and He made me;  
He'll understand about the way

Me and His laws could not agree.  
He might say, 'You're worth more, My son,  
Than all My laws since law began.  
Take good with bad--here's something done--  
And I'm your God, and you're My man.'

Edith Nesbit

# The Crown Of Life

THE days, the doubts, the dreams of pain  
Are over, not to come again,  
And from the menace of the night  
Has dawned the day-star of delight:  
My baby lies against me pressed--  
Thus, Mother of God, are mothers blessed!

His little head upon my arm,  
His little body soft and warm,  
His little feet that cannot stand  
Held in the heart of this, my hand.  
His little mouth close on my breast--  
Thus, Mary's Son, are mothers blessed.

All dreams of deeds, all deeds of day  
Are very faint and far away,  
Yet you some day will stand upright  
And fight God's foes, in manhood's might,  
You--tiny, worshipped, clasped, caressed--  
Thus, Mother of God, are mothers blessed.

Whatever grief may come to be  
This hour divine goes on for me.  
All glorious is my little span,  
Since I, like God, have made a man,  
A little image of God's best--  
Thus, Mary's Son, are mothers blessed.

Come change, come loss, come worlds of tears,  
Come endless chain of empty years;  
They cannot take away the hour  
That gives me You--my bird, my flower!  
Thank God for this! Leave God the rest!--  
Thus, Mother of God, are mothers blessed.



# The Daisies

In the great green park with the wooden palings -  
The wooden palings so hard to climb,  
There are fern and foxglove, primrose and violet,  
And green things growing all the time;  
And out in the open the daisies grow,  
Pretty and proud in their proper places,  
Millions of white-frilled daisy faces,  
Millions and millions--not one or two.  
And they call to the bluebells down in the wood:  
'Are you out--are you in? We have been so good  
All the school-time winter through,  
But now it's playtime,  
The gay time, the May time;  
We are out and at play. Where are you?'

In the gritty garden inside the railings,  
The spiky railings all painted green,  
There are neat little beds of geraniums and fuchsia  
With never a happy weed between.  
There's a neat little grass plot, bald in places,  
And very dusty to touch;  
A respectable man comes once a week  
To keep the garden weeded and swept,  
To keep it as we don't want it kept.  
He cuts the grass with his mowing-machine,  
And we think he cuts it too much.  
But even on the lawn, all dry and gritty,  
The daisies play about.  
They are so brave as well as so pretty,  
You cannot keep them out.  
I love them, I want to let them grow,  
But that respectable man says no.  
He cuts off their heads with his mowing-machine  
Like the French Revolution guillotine.  
He sweeps up the poor little pretty faces,  
The dear little white-frilled daisy faces;  
Says things must be kept in their proper places  
He has no frill round his ugly face -  
I wish I could find his proper place!



Edith Nesbit

# The Day Of Judgment

When the bearing and doing are over,  
And no more is to do or bear,  
God will see us and judge us  
The kind of men we were;  
And our sins, so ugly and heavy,  
We shall drag them into His sight,  
And throw them down at the foot of the throne,  
Foul on the steps of light.

We shall not be shamed or frightened,  
Though the angels are all at hand,  
For He will look at our burden,  
And He will understand.  
He will turn to the little angels,  
Agog to hear and obey,  
And point to the festering sin-loads  
With, 'Take that rubbish away!'

Then the steps will be cleared of the burdens  
That we threw down at His feet;  
And we shall be washed in the tears of Christ,  
And our tears bathe His feet.  
And the harvest of all our sinning  
That moment's shame will reap -  
When we look in the eyes that love us  
And know we have made them weep.

Edith Nesbit

# The Dead To The Living

Work while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

IN the childhood of April, while purple woods  
With the young year's blood in them smiled,  
I passed through the lanes and the wakened fields,  
And stood by the grave of the child.  
And the pain awoke that is never dead  
Though it sometimes sleeps, and again  
It set its teeth in this heart of mine,  
And fastened its claws in my brain:  
For it seemed so hard that the little hands  
And the little well-loved head  
Should be out of reach of my living lips,  
And be side by side with the dead--  
Not side by side with us who had loved,  
But with these who had never seen  
The grace of the smile, the gold of the hair,  
And the eyes of my baby-queen.  
Yet with trees about where the brown birds build,  
And with long green grass above,

She lies in the cold sweet breast of earth  
Beyond the reach of our love;  
Whatever befalls in the coarse loud world,  
We know she will never wake.  
When I thought of the sorrow she might have known,  
I was almost glad for her sake. . . .  
Tears might have tired those kiss-closed eyes,  
Grief hardened the mouth I kissed;  
I was almost glad that my dear was dead  
Because of the pain she had missed.  
Oh, if I could but have died a child  
With a white child-soul like hers,  
As pure as the wind-flowers down in the copse,  
Where the soul of the spring's self stirs;  
Or if I had only done with it all,  
And might lie by her side unmoved!  
I envied the very clods of earth

Their place near the child I loved!

And my soul rose up in revolt at life,  
As I stood dry-eyed by her grave,  
When sudden the grass of the churchyard sod  
Rolled back like a green smooth wave;  
The brown earth looked like the brown sea rocks,  
The tombstones were white like spray,  
And white like surf were the curling folds  
Of the shrouds where the dead men lay;  
For each in his place with his quiet face  
I saw the dead lie low,  
Who had worked and suffered and found life sad,  
So many sad years ago.  
Unchanged by time I saw them lie  
As when first they were laid to rest,  
The tired eyes closed, the sad lips still,  
And the work-worn hands on the breast.  
There were some who had found the green world so grey,  
They had left it before their time,  
And some were little ones like my dear,  
And some had died in their prime;  
And some were old, they had had their fill  
Of bitter unfruitful hours,  
And knew that none of them, none, had known  
A flower of a hope like ours!

Through their shut eyelids the dead looked up,  
And without a voice they said:  
'We lived without hope, without hope we died,  
And hopeless we lie here dead;  
And death is better than life that draws  
Pain in, as it draws in breath,  
If life never dreams of a coming day  
When life shall not envy death.  
Through the dark of our hours and our times we lived,  
Uncheered by a single ray  
Of such hope as lightens the lives of you  
Who are finding life hard to-day;  
With our little lanterns of human love

We lighted our dark warm night--  
But you in the chill of the dawn are set  
With your face to the eastern light.  
Freedom is waiting with hands held out  
Till you tear the veil from her face--  
And when once men have seen the light of her eyes,  
And felt her divine embrace,  
The light of the world will be risen indeed,  
And will shine in the eyes of men,  
And those who come after will find life fair,  
And their lives worth living then!  
Will you strive to the light in your loud rough world,  
That these things may come to pass,  
Or lie in the shadow beside the child,  
And strive to the sun through the grass?'

'My world while I may,' I cried; 'but you  
Whose lives were as dark as your grave?'  
'We too are a part of the coming light,'  
They called through the smooth green wave.  
Their white shrouds gleamed as the flood of green  
Rolled over and hid them from me--  
Hid all but the little hands and the hair,  
And the face that I always see.

Edith Nesbit

# The Death Of Agnes

Now that the sunlight dies in my eyes,  
And the moonlight grows in my hair,  
I who was never very wise,  
Never was very fair,  
Virgin and martyr all my life,  
What has life left to give  
Me--who was never mother nor wife,  
Never got leave to live?

Nothing of life could I clasp or claim,  
Nothing could steal or save.  
So when you come to carve my name,  
Give me life in my grave.  
To keep me warm when I sleep alone  
A lie is little to give;  
Call me 'Magdalen' on my stone,  
Though I died and did not live.

Edith Nesbit

# The December Rose

Here's a rose that blows for Chloe,  
Fair as ever a rose in June was,  
Now the garden's silent, snowy,  
Where the burning summer noon was.

In your garden's summer glory  
One poor corner, shelved and shady,  
Told no rosy, radiant story,  
Grew no rose to grace its lady.

What shuts sun out shuts out snow too;  
From his nook your secret lover  
Shows what slighted roses grow to  
When the rose you chose is over.

Edith Nesbit

# The Depths Of The Sea

FOR A PICTURE BY E. BURNE JONES

I

Habes tota quod mente petisti  
Infelix.

IN deep vague spaces of the lonely sea  
She deemed her soulless life was almost fair,  
Yet ever dreamed that in the upper air  
Lay happiness--supreme in mystery;  
Then saw him--out of reach as you I see--  
Worshipped his strength, the brown breast broad and bare,  
The arms that bent the oar, and grew aware  
Of what life means, and why it is good to be;  
And yearned for him with all her body sweet,  
Her lithe cold arms, and chill wet bosom's beat,  
Vowed him her beauty's unilluminated shrine:  
So I--seeing you above me--turn and tire,  
Sick with an empty ache of long desire  
To drag you down, to hold you, make you mine!

II

Attained at last--the lifelong longing's prize!  
Raped from the world of air where warm loves glow,  
She bears him through her water-world below;  
Yet in those strange, glad, fair, mysterious eyes  
The shadow of the after-sorrow lies,  
And of the coming hour, when she shall know  
What she has lost in having gained him so,  
And whether death life's longing satisfies.  
She shall find out the meaning of despair,  
And know the anguish of a granted prayer,  
And how, all ended, all is yet undone.  
So I--I long for what, far off, you shine,



Not what you must be ere you could be mine,  
That which would crown despair if it were won.

Edith Nesbit

# The Despot

- 1 The garden mould was damp and chill,
- 2 Winter had had his brutal will
- 3 Since over all the year's content
- 4 His devastating legions went.
  
- 5 Then Spring's bright banners came: there woke
- 6 Millions of little growing folk
- 7 Who thrilled to know the winter done,
- 8 Gave thanks, and strove towards the sun.
  
- 9 Not so the elect; reserved, and slow
- 10 To trust a stranger-sun and grow,
- 11 They hesitated, cowered and hid
- 12 Waiting to see what others did.
  
- 13 Yet even they, a little, grew,
- 14 Put out prim leaves to day and dew,
- 15 And lifted level formal heads
- 16 In their appointed garden beds.
  
- 17 The gardener came: he coldly loved
- 18 The flowers that lived as he approved,
- 19 That duly, decorously grew
- 20 As he, the despot, meant them to.
  
- 21 He saw the wildlings flower more brave
- 22 And bright than any cultured slave;
- 23 Yet, since he had not set them there,
- 24 He hated them for being fair.
  
- 25 So he uprooted, one by one
- 26 The free things that had loved the sun,
- 27 The happy, eager, fruitful seeds
- 28 That had not known that they were weeds.

Edith Nesbit

# The Destroyer

ACROSS the quiet pastures of my soul  
The invading army marched in splendid might  
My few poor forces fled beyond control,  
Scattered, defeated, hidden in the night.

My fields were green, their hedges white with May,  
With gold of buttercups made bright and fair,  
The careless conquerors did not even stay  
To gather one of all the blossoms there.

Only when they had passed, the fields were brown,  
The grass and blossoms trampled in the mud:  
The flowering hedges withered and torn down,  
And no one richer by a single bud.

Edith Nesbit

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Edith Nesbit

# The Egoists

TWO strangers, from opposing poles,  
Meet in the torrid zone of Love:  
And their desire seems set above  
The limitation of their souls.

This is the trap; this is the snare,  
This is the false, enchanting light,  
And when it smoulders into night,  
How can each know the other is there?

They own no bond of common speech;  
Each, from far shores by wild winds brought,  
Gropes for some cord of common thought  
To draw the other within reach.

Each when the dark tide drowns their star,  
Cries out, 'Thou art not one with me:  
One flesh we seemed when eyes could see,  
But now, how far thou art! How far!'

Each calling, 'Come! be mine! be wise!'  
Stands obstinately in his place,  
How can these two come face to face,  
Till light spring from their meeting eyes?

Could both but once cry, 'Far thou art,  
But I am coming!' How the beat  
Of waves that part them would retreat,  
Resurge and find them, heart to heart!

Edith Nesbit

# The Enchanted Garden

OH, what a garden it was, living gold, living green,  
Full of enchantments like spices embalming the air,  
There, where you fled and I followed--you ever unseen,  
Yet each glad pulse of me cried to my heart, 'She is there!'

Roses and lilies and lilies and roses again,  
Tangle of leaves and white magic of blossoming trees,  
Sunlight that lay where, last moment, your footstep had lain--  
Was not the garden enchanted that proffered me these?

Ah, what a garden it is since I caught you at last--  
Scattered the magic and shattered the spell with a kiss:  
Wintry and dreary and cold with the wind of the past,  
Ah that a garden enchanted should wither to this!

Edith Nesbit

# The End

ADIEU, Madame! The moon of May  
Wanes now above the orchard grey;  
The white May-blossoms fall like snow,  
As Love foretold a month ago--  
Or was it only yesterday?

All pleasant things must pass away;  
You would not, surely, have me stay?  
I own I shun the inference! No!  
Adieu, Madame!

Come, dry your eyes, for not this way  
Should end your pretty pastoral play.  
You have no heart--you told me so--  
And I adore you, as you know;  
Smile, while I break my heart and say  
Adieu, Madame!

Edith Nesbit

# The Eternal

Your dear desired grace,  
Your hands, your lips of red,  
The wonder of your perfect face  
Will fade, like sweet rose-petals shed,  
When you are dead.

Your beautiful hair  
Dust in the dust will lie -  
But not the light I worship there,  
The gold the sunshine crowns you by -  
This will not die.

Your beautiful eyes  
Will be closed up with clay;  
But all the magic they comprise,  
The hopes, the dreams, the ecstasies  
Pass not away.

All I desire and see  
Will be a carrion thing;  
But all that you have been to me  
Is, and can never cease to be.  
O Grave! where is thy victory?  
Where, Death, thy sting?

Edith Nesbit



# The Ferry

DRAW close the curtains, and shut out  
The spring's green glow and glitter;  
The resurrection-life of spring  
To me brings no fresh blossoming;  
I'm wearied of the flowers about--  
The London sparrows' twitter.

If I could dream--if I could see  
Once more the slow smooth river,  
The narrow path she used to tread,  
The sunlight on her little head,  
The white fire of the hawthorn tree--  
But I shall see them never.

Only the boat in dreams I steer  
Among the tufted rushes,  
I see her white gown through the grass,  
That thrills with love to feel her pass;  
Only in dreams again I hear  
Those unforgotten thrushes.

Sometimes in dreams I see her stand,  
Her hand held out, and making  
The sweet unreal so vivid seem,  
I only know it is a dream  
When I reach out to take her hand,  
And find no hand for taking.

So once she stood; and I--too weak  
To dare to say, 'I love her'--  
I dropped her hand, and took the oar  
And rowed her to the farther shore;  
I had my chance, and did not speak,  
And chances now are over.

How dark the room has grown!--yet no,  
The sky is blue above me;  
This is the boat--the hawthorn tree  
Is showering blossoms down on me;  
And she is here as long ago,  
And she has learned to love me!

Edith Nesbit

# The Fields Of Flanders

Last year the fields were all glad and gay  
With silver daisies and silver may;  
There were kingcups gold by the river's edge  
And primrose stars under every hedge.

This year the fields are trampled and brown,  
The hedges are broken and beaten down,  
And where the primroses used to grow  
Are little black crosses set in a row.

And the flower of hopes, and the flowers of dreams,  
The noble, fruitful, beautiful schemes,  
The tree of life with its fruit and bud,  
Are trampled down in the mud and the blood.

The changing seasons will bring again  
The magic of Spring to our wood and plain;  
Though the Spring be so green as never was seen  
The crosses will still be black in the green.

The God of battles shall judge the foe  
Who trampled our country and laid her low. . . .  
God! hold our hands on the reckoning day,  
Lest all we owe them we should repay

Edith Nesbit

# The Fire

I was picking raspberries, my head was in the canes,  
And he came behind and kissed me, and I smacked him for his pains.  
Says he, 'You take it easy! That ain't the way to do!  
I love you hot as fire, my girl, and you know you know it too.  
So won't you name the day?'  
But I said, 'That I will not.'  
And I pushed him away,  
Out among the raspberries all on a summer day.  
And I says, 'You ask in winter, if your love's so hot,  
For it's summer now, and sunny, and my hands is full,' says I,  
'With the fair by and by,  
And the village dance and all;  
And the turkey poults is small,  
And so's the ducks and chicks,  
And the hay not yet in ricks,  
And the flower-show'll be presently and hop-picking's to come,  
And the fruiting and the harvest home,  
And my new white gown to make, and the jam all to be done.  
Can't you leave a girl alone?  
Your love's too hot for me!  
Can't you leave a girl be  
Till the evenings do draw in,  
Till the leaves be getting thin,  
Till the fires be lighted early, and the curtains drawn for tea?  
That's the time to do your courting, if you come a-courting me!'

\* \* \*

And he took it as I said it, an' not as it was meant.  
And he went.

\* \* \*

The hay was stacked, the fruit was picked, the hops were dry and  
brown,  
And everything was garnered, and the year turned upside down,  
And the winter it come on, and the fires were early lit,  
And he'd never come anigh again, and all my life was sick.  
And I was cold alone, with nought to do but sit

With my hands in my black lap, and hear the clock tick.  
For father, he lay dead  
With the candles at his head,  
And his coffin was that black I could see it through the wall;  
And I'd sent them all away,  
Though they'd offered for to stay.  
I wanted to be cold alone, and learn to bear it all.  
Then I heard him. I'd a-known it for his footstep just as plain  
If he'd brought his regiment with him up the ruddy frozen lane.  
And I hadn't drawn the curtains, and I see him through the pane;  
And I jumped up in my blacks and I threw the door back wide.  
Says I, 'You come inside;  
For it's cold outside for you,  
And it's cold here too;  
And I haven't no more pride -  
It's too cold for that,' I cried.

\* \* \*

Then I saw in his face  
The fear of death, and desire.  
And oh, I took and kissed him again and again,  
And I clipped him close and all,  
In the winter, in the dusk, in the quiet house-place,  
With the coffin lying black and full the other side the wall;  
And 'YOU warm my heart,' I told him, 'if there's any fire in men!'  
And he got his two arms round me, and I felt the fire then.  
And I warmed my heart at the fire.

Edith Nesbit

# The Forest Pool

LEAN down and see your little face  
Reflected in the forest pool,  
Tall foxgloves grow about the place,  
Forget-me-nots grow green and cool.  
Look deep and see the naiad rise  
To meet the sunshine of your eyes.

Lean down and see how you are fair,  
How gold your hair, your mouth how red;  
See the leaves dance about your hair  
The wind has left unfileted.  
What naiad of them can compare  
With you for good and dear and fair?

Ah! look no more--the water stirs,  
The naiad weeps your face to see,  
Your beauty is more rare than hers,  
And you are more beloved than she.  
Fly! fly, before she steals the charms  
The pool has trusted to her arms.

Edith Nesbit

# The Garden

CHOKED with ill weeds my garden lay a-dying,  
Hard was the ground, no bud had heart to blow,  
Yet shone your smile there, with your soft breath sighing:  
'Have patience, for some day the flowers will grow.'

Some weeds you killed, you made a plot and tilled it;  
'My plot,' you said, 'rich harvest yet shall give,'  
With sun-warmed seeds of hope your dear hands filled it,  
With rain-soft tears of pity bade them live.

So, weak among the weeds that had withstood you,  
One little pure white flower grew by-and-by;  
You could not pluck my flower--alas! how should you?  
You sowed the seed, but let the blossom die.

Edith Nesbit

# The Garden Refused

There is a garden made for our delight,  
Where all the dreams we dare not dream come true.  
I know it, but I do not know the way.  
We slip and tumble in the doubtful night,  
Where everything is difficult and new,  
And clouds our breath has made obscure the day.

The blank unhappy towns, where sick men strive,  
Still doing work that yet is never done;  
The hymns to Gold that drown their desperate voice;  
The weeds that grow where once corn stood alive,  
The black injustice that puts out the sun:  
These are our portion, since they are our choice.

Yet there the garden blows with rose on rose,  
The sunny, shadow-dappled lawns are there;  
There the immortal lilies, heavenly sweet.  
O roses, that for us shall not uncloset!  
O lilies, that we shall not pluck or wear!  
O dewy lawns untrodden by our feet!

Edith Nesbit



# The Ghost

NOW that the curtains are drawn close  
Now that the fire burns low,  
And on her narrow bed the rose  
Is stark laid out in snow;  
Now that the wind of winter blows  
Bid my heart say if still it knows  
The step it used to know.

I hear the silken gown you wear  
Sweep on the gallery floor,  
Your step comes up the wide, dark stair  
And pauses at my door.  
My heart with the old hope flowers fair--  
That shrivels to the old despair,  
For you come in no more!

Edith Nesbit

# The Ghost Bereft

THE poor ghost came through the wind and rain  
And passed down the old dear road again.

Thin covered the hedges, the tall trees swayed  
Like little children that shrank afraid.

The wind was wild and the night was late  
When the poor ghost came to the garden gate;

Dank were the flower-beds, heavy and wet,  
The weeds stood up where the rose was set.

The wind was angry, the rain beat sore  
When the poor ghost came to its own house-door.

'And shall I find her a-weeping still  
To think how alone I lie and chill?

'Or shall I find her happy and warm  
With her dear head laid on a new love's arm?

'Or shall I find she has learned to pine  
For another's love, and not for mine?

'Whatever chance, I have this to my store,  
She is mine, my own, for evermore!'

So the poor ghost came through the wind and rain  
Till it reached the square bright window pane.

'Oh! what is here in the room so bright?  
Roses and love, and a hid delight?

'What lurks in the silence that fills the room?  
A cypress wreath from a dead man's tomb?

'What sleeps? What wakes? And oh! can it be  
Her heart that is breaking--and not for me?'

Then the poor ghost looked through the window pane,  
Though all the glass was wrinkled with rain.

'Oh, there is light, at the feet and head  
Twelve tall tapers about the bed.

'Oh, there are flowers, white flowers and rare,  
But not the garland a bride may wear.

'Jasmine white and a white white rose,  
But its scent is gone where the lost dream goes.

'Straight lilies laid on the strait white bier--  
But the room is empty--she is not here!

'Her body lies here, deserted, cold;  
And the body that loved it creeps in the mould.

'Was there ever an hour when my Love, set free,  
Would not have hastened and come to me?

'Can the soul that loved mine long ago  
Be hence and away, and I not know?

'Oh, then God's judgment is on me sore,  
For I have lost her for evermore!

And the poor ghost fared through the wind and rain  
To its own appointed place again.

But up in Heaven, where memories cease  
Because the blessed have won to peace,

One pale saint shivered, and closer wound  
The shining raiment that wrapped her round.

'Oh, fair is Heaven, and glad am I,  
Yet I fain would remember the days gone by.

'The past is veiled, and I may not know,  
But I think there was sorrow, long ago;

'The sun of Heaven is warm and bright,  
But I think there is rain on the earth to-night.

'O Christ, because of Thine own sore pain  
Help all poor souls in the wind and rain.'

Edith Nesbit

# The Gift Of Life

Life is a night all dark and wild,  
Yet still stars shine:  
This moment is a star, my child -  
Your star and mine.

Life is a desert dry and drear,  
Undewed, unblest;  
This hour is an oasis, dear;  
Here let us rest.

Life is a sea of windy spray,  
Cold, fierce and free:  
An isle enchanted is to-day  
For you and me.

Forget night, sea, and desert: take  
The gift supreme,  
And, of life's brief relenting, make  
A deathless dream.

Edith Nesbit

# The Gift Of The Gods

'GIVE me thy dreams,' she said, and I  
With empty hands and very poor,  
Watched my fair flowery visions die  
Upon the temple's marble floor.

'Give joy,' she said. I let joy go;  
I saw with cold, unclouded eyes  
The crimson of the sunset glow  
Across the disenchanting skies.

'Give me thy youth,' she said. I gave,  
And, sudden-clouded, died the sun,  
And on the green mound of a grave  
Fell the slow raindrops, one by one.

'Give love,' she cried. I gave that too.  
'Give beauty.' Beauty sighed and fled;  
For what on earth should beauty do,  
When love, who was her life, was dead?

She took the balm of innocent tears  
To hiss upon her altar-coal;  
She took the hopes of all my years,  
And, at the last, she took my soul.

With heart made empty of delight,  
And hands that held no more fair things  
I questioned her--'What shall requite  
The savour of my offerings?'

'The Gods,' she said, 'with generous hand  
Give guerdon for thy gifts of cost--  
Wisdom is thine--to understand

The worth of all that thou hast lost!

Edith Nesbit

# The Glow-Worm To Her Love

BENEATH cool ferns, in dewy grass,  
Among the leaves that fringe the stream,  
I hear the feet of lovers pass,  
--I hide all day, and dream.

But when the night, with wide soft wings,  
Droops on the trembling waiting wood,  
And lulls the restless woodland things  
Within its solitude,

Ah, then my soft green lamp I light,  
That thou may'st find me by its fire--  
Come, crown me, O my winged delight  
My darling, my desire.

Yet they who praise the lamp I bear  
Have never a word of praise for thee,  
My love, my life, my King of Air,  
Who lightest the lamp in me.

Thine, thine should be the praise they give  
My King, who art all praise above,  
Since but for thee I dream and live,  
And light the lamp of love.

Edith Nesbit



# The Golden Rose

A POOR lost princess, weary and worn,  
Came over the down by the wind-washed moor,  
And the king looked out on her grace forlorn,  
And he took her in at his palace door.

He made her queen, he gave her a crown,  
Bidding her rest and be glad and gay  
In his golden town, with a golden gown,  
And a new gold lily every day.

But the crown is heavy, the gold gown gray,  
And the queen's pale breast is like autumn snows;  
For he brings a gold lily every day,  
But no king gathers the golden rose.

One came at last to the palace keep  
By worlds of water and leagues of land,  
Gray were his garments, his eyes were deep,  
And he held the golden rose in his hand.

She left gold gown, gold town, gold crown,  
And followed him straight to a world apart,  
And he left her asleep on the wind-washed down,  
With the golden rose on her quiet heart.

Edith Nesbit

# The Goose-Girl

I WANDERED lonely by the sea,  
As is my daily use,  
I saw her drive across the lea  
The gander and the goose.  
The gander and the gray, gray goose,  
She drove them all together;  
Her cheeks were rose, her gold hair loose,  
All in the wild gray weather.

'O dainty maid who drive the geese  
Across the common wide,  
Turn, turn your pretty back on these  
And come and be my bride.

I am a poet from the town,  
And, 'mid the ladies there,  
There is not one would wear a crown  
With half your charming air!'

She laughed, she shook her pretty head.  
'I want no poet's hand;  
Go read your fairy-books,' she said,  
'For this is fairy-land.  
My Prince comes riding o'er the leas;  
He fitly comes to woo,  
For I'm a Princess, and my geese  
Were poets, once, like you!'

Edith Nesbit

# The Gray Folk

THE house, with blind unhappy face,  
Stands lonely in the last year's corn,  
And in the grayness of the morn  
The gray folk come about the place.

By many pathways, gliding gray  
They come past meadow, wood, and wold,  
Come by the farm and by the fold  
From the green fields of yesterday.

Past lock and chain and bolt and bar  
They press, to stand about my bed,  
And like the faces of the dead  
I know their hidden faces are.

They will not leave me in the day  
And when night falls they will not go,  
Because I silenced, long ago,  
The only voice that they obey.

Edith Nesbit

# The Guardian Angel

WHEN my good-nights and prayers are said  
And I am safe tucked up in bed,  
I know my guardian angel stands  
And holds my soul between his hands.

I cannot see his wings of light  
Because I keep my eyes shut tight,  
For, if I open them, I know  
My pretty angel has to go.

But through the darkness I can hear  
His white wings rustling very near;  
I know it is his darling wings,  
Not Mother folding up my things!

Edith Nesbit

# The Heart Of Grief

YOU will not come again  
Along the deep-banked lane  
To where the field and fold so long have missed you;  
You know no more the way  
To where, so many a day  
Before the world grew gray,  
Your lover kissed you.

The wonders and delights  
Of London days and nights  
Hold fast a soul not made for pastoral pleasures;  
The scent of mignonette  
Brings to you no regret,  
No withered flowers lie yet  
Among your treasures.

And I, who long for you  
Sad and glad seasons through,  
Find my grief's heart in knowing grief will find you;  
Some day you too will sigh,  
And lay a dead flower by,  
And weep to see joy lie  
At last behind you.

What though the flower you hide  
With London wire be tied?  
What though the heart that broke your heart be rotten?  
You too at last must miss  
The smile, the word, the kiss,  
And know how hard it is  
To be forgotten.

Edith Nesbit

# The Heart Of Joy

DEAR, do you sigh that your love may not stay with you,  
Laugh with and play with you,  
Weep with and pray with you,  
All his life through?  
Think, O my heart, if you never had found me,  
Crept through the cere-clothes the world has wound round me,  
What would you do?

Wide is the world, and so many would sigh for you,  
Long for and cry for you,  
Weep for and die for you,  
You being you.

I only I, am the man you could sigh for,  
Live for and suffer for, sorrow and die for,  
Twenty lives through.

Think! Had I missed you! The world was so wide for us,  
Traps on each side for us,  
Nothing as guide for us,  
Yet I and you  
Found Life's great treasure, the last and the first, love;  
Life's little things, Time and Space, do their worst, love!  
What, after all, can they do?

Edith Nesbit

# The Heart Of Sadness

IT is not, Dear, because I am alone,  
For I am lonelier when the rest are near,  
But that my place against your heart has grown  
Too dear to dream of when you are not here.

I weep because my thoughts no more may roam  
To meet, half-way, your longing thoughts of me,  
To turn with these and spread glad wings for home,  
For the dear haven where I fain would be.

When first we loved, I loved to steal away  
To show to solitude what love could do,  
To fill the waste space of the night and day  
With thousand-wingèd dreams that flew to you;

But now through many tears I am grown wise  
To know how mighty and how dear love is;  
I dare not turn to him my longing eyes,  
Nor even in dreams lean out my face to his,

Because, if once I let my caged heart go  
Through dreams to seek you, I should follow too  
Through wrong and right, through wisdom and through woe,  
Through heaven and hell, until I won to you!

Edith Nesbit

# The Home-Coming

This was our house. To this we came  
Lighted by love with torch aflame,  
And in this chamber, door locked fast,  
I held you to my heart at last.

This was our house. In this we knew  
The worst that Time and Fate can do.  
You left the room bare, wide the door;  
You did not love me any more.

Where once the kind warm curtain hung  
The spider's ghostly cloth is flung;  
The beetle and the woodlouse creep  
Where once I loved your lovely sleep.

Yet so the vanished spell endures,  
That this, our house, still, still is yours.  
Here, spite of all these years apart,  
I still can hold you to my heart!

Edith Nesbit



# The Husband Of To-Day

EYES caught by beauty, fancy by eyes caught;  
Sweet possibilities, question, and wonder--  
What did her smile say? What has her brain thought?  
Her standard, what? Am I o'er it or under?  
Flutter in meeting--in absence dreaming;  
Tremor in greeting--for meeting scheming;  
Caught by the senses, and yet all through  
True with the heart of me, sweetheart, to you.

Only the brute in me yields to the pressure  
Of longings inherent--of vices acquired;  
All this, my darling, is folly--not pleasure,  
Only my fancy--not soul--has been fired.  
Sense thrills exalted, thrills to love-madness;  
Fancy grown sad becomes almost love-sadness;  
And yet love has with it nothing to do,  
Love is fast fettered, sweetheart, to you.

Lacking fresh fancies, time flags--grows wingless;  
Life without folly would fail--fall flat;  
But the love that lights life, and makes death's self stingless--  
You, and you only, have wakened that.  
Sweet are all women, you are the best of them;  
You are so dear because dear are the rest of them;  
After each fancy has sprung, grown, and died,  
Back I come ever, dear, to your side.  
The strongest of passions--in joy--seeks the new,  
But in grief I turn ever, sweetheart, to you.

Edith Nesbit

# The Invitation

DELIA, my dear, delightful Lady,  
Time flies in town, you say,  
New gowns shine fresh as May,  
The Park is glad and gay,  
Ah--but the woods are green and shady--  
Come, Delia, come away!

The crown your kneeling slaves award you  
Is beauty's royal right;  
Your beauty, Delia, might  
Win crowns more sweet, more bright:  
Your niggard world will not afford you  
The crown of Heart's delight.

Sable your court will wear--to lose you;  
My garden's dressed in green,  
Such buds its leaves between  
As never yet were seen;  
There is no flower it can refuse you--  
Come to your King, my Queen!

Edith Nesbit

# The Island

Does the wind sing in your ears at night, in the town,  
Rattling the windows and doors of the cheap-built place?  
Do you hear its song as it flies over marsh and down?  
Do you feel the kiss that the wind leaves here on my face?  
Or, wrapt in a lamplit quiet, do you restrain  
Thoughts that would take the wind's way hither to me,  
And bid them rest safe-anchored, nor tempt again  
The tumult, and torment, and passion that live in the sea?

I, for my part, when the wind sings loud in its might,  
I bid it hush---nor awaken again the storm  
That swept my heart out to sea on a moonless night,  
And dashed it ashore on an island wondrous and warm  
Where all things fair and forbidden for ever flower,  
Where the worst of life is a dream, and the best comes true,  
Where the harvest of years was reaped in a single hour  
And the gods, for once, were honest with me and you.

I will not hear when the wind and the sea cry out,  
I will not trust again to the hurrying wind,  
I will not swim again in a sea of doubt,  
And reach that shore with the world left well behind;  
But you,---I would have you listen to every call  
Of the changing wind, as it blows over marsh and main,  
And heap life's joys in your hands, and offer them all,  
If only your feet might touch that island again!

Edith Nesbit

## The Jilted Lover To His Mother

You needn't pray for me, old lady, I don't want no one's prayer,  
I'm fit and jolly as ever I was--you needn't think I care.  
When I go whistling down the road, when the warm night is falling,  
She needn't think I'm whistling her, it's another girl I'm calling.

If I pass her house a dozen times, or fifty times a day,  
She needn't think I think of her, my work lies out that way.  
If they should tell her I've grown thin (for that is what they've told me)  
This cursed weather counts for that, and not the girl who sold me.

And if they say I'm off my feed I still can tip a can;  
If I get drunk what's that to her? I am not her young man.  
I know I've had a lucky let-off--she ain't no class, she ain't,  
For all she looked like a bush o' roses and talked like a story book saint.

I never give a thought to her. Don't worry your old head,  
I've quite forgot her pretty ways and the cruel things she said,  
There's lots of other gals to be had as any chap can see,  
So you cheer up, you've got no call to go and pray for me.  
But all the same, if you want to pray, you'd best pray God take care of them,  
For if I catch them two together, by hell! I'll swing for the pair of them.

Edith Nesbit

# The Kiss

The snow is white on wood and wold,  
The wind is in the firs,  
So dead my heart is with the cold,  
No pulse within it stirs,  
Even to see your face, my dear,  
Your face that was my sun;  
There is no spring this bitter year,  
And summer's dreams are done.

The snakes that lie about my heart  
Are in their wintry sleep;  
Their fangs no more deal sting and smart,  
No more they curl and creep.  
Love with the summer ceased to be;  
The frost is firm and fast.  
God keep the summer far from me,  
And let the snakes' sleep last!

Touch of your hand could not suffice  
To waken them once more;  
Nor could the sunshine of your eyes  
A ruined spring restore.  
But ah-your lips! You know the rest:  
The snows are summer rain,  
My eyes are wet, and in my breast  
The snakes' fangs meet again.

Edith Nesbit

# The Last Act

NEVER a ring or a lock of hair  
Or a letter stained with tears,  
No crown for the princely hour to wear,  
To be mocked of the rebel years.  
Not a spoken vow, not a written page  
And never a rose or a rhyme  
To tell to the wintry ear of age  
The tale of the summer time.

Never a tear or a farewell kiss  
When the time is come to part;  
For the kiss would burn and the tear would hiss  
On the smouldering fire in my heart.  
But let me creep to the kindly clay,  
And nothing be left to tell  
How I played in your play a year and a day,  
And died when the curtain fell!

Edith Nesbit

# The Last Betrayal

AND I shall lie alone at last,  
Clear of the stream that ran so fast,  
And feel the flower roots in my hair,  
And in my hands the roots of trees;  
Myself wrapt in the ungrudging peace  
That leaves no pain uncovered anywhere.

What--this hope left? this way not barred?  
This last best treasure without guard?  
This heaven free--no prayers to pay?  
Fool--are the Rulers of men asleep?  
Thou knowest what tears They bade thee weep,  
But, when peace comes, 'tis thou wilt sleep, not They.

Edith Nesbit

# The Last Defeat

Across the field of day  
In sudden blazon lay  
The pallid bar of gold  
Borne on the shield of day.  
Night had endured so long,  
And now the Day grew strong  
With lance of light to hold  
The Night at bay.

So on my life's dull night  
The splendour of your light  
Traversed the dusky shield  
And shone forth golden bright.  
Your colours I have worn  
Through all the fight forlorn,  
And these, with life, I yield,  
To-night, to Night.

Edith Nesbit



# The Last Ditch

LOVE, through your varied views on Art  
Untiring have I followed you,  
Content to know I had your heart  
And was your Art-ideal, too.

As, dear, I was when first we met.  
( 'Twas at the time you worshipped Leighton,  
And were attempting to forget  
Your Foster and your Noel Paton.)

'Love rhymes with Art,' said your dear voice,  
And, at my crude, uncultured age,  
I could but blushinglly rejoice  
That you had passed the Rubens stage.

When Madox Brown and Morris swayed  
Your taste, did I not dress and look  
Like any Middle Ages maid  
In an illuminated book?

I wore strange garments, without shame,  
Of formless form and toneless tones,  
I might have stepped out of the frame  
Of a Rossetti or Burne-Jones.

I stole soft frills from Marcus Stone,  
My waist wore Herkomer's disguise,  
My slender purse was strained, I own,  
But--my silk lay as Sargent's lies.

And when you were abroad--in Prague--  
'Mid Cherets I had shone, a star;  
Then for your sake I grew as vague

As Mr. Whistler's ladies are.

But now at last you sue in vain,  
For here a life's submission ends:  
Not even for you will I grow plain  
As Aubrey Beardsley's 'lady friends.'

Here I renounce your hand--unless  
You find your Art-ideal elsewhere;  
I will not wear the kind of dress  
That Laurence Housman's people wear!

Edith Nesbit

# The Last Envoy

THIS wind, that through the silent woodland blows,  
O'er rippling corn and dreaming pastures goes  
Straight to the garden where the heart of spring  
Faints in the heart of summer's earliest rose.

Dimpling the meadow's grassy green and grey,  
By furze that yellows all the common way,  
Gathering the gladness of the flowering broom,  
And too persistent fragrance of the may--

Gathering whatever is of sweet and dear,  
The wandering wind has passed away from here,  
Has passed to where within your garden waits  
The concentrated sweetness of the year.

And in your leafed enclosure as you stood,  
Training your flowers to new beatitude--  
Ah! did you guess the wind that kissed your hair  
Had kissed my forehead in this solitude--

Had kissed my lips, and gathered there the heat  
It breathed upon your mouth, my only sweet--  
Had gathered from my eyes the tender thought  
That drooped your eyes, and stirred your pulses' beat?

You only thought the sun's caress too warm  
That lay upon your bosom and your arm;  
You did not guess the wind had brought from me  
The unacknowledged fancy's fire and charm--

You only said, 'Too strong these sunlit skies,  
More dear the moments when the daylight dies!'  
And then you dreamed of meetings by your gate

In sanctity of sunset and moonrise.

To-night, when he shall come and meet you there,  
To kiss your lips and hands and eyes and hair,  
To light with love and hope youth's waiting shrine--  
Think of my love, and my assured despair!

To-night the wind will rob the languid flowers  
Of secret scents kept close through daylight hours;  
It will blow coolly over dewy lawns,  
Where the laburnums fall in silent showers.

I, too, shall learn a secret then--shall wrest  
Life's hidden things from out her languorous breast,  
Shall learn the way that leads away from life  
Into the land where nothing lives but rest.

You will not know that the cold air you prize,  
After the stormy sweetness of his sighs,  
Is cold from blowing through a moonlit wood  
Over the hollow where a dead man lies!

Edith Nesbit

# The Least Possible

DEAR goddess of the shining shrine  
Where all my votive tapers burn,  
Where every gold-embroidered thought  
And all my flowers of life are brought  
--With many, alas! that are not mine--  
What will you give me in return?

The bow in Bond Street--in the Park  
The smile all worship on your lips,  
The courteous word at dinner--dance--  
But never a blush--a conscious glance;  
At most, at Henley, in the dark,  
Your fleet mistaken finger-tips?

Ah, just for once, once only, be  
An altar-server--stoop and set me  
Upon the altar richly wrought  
Of your most secret flower-sweet thought:  
One nightlight's flicker burn for me  
Before you sleep and quite forget me.

Edith Nesbit

# The Lost Embassy

THE lilies lean to the white, white rose,  
The sweet limes send to the blossomed trees,  
Soft kisses borne by the golden bees--  
And all the world is alive, awake,  
And glad to the heart for the summer's sake.

From her tower window the Princess leant,  
Where the white light butterflies came and went;  
She dropped soft kisses by twos and threes:  
'White butterflies mine, will you carry these  
To my Prince in prison? for they, who knows,  
May break the spell that has held him close  
And wake him and win him to stand up free  
And laugh--in the sun--with me!'

White lilies, gold in the golden sun,  
White Princess, gold in your golden gown--  
Far off lies the sad, enchanted town!  
Bright wings, light wings, white wings that tire,  
Though they carry the flower of the heart's desire--  
Will you trust to these, too white, too slight  
To bring back the fruit of heart's delight?

All round and about the spell-bound town  
The ways are dusty, the woods are brown;  
There are no green coverts, no welcoming flowers  
For little weary butterfly wings,  
No dew, no lilies, no glad live things.  
'Neath the sky of steel and the brazen sun  
White wings, kiss-laden, dropped one by one:  
By twos and threes they dropped by the way,  
And only one reached the grim, gray tower  
Where, wretched from his kingdom, the poor Prince lay--  
One poor tired butterfly, smirched and gray  
With the dust of the town and the weary way,  
And it lit on the Prince's hand and died.

'Bright wings, light wings, white wings,' he cried  
'You, only you, might have lived and borne  
My prayer to my love in her tower forlorn,  
And brought back the kiss that could set me free--  
She might have broken the spell that lies  
On my foolish heart and my foolish eyes--  
But no live butterflies come my way!'

The winds are cold and the skies are gray,  
And all the lilies died yesterday;  
The Princess leans from her steel-wrought tower  
To watch for her butterflies hour by hour.  
Poor little Princess, you watch in vain!  
Butterflies die where the green wood browns,  
And kisses sent to enchanted towns  
Never come home again.

Edith Nesbit

# The Lower Room

How soft the lamplight falls  
On pictures, books,  
And pleasant coloured walls  
And curtains drawn!  
How happily one looks  
On glowing flame and ember;  
Ah, why should one remember  
Dew and dawn!

Here age and wisdom sit  
Calm and discreet,  
Life and the fruit of it  
Are here in truth,  
Whose gathering once was sweet--  
Wisdom and age! Well met!  
Yet neither can forget  
Folly and youth!

Edith Nesbit



# The Magic Flower

THROUGH many days and many days  
The seed of love lay hidden close;  
We walked the dusty tiresome ways  
Where never a leaf or blossom grows.  
And in the darkness, all the while,  
The little seed its heart uncurled,  
And we by many a weary mile  
Travelled towards it, round the world.

To the hid centre of the maze  
At last we came, and there we found--  
O happy day, O day of days!  
--Twin seed-leaves breaking holy ground.  
We dropped life's joys, a garnered sheaf,  
And spell-bound watched, still hour by hour,  
Magic on magic, leaf by leaf,  
The unfolding of our love's white flower.

Edith Nesbit

# The Magic Ring

Your touch on my hand is fire,  
Your lips on my lips are flowers.  
My darling, my one desire,  
Dear crown of my days and hours.  
Dear crown of each hour and day  
Since ever my life began.  
Ah! leave me--ah! go away -  
We two are woman and man.

To lie in your arms and see  
The stars melt into the sun;  
Till there is no you and me,  
Since you and I are one.  
To loose my soul to your breath,  
To bare my heart to your life -  
It is death, it is death, it is death!  
I am not your wife.

The hours will come and will go,  
But never again such an hour  
When the tides immortal flow  
And life is a flood, a flower . . .  
Wait for the ring; it is strong,  
It has a magic of might  
To make all that was splendid and wrong  
Sordid and right.

Edith Nesbit

# The Maiden's Prayer

SPRING, pretty Spring, what treasure do you bring to me?  
Green grass and buttercups, cherry-bloom and may?  
Sunshine to be glad with me, and little birds to sing to me?  
Warm nests to call me along the woodland way?

Spring, happy Spring, what wonder will you do for me?  
Light the tulip lanterns, and set the furze a-fire?  
Fill your sky with sails of cloud on waves of living blue for me?  
Show me green cornfields and budding of the briar?

Spring, darling Spring, my days will not return to me,  
You who see them fleeting, you, all time above,  
You who move the whole world's heart, ah move one heart to turn to me,  
--Bring me a lover, and teach me how to love!

Edith Nesbit

# The Moat House

## PART I

### I

UNDER the shade of convent towers,  
Where fast and vigil mark the hours,  
From childhood into youth there grew  
A maid as fresh as April dew,  
And sweet as May's ideal flowers,

Brighter than dawn in wind-swept skies,  
Like children's dreams most pure, unwise,  
Yet with a slumbering soul-fire too,  
That sometimes shone a moment through  
Her wondrous unawakened eyes.

The nuns, who loved her coldly, meant  
The twig should grow as it was bent;  
That she, like them, should watch youth's bier,  
Should watch her day-dreams disappear,  
And go the loveless way they went.

The convent walls were high and grey;  
How could Love hope to find a way  
Into that citadel forlorn,  
Where his dear name was put to scorn,  
Or called a sinful thing to say?

Yet Love did come; what need to tell  
Of flowers downcast, that sometimes fell  
Across her feet when dreamily  
She paced, with unused breviary,  
Down paths made still with August's spell--

Of looks cast through the chapel grate,

Of letters helped by Love and Fate,  
That to cold fingers did not come  
But lay within a warmer home,  
Upon her heart inviolate?

Somehow he loved her--she loved him:  
Then filled her soul's cup to the brim,  
And all her daily life grew bright  
With such a flood of rosy light  
As turned the altar candles dim.

But love that lights is love that leads,  
And lives upon the heart it feeds;  
Soon grew she pale though not less fair,  
And sighed his name instead of prayer,  
And told her heart-throbs, not her beads.

How could she find the sunlight fair,  
A sunlight that he did not share?  
How could a rose smell sweet within  
The cruel bars that shut her in,  
And shut him out while she was there?

He vowed her fealty firm and fast,  
Then to the winds her fears she cast;  
They found a way to cheat the bars,  
And in free air, beneath free stars,  
Free, and with him, she stood at last.

'Now to some priest,' he said, 'that he  
May give thee--blessing us--to me.'  
'No priest,' she cried in doubt and fear,  
'He would divide, not join us, dear.  
I am mine--I give myself to thee.

'Since thou and I are mine and thine,

What need to swear it at a shrine?  
Would love last longer if we swore  
That we would love for evermore?  
God gives me thee--and thou art mine.'

'God weds us now,' he said, 'yet still  
Some day shall we all forms fulfil.  
Eternal truth affords to smile  
At laws wherewith man marks his guile,  
Yet law shall join us--when you will.

'So look your last, my love, on these  
Forbidding walls and wooing trees.  
Farewell to grief and gloom,' said he;  
'Farewell to childhood's joy,' said she;  
But neither said, 'Farewell to peace.'

Song.

My sweet, my sweet,  
She is complete  
From dainty head to darling feet;  
So warm and white,  
So brown and bright,  
So made for love and love's delight.

God could but spare  
One flower so fair,  
There is none like her anywhere;  
Beneath wide skies  
The whole earth lies,  
But not two other such brown eyes.

The world we're in,  
If one might win?  
Not worth that dimple in her chin  
A heaven to know?  
I'll let that go

But once to see her lids droop low

Over her eyes,  
By love made wise:  
To see her bosom fall and rise  
Is more than worth  
The angels' mirth,  
And all the heaven-joys of earth.

This is the hour  
Which gives me power  
To win and wear earth's whitest flower.  
Oh, Love, give grace,  
Through all life's ways  
Keep pure this heart, her dwelling place.

## II

The fields were reaped and the pastures bare,  
And the nights grown windy and chill,  
When the lovers passed through the beech woods fair,  
And climbed the brow of the hill.  
In the hill's spread arm the Moat House lies  
With elm and willow tree;  
'And is that your home at last?' she sighs.  
'Our home at last,' laughs he.

Across the bridge and into the hall  
Where the waiting housefolk were.  
'This is my lady,' he said to them all,  
And she looked so sweet and fair  
That every maid and serving-boy  
God-blessed them then and there,  
And wished them luck, and gave them joy,  
For a happy, handsome pair.

And only the old nurse shook her head:

'Too young,' she said, 'too young.'  
She noted that no prayers were read,  
No marriage bells were rung;  
No guests were called, no feast was spread,  
As was meet for a marriage tide;  
The young lord in the banquet hall broke bread  
Alone with his little bride.

Yet her old heart warmed to the two, and blessed,  
They were both so glad and gay,  
By to-morrow and yesterday unoppressed,  
Fulfilled of the joy of to-day;  
Like two young birds in that dull old nest,  
So careless of coming care,  
So rapt in the other that each possessed,  
The two young lovers were.

He was heir to a stern hard-natured race,  
That had held the Moat House long,  
But the gloom of his formal dwelling place  
Dissolved at her voice and song;  
So bright, so sweet, to the house she came,  
So winning of way and word,  
The household knew her by one pet name,  
'My Lady Ladybird.'

First love so rarely gets leave to bring,  
In our world where money is might,  
Its tender buds to blossoming  
With the sun of its own delight.  
We love at rose or at vintage prime,  
In the glare and heat of the day,  
Forgetting the dawn and the violet time,  
And the wild sweet scent of the may.

These loved like children, like children played,  
The old house laughed with delight  
At her song of a voice, at the radiance made



By her dress's flashing flight.  
Up the dark oak stair, through the gallery's gloom,  
She ran like a fairy fleet,  
And ever her lover from room to room  
Fast followed her flying feet.

They gathered the buds of the late-lived rose  
In the ordered garden ways,  
They walked through the sombre yew-walled close  
And threaded the pine woods maze,  
They rode through woods where their horses came  
Knee-deep through the rustling leaves,  
Through fields forlorn of the poppies' flame  
And bereft of their golden sheaves.

In the mellow hush of October noon  
They rowed in the flat broad boat,  
Through the lily leaves so thickly strewn  
On the sunny side of the moat.  
They were glad of the fire of the beech-crowned hill,  
And glad of the pale deep sky,  
And the shifting shade that the willows made  
On the boat as she glided by.

They roamed each room of the Moat House through  
And questioned the wraiths of the past,  
What legends rare the old dresses knew,  
And the swords, what had wet them last?  
What faces had looked through the lozenge panes,  
What shadows darkened the door,  
What feet had walked in the jewelled stains  
That the rich glass cast on the floor?

She dressed her beauty in old brocade  
That breathed of loss and regret,  
In laces that broken hearts had swayed,  
In the days when the swords were wet;  
And the rubies and pearls laughed out and said,

'Though the lovers for whom we were set,  
And the women who loved us, have long been dead,  
Yet beauty and we live yet.'

When the wild white winter's spectral hand  
Effaced the green and the red,  
And crushed the fingers brown of the land  
Till they grew death-white instead,  
The two found cheer in their dark oak room,  
And their dreams of a coming spring,  
For a brighter sun shone through winter's gloom  
Than ever a summer could bring.

They sat where the great fires blazed in the hall,  
Where the wolf-skins lay outspread,  
The pictured faces looked down from the wall  
To hear his praise of the dead.  
He told her ghostly tales of the past,  
And legends rare of his house,  
Till she held her breath at the shade fire-cast,  
And the scamper-rush of the mouse,

Till she dared not turn her head to see  
What shape might stand by her chair--  
Till she cried his name, and fled to his knee,  
And safely nestled there.  
Then they talked of their journey, the city's crowd,  
Of the convent's faint joy and pain,  
Till the ghosts of the past were laid in the shroud  
Of commonplace things again.

So the winter died, and the baby spring,  
With hardly voice for a cry,  
And hands too weak the signs to bring  
That all men might know her by,  
Yet woke, and breathed through the soft wet air  
The promise of all things dear,  
And poets and lovers knew she was there,

And sang to their hearts, 'She is here.'

Song.

Soft is the ground underfoot,  
Soft are the skies overhead,  
Green is the ivy round brown hedge root,  
Green is the moss where we tread.

Purple the woods are, and brown;  
The blackbird is glossy and sleek,  
He knows that the worms are no more kept down  
By frost out of reach of his beak.

Grey are the sheep in the fold,  
Tired of their turnip and beet,  
Dreaming of meadow and pasture and wold,  
And turf the warm rain will make sweet.

Leaves sleep, no bud wakens yet,  
But we know by the song of the sun,  
And the happy way that the world smiles, wet,  
That the spring--oh, be glad!--is begun.

What stirs the heart of the tree?  
What stirs the seed the earth bears?  
What is it stirring in you and in me  
Longing for summer, like theirs?--

Longing you cannot explain,  
Yearning that baffles me still!  
Ah! that each spring should bring longings again  
No summer can ever fulfil!

III

When all the world had echoed the song

That the poet and lover sang,  
When 'Glory to spring,' sweet, soft, and strong,  
From the ferny woods outrang,  
In wet green meadow, in hollow green,  
The primrose stars outshone,  
And the bluebells balanced their drooping sheen  
In copses lovely and lone.

The green earth laughed, full of leaf and flower,  
The sky laughed too, full of sun;  
Was this the hour for a parting hour,  
With the heaven of spring just won?  
The woods and fields were echoing  
To a chorus of life and bliss.  
Oh, hard to sting the face of the spring  
With the smart of a parting kiss!

A kinsman ailing, a summons sent  
To haste to his dying bed.  
'Oh, cruel sentence of banishment!  
For my heart says 'Go!'' he said.  
'So now good-bye to my home, my dear,  
To the spring we watched from its birth;  
There is no spring, oh, my sweet, but here,  
'Tis winter all over the earth.

'But I come again, oh, spring of my life,  
You hold the cord in your hand  
That will draw me back, oh, my sweetheart wife,  
To the place where your dear feet stand;  
But a few short days, and my arms shall be  
Once more round your little head,  
And you will be weeping glad tears with me  
On the grave of our parting, dead!

'I leave you my heart for a short short while,  
It will ache if 'tis wrapped in fears;  
Keep it safe and warm in the sun of your smile,

Not wet with the rain of your tears.

Be glad of the joy that shall soon be won,  
Be glad to-day, though we part;  
You shall weep for our parting when parting is done,  
And drop your tears on my heart.'

Song.

Good-bye, my love, my only dear, I know your heart is true  
And that it lingers here with me while mine fares forth with you.  
We part? Our hearts are almost one, and are so closely tied  
'Tis yours that stirs my bosom-lace, mine beats against your side.

So not at losing you I grieve, since heart and soul stay here,  
But all the gladness of my life, I cry to lose it, dear;  
Warmth of the sun, sweet of the rose, night's rest and light of day,  
I mourn for these, for if you go, you take them all away.

You are sad too--not at leaving me, whose heart must with you go,  
But at the heaven you leave behind--ah, yes--you told me so,  
You said wherever you might go you could not ever find  
A spring so sweet, love so complete, as these you leave behind.

No future joy will ever pay this moment's bitter ache,  
Yet I am glad to be so sad, since it is for your sake.  
You take so much, I do but wish that you could take the whole,  
Could take me, since you take my rest, my light, my joy, my soul.

Song.

Oh, love, I leave  
This springtide eve,  
When woods in sunset shine blood-red;  
The long road lies  
Before my eyes,  
My horse goes on with even tread.

I dare not turn  
These eyes that burn  
Back to the terrace where you lean;  
If I should see  
Your tears for me,  
I must turn back to dry them, O my queen!

Yet I must go,  
Fate has it so,  
Duty spoke once, and I obey;  
Sadly I rise,  
Leave paradise,  
And turn my face the other way.

Nothing is dear  
On earth but here,  
There is no joy away from you;  
What though there be  
New things to see,  
New friends, new faces, and adventures new?

Yet since I may  
Not with you stay,  
Hey for the outer world of life!  
Brace limbs, shake rein,  
And seek again  
The hurry, jostle, jar and strife.

Hey for the new!  
Yet, love, for you--  
I have loved you so--the last hand-kiss.  
How vast a world  
Lies here unfurled!  
How small, if sweet, home's inner round of bliss!

The road bends right,

Leads out of sight,  
Here I may turn, nor fear to see;  
So far away,  
One could not say  
If you are weeping now for me.

Behind this eve  
My love I leave,  
The big bright world spreads out before;  
Yet will I come,  
To you and home,  
Oh, love, and rest beneath your yoke once more.

#### IV

She stood upon the terrace, gazing still  
Down the long road to watch him out of sight,  
Dry-eyed at first, until the swelling hill  
Hid him. Then turned she to the garden bright,  
Whose ways held memories of lover's laughter,  
And lover's sadness that had followed after,  
Both born of passion's too intense delight.

The garden knew her secrets, and its bowers  
Threw her her secrets back in mocking wise;  
'Twas here he buried you in lilac flowers.  
Here while he slept you covered up his eyes  
With primroses. They died; and by that token  
Love, like a flower whose stalk has once been broken,  
Will live no more for all your tears and sighs.'

The sundial that had marked their happy hours  
Cried out to her, 'I know that he is gone;  
So many twos have wreathed me round with flowers,  
And always one came afterwards alone,  
And always wept--even as you are weeping.  
The flowers while they lived were cold, shade keeping,  
But always through the tears the sun still shone.'

She left the garden; but the house still more  
Whispered, 'You love him--he has gone away.'  
Where fell her single footstep sighed the floor,  
'Another foot than yours fell here to-day.'  
The very hound she stroked looked round and past her,  
Then in her face, and whined, 'Where is our master?'  
The whole house had the same one thing to say.

Empty, without its soul, disconsolate,  
The great house was: through all the rooms went she,  
And every room was dark and desolate,  
Nothing seemed good to do or good to see.  
At last, upon the wolf-skins, worn with weeping,  
The old nurse found her, like a tired child, sleeping  
With face tear-stained, and sobbing brokenly.

Wearily went the days, all sad the same,  
Yet each brought its own added heaviness.  
Why was it that no letter from him came  
To ease the burden of her loneliness?  
Why did he send no message, word, or greeting,  
To help her forward to their day of meeting,  
No written love--no black and white caress?

At last there came a letter, sweet but brief,  
'He was so busy--had no time for more.'  
No time! She had had time enough for grief,  
There never had been so much time before;  
And yet the letter lay within her bosom,  
Pressed closely to her breathing beauty's blossom,  
Worn for a balm, because her heart was sore.

She knew not where he stayed, and so could send,  
Of all the letters that she wrote, not one;  
Hour after soft spring hour the child would spend  
In pouring out her soul, for, once begun,



The tale of all her love and grief flowed over  
Upon the letters that she wrote her lover,  
And that the fire read when the tale was done.

And yet she never doubted he would come,  
If not before, yet when a baby's eyes  
Should look for him, when his deserted home  
Should waken to a baby's laughs and cries.  
'He judges best--perhaps he comes to-morrow,  
But come he will, and we shall laugh at sorrow  
When in my arms our little baby lies.'

And in the August days a soft hush fell  
Upon the house--the old nurse kept her place  
Beside the little wife--and all was well;  
After rapt anguish came a breathing space,  
And she, mid tears and smiles, white-faced, glad-eyed,  
Felt her wee baby move against her side,  
Kissed its small hands, worshipped its tiny face.

Song.

Oh, baby, baby, baby dear,  
We lie alone together here;  
The snowy gown and cap and sheet  
With lavender are fresh and sweet;  
Through half-closed blinds the roses peer  
To see and love you, baby dear.

We are so tired, we like to lie  
Just doing nothing, you and I,  
Within the darkened quiet room.  
The sun sends dusk rays through the gloom,  
Which is no gloom since you are here,  
My little life, my baby dear.

Soft sleepy mouth so vaguely pressed  
Against your new-made mother's breast,

Soft little hands in mine I fold,  
Soft little feet I kiss and hold,  
Round soft smooth head and tiny ear,  
All mine, my own, my baby dear.

And he we love is far away!  
But he will come some happy day.  
You need but me, and I can rest  
At peace with you beside me pressed.  
There are no questions, longings vain,  
No murmuring, nor doubt, nor pain,  
Only content and we are here,  
My baby dear.

## PART II

### I

While winged Love his pinions folded in the Moat House by the hill,  
In the city there was anger, doubt, distrust, and thoughts of ill;  
For his kinsmen, hearing rumours of the life the lovers led,  
Wept, and wrung their hands, and sorrowed--'Better that the lad were dead  
Than to live thus--he, the son of proudest man and noblest earl--  
Thus in open sin with her, a nameless, shameless, foreign girl.'  
(Ever when they thus lamented, 'twas the open sin they named,  
Till one wondered whether sinning, if less frank, had been less blamed.)  
'Tis our duty to reclaim him--mate him to a noble bride  
Who shall fitly grace his station, and walk stately by his side--  
Gently loose him from the fetters of this siren fair and frail  
(In such cases time and absence nearly always will prevail).  
He shall meet the Duke's fair daughter--perfect, saintly Lady May--  
Beauty is the surest beacon to a young man gone astray!  
Not at all precipitately, but with judgment sure and fine,  
We will rescue and redeem him from his shameful husks and swine.

So--his uncle's long been ailing (gout and dropsy for his sins)--  
Let that serve for pretext; hither bring the youth--his cure begins.'  
So they summoned him and welcomed, and their utmost efforts bent

To snatch back a brand from burning and a soul from punishment--  
Sought to charm him with their feastings, each more sumptuous than the last,  
From his yearning recollections of his very sinful past--  
Strove to wipe his wicked doings from his memory's blotted  
By the chaster, purer interests of the ball-room and the stage.  
And for Lady May--they hinted to the girl, child-innocent,  
That her hand to save the sinner by her Saviour had been sent,  
That her voice might bring his voice her Master's triumph choir to swell,  
And might save a man from sorrow and a human soul from hell.

So she used her maiden graces, maiden glances, maiden smiles,  
To protect the erring pilgrim from the devil's subtle wiles--  
Saw him daily, sent him letters, pious verses by the score,  
Every angel's trap she baited with her sweet religious lore--  
Ventured all she knew, not knowing that her beauty and her youth  
Were far better to bait traps with than her odds and ends of truth.  
First he listened, vain and flattered that a girl as fair as she  
Should be so distinctly anxious for his lost humanity,  
Yet determined no attentions, even from the Lady May,  
Should delay his home-returning one unnecessary day.  
But as she--heart-wrung with pity for his erring soul--grew kind,  
Fainter, fainter grew the image of his sweetheart left behind;  
Till one day May spoke of sorrow--prayed him to reform--repent,  
Urged the festival in heaven over every penitent;  
Bold in ignorance, spoke vaguely and low-toned of sin and shame,

And at last her voice, half breathless, faltered, broke upon his name,  
And two tears fell from her lashes on the roses at her breast,  
Far more potent in their silence than her preaching at its best.  
And his weak soul thrilled and trembled at her beauty, and he cried,  
'Not for me those priceless tears: I am your slave--you shall decide.'  
'Save your soul,' she sighed. 'Was ever man so tempted, tried, before?  
It is yours!' and at the word his soul was lost for evermore.  
Never woman pure and saintly did the devil's work so well!  
Never soul ensnared for heaven took a surer road to hell!  
Lady May had gained her convert, loved him, and was satisfied,  
And before the last leaves yellowed she would kneel down as his bride.  
She was happy, and he struggled to believe that perfidy  
Was repentance--reformation was not one with cruelty,

Yet through all congratulations, friends' smiles, lovers' flatteries,  
Lived a gnawing recollection of the lost love harmonies.  
In the day he crushed it fiercely, kept it covered out of sight,  
But it held him by the heart-strings and came boldly out at night:  
In the solemn truthful night his soul shrank shuddering from its lies,  
And his base self knew its baseness, and looked full in its false eyes.  
In the August nights, when all the sky was deep and toneless blue,  
And the gold star-points seemed letting the remembered sunlight through,  
When the world was hushed and peaceful in the moonlight's searching white,  
He would toss and cast his arms out through the silence and the night  
To those eyes that through the night and through the silence came again,  
Haunting him with the persistence and the passion of their pain.

'Oh, my little love--my sweetheart--oh, our past--our sweet love-day--  
Oh, if I were only true--or you were only Lady May!'  
But the sunshine scared the vision, and he rose once more love-warm  
To the Lady May's perfections and his own proposed reform.  
Coward that he was! he could not write and break that loving heart:  
To the worn-out gouty kinsman was assigned that pleasing part.  
'Say it kindly,' said her lover, 'always friends--I can't forget--  
We must meet no more--but give her tenderest thought and all regret;  
Bid her go back to the convent--she and I can't meet as friends--  
Offer her a good allowance--any terms to make amends  
For what nought could make amends for--for my baseness and my sin.  
Oh, I know which side the scale this deed of mine will figure in!  
Curse reform!--she may forget me--'tis on me the burdens fall,

For I love her only, solely--not the Lady May at all!  
'Patience,' said the uncle, 'patience, this is but the natural pain  
When a young man turns from sinning to the paths of grace again.  
Your wild oats are sown--you're plighted to the noble Lady May  
(Whose estates adjoin your manor in a providential way).  
Do your duty, sir, for surely pangs like these are such as win  
Pardon and the heavenly blessing on the sinner weaned from sin.'

Song.

Day is fair, and so is she  
Whom so soon I wed;

But the night, when memory  
Guards my sleepless bed,  
And with cold hands brings once more  
Thorns from rose-sweet days of yore--  
Night I curse and dread.

Day is sweet, as sweet as her  
Girlish tenderness;  
But the night, when near me stir  
Rustlings of a dress,  
Echoes of a loving tone  
Now renounced, forsworn, foregone,  
Night is bitterness.

Day can stir my blood like wine  
Or her beauty's fire,  
But at night I burn and pine,  
Torture, turn and tire,  
With a longing that is pain,  
Just to kiss and clasp again  
Love's one lost desire.

Day is glad and pure and bright,  
Pure, glad, bright as she;  
But the sad and guilty night  
Outlives day--for me.  
Oh, for days when day and night  
Equal balance of delight  
Were alike to me!

In the day I see my feet  
Walk in steadfast wise,  
Following my lady sweet  
To her Paradise,  
Like some stray-recovered lamb;  
But I see the beast I am  
When the night stars rise.

Yet in wedding day there lies  
Magic--so they say;  
Ghosts will have no chance to rise  
Near my Lady May.  
Vain the hope! In good or ill  
Those lost eyes will haunt me still  
Till my dying day.

## II

Quickly died the August roses, and the kin of Lady May  
Dowered her richly, blessed her freely, and announced her wedding day;  
And his yearnings and remorse fainter grew as days went on  
'Neath the magic of the beauty of the woman he had won;  
And less often and less strongly was his fancy caught and crossed  
By remembrance of the dearness of the woman he had lost.  
Long sweet mornings in the boudoir where the flowers stood about,  
Whisperings in the balcony when stars and London lamps came out,

Concerts, flower shows, garden parties, balls and dinners, rides and drives,  
All the time-killing distractions of these fashionable lives;  
Dreary, joyless as a desert, pleasure's everlasting way,  
But enchantment can make lovely even deserts, so they say,  
Sandy waste, or waste of London season, where no green leaf grows,  
Shone on but by love or passion, each will blossom like the rose!  
Came no answer to the letter that announced his marriage day;  
But his people wrote that Lady Ladybird had gone away.  
So he sent to bid get ready to receive his noble wife.  
Two such loving women granted to one man, and in one life!  
Though he shuddered to remember with what ghosts the Moat House swarmed--  
Ghosts of lovely days and dreamings ere the time when he reformed--  
Yet he said, 'She cannot surely greatly care, or I had heard

Some impulsive, passionate pleading, had some sorrowing written word;  
She has journeyed to her convent--will be glad as ere I came,  
Through her beauty's dear enchantment, to a life of shameless shame;  
And the memories of her dearness passion's flaming sword shall slay,  
When the Moat House sees the bridal of myself and Lady May!

## III

Bright the mellow autumn sunshine glows upon the wedding day;  
Lawns are swept from leaves, and doorways are wreathed round with garlands  
gay,

Flowery arches span the carriage drive from grass again to grass,  
Flowers are ready for the flinging when the wedded pair shall pass;  
Bells are ringing, clanging, clamouring from the belfry 'mid the trees,  
And the sound rings out o'er woodlands, parks and gardens, lawns and leas;

All the village gay with banners waits the signal, 'Here they come!'  
To strew flowers, wave hats, drop curtseys, and hurra its 'Welcome home!'  
At the gates the very griffins on the posts are wreathed with green.  
In their ordered lines wait servants for the pair to pass between;  
But among them there is missing more than one familiar face,  
And new faces, blank expectant, fill up each vacated place,  
And the other servants whisper, 'Nurse would wail to see this day,  
It was well she left the service when 'my Lady' ran away.'  
Louder, clearer ring the joy-bells through the shaken, shattered air,  
Till the echoes of them waken in the hillside far and fair;  
Level shine the golden sunbeams in the golden afternoon.  
In the east the wan ghost rises of the silver harvest moon.

Hark! wheels was it? No, but fancy. Listen! No--yes--can you hear?  
Yes, it is the coming carriage rolling nearer and more near!  
Till the horse-hoofs strike the roadway, unmistakable and clear!  
They are coming! shout your welcome to my lord and lady fair:  
May God shower his choicest blessings on the happy wedded pair!  
Here they are! the open carriage and surrounding dusty cloud,  
Whence he smiles his proud acceptance of the homage of the crowd;  
And my lady's sweet face! Bless her! there's a one will help the poor,  
Eyes like those could never turn a beggar helpless from her door!  
Welcome, welcome! scatter flowers: see, they smile--bow left and right,  
Reach the lodge gates--God of heaven! what was that, the flash of white?  
She has sprung out from the ambush of the smiling, cheering crowd:

'Fling your flowers--here's my welcome!' sharp the cry rings out and loud.  
Sudden sight of wild white face, and haggard eyes, and outstretched hands--  
Just one heart-beat's space before the bridal pair that figure stands,  
Then the horses, past controlling, forward bound, their hoofs down thrust--  
And the carriage wheels jolt over something bloody in the dust.  
'Stop her! Stop her! Stop the horses!' cry the people all too late,

For my lord and Lady May have had their welcome at their gate.

'Twas the old nurse who sprang to her, raised the brown-haired, dust-soiled head,  
Looked a moment, closed the eyelids--then turned to my lord and said,  
Kneeling still upon the roadway, with her arm flung round the dead,  
While the carriage waited near her, blood and dust upon its wheels  
(Ask my lord within to tell you how a happy bridegroom feels):  
'Now, my lord, you are contented; you have chosen for your bride  
This same fine and dainty lady who is sitting by your side.  
Did ye tell her ere this bridal of the girl who bore your shame,  
Bore your love-vows--bore your baby--everything except your name?  
When they strewed the flowers to greet you, and the banners were unfurled,  
She has flung before your feet the sweetest flower in all the world!  
Woe's the day I ever nursed you--loved your lisping baby word,  
For you grew to name of manhood, and to title of my lord;  
Woe's the day you ever saw her, brought her home to wreck her life,  
Throwing by your human plaything, to seek out another wife.  
God will judge, and I would rather be the lost child lying there,

With your babe's milk in her bosom, your horse-hoof marks on her hair,  
Than be you when God shall thunder, when your days on earth are filled,  
'Where is she I gave, who loved you, whom you ruined, left and killed?'  
Murderer, liar, coward, traitor, look upon your work and say  
That your heart is glad within you on your happy wedding day!  
And for you, my noble lady, take my blessing on your head,  
Though it is not like the blessing maidens look for when they wed.  
Never bride had such a welcome, such a flower laid on her way,  
As was given you when your carriage crushed her out of life to-day.  
Take my blessing--see her body, see what you and he have done--  
And I wish you joy, my lady, of the bridegroom you have won.'

Like a beaten cur, that trembles at the whistling of the lash,  
He stands listening, hands a-tremble, face as pale as white wood ash;  
But the Lady May springs down, her soul shines glorious in her eyes,  
Moving through the angry silence comes to where the other lies,  
Gazes long upon her silent, but at last she turns her gaze  
On the nurse, and lips a-tremble, hands outstretched, she slowly says,  
'She is dead--but, but her baby--' all her woman's heart is wild



With an infinite compassion for the little helpless child.  
Then she turns to snatch the baby from the arms of one near by,  
Holds it fast and looks towards him with a voiceless bitter cry,  
As imploring him to loose her from some nightmare's deadly bands.  
Dogged looks he down and past her, and she sees and understands,  
Then she speaks--'I keep your baby--that's my right in sight of men,  
But by God I vow I'll never see your dastard face again.'  
So she turned with no word further towards the purple-clouded west,  
And passed thither with his baby clasped against her maiden breast.

Little Ladybird was buried in the old ancestral tomb.  
From that grave there streams a shadow that wraps up his life in gloom,  
And he drags the withered life on, longs for death that will not come,  
The interminable night hours riven by that 'Welcome home!'  
And he dares not leave this earthly hell of sharp remorse behind,  
Lest through death not rest but hotter fire of anguish he should find.  
Coward to the last, he will not risk so little for so much,  
So he burns, convicted traitor, in the hell self-made of such:  
And at night he wakes and shivers with unvanquishable dread  
At the ghosts that press each other for a place beside his bed,  
And he shudders to remember all the dearness that is dead.

Song.

I had a soul,  
Not strong, but following good if good but led.  
I might have kept it clean and pure and whole,  
And given it up at last, grown strong with days  
Of steadfast striving in truth's stern sweet ways;  
Instead, I soiled and smutched and smothered it  
With poison-flowers it valued not one whit--  
Now it is dead.

I had a heart  
Most true, most sweet, that on my loving fed.  
I might have kept her all my life, a part  
Of all my life--I let her starve and pine,  
Ruined her life and desolated mine.  
Sin brushed my lips--I yielded at a touch,

Tempted so little, and I sinned so much,  
And she is dead.

There was a life  
That in my sin I took and chained and wed,  
And made--perpetual remorse!--my wife.  
In my sin's harvest she must reap her share,  
That makes its sheaves less light for me to bear.  
Oh, life I might have left to bloom and grow!  
I struck its root of happiness one blow,  
And it is dead.

Once joy I had,  
Now I have only agony instead,  
That maddens, yet will never send me mad.  
The best that comes is numbed half-sick despair,  
Remembering how sweet the dear dead were.  
My whole life might have been one clear joy song!  
Now--oh, my heart, how still life is, how long,  
For joy is dead.

Yet there is this:  
I chose the thorns not grapes, the stones not bread;  
I had my chance, they say, to gain or miss.  
And yet I feel it was predestinate  
From the first hour, from the first dawn of fate,  
That I, thus placed, when that hour should arise,  
Must act thus, and could not act otherwise.  
This is the worst of all that can be said;  
For hope is dead.

Edith Nesbit

# The Monk

WHEN in my narrow cell I lie,  
The long day's penance done at last,  
I see the ghosts of days gone by,  
And hear the voices of the past.

I see the blue-gray wood-smoke curled  
From hearths where life has rhymed to love,  
I see the kingdoms of the world--  
The glory and the power thereof,

And cry, 'Ah, vainly have I striven!'  
And then a voice calls, soft and low:  
'Thou gavest My Earth to win My Heaven;  
But Heaven-on-Earth thou mayest not know!'

It is not for Thy Heaven, O Lord,  
That I renounced Thy pleasant earth--  
The ship, the furrow, and the sword--  
The dreams of death, the dreams of birth!

Weary of vigil, fast, and prayer,  
Weak in my hope and in my faith--  
O Christ, for whom this cross I bear,  
Meet me beside the gate of Death!

When the night comes, then let me rest  
(O Christ, who sanctifiest pain!)  
Falling asleep upon Thy breast,  
And, if Thou wilt, wake never again!

Edith Nesbit

# The Moors

NOT in rich glebe and ripe green garden only  
Does Summer weave her sweet resistless spells,  
But in high hills, and moorlands waste and lonely,  
The vast enchantment of her presence dwells.  
Wide sky, and sky-wide waste of thyme and heather,  
Perpetual sleepy hum of golden bees--  
If you and I were only there together,  
Free from the weight of all your garden's trees!

The north is mine; though bred by elm and meadow,  
Pines, torrents, rocks, and moors my heart loves best;  
I love the plover's wail, the cleft hill's shadow,  
The sun-browned grass that is the skylark's nest.  
Ah, yes! you too I love, dear wistful pleader,  
You most I love, dear southern rose, half-blown,  
And rather lounge with you beneath your cedar,  
Than greet the moor's wide heaven-on-earth alone.

Edith Nesbit

# The Mother's Prayer

This was my little son  
Who leapt and laughed on my knee:  
Body we made with love,  
Soul made with love by Thee.  
This was the mystery  
In which I worshipped Thy grace;  
This was the sign to me -  
The unveiling of Thy face . . .  
This, that lies under Thy skies  
Naked as on that day  
When the floor of heaven gave way  
And the glory of God shone through,  
When the world was made new  
And Thy word was made flesh for me . . .  
He lies there, bare to Thy skies,  
O Lord God, see!

Body that was in mine  
A secret, sacred spell,  
Little hands I have kissed  
Trampled by beasts in Hell . . .  
Growing beauty and grace . . .  
Oh, head that lay on my bosom . . .  
Broken, battered, shattered . . .  
Body that grew like a blossom!  
All that was promised me  
On my life's royal day.  
Every promise broken -  
Only a ghost, and clay!

O God, I kneel at Thy feet;  
I lay my hands in Thine:  
Thou gavest Thy Son for the world,  
And shall I not give mine?  
Only--O God, have pity!  
All my defences are down:  
God, I accept the Cross,  
Let HIM have the Crown!

By all that my love has borne,  
By all that all mothers bear,  
By the infinite patient anguish,  
By the never-ceasing prayer,  
By the thoughts that cut like a living knife,  
By the tears that are never dry,  
Take what he died to win You -  
God, take Your victory!

We have watched on till the light burned low,  
And watched the dawn awake;  
We have lived hardly and hardly fared  
For our sons' sake.  
All that was good in Thy earth,  
All that taught us of Heaven,  
All that we had in the world  
We have given.  
We pray with empty hands  
And hearts that are stiff with pain.  
O God! O God! O God!  
Let the sacrifice not be vain.  
This is his blood, Lord, see!  
His blood that was shed for Thee;  
Thy banner is dyed in that red tide  
Lord, take Thy victory!

God! give Thine angels power  
To fight as he fought,  
To scatter the hosts of evil,  
To bring their boastings to naught -  
Gabriel with trumpet of battle . . .  
Michael, who wields Thy sword . . .  
Breathe Thou Thy spirit upon them,  
Put forth Thy strength, O Lord.  
See, Lord, this is his body,  
Broken for Thee, for Thee . . .  
My son, my little son,  
Who leapt and laughed on my knee.

Edith Nesbit

# The Nest

That was the skylark we heard  
Singing so high,  
The little quivering bird  
We saw, and the sky.  
The earth was drenched with sun,  
The sky was drenched with song;  
We lay in the grass and listened,  
Long and long and long.

I said, 'What a spell it is  
Has made her rise  
To pour out her world of bliss  
In that world of skies!'  
You said, 'What a spell must pass  
Between sky and plain,  
Since she finds in this world of grass  
Her nest again!'

Edith Nesbit

# The Offering

What will you give me for this heart of mine,  
No heart of gold, and yet my dearest treasure?  
It has its graces, it can ache and pine,

And beat true time to your sweet voice's measure;  
It bears your name, it lives but for your pleasure:  
What will you give me for this heart I bring,  
That holds my life, my joy, my everything?

How can I ask a price, when all my prayer  
Is that, without return, you will but take it,  
Feed it with hope, or starve it to despair,

Keep it to play with, mock it, crush it, break it,  
And, if your will lies there, at last forsake it?  
Its epitaph shall voice its deathless pride:  
'She held me in her hands until I died.'

Edith Nesbit



# The Old Dispensation

O THOU, who, high in heaven,  
To man hast given  
This clouded earthly life  
All storm and strife,  
Blasted with ice and fire,  
Love and desire,  
Filled with dead faith, and love  
That change is master of--

O Thou, who mightest have given  
To all Thy heaven,  
But who, instead, didst give  
This life we live--  
Who feedest with blood and tears  
The hungry years--  
I make one prayer to Thee,  
O Great God! grant it me.

Some day when summer shows  
Her leaf, her rose,  
God, let Thy sinner lie  
Under Thy sky,  
And feel Thy sun's large grace  
Upon his face;  
Then grant him this, that he  
May not believe in Thee!

Edith Nesbit

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Edith Nesbit

# The Old Magic

Gray is the sea, and the skies are gray;  
They are ghosts of our blue, bright yesterday;  
And gray are the breasts of the gulls that scream  
Like tortured souls in an evil dream.

There is white on the wings of the sea and sky,  
And white are the gulls' wings wheeling by,  
And white, like snow, is the pall that lies  
Where love weeps over his memories.

For the dead is dead, and its shroud is wrought  
Of good unfound and of wrong unsought;  
Yet from God's good magic there ever springs  
The resurrection of holy things.

See--the gold and blue of our yesterday  
In the eyes and the hair of a child at play;  
And the spell of joy that our youth beguiled  
Is woven anew in the laugh of the child.

Edith Nesbit

# The Onlooker

If I could make a pillow for your head,  
Soft, pleasant, filled with every pretty thought;  
If I could lay a carpet where you tread  
Of all my life's most radiant fancies wrought,  
And spread my love as canopy above you,  
Your sleep, your steps should know how much I love you.

But--as life goes, to the old sorry tune--  
I stand apart, I see thorns wound your feet,  
Your sleeping eyes resenting sun and moon,  
Your head lie restless on a breast unmeet--  
And say no word, and suffer without moan,  
Lest you should guess how much you are alone.

Edith Nesbit

# The Past

MAKE strong your door with bolt and bar,  
Make every window fast;  
Strong brass and iron as they are,  
They are so easy passed--  
So easy broken and cast aside,  
And by the open door  
My footsteps come to your guarded home,  
And pass away no more.

In the golden noon--by the lovers' moon,  
My shadow bars your way,  
My shroud shows white in the blackest night  
And grey in the gladdest day.  
And by your board and by your bed  
There is a place for me,  
And in the glow when the coals burn low,  
My face is the face ye see

I come between when ye laugh and lean,  
I burn in the tears ye weep:  
I am there when ye wake in the gray day-break  
From the gold of a lovers' sleep.  
I wither the rose and I spoil the song,  
And Death is not strong to save--  
For I shall creep while your mourners weep,  
And wait for you in your grave.

Edith Nesbit

# The Pedlar

FLY, fly, my pretty pigeon, fly!  
And see if you can find him;  
He has blue eyes--you'll know him by,--  
He wears a pack behind him.  
He's gone away--ah! many a mile  
Because he could not please me,  
And, oh! 'twill be a weary while  
Ere next he comes to tease me.

He carries wares of every kind,  
Fine ribbons, silks, and laces,  
Bargains to rhyme with every mind,  
And hues to suit all faces.  
He has gold rings and pretty things  
That other maids will throng for,  
Ah, pigeon! spread your pretty wings,  
And fly to him I long for.

Tell him to turn and come again,  
For once I sent him packing;  
He offered me a bargain then,  
But wit and price were lacking.  
I have the price he asked of me,  
The wit that will not weigh it;  
Ah! bid him come again and see  
How gladly I will pay it.

A heart of gold he offered me  
As 'twere a penny fairing,  
And only asked a worthless fee,  
This heavy heart I'm wearing.  
I would not then--now long and drear  
The white way winds behind him;  
Ah! seek him, seek him, Pigeon dear,  
But you will never find him!



# The Poet To His Love

ALL the flight of thoughts here, shy, bold, scared, intrusive,  
Fluttering in the sun, between the green and blue,  
Wheeling, whirling, poising, lovely and elusive,  
How to cage the flying thoughts, my winged delight, for you?

Set a spring of rhyme, and hope to catch them in it?  
Strew my love as grain to lure them to the snare?  
Watch the hours built up, slow minute piled on minute?  
Still the wide sky guards their flight, and still the cage is bare.

Gleam of hovering feathers, brushing me to flout me!  
Wings, be weary! Rest! Who loves you more than I?  
Caught? Oh fluttering pinions whitening air about me!  
Rustling wings, and distant flight, and empty cage and sky!

Edith Nesbit



# The Point Of View: I

I

There was never winter, summer only: roses,  
Pink and white and red,  
Shining down the warm rich garden closes;  
Quiet trees and lawns of dappled shadow,  
Silver lilies, whisper of mignonette,  
Cloth-of-gold of buttercups outspread;  
Good gold sun that kissed me when we met,  
Shadows of floating clouds on sunny meadow.  
In the hay-field, scented, grey,  
Loving life and love, I lay;  
By fresh airs blown, drifted into sleep;  
Slept and dreamed there. Winter was the dream.

II

Summer never was, was always winter only;  
Cold and ice and frost  
Only, driven by the ice-wind, lonely,  
In a world of strangers, in the welter  
Of the puddles and the spiteful wind and sleet,  
Blinded by the spitting hailstones, lost  
In a bitter unfamiliar street,  
I found a doorway, crouched there for just shelter,  
Crouched and fought in vain for breath,  
Cursed the cold and wished for death;  
Crouched there, gathered somehow warmth to sleep;  
Slept and dreamed there. Summer was the dream.

Edith Nesbit

# The Point Of View: Ii

## I

In the wood of lost causes, the valley of tears,  
Old hopes, like dead leaves, choke the difficult way;  
Dark pinions fold dank round the soul, and it hears:  
'It is night, it is night, it has never been day;  
Thou hast dreamed of the day, of the rose of delight;  
It was always dead leaves and the heart of the night.  
Drink deep then, and rest, O thou foolish wayfarer,  
For night, like a chalice, holds sleep in her hands.'

## II

Then you drain the dark cup, and, half-drugged as you lie  
In the arms of despair that is masked as delight,  
You thrill to the rush of white wings, and you hear:  
'It is day, it is day, it has never been night!  
Thou hast dreamed of the night and the wood of lost leaves;  
It was always noon, June, and red roses in sheaves,  
Unlock the blind lids, and behold the light-bearer  
Who holds, like a monstrance, the sun in his hands.'

Edith Nesbit

# The Poor Man's Guest

ONE came to me in royal guise  
With banners flying fair and free  
But many griefs had made me wise  
And I refused to bow the knee.

Then one drew near who bore the flower  
Of all the flowers of June and May;  
But many griefs had lent me power  
And I was strong to turn away.

Then came a beggar to my gate  
With shoulders bowed to sorrow's pack,  
So weary and so desolate  
I had no heart to turn him back.

I let him share my board, my bed,  
I warmed him in my shrinking breast,  
I gave him all I had, and said:  
'You, only you, have been my guest.

'Love passed in many a fair disguise  
But never could an entrance win,  
But you came in such piteous wise,  
Poor friend, I could but let you in.'

Low laughed my guest: 'Kind friend!' said he,  
And dropped the rags he was weary of;  
And I, betrayed, saw over me  
The terrible face of outraged Love.

Edith Nesbit

# The Prodigal Son

COME home, come home, for your eyes are sore  
With the glare of the noonday sun,  
And nothing looks as it did before,  
And the best of the day is done.

You have played your match, and ridden your race,  
You have fought in your fight--and lost;  
And life has set its claws in your face,  
And you know what the scratches cost.

Out there the world is cruel and loud,  
It strikes at the beaten man;  
Come out of the press of the stranger crowd  
To the place where your life began.

The best robe lies in the cedar chest,  
And your father's ring is here;  
You have known the worst, come home to the best--  
You will pay for it, never fear!

In every kiss of your sister's mouth,  
In each tear from your mother's eyes,  
You will pay the price of the days in the South  
Where the far-off country lies.

Edith Nesbit

# The Prodigal's Return

I reach my hand to thee!  
Stoop; take my hand in thine;  
Lead me where I would be,  
Father divine.

I do not even know  
The way I want to go,  
The way that leads to rest:  
But, Thou who knowest me,  
Lead where I cannot see,  
Thou knowest best.

Toys, worthless, yet desired,  
Drew me afar to roam.  
Father, I am so tired;  
I am come home.  
The love I held so cheap  
I see, so dear, so deep,  
So almost understood.  
Life is so cold and wild,  
I am thy little child -  
I WILL be good.

Edith Nesbit

# The Promise Of Spring

JUST a whisper, half-heard,  
But our heart knows the word;  
Caresses that seem  
Like love's lips in a dream;  
Yet we know she is here,  
The desired, the dear,  
The love of the year!  
In the murmur of boughs,  
In the softening of skies,  
In the sun on the house,  
In the daffodil's green  
(Half an inch, half-unseen  
Mid the mournful brown mould  
Where the rotten leaf lies)  
Her story is told.

O Spring, darling Spring,  
O sweet days of blue weather  
The thrushes shall sing,  
Fields shall grow green again,  
Daisies be seen again,  
Hedges grow white;  
Then down the lane,  
Grown leafy again,  
Shall go lovers together--  
Lovers who see again  
Sunshine and showers,  
Perfume and flowers,  
Dewy dear hours,  
Dream and delight.

Warm shall nests be again,  
Winter's behind us;  
Springtime shall find us,  
Taking our hands,  
Lead us away from the cold and the snow,  
Into the green world where primroses grow.

Winter, hard winter, forgotten, forgiven;  
All the old pain paid, to seventy times seven,  
All the new glory a-glow.  
Love, when Spring calls, will you still turn away?  
Winter has wooed you in vain, and shall May?  
Love, when Spring calls, will you go?

Edith Nesbit

# The Refusal

MINE is a palace fair to see,  
All hung with gold and silver things,  
It is more glorious than a king's,  
And crownèd queens might envy me.

Ah, no, I will not let you in!  
Stay rather at the gates and weep  
For all the splendour that I keep,  
The treasures that you cannot win.

While you desire and I refuse,  
For both the palace still is here--  
Its turrets gold, its silver gear  
Are yours to wish for--mine to use.

But if I let you in, I know  
The spell would break, the palace fade,  
And we stand, trembling and afraid,  
Lost in the dark where chill winds blow.

Edith Nesbit



# The Return

The grass was gray with the moonlit dew,  
The stones were white as I came through;  
I came down the path by the thirteen yews,  
Through the blocks of shade that the moonlight hews.  
And when I came to the high lych-gate  
I waited awhile where the corpses wait;  
Then I came down the road where the moonlight lay  
Like the fallen ghost of the light of day.

The bats shrieked high in their zigzag flight,  
The owls' spread wings were quiet and white,  
The wind and the poplar gave sigh for sigh,  
And all about were the rustling shy  
Little live creatures that love the night -  
Little wild creatures timid and free.  
I passed, and they were not afraid of me.

It was over the meadow and down the lane  
The way to come to my house again:  
Through the wood where the lovers talk,  
And the ghosts, they say, get leave to walk.  
I wore the clothes that we all must wear,  
And no one saw me walking there,  
No one saw my pale feet pass  
By my garden path to my garden grass.  
My garden was hung with the veil of spring -  
Plum-tree and pear-tree blossoming;  
It lay in the moon's cold sheet of light  
In garlands and silence, wondrous and white  
As a dead bride decked for her burying.

Then I saw the face of my house  
Held close in the arms of the blossomed boughs:  
I leaned my face to the window bright  
To feel if the heart of my house beat right.  
The firelight hung it with fitful gold;  
It was warm as the house of the dead is cold.  
I saw the settles, the candles tall,  
The black-faced presses against the wall,

Polished beechwood and shining brass,  
The gleam of china, the glitter of glass,  
All the little things that were home to me -  
Everything as it used to be.

Then I said, 'The fire of life still burns,  
And I have returned whence none returns:  
I will warm my hands where the fire is lit,  
I will warm my heart in the heart of it!'  
So I called aloud to the one within:  
'Open, open, and let me in!  
Let me in to the fire and the light -  
It is very cold out here in the night!'  
There was never a stir or an answering breath -  
Only a silence as deep as death.

Then I beat on the window, and called, and cried.  
No one heard me, and none replied.  
The golden silence lay warm and deep,  
And I wept as the dead, forgotten, weep;  
And there was no one to hear or see -  
To comfort me, to have pity on me.

But deep in the silence something stirred -  
Something that had not seen or heard -  
And two drew near to the window-pane,  
Kissed in the moonlight and kissed again,  
And looked, through my face, to the moon-shroud, spread  
Over the garlanded garden bed;  
And--'How ghostly the moonlight is!' she said.

Back through the garden, the wood, the lane,  
I came to mine own place again.  
I wore the garments we all must wear,  
And no one saw me walking there.  
No one heard my thin feet pass  
Through the white of the stones and the gray of the grass,  
Along the path where the moonlight hews  
Slabs of shadow for thirteen yews.

In the hollow where drifted dreams lie deep  
It is good to sleep: it was good to sleep:

But my bed has grown cold with the drip of the dew,  
And I cannot sleep as I used to do.

Edith Nesbit

# The Singing Of The Magnificat

## A LEGEND

IN midst of wide green pasture-lands, cut through  
By lines of alders bordering deep-banked streams,  
Where bulrushes and yellow iris grew,  
And rest and peace, and all the flowers of dreams,  
The Abbey stood--so still, it seemed a part  
Of the marsh-country's almost pulseless heart.

Where grey-green willows fringed the stream and pool,  
The lazy meek-faced cattle strayed to graze,  
Sheep in the meadows cropped the grasses cool,  
And silver fish shone through the watery ways,  
And many a load of fruit and load of corn  
Into the Abbey storehouses was borne.

Yet though so much they had of life's good things,  
The monks but held them as a sacred trust,  
Lent from the storehouse of the King of kings  
Till they, His stewards, should crumble back to dust.  
'Not as our own,' they said, 'but as the Lord's,  
All that the stream yields, or the land affords.'

And all the villages and hamlets near  
Knew the monks' wealth, and how their wealth was spent.  
In tribulation, sickness, want, or fear,  
First to the Abbey all the peasants went,  
Certain to find a welcome, and to be  
Helped in the hour of their extremity.

When plague or sickness smote the people sore,  
The Brothers prayed beside the dying bed,  
And nursed the sick back into health once more,  
And through the horror and the danger said:  
'How good is God, Who has such love for us,

He lets us tend His suffering children thus!

They in their simple ways and works were glad:  
Yet all men must have sorrows of their own.  
And so a bitter grief the Brothers had,  
Nor mourned for others' heaviness alone.  
This was the secret of their sorrowing,  
That not a monk in all the house could sing!

Was it the damp air from the lovely marsh,  
Or strain of scarcely intermitted prayer,  
That made their voices, when they sang, as harsh  
As any frog's that croaks in evening air--  
That made less music in their hymns to lie  
Than in the hoarsest wild-fowl's hoarsest cry?

If love could sweeten voice to sing a song,  
Theirs had been sweetest song was ever sung:  
But their hearts' music reached their lips all wrong,  
The soul's intent foiled by the traitorous tongue  
That marred the chapel's peace, and seemed to scare  
The rapt devotion lingering in the air.

The birds that in the chapel built their nests,  
And in the stone-work found their small lives fair,  
Flew thence with hurled wings and fluttering breasts  
When rang the bell to call the monks to prayer.  
'Why will they sing,' they twittered, 'why at all?  
In heaven their silence must be festival!'

The brothers prayed with penance and with tears  
That God would let them give some little part  
Out for the solace of their own sad ears  
Of all the music crowded in their heart.  
Their nature and the marsh-air had their way,  
And still they sang more vilely every day.

And all their prayers and fasts availing not  
To give them voices sweet, their souls' desire,  
The Abbot said, 'Gifts He did not allot  
God at our hands will not again require;  
The love He gives us He will ask again  
In love to Him and to our fellow-men.

'Praise Him we must, and since we cannot praise  
As we would choose, we praise Him as we can.  
In heaven we shall be taught the angels' ways  
Of singing--we afford to wait a span.  
In singing, as in toil, do ye your best;  
God will adjust the balance--do the rest!'

But one good Brother, anxious to remove  
This, the reproach now laid on them so long,  
Rejected counsel, and for very love  
Besought a Brother, skilled in art of song,  
To come to them--his cloister far to leave--  
And sing Magnificat on Christmas Eve.

So when each brown monk duly sought his place,  
By two and two, slow pacing to the choir,  
Shrined in his dark oak stall, the strange monk's face  
Shone with a light as of devotion's fire,  
Good, young and fair, his seemed a form wherein  
Pure beauty left no room at all for sin.

And when the time for singing it had come,  
'Magnificat,' face raised, and voice, he sang:  
Each in his stall the monks stood glad and dumb,  
As through the chancel's dusk his voice outrang,  
Pure, clear, and perfect--as the thrushes sing  
Their first impulsive welcome of the spring.

At the first notes the Abbot's heart spoke low:

'Oh God, accept this singing, seeing we,  
Had we the power, would ever praise Thee so--  
Would ever, Lord, Thou know'st, sing thus for Thee;  
Thus in our hearts Thy hymns are ever sung,  
As he Thou blestest sings them with his tongue.'

But as the voice rose higher, and more sweet,  
The Abbot's heart said, 'Thou hast heard us grieve,  
And sent an angel from beside Thy feet,  
To sing Magnificat on Christmas Eve;  
To ease our ache of soul, and let us see  
How we some day in heaven shall sing to Thee.'

Through the cold Christmas night the hymn rang out,  
In perfect cadence, clear as sunlit rain--  
Such heavenly music that the birds without  
Beat their warm wings against the window pane,  
Scattering the frosted crystal snow outspread  
Upon the stone-lace and the window-lead.

The white moon through the window seemed to gaze  
On the pure face and eyes the singer raised;  
The storm-wind hushed the clamour of its ways,  
God seemed to stoop to hear Himself thus praised,  
And breathless all the Brothers stood, and still  
Reached longing souls out to the music's thrill.

Old years came back, and half-remembered hours,  
Dreams of delight that never was to be,  
Mothers' remembered kiss, the funeral flowers  
Laid on the grave of life's felicity;  
An infinite dear passion of regret  
Swept through their hearts, and left their eyelids wet.

The birds beat ever at the window, till  
They broke the pane, and so could entrance win;  
Their slender feet clung to the window-sill,

And though with them the bitter air came in,  
The monks were glad that the birds too should hear,  
Since to God's creatures all, His praise is dear.

The lovely music waxed and waned, and sank,  
And brought less conscious sadness in its train,  
Unrecognised despair that thinks to thank  
God for a joy renounced, a chosen pain--  
And deems that peace which is but stifled life  
Dulled by a too-prolonged unfruitful strife.

When, service done, the Brothers gathered round  
To thank the singer--modest-eyed, said he:  
'Not mine the grace, if grace indeed abound;  
God gave the power, if any power there be;  
If I in hymn or psalm clear voice can raise,  
As His the gift, so His be all the praise!'

That night--the Abbot lying on his bed--  
A sudden flood of radiance on him fell,  
Poured from the crucifix above his head,  
And cast a stream of light across his cell--  
And in the fullest fervour of the light  
An Angel stood, glittering, and great, and white.

His wings of thousand rainbow clouds seemed made,  
A thousand lamps of love shone in his eyes,  
The light of dawn upon his brows was laid,  
Odours of thousand flowers of Paradise  
Filled all the cell, and through the heart there stirred  
A sense of music that could not be heard.

The Angel spoke--his voice was low and sweet  
As the sea's murmur on low-lying shore--  
Or whisper of the wind in ripened wheat:  
'Brother,' he said, 'the God we both adore  
Has sent me down to ask, is all not right?--



Why was Magnificat not sung to-night?'

Tranced in the joy the Angel's presence brought,  
The Abbot answered: 'All these weary years  
We have sung our best--but always have we thought  
Our voices were unworthy heavenly ears;  
And so to-night we found a clearer tongue,  
And by it the Magnificat was sung.'

The Angel answered, 'All these happy years  
In heaven has your Magnificat been heard;  
This night alone, the angels' listening ears  
Of all its music caught no single word.  
Say, who is he whose goodness is not strong  
Enough to bear the burden of his song?'

The Abbot named his name. 'Ah, why,' he cried,  
'Have angels heard not what we found so dear?'  
'Only pure hearts,' the Angel's voice replied,  
'Can carry human songs up to God's ear;  
To-night in heaven was missed the sweetest praise  
That ever rises from earth's mud-stained maze.

'The monk who sang Magnificat is filled  
With lust of praise, and with hypocrisy;  
He sings for earth--in heaven his notes are stilled  
By muffling weight of deadening vanity;  
His heart is chained to earth, and cannot bear  
His singing higher than the listening air!

'From purest hearts most perfect music springs,  
And while you mourned your voices were not sweet,  
Marred by the accident of earthly things,--  
In heaven, God, listening, judged your song complete.  
The sweetest of earth's music came from you,  
The music of a noble life and true!'



# The Skylark

'It is the skylark come.' For shame!  
Robert-a-Cockney is thy name:  
Robert-a-Field would surely know  
That skylarks, bless them, never go!

\* \* \*

Love of my life, bear witness here  
How we have heard them all the year;  
How to the skylark's song are set  
The days we never can forget.  
At Rustington, do you remember?  
We heard the skylarks in December;  
In January above the snow  
They sang to us by Hurstmonceaux  
Once in the keenest airs of March  
We heard them near the Marble Arch;  
Their April song thrilled Tonbridge air;  
May found them singing everywhere;  
And oh, in Sheppey, how their tune  
Rhymed with the bean-flower scent in June.  
One unforgotten day at Rye  
They sang a love-song in July;  
In August, hard by Lewes town,  
They sang of joy 'twixt sky and down;  
And in September's golden spell  
We heard them singing on Scaw Fell.  
October's leaves were brown and sere,  
But skylarks sang by Teston Weir;  
And in November, at Mount's Bay,  
They sang upon our wedding day!

\* \* \*

Mr.-a-Field, go forth, go forth,  
Go east and west and south and north;  
You'll always find the furze in flower,  
Find every hour the lovers' hour,  
And, by my faith in love and rhyme,

The skylark singing all the time!

Edith Nesbit

# The Spell

OUR boat has drifted with the stream  
That stirs the river's full sweet bosom  
And now she stays where gold flags gleam  
By meadow-sweet's pale foam of blossom.

Sedge-warblers sing the sun the song  
The nightingale sings to the shadows;  
Forget-me-nots grow all along  
The fringes of the happy meadows.

See the wet lilies' golden beads!  
The river-nymphs for necklace string them,  
And in the sighing of the reeds  
You hear the song their lovers sing them.

Gold sun, blue air, green shimmering leaves,  
The weir's old song--the wood's old story--  
Such spells the enchanting Summer weaves  
She holds me in a web of glory.

And you--with head against my arm  
And subtle wiles that seek to hold me--  
Not even you can add a charm  
To the sweet sorceries that enfold me.

Yet lean there still! The hour is ours;  
If we should move the charm might shiver  
And joyless sun and scentless flowers  
Might mock a disenchanting river.

Edith Nesbit

# The Sphinx

THIS mystery of golden hair,  
Of eyes and lips and bosom fair,  
Is not--if one could really see--  
Mere flesh and blood, like you and me:  
This is a sphinx whose still lips say  
This one thing ever, day by day,  
To all who cross her in life's ways:  
'Which is the way to love?' she says.

For every man who meets her eyes  
In their deep depths the question lies;  
And vainly would he seek to fly  
Or put the wordless challenge by,  
Unless within his soul be set  
Some true-love vow as amulet:  
This clasping, let him flee her spell,  
Nor trust its guardian powers too well.

Nothing seems good to think about  
But just to find that secret out;  
We bring her fruits of earnest hours,  
And offer choice of passion-flowers,  
Of crowns, of heart's blood, of heart's ache,  
Our hopes we spurn, our joys forsake,  
While she looks down upon our pain  
Without compassion or disdain.

She does not will to question thus--  
Fate made her just to torture us;  
Nor can she tell you, if she will,  
Aught of your guesses, good or ill.  
But if you fail to answer well,  
Your own foiled heart prepares your hell,  
And all your days you walk alone,  
And curse the done and the undone.

She does not bid you for her sake  
Your soul to wreck, your life to break,  
Nor would she choose it for her part.  
Only for ever in your heart  
The haunting question must abide,  
And clamour morn and eventide,  
Until no single note your ear  
Of all life's harmonies can hear.

Yet to some man it will be given  
To find the key that opens heaven;  
For him, beloved by all the Fates,  
Answer as well as question waits  
In those unawakened eyes of hers,  
And when their calm that answer stirs,  
From her stone sleep the sphinx will wake  
Into a woman, for his sake.

What though one's whole life's light grows night  
With that unanswered question's blight?  
One's one poor chance is richly worth  
The richest certainties of earth!  
Myself would rather die, I know--  
Starved, just because I want her so--  
Than feast in highest heaven of bliss  
On any other woman's kiss.

Such spells she has, I would not choose  
One look or touch of hers to lose,  
Though every touch and look have power  
To sting me to my dying hour;  
Though every breath of hers should bring  
Frost on life's bud and blossoming,  
What soul could ask a dearer death  
Than to be withered by her breath?

Edith Nesbit

# The Spider Queen

IN the deep heart of furthest fairyland  
Where foot of man has never trodden yet  
The enchanted portals of her palace stand,  
And there her sleepless sentinels are set.

All round grow forests of white eglantine  
And drooping, dreaming clematis; there blows  
The purple nightshade; there pale bindweeds twine  
And there the pale, frail flower of slumber grows.

Her palaces are decked with gleaming wings,  
Hung o'er with webs through spacious bower and hall,  
Filled through and through with precious priceless things;  
She is their mistress and she hates them all.

No darkling webs, woven in dust and gloom,  
Adorn her palace walls; there gleam astir  
Live threads of light, spun for a fairy's loom,  
And stolen by her slaves and brought to her.

She wears a robe woven of the July sun,  
Mixed with green threads won from the East at dawn,  
Bordered with silver moonrays, finely spun,  
And gemmed with glowworms from some shadowy lawn.

She wears a crown of dewdrops bright like tears,  
Her girdle is a web of rainbow dyes;  
She knows no youth, nor age; the hours and years  
Leave never a shadow on her lips and eyes.

In magic rings of green and glistening light  
Her fairies dance, in star-spun raiment clad,  
Her people do her bidding day and night,



Her dark-robed servants toil to make her glad.

Her minstrels play to her--her singers raise  
Soft songs, more sweet than man has ever heard,

With endless rhythms of love her courtiers praise,  
And all their heart is in their every word.

She is the mistress of all things that set  
Snare of fine webs to win their hearts' desire,  
Queen of all folk who weave the death-strong net  
Between the poppy and the wild-rose briar.

Yet sits despair upon that brow of hers,  
And sorrow in her eyes makes festival;  
The soul of grief with her sad soul confers,  
And she sits lonely in her crowded hall;

Because she has woven a web of her bright hair--  
A tear-bright web, to catch one soul; and he  
Beheld her, in her beauty, set the snare,  
And seeing laughed, and laughing passed out free!

Edith Nesbit

# The Star

I HAD a star to sing by, a beautiful star that led,  
But when I sang of its splendour the world in its wisdom said:  
'Sweet are your songs, yet the singer sings but in madness when  
He hymns but stars un beholden of us his fellows of men;  
Glow-worms we see and marshlights; sing us sweet songs of those  
For the guerdons we have to give you, laurel and gold and rose;  
Or if you must sing of stars, unseen of your brother man,  
Go, starve with your eyes on your vision; your star may save if it can!'

So I said, 'If I starve and die I never again shall see  
The glory, the high white radiance that hallows the world for me;  
I will sing their songs, if it must be, and when I have golden store,  
I will turn from the marsh and the glow-worms, and sing of my star once more.'  
So I walked in the warm wet by-ways, not daring to lift my eyes  
Lest love should drive me to singing my star supreme in the skies,  
And the world cried out, 'We will crown him, he sings of the lights that are,  
Glories of marshlight and glow-worms, not visions vain of a star!'

I said, 'Now my brows are laurelled, my hands filled full of their gold,  
I will sing the starry songs that these earthworms bade withhold.  
It is time to sing of my star!' for I dreamed that my star still shone,  
Then I lifted my eyes in my triumph. Night! night! and my star was gone.

Edith Nesbit

# The Stolen God--Lazarus To Dives

We do not clamour for vengeance,  
We do not whine for fear;  
We have cried in the outer darkness  
Where was no man to hear.  
We cried to man and he heard not;  
Yet we thought God heard us pray;  
But our God, who loved and was sorry -  
Our God is taken away.

Ours were the stream and the pasture,  
Forest and fen were ours;  
Ours were the wild wood-creatures,  
The wild sweet berries and flowers.  
You have taken our heirlooms from us,  
And hardly you let us save  
Enough of our woods for a cradle,  
Enough of our earth for a grave.

You took the wood and the cornland,  
Where still we tilled and felled;  
You took the mine and quarry,  
And all you took you held.  
The limbs of our weanling children  
You crushed in your mills of power;  
And you made our bearing women toil  
To the very bearing hour.

You have taken our clean quick longings,  
Our joy in lover and wife,  
Our hope of the sunset quiet  
At the evening end of life;  
You have taken the land that bore us,  
Its soil and stone and sod;  
You have taken our faith in each other -  
And now you have taken our God.

When our God came down from Heaven  
He came among men, a Man,  
Eating and drinking and working

As common people can;  
And the common people received Him  
While the rich men turned away.  
But what have we to do with a God  
To whom the rich men pray?

He hangs, a dead God, on your altars,  
Who lived a Man among men,  
You have taken away our Lord  
And we cannot find Him again.  
You have not left us a handful  
Of even the earth He trod . . .  
You have made Him a rich man's idol  
Who came as a poor man's God.

He promised the poor His heaven,  
He loved and lived with the poor;  
He said that the rich man's shadow  
Should never darken His door:  
But bishops and priests lie softly,  
Drink full and are fully fed  
In the Name of the Lord, who had not  
Where to lay His head.

This is the God you have stolen,  
As you steal all else--in His name.  
You have taken the ease and the honour,  
Left us the toil and the shame.  
You have chosen the seat of Dives,  
We lie where Lazarus lay;  
But, by God, we will not yield you our God,  
You shall not take Him away.

All else we had you have taken;  
All else, but not this, not this.  
The God of Heaven is ours, is ours,  
And the poor are His, are His.  
Is He ours? Is He yours? Give answer!  
For both He cannot be.  
And if He is ours--O you rich men,  
Then whose, in God's name, are ye?



# The Temptation

YOU bring your love too late, dear, I have no love to buy it,  
I spent my love on worthless toys, at fairs you do not know;  
I am a bankrupt trader--dear eyes, do not deny it,  
I could have bought your love, dear, but that was long ago.

My soul has left me widowed, my heart has made me orphan,  
Leave me--all good things, dear, have left me--leave me too!  
For here is ice no tears of yours, no smiles of yours can soften:  
Leave me, leave me, leave me, I have no love for you!

I have no flowers to give you, they grow not in my garden;  
I have no songs to sing you, my songs have all been sung;  
I have no hope of heaven, no faith in any pardon,  
I might have loved you once, dear, when I was good and young.

I will not steal, nor cheat you; take back the heart you lent me.  
O God, whom I have outraged, now teach me how to pray,  
That love come never again so near me to torment me,  
Lest I be found less faithful than, by Thy grace, to-day.

Edith Nesbit

# The Things That Matter

NOW that I've nearly done my days,  
And grown too stiff to sweep or sew,  
I sit and think, till I'm amaze,  
About what lots of things I know:  
Things as I've found out one by one--  
And when I'm fast down in the clay,  
My knowing things and how they're done  
Will all be lost and thrown away.

There's things, I know, as won't be lost,  
Things as folks write and talk about:  
The way to keep your roots from frost,  
And how to get your ink spots out.  
What medicine's good for sores and sprains,  
What way to salt your butter down,  
What charms will cure your different pains,  
And what will bright your faded gown.

But more important things than these,  
They can't be written in a book:  
How fast to boil your greens and peas,  
And how good bacon ought to look;  
The feel of real good wearing stuff,  
The kind of apple as will keep,  
The look of bread that's rose enough,  
And how to get a child asleep.

Whether the jam is fit to pot,  
Whether the milk is going to turn,  
Whether a hen will lay or not,  
Is things as some folks never learn.  
I know the weather by the sky,  
I know what herbs grow in what lane;  
And if sick men are going to die,  
Or if they'll get about again.

Young wives come in, a-smiling, grave,  
With secrets that they itch to tell:  
I know what sort of times they'll have,

And if they'll have a boy or gell.  
And if a lad is ill to bind,  
Or some young maid is hard to lead,  
I know when you should speak 'em kind,  
And when it's scolding as they need.

I used to know where birds ud set,  
And likely spots for trout or hare,  
And God may want me to forget  
The way to set a line or snare;  
But not the way to truss a chick,  
To fry a fish, or baste a roast,  
Nor how to tell, when folks are sick,  
What kind of herb will ease them most!

Forgetting seems such silly waste!  
I know so many little things,  
And now the Angels will make haste  
To dust it all away with wings!  
O God, you made me like to know,  
You kept the things straight in my head,  
Please God, if you can make it so,  
Let me know something when I'm dead.

Edith Nesbit



# The Three Kings

WHEN the star in the East was lit to shine  
The three kings journeyed to Palestine;

They came from the uttermost parts of earth  
With long trains laden with gifts of worth.

The first king rode on a camel's back,  
He came from the land where the kings are black,

Bringing treasures desired of kings,  
Rubies and ivory and precious things.

An elephant carried the second king,  
He came from the land of the sun-rising,

And gems and gold and spices he bare  
With brodered raiment for kings to wear.

The third king came without steed or train  
From the misty land where the white kings reign.

He bore no gifts save the myrrh in his hand,  
For he came on foot from a far-off land.

Now when they had travelled a-many days  
Through tangled forests and desert ways,

By angry seas and by paths thorn-set  
On Christmas Vigil the three kings met.

And over their meeting a shrouded sky  
Made dark the star they had travelled by.

Then the first king spake and he frowned and said:  
'By some ill spell have our feet been led,

'Now I see in the darkness the fools we are  
To follow the light of a lying star.

'Let us fool no more, but like kings and men  
Each get him home to his land again!'

Then the second king with the weary face,  
Gold-tinct as the sun of his reigning place,

Lifted sad eyes to the clouds and said,  
'It was but a dream and the dream is sped.

'We dreamed of a star that rose new and fair,  
But it sets in the night of the old despair.

'Yet night is faithful though stars betray,  
It will lead to our kingdoms far away.'

Then spake the king who had fared alone  
From the far-off kingdom, the white-hung throne:

'O brothers, brothers, so very far  
Ye have followed the light of the radiant star,

'And because for a while ye see it not  
Shall its faithful shining be all forgot?

'On the spirit's pathway the light still lies  
Though the star be hid from our longing eyes.

'To-morrow our star will be bright once more  
The little pin-hole in heaven's floor--

'The Angels pricked it to let it bring  
Our feet to the throne of the new-born King!'

And the first king heard and the second heard  
And their hearts grew humble before the third.

And they laid them down beside bale and beast  
and their sleeping eyes saw light in the East.

For the Angels fanned them with starry wings  
And the waft of visions of unseen things.

And the next gold day waned trembling and white  
And the star was born of the waxing night.

And the three kings came where the Great King lay,  
A little baby among the hay,

The ox and the ass were standing near  
And Mary Mother beside her Dear.

Then low in the litter the kings bowed down,  
They gave Him gold for a kingly crown,

And frankincense for a great God's breath  
and Myrrh to sweeten the day of death.

The Maiden Mother she stood and smiled  
And she took from the manger her little child.

On the dark king's head she laid His hand  
And anger died at that dear command.

She laid His hand on the gold king's head  
And despair itself was comforted.

But when the pale king knelt in the stall  
She heard on the straw his tears down fall.

And she stooped where he knelt beside her feet  
And laid on his bosom her baby sweet.

And the king in the holy stable-place  
Felt the little lips through the tears on his face.

\* \* \* \* \*

Christ! lay Thy hand on the angry king  
Who reigns in my breast to my undoing,

And lay thy hands on the king who lays  
The spell of sadness on all my days,

And give the white king my soul, Thy soul,

Of these other kings the high control.

That soul and spirit and sense may meet  
In adoration before Thy feet!

Now Glory to God the Father Most High,  
And the Star, the Spirit, He leads us by.

And to God's dear Son, the Babe who was born  
And laid in the manger on Christmas morn!

Edith Nesbit

# The Touchstone

There was a garden, very strange and fair  
With all the roses summer never brings.  
The snowy blossom of immortal Springs  
Lighted its boughs, and I, even I, was there.  
There were new heavens, and the earth was new,  
And still I told my heart the dream was true.

But when the sun stood still, and Time went out  
Like a blown candle--when she came to me  
Under the bride-veil of the blossomed tree,  
Chill through the garden blew the winds of doubt,  
And when, with starry eyes, and lips too near,  
She leaned to me, my heart knew what to fear.

'It is no dream,' she said. 'What dream had stayed  
So long? It is the blessed isle that lies  
Between the tides of twin eternities.  
It is our island; do not be afraid!  
Then, then at last my heart was well deceived;  
I hid my eyes; I trembled and believed.

Her real presence sanctified my faith,  
Her very voice my restless fears beguiled,  
And it was Life that clasped me when she smiled,  
But when she said 'I love you!' it was Death.  
That, that at least could neither be nor seem -  
Oh, then, indeed, I knew it was a dream!

Edith Nesbit

# The Treasure

UNDER our lead we lie  
While the sun and the snow go by,  
And our shrouds lie close, lie close,  
Like the leaves of a shut white rose  
That knows not what summer knows  
Before it is time to die.

You, in the sun, up there  
Where the wild thyme scents the air;  
Is it warm still--and sweet and gay  
Up there in the wide blue day?  
Do you pity us, shut away  
From the fields where the flowers are fair?

Pity us here? shut in  
In the dark, where the flowers begin?  
The coins lie light on our eyes,  
In our empty hands is the prize,  
The treasure that fools and wise  
Are breaking their hearts to win!

Edith Nesbit

# The Tree Of Knowledge

I PLUCKED the blossoms of delight  
In many a wood and many a field,  
I made a garland fair and bright  
As any gardens yield.

But when I sought the living tree  
To make new earth and Heaven new,  
I found--alas for you and me--  
Its roots were set in you.

Oh, dear my garden, where the fruit  
Of lovely knowledge sweetly springs,  
How jealously you guard the root  
Of all enlightening things!

Edith Nesbit

# The Vain Spell

THE house sleeps dark and the moon wakes white,  
The fields are alight with dew;  
'Oh, will you not come to me, Love, to-night?  
I have waited the whole night through,  
For I knew,  
O Heart of my heart, I knew by my heart,  
That the night of all nights is this,  
When elm shall crack and lead shall part,  
When moulds shall sunder and shot bolts start  
To let you through to my kiss.'

So spake she alone in the lonely house.  
She had wrapped her round with the spell,  
She called the call, she vowed the vow,  
And the heart she had pledged knew well  
That this was the night, the only night,  
When the moulds might be wrenched apart,  
When the living and dead, in the dead of the night,  
Might clasp once more, in the grave's despite,  
For the price of a living heart.

But out in the grave the corpse lay white  
And the grave clothes were wet with dew;  
'Oh, will you not come to me, Love, to-night,  
I have waited the whole night through,  
For I knew  
That I dared not leave my grave for an hour  
Since the hour of all hours is near,  
When you shall come to the hollow bower,  
In a cast of the wind, in a waft of the Power,  
To the heart that to-night beats here!'

The moon grows pale and the house sleeps still  
Ah, God! do the dead forget?  
The grave is white and the bed is chill,  
But a guest may be coming yet.



But the hour has come and the hour has gone  
That never will come again;  
Love's only chance is over and done,  
And the quick and the dead are twain, not one,  
And the price has been paid in vain.

Edith Nesbit

# The Vault--After Sedgmoor

You need not call at the Inn;  
I have ordered my bed:  
Fair linen sheets therein  
And a tester of lead.  
No musty fusty scents  
Such as inn chambers keep,  
But tapestried with content  
And hung with sleep.

My Inn door bears no bar  
Set up against fear.  
The guests have journeyed far,  
They are glad to be here.  
Where the damp arch curves up grey,  
Long, long shall we lie;  
Good King's men all are they,  
A King's man I.

Old Giles, in his stone asleep,  
Fought at Poitiers.  
Piers Ralph and Roger keep  
The spoil of their fighting years.  
I shall lie with my folk at last  
In a quiet bed;  
I shall dream of the sword held fast  
In a round-capped head.

Good tale of men all told  
My Inn affords;  
And their hands peace shall hold  
That once held swords.  
And we who rode and ran  
On many a loyal quest  
Shall find the goal of man -  
A bed, and rest.

We shall not stand to the toast  
Of Love or King;  
We be all too tired to boast

About anything.  
We be dumb that did jest and sing;  
We rest who laboured and warred . . .  
Shout once, shout once for the King.  
Shout once for the sword!

Edith Nesbit

# The Veil Of Maya

SWEET, I have loved before. I know  
This longing that invades my days;  
This shape that haunts life's busy ways  
I know since long and long ago.

This starry mystery of delight  
That floats across my eager eyes,  
This pain that makes earth Paradise,  
These magic songs of day and night--

I know them for the things they are:  
A passing pain, a longing fleet,  
A shape that soon I shall not meet,  
A fading dream of veil and star.

Yet, even as my lips proclaim  
The wisdom that the years have lent,  
Your absence is joy's banishment,  
And life's one music is your name.

I love you to my heart's hid core:  
Those other loves? how should one learn  
From marshlights how the great fires burn?  
Ah, no! I never loved before!

Edith Nesbit

# The Way Of Love

THE butterfly loves the rose,  
He flutters around her bed,  
Till the soft curled leaves unclose,  
And she raises her darling head.

He whispers of dawn and of dew,  
Of love, and the heart of love,  
Of worship, timid and true,  
And she takes no joy thereof.

But when, through the noon's blind heat,  
The arrogant bee flaunts by,  
She yields him her heart's hid sweet,  
And he leaves her alone, to die.

The depth of her dying bliss  
Her grief-white butterfly knows:  
And the bee laughs low in the kiss  
Of another, a redder rose.

Edith Nesbit

# The Way Of The Wood

WHERE baby oaks play in the breeze  
Among wood-sorrel and fringed fern,  
Through the green garments of the trees  
The quivering shafts of sunlight burn,

And all along the wet green ride  
The dripping hazel-boughs between,  
The spotted orchis, stiff with pride,  
Stands guard before the eglantine.

Sweet chestnuts droop their long, sharp leaves  
By knotted tree roots, mossed and brown,  
Round which the honeysuckle weaves  
Its scented golden wild-wood crown.

O wood, last year you saw us meet,  
For her your leaves and buds were gay,  
Your moss spread velvet for her feet.  
Your flowers upon her bosom lay.

This year you wear your raiment bright,  
As fair as ever yet you wore.  
And, none the less, the world's delight  
Walks in your ways no more, no more.

Edith Nesbit

# The Whirligig Of Time

Before your feet,  
My love, my sweet,  
Behold! your slave bows down;  
And in his hands  
From other lands  
Brings you another crown.

For in far climes,  
In bygone times,  
Myself was royal too:  
Oh, I have been  
A king, my queen,  
Who am a slave for you!

Edith Nesbit

# The Wife Of All Ages

I DO not catch these subtle shades of feeling,  
Your fine distinctions are too fine for me;  
This meeting, scheming, longing, trembling, dreaming,  
To me mean love, and only love, you see;  
In me at least 'tis love, you will admit,  
And you the only man who wakens it.

Suppose I yearned, and longed, and dreamed, and fluttered,  
What would you say or think, or further, do?  
Why should one rule be fit for me to follow,  
While there exists a different law for you?  
If all these fires and fancies came my way,  
Would you believe love was so far away?

On all these other women--never doubt it--  
'Tis love you lavish, love you promised me!  
What do I care to be the first, or fiftieth?  
It is the only one I care to be.  
Dear, I would be your sun, as mine you are,  
Not the most radiant wonder of a star.

And so, good-bye! Among such sheaves of roses  
You will not miss the flower I take from you;  
Amid the music of so many voices  
You will forget the little songs I knew--  
The foolish tender words I used to say,  
The little common sweets of every day.

The world, no doubt, has fairest fruits and blossoms  
To give to you; but what, ah! what for me?  
Nay, after all I am your slave and bondmaid,  
And all my world is in my slavery.  
So, as before, I welcome any part  
Which you may choose to give me of your heart.





# The Will To Live

SINCE Faith is a veil that has nothing behind it,  
And Hope wanders lost where no mortal can find it,  
Since Love is a mirror we break in a minute  
In snatching the image our soul has cast in it,  
What is the use of the Summers and Springs,  
The wave of the woods and the waft of the wings--  
Since all means nothing, and good things and ill  
Make madness,--a mirage tormenting us still?

Since all the fighting, the ardent endeavour,  
The heart cast bleeding to feed the Ideal,  
Are vain, vain, vain, and the one thing real  
Is that all's vain, for ever and ever;  
Why then, be a man and stand back from the strife,  
Fall by the sword, but keep out of the snare;  
Will but to be--and be willing to bear  
All that the gods may lay on your of life!

In the far East, where light ever dawns first,  
There has man learned how the Fates may be cheated,  
How by our craft may their strength be defeated,  
Though all our best be no match for their worst!  
Kill the desire that they set in your bosom,  
Long not for fruit when you gaze on the blossom,  
Dream not of flowers when you gaze on the bud,  
Kill all the rebels that shout in your blood.  
Sorrow and sickness, disease and decay--  
These toll the hours of Life's desolate day;  
Hopes unfulfilled and forbidden delight  
These are the dreams of Life's treacherous night.  
So let me image an infinite peace  
Touched with no joy but the ease of release.  
Out of the eddies I climb and I cease  
Keeping, in change for this man's soul of me,  
Something which, by the eternal decree,  
Is as like Nothing as Something can be!

Not to desire, to admit, to adore,  
Casting the robe of the soul that you wore

Just as the soul casts the body's robe down.  
This is man's destiny, this is man's crown.  
This is the splendour, the end of the feast;  
This is the light of the Star in the East.

So, Silence reconciles Life's jarring phrases  
Far in the future, austere and august:  
Meanwhile, the buds of the poplars are falling,  
Spring's on the lawn, and a little voice calling:  
'Daddy, come out! Daddy darling, you must!  
Daddy come out and help Molly pick daisies!'  
And, since one's here, and the Spring's in the garden  
(How many lives hence will that thought earn pardon?)  
Since one's a man and man's heart is insistent,  
And, since Nirvana is doubtful and distant,  
Though life's a hard road and thorny to travel--  
Stones in the borders and grass on the gravel,  
Still there's the wisdom that wise men call folly,  
Still one can go and pick daisies with Molly!

Edith Nesbit

# These Little Ones

'What of the garden I gave?'  
God said to me;  
'Hast thou been diligent to foster and save  
The life of flower and tree?  
How have the roses thriven,  
The lilies I have given,  
The pretty scented miracles that Spring  
And Summer come to bring?

'My garden is fair and dear,'  
I said to God;  
'From thorns and nettles I have kept it clear.  
Green-trimmed its sod.  
The rose is red and bright,  
The lily a live delight;  
I have not lost a flower of all the flowers  
That blessed my hours.'

'What of the child I gave?'  
God said to me;  
'The little, little one I died to save  
And gave in trust to thee?  
How have the flowers grown  
That in its soul were sown,  
The lovely living miracles of youth  
And hope and joy and truth?'

'The child's face is all white,'  
I said to God;  
'It cries for cold and hunger in the night:  
Its little feet have trod  
The pavement muddy and cold.  
It has no flowers to hold,  
And in its soul the flowers you set are dead.'  
'Thou fool!' God said.

Edith Nesbit

# This Desirable Mansion

THE long white windows blankly stare  
Across the sodden, tangled grass,  
Weed-covered are the pathways where  
No footsteps ever pass;  
No whispers wake, no kisses die,  
No laughter thrills the dwindling flowers,  
Only the night hears sigh on sigh  
From ghosts of long-dead hours.

None come here now to laugh or weep;  
The spider spins on stair and hall,  
And round the windows shadows creep,  
And loathly creatures crawl.  
Cold is the hearth; the door is fast;  
No guest the silent threshold sees  
Save ghosts out of the happy past,--  
And one who is as these.

Edith Nesbit

# Through The Wood

THROUGH the wood, the green wood, the wet wood, the light wood,  
Love and I went maying a thousand lives ago;  
Shafts of golden sunlight had made a golden bright wood  
In my heart reflected, because I loved you so.

Through the wood, the chill wood, the brown wood, the bare wood,  
I alone went lonely no later than last year,  
What had thinned the branches, and wrecked my dear and fair wood,  
Killed the pale wild roses and left the rose-thorns sere?

Through the wood, the dead wood, the sad wood, the lone wood,  
Winds of winter shiver through lichens old and grey,  
You ride past forgetting the wood that was our own wood  
All our own--and withered as ever a flower of May.

Edith Nesbit

# To A Child

(Rosamund.)

The fairies have been busy while you slept;  
They have been laughing where the sad rain wept,  
They have taught Beauty to the ignorant flowers,  
Set tasks of hope to weary wind-torn bowers,  
And heard the lessons learned in school-rooms cold  
By seedling snapdragon and marigold.  
At dawn, while still you slept, I grew aware  
How good the fairies are, how many and fair.

The fairy whose delightful gown is red  
Across a corner of our garden sped,  
And, where her flying raiment fluttered past,  
Its roseate reflection still is cast:  
Red poppies by the rhododendron's side,  
Paeonies gorgeous in their summer pride,  
And red may-bushes by the old red wall  
Shower down their crimson petals over all.

Then she whose gown is gold, and gold her hair,  
Swept down the golden steep straight sunbeam-stair,  
She lit the tulip-lamps, she lit the torch  
Of hollyhock beside the cottage porch.  
She dressed the honeysuckle in fringe of gold,  
She gave the king-cups fairy wealth to hold,  
She kissed St. John's wort till it opened wide,  
She set the yarrow by the river side.

Then came the lady all whose robes are white:  
She made the pale buds blossom in delight,  
Set silver stars upon the jasmine's hair,  
And gave the stream white lily-buds to wear.  
She painted lilies white, and pearl-white phlox,  
White poppies, passion-flowers and gray-leaved stocks.  
Her pure kind touch redeemed the most forlorn,  
And even the vile petunia smiled, new-born.

The dearest fairy of all--green is her gown--

She kissed the plane-trees in the tiresome town,  
She smoothed the pastures and the lawn's pale sheen,  
She decked the boughs with hangings fresh and green,  
She showed each flower the one and only way  
Its beauty of shape and colour to display;  
She taught the world to be a Paradise  
Of changing leaf and blade, for tired eyes.

Then, one and all, they came where you were laid  
In your strait bed, my little lovely maid;  
The red-robed fairy kissed your lips, your face,  
The white-robed made your heart her dwelling-place.  
Into your eyes the green robed fairy smiled;  
The golden fairy touched your dreams, my child,  
And one, not named, but mightiest, made my Dear  
The innermost rose of the re-flowered year.

Edith Nesbit



# To A Tulip-Bulb

SLEEP first,  
And let the storm and winter do their worst;  
Let all the garden lie  
Bare to the angry sky,  
The shed leaves shiver and die  
Above your bed;  
Let the white coverlet  
Of sunlit snow be set  
Over your sleeping head,  
While in the earth you sleep  
Where dreams are dear and deep,  
And heed nor wind nor snow,  
Nor how the dark moons go.  
In this sad upper world where Winter's hand  
Has bound with chains of ice the weary land.

Then wake  
To see the whole world lovely for Spring's sake;  
The garden fresh and fair  
With green things everywhere,  
And winter's want and care  
Banished and fled;  
Primrose and violet  
In every border set,  
With rain and sunshine fed.  
Then bless the fairy song  
That cradled you so long,  
And bless the fairy kiss  
That wakened you to this--  
A world where Winter's dead and Spring doth reign  
And lovers whisper in the budding lane.

Edith Nesbit

## To Her: In Time Of War

Once I made for you songs,  
Rondels, triolets, sonnets;  
Verse that my love deemed due,  
Verse that your love found fair.  
Now the wide wings of war  
Hang, like a hawk's, over England,  
Shadowing meadows and groves;  
And the birds and the lovers are mute.

Yet there's a thing to say  
Before I go into battle,  
Not now a poet's word  
But a man's word to his mate:  
Dear, if I come back never,  
Be it your pride that we gave  
The hope of our hearts, each other,  
For the sake of the Hope of the World.

Edith Nesbit

# To His Lady

(Who asked a Song in Spring)

WHY do you bid your poet sing,  
Who has no mind to song--  
Who only wants to see the Spring,  
Long sought and tarrying long?  
The shivering, dreary winter through  
My song enshrined my vow;  
If then my songs were sweet to you,  
Let me be silent now!

Have I not duly sung, my dear,  
Your goodness and your grace?  
Now that your rival, Spring, is here,  
O let me see her face!  
The hedge is white with buds of May,  
The fields are green with Spring,  
Oh, give your bard a holiday:  
He does not want to sing!

He wants to listen; all alone,  
He wants to steal away  
To hear the ring-doves' tender tone,  
And what the thrushes say.  
He wants to hear what can't be heard  
When you and love are near--  
The sweet Spring's soft and secret word;  
Oh, let him go, my dear!

Edith Nesbit

# To His Lady,

## IMPLORING HER TO BE TRUE

MISTRESS of me, mistress of all the arts  
And charms that sway men's hot ungoverned hearts,  
Receive their tribute--smile at their defeat;  
I do not ask that you should spare them, sweet.  
Only I ask that in the secret shrine  
No prayers be heard, no offering laid, but mine.  
Each man who sees your eyes must needs lay down  
Low at your feet the votive myrtle crown:  
Let them bring crowns to die beneath your feet;  
I, only I, must bring the crown you wear  
Shadowing the sombre glory of your hair.

Edith Nesbit

# To Hubert

Dear Hubert, if I ever found  
A wishing-carpet lying round,  
I'd stand upon it, and I'd say:  
'Take me to Hubert, right away!'  
And then we'd travel very far  
To where the magic countries are  
That you and I will never see,  
And choose the loveliest gifts for you, from me.

But oh! alack! and well-a-day!  
No wishing-carpets come my way.  
I never found a Phoenix yet,  
And Psammeads are so hard to get!  
So I give you nothing fine-  
Only this book, your book and mine,  
And hers, whose name by yours is set;  
Your book, my book, the book of Margaret!

Edith Nesbit

## To Iris

IF I might build a palace, fair  
With every joy of soul and sense,  
And set my heart as sentry there  
To guard your happy innocence--  
If I might plant a hedge so strong  
No creeping sorrow could writhe through,  
And find my whole life not too long  
To give, to make your hedge for you--

If I could teach the wandering air  
To bring no sounds that were not sweet,  
Could teach the earth that only fair  
Untrodden flower deserved your feet:  
Would I not tear the secret scroll  
Where all your griefs lie closely curled,  
And give your little hand control  
Of all the joys of all the world?

But ah! I have no skill to raise  
The palace, teach the hedge to grow;  
The common airs blow through your days,  
By common ways your dear feet go.  
And you must twine of common flowers  
The wreath that happy women wear,  
And bear in desolate darkened hours  
The common griefs that all men bear.

The pinions of my love I fold  
Your little shoulders close about:  
Ah--could my love keep out the cold  
And shut the creeping sorrows out!  
Rough paths will tire your darling feet,  
Gray skies will weep your tears above,  
While round you still, in torment, beat  
The impotent wings of mother-love.

Edith Nesbit

# To One Who Bade Him Work

EACH day Work bids my heart anew,  
Fold wings and watch my brain at play;  
But brain and heart will fly your way,  
And find their natural home in you!  
Come to me--'tis the only way!

For heart and brain have had to learn  
Such carrier-pigeon feats of flight,  
That were you here, my heart's delight,  
My brain and heart to Work would turn,  
Spread wings, and flutter from your sight.

Edith Nesbit

# To One Who Pleaded For Candour In Love

HERE is the dim enchanted wood  
Your face, a mystery divine,  
But half revealed, half understood,  
Appears the counterpart of mine.

Beyond the wood the daylight lies;  
Cruel and hard, it lies in wait  
To steal the magic from your eyes  
And from your lips the thrill of fate.

Ah, stay with me a little while  
Here, where the magic shadows rest,  
Where all my world is in your smile  
And all my heaven on your breast.

Ah no!--cling close, what need to move,  
What need to advance or explore?  
We came here blindly, led by love,  
Who will not lead us any more.

Thank God that here we two have stood,  
Thank God this shade was ours to win;  
Time with his axe has marked our wood  
And he will let the daylight in.

Edith Nesbit



# To Rosamund

AND it is fair and very fair  
This maze of blossom and sweet air,  
This drift of orchard snows,  
This royal promise of the rose  
Wherein your young eyes see  
Such buds of scented joys to be.  
A gay green garden, softly fanned  
By the blythe breeze that blows  
To speed your ship of dreams to the enchanted land.

But I--beyond the budding screen  
Of green and red and white and green,  
Behind the radiant show  
Of things that cling and grow and glow  
I see the plains where lie  
The hopes of days gone by:  
Gray breadths of melancholy, crossed  
By winds that coldly blow  
From that cold sea wherein my argosy is lost.

Edith Nesbit

# To The Queen Of England

COME forth! the world's aflame with flags and flowers,  
The shout of bells fills full the shattered air,  
This is the crown of all your golden hours,  
More than all other hours august and fair;  
This did the years prepare,  
A triumph for our Lady and our Queen,  
More rich than any king in any land hath seen.

Clothed are your streets with scarlet, gold, and blue,  
Flowers under foot and banners over head,  
And while your people's voice storms Heaven for you  
About your way are voiceless blessings shed,  
And over you are spread  
Wide wings of love, free love, tamed to your hand,  
Love that gold cannot buy, nor Majesty command.

Not these mere visible millions only, share  
Your triumph--here all English hearts beat high,  
Nations far off your royal colours wear,  
And swell with unheard voice this loyal cry  
That strikes the English sky:  
A cloud of unseen witnesses is here  
To testify how great is England's Queen, and dear.

From out the grey-veiled past, long years away,  
Come visionary faces, vision-led,  
And splendid shapes that are not of our day,  
The spirits of the mute and mighty dead,  
To see how Time has sped  
The fortunes of their England, and behold  
How much more great she is than in the days of old.

The world can see them not; but you can see--  
You the inheritor of all the past  
Wherein the dead, in noble heraldry,

Blazoned the shield of England, and forecast  
The charge it bears at last--  
More splendid than the azure and the or  
Of the French lilies lost--long lost and sorrowed for.

Here be the weaponed men, the English folk,  
Who in long ships across the swan's bath fared,  
In whose rude tongue the voice of Freedom spoke,  
In whose rough hands the sword was bright and bared--  
The men who did and dared,  
And to their sons bequeathed the fighting blood  
That drives to Victory and will not be withstood.

Here, in your ordered festival, O Queen,  
Mixed with the crowd and all unseen of these,  
On their long swords the wild Norse rovers lean  
And watch the progress of your pageantries,  
And on this young June breeze  
Float the bright pennons of the Cressy spears--  
Shine shadowy shafts that fell, as snow falls, at Poitiers.

Here flutter phantom flags that once flew free  
Above the travail of the tournament;  
Here gleam old swords, once wet for Liberty;  
Old blood-stiff banners, worn with war and rent,  
Are with your fresh flowers blent,  
And by your crown, where love and fame consort,  
Shines the unvanquished cloven crown of Agincourt.

Upon your river where, by day and night,  
Your world-adventuring ships come home again,  
Glide ghostly galleons, manned by men of might  
Who plucked the wings and singed the beard of Spain;  
The men who, not in vain,  
Saved to the children of a world new-trod  
The birth-tongue of our land, her freedom, and her God.

Princes who lived to make our England great,  
Poets who wreathed her greatness with their song,  
Wise men who steered her heavy ship of State,  
Brave men who steered her battle-ships along,  
In spectral concourse throng  
To applaud the consummated power and pride  
Of that belovèd land for which they lived and died.

The thousand un-named heroes who, sword-strong,  
Ploughed the long acre wherein Empire grows  
Wide as the world, and long as Time is long--  
These mark the crescence of the English rose  
Whose thorny splendour glows  
O'er far-off subject lands, by alien waves,  
A crown for England's brow, a garland for her graves.

And faces out of unforgotten years,  
Faces long hidden by death's misty screen,  
Faces you still can scarcely see for tears,  
Will smile on you to-day and near you lean,  
O Mother, Wife, and Queen!  
With whispered love too sacred and too dear  
For any ear than yours, Mother and Wife, to hear.

Lady, the crowd will vaunt to-day your fame,  
Daughter and heir of many mighty kings,  
The Queen of England, whose imperial name  
From England's heart and lips tumultuous springs  
In prayers and thanksgivings,  
Because your greatness and her greatness shine  
Merged each in each, as stars their beams that intertwine.

Yet in the inmost heart, where folded close  
The richest treasures of the poorest lie,  
Love, whose clear eyes see many secrets, knows  
A nobler name than Queen to call you by,  
And breathes it silently;  
But, 'mid His listening crowd of angels, One

Shall speak your name and say, 'Faithful and good, well done!'

Edith Nesbit

# To Vera, Who Asked A Song

IF I only had time!  
I could make you a rhyme.  
But my time is kept flying  
By smiling and sighing  
And living and dying for you.  
The song-seed, I sow it,  
I water and hoe it,  
But never can grow it.  
Ah, traitress, you know it!  
What is a poor poet to do?

Ah, let me take breath!  
I am harried to death  
By the loves and the graces  
That crowd where your face is  
That lurk in your laces and throng.  
Call them off for a minute,  
Once let me begin it  
The devil is in it  
If I can not spin it  
As sweet as a linnet, your song!

Edith Nesbit

# Too Late

WHEN Love, sweet Love, was tangled in my snare  
I clipped his wings, and dressed his cage with flowers,  
Made him my little joy for little hours,  
And fed him when I had a song to spare.  
And then I saw how good life's good things were,  
The kingdoms and the glories and the powers.  
Flowers grew in sheaves and stars were shed in showers,  
And, when the great things wearied, Love was there.

But when, within his cage, one winter day  
I found him lying still with folded wings,  
No longer fluttering, eager to be fed--  
Kingdoms and powers and glories passed away,  
And of life's countless, precious, priceless things  
Nothing was left but Love--and Love was dead!

Edith Nesbit

# Town And Country

THE Sun tells to Trafalgar Square  
His old and radiant story,  
And touches in the young spring air  
The pepper-pots to glory.

Spring's robe down Piccadilly floats,  
The parks glow with her treasure,  
And button-holes of morning coats  
Rhyme with her royal pleasure.

Now persons beautifully dressed  
In Bond-street shop and saunter,  
And town--by Spring's soft breath caressed--  
Would as its mistress vaunt her.

But far away from square and street,  
Where willows shine and shiver,  
The splendour of her silver feet  
Is on the wood and river.

She laughs among the tree-roots brown,  
Among the dewy clover,  
For Spring coquets but with the town;  
The country is her lover.

Edith Nesbit



# Trafalgar Day

LAURELS, bring laurels, sheaves on sheaves,  
Till England's boughs are bare of leaves!  
Soon comes the flower more rare, more dear  
Than any laurel this year weaves--  
The Aloe of the hundredth year  
Since from the smoke of Trafalgar  
He passed to where the heroes are,  
Nelson, who passed and yet is here,  
Whose dust is fire beneath our feet,  
Whose memory mans our fleet.

Laurels, bring laurels, since they hold  
His England's tears in each green fold,  
His England's joy, his England's pride,  
His England's glories manifold.  
Yet what was Victory since he died?  
And what was Death since he lives yet,  
Above a Nation's worship set,  
Above her heroes glorified?--  
Nelson, who made our flag a star  
To lead where Victories are!

Edith Nesbit

# True Love And New Love

OVER the meadow and down the lane  
To the gate by the twisted thorn:  
Your feet should know each turn of the way  
You trod so many many a day,  
Before the old love was put out of its pain,  
Before the new love was born.

Kiss her, hold her and fold her close,  
Tell her the old true tale:  
You ought to know each turn of the phrase,--  
You learned them all in the poor old days  
Before the birth of the new red rose,  
Before the old rose grew pale.

And do not fear I shall creep to-night  
To make a third at your tryst:  
My ghost, if it walked, would only wait  
To scare the others away from the gate  
Where you teach your new love the old delight,  
With the lips that your old love kissed.

Edith Nesbit

# Two Christmas Eves

I

THE white snow veils the earth's brown face,  
Strong frost has bound the veil in place--  
Under the wide, clear, dark-blue sky  
All choked with snow the hollows lie,  
Dead-white the fields--once summer sweet--  
And woodlands where we used to meet:  
We don't meet now, we never part.  
Ever together, heart to heart,  
We've worked, lost often, seldom won,  
Seen pleasures ended, pains begun,  
Have done our best, and faced, we two,  
Almost the worst that Fate could do--  
Yet not Fate's uttermost of ill,  
Since here we are--together still!

For me you left, my dearest, best,  
Your girlhood's safe warm sheltered nest;  
For me gave up all else that could  
Have made your woman-life seem good.  
You thought a man's whole heart was worth  
Just all the other wealth of earth;  
I thought my painter's brush would be  
A magic wand for you and me.  
What dreams we had of fame and gold,  
Of Art-that never could withhold  
From me, who loved her so, full powers  
To make my love for her serve ours,  
To shape and build a palace fair  
Of radiant hours, and place you there!  
Art turned away her face from us,  
And all the dreaming's ended--thus!  
Our garret's cold; the wind is keen,  
And cuts these rotten boards between.  
There is no lock upon the door,  
No carpet on the uneven floor,  
No curtain to the window where

Through frost-blanced panes the moon's cold stare  
Fronts us. She's careless--used to see  
This world of ours, and misery!  
Why, how you shiver! Oh, my sweet,  
How cold your hands are, and your feet!

How hot this face of yours I kiss!  
How could our love have led to this?  
What devil is there over all  
That lets such things as this befall?  
It was not want of striving. Love,  
Bear witness for me how I strove,  
Worked till I grew quite sick and faint,  
Worked till I could not see to paint  
Because my eyes were sore and wet,  
Yet never sold one picture yet.  
We would have worked--yes, there's the sting--  
We would have worked at anything!  
Our hands asked work. There's work somewhere,  
That makes it all more hard to bear;  
Yet we could never understand  
Where is the work that asks our hand!

There's no more firing, and the cold  
Is biting through your shawl's thin fold,  
And both the blankets have been sold.  
Nestle beside me, in my arm,  
And let me try to keep you warm.  
We pawned the table and the bed,  
To get our last week's fire and bread,

And now the last crust's eaten. Well,  
There's nothing left to pawn or sell!  
Our rent is due on Monday too,  
How can we pay it--I and you?  
What shall we do? What shall we do?  
And we are--what was that you said?  
You are so tired? Your dearest head  
Is burning hot, and aching so?

Ah, yes! I know it is--I know!  
You're tired and weak and faint and ill,  
And fevers burn and shiverings chill  
This world of mine I'm holding here.  
If I could suffer only, dear--  
But all the burdens on you fall,  
And I sit here, and bear it all!  
And other men and other wives,  
Who never worked in all their lives--  
No, nor yet loved as we have, sweet--  
Are wrapped in furs, warm hands and feet,  
And feast to-night in homes made bright  
With blazing logs and candle-light;  
Not dark like this, where we two sit,  
Who chose to work, and starve for it!

Don't go to sleep; you mustn't sleep  
Here on the frozen floor! Yes, creep  
Closer to me. Oh, if I knew  
What is this something left to do!

Listen to me! It's Christmas Eve,  
When hearts grow warmer, I believe,  
And friends forget and friends forgive.  
What if we stifled down my pride,  
And put your bitter thoughts aside,  
And asked your father's help once more?  
True, when we asked for it before,  
He turned and cursed us both, and swore  
That he disowned you. You and I  
Had made our bed, and there must lie;  
That he would help us not one whit,  
Though we should die for want of it.  
Now I shall ask his help again.  
It's colder now than it was then;  
The cold creeps closer to life's core--  
Death's nearer to us than before;  
And when your father sees how near,  
He may relent, and save you, dear.

For my sake, love! I am too weak  
To bear your tears upon my cheek,  
Your sobs against my heart, to bear  
Those eyes of yours, and their despair!  
Not faltering, my own pain I bore--  
I cannot bear yours any more!  
Stand up. You're stiff? That will not last!  
The stairs are dark? They'll soon be passed!  
You're tired? My sweet, I know you are;  
But try to walk--it isn't far.  
Oh, that the Christ they say was born  
On that dream-distant Christmas morn  
May hear and help us now! Be strong!  
Yes, lean on me. Perhaps ere long,  
All this, gone by, will only seem  
A half-remembered evil dream.  
Come; I will help you walk. We'll try  
Just this last venture, you and I!

## II

Failed! Back again in the ice-gloom  
Of our bare, bleak, rat-haunted room!  
The moon still looks--what does she care  
To see my moon-flower lying there?  
My rose, once red and white and fair,  
Now white and wan, and pinched and thin,  
Cold, through the coat I've wrapped her in,  
And shivering, even in her sleep,  
To hear how wakeful rats can keep.

We dragged our weary faltering feet  
Through the bright noisy crowded street,  
And reached the square where, stern in stone,  
Her father's town-house sulks alone.  
Sick, stupid, helpless, wretched, poor,  
We waited at her father's door.  
They let us in. Then let us tread

Through the warm hall with soft furs spread.  
Next, 'Name and business.' Oh, exact  
Were the man's orders how to act,  
If e'er his master's child should come  
To cross the threshold of her home!  
I told our name. The man 'would see  
If any message was' for me.  
We waited there without a word.  
How warm the whole house was! We heard

Soft music with soft voices blent,  
And smelt sweet flowers with mingled scent,  
And heard the wine poured out--that chink  
That glass makes as the diners drink--  
The china clatter. We, at least,  
Appreciated that night's feast.

Then some one gave a note to me  
With insolent smile. I read: 'When she  
Is tired of love and poverty,  
And chooses to return to what  
She left, the duties she forgot,  
And never see again this man,  
And be here as before--she can.'

We came away: that much is clear;  
I don't know how we got back here--  
I must have carried her somehow,  
And have been strong enough. And now  
She lies asleep--and I, awake,  
Must do this something for her sake--  
The only possible thing to do,  
Oh, love! to cut our soul in two,  
And take 'this man' away from you!

If now I let your father know  
My choice is made, and that I go  
And you are here--oh, love! oh, wife!

I break my heart and save your life.  
Doubt what to do? All doubt's about  
The deeds that are not worth a doubt!  
This deed takes me, and I obey,  
And there is nothing left to say.

Good-bye, dear eyes I cannot see--  
Weep only gently, eyes, for me;  
Dear lips, I've kissed and kissed again,  
Lose those encircling lines of pain;  
Dear face, so thin and faded now,  
Win back youth's grace, and light, and glow;  
Oh, hands I hold in mine--oh, heart  
That holds mine in it--we must part!  
When you wake up, and find me fled,  
And find your father here instead,  
Will you not wonder how my feet  
Ever could turn from you, my sweet?  
Ah, no! your heart and mine are one;  
Our heart will tell you how 'twas done.

No more we meet until I've won  
Enough to dare be happy on;  
And if I fail--I have known bliss,  
And bliss has bred an hour like this.  
I am past Fate's harming--all her power  
Could mix nought bitterer than this hour.  
Good-bye--our room--our marriage life!--  
Oh, kiss me through your dreams, my wife!

### III

I have grown rich! I have found out  
The thing men break their hearts about!  
I have dug gold, and gold, and sold  
My diggings, and reaped in more gold--  
Sowed that, and reaped again, and played  
For stakes, and always won, and made



More money than we'll ever spend,  
And have forborne one word to send.  
It has been easier for her so:  
To wait one year, and then to know  
How all is well, and how we two  
Shall part no more our whole lives through.  
It had been harder to have heard  
Some incomplete, imperfect word

Of how I prospered, how despaired,  
How well I strove, how ill I fared,  
Or strove well and fared well, nor know  
Each day which way the scale would go;  
Rejoice, and grieve, and hope, and fear,  
As I have done throughout the year.  
The year is over now--the prize  
Is--all our lives of Paradise!  
Through all the year her lips and hands  
Have drawn me on with passion-bands,  
Her soul has held my soul, and taught  
The way of storming Fortune's fort.  
My little love, those days of ours,  
Our dear delight, our sacred hours  
Have wrapped me round in all the year;  
And brought the gold and brought me here,  
And brought this hour than all more fair--  
Our triumph hour! What shall we care  
For all the past's most maddening pain  
When you are in my arms again?

The yellow dust I loved to hold  
Was like your hair's less heavy gold;  
The clear, deep sea, that bore me hence,  
Was like your eyes' grey innocence;

And not one fair thing could I see  
But somehow seemed yourself to me.  
The very work I had to do  
Easier than rest was, done for you.

And through my dreams you walked all night  
And filled sleep's byways with delight!  
How I have wondered every day  
How you would look, and what would say  
On that same day! 'Perhaps she paints,  
Thinks of our lessons--prays to saints  
With my name in her prayers--or goes  
Through gardens, heaping rose on rose.  
How I love roses! Or mayhap  
Sits with some work dropped in her lap,  
And dreams and dreams--what could there be  
For her to dream about but me?'

This London--how I hated it  
A year ago! It now seems fit  
Even to be our meeting-place.  
It holds the glory of her face,  
The wonder of her eyes, the grace  
Of lovely lines and curves--in fine,  
The soul of sweetness that is mine!

I'll seek her at her father's; say,  
'I claim my wife. I will repay  
A hundredfold all you have spent  
On keeping me in banishment,  
On keeping her in affluence,  
At her heart's dearest coin's expense!  
That is past now, and I have come  
To take my wife and sweetheart home,  
To show her all my golden store,  
My heart, hers to the very core,  
And never leave her any more!'

But just before that hour supreme,  
Close here our old house is, that dream  
And daylight have been showing me  
The year through. I would like to see  
That room I found so hard to leave,  
So hard to keep, last Christmas Eve.

Faith's easy now! There is a God  
Who trod the earth we two have trod;  
He pays me for our pain last year,  
For all these months of longing, fear,

Doubt and uncertainty--outright,  
By letting me come here to-night  
And just contrast that dead despair  
With the Earth-Heaven we two shall share!

Just one look at the old room's door,  
If I can get no chance of more;  
Yet gold will buy most things--may buy  
The leave to see that room. We'll try!

May I go up? Just once to see  
The room that sheltered her and me?--  
My God! the rapture of to-day  
Has sent me mad;--you did not say  
She died the night I went away!

Edith Nesbit

# Two Voices

## COUNTRY

'SWEET are the lanes and the hedges, the fields made red with the clover,  
With tall field-sorrel, and daisies, and golden buttercups glowing;  
Sweet is the way through the woods, where at sundown maiden and lover  
Linger by stile or by bank where wild clematis is growing.  
Fair is our world when the dew and the dawn thrill the half-wakened roses,  
Fair when the corn-fields grow warm with poppies in noonlight gleaming,  
Fair through the long afternoon, when hedges and hay-fields lie dreaming,  
Fair as in lessening light the last convolvulus closes

'Scent of geranium and musk that in cottage windows run riot,  
Breath from the grass that is down in the meadows each side the highway,  
Slumberous hush of the churchyard where we one day may lie quiet,  
Murmuring wind through the leaves bent over the meadow byway,  
Deeps of cool shadow, and gleams of light on high elm-tops shining,  
Such peace in the dim green brake as the town, save in dreams, knows never,  
But in, through, under it all, the old pain follows us ever--  
Ever the old despair, the old unrest and repining.

'Dark is the City's face; but her children who know her find her  
Mother to them who are brothers, mindful of brotherhood's duty;  
To each of us, lonely, unhelped, the grave would be warmer, kinder,  
Than the cold unloving face of our world of blossom and beauty.  
Poverty deep and dark cowers under the thatch with the swallows,  
Cruel disease lies hid in the changeful breast of the waters,  
Drink sets snares for our sons, and shame digs graves for our daughters,  
Want and care crush the flower of a youth that no life-fruit follows.

'What are the woodland sweets--the meadow's fair flowery treasure--  
When we are hungry and sad, and stupid with work and with sorrows?  
Leisure for nothing but sleep, and with heart but for sleep in our leisure;  
The work of to-day still the same as yesterday's work, and to-morrow's.  
Ever the weary round--the treadmill of innocent lives--  
Hopeless and helpless, and bowing our backs like a hound's to the lashes;  
What can seem fair to the eyes that are smarting and sore with the ashes

Blown from the fires that consume the souls of our children and wives?

'Dreams sometimes we have had of an hour when we might speak plainly,  
Raise the mantle and show how the iron eats into our bosom,  
The rotting root of the Nation, the worm at the heart of its blossom,  
Dreaming we said, 'We will speak, when the time for it comes, not vainly.'  
Ah--but the time comes never--Life, we are used to bear it,  
Starved are our brains and grow not, our hands are fit but for toiling,  
If we stretched them out their touch to our masters' hand would be soiling;  
Weak is our voice with disuse--too weak for our lords to hear it!'

## CITY

'So has the spark died out that the torch of hope dropped among you?  
So is the burden bound more fast to the shrinking shoulder?  
Far too faint are your cries to be heard by the men who wrong you?  
And if they heard they are high, and the air as men rise grows colder!  
Yet you are men though so weak, and in mine and workshop your brothers,  
Stronger in head, and in heart not less sad, for deliverance are striving;  
These will stand fast, and will face the cruel unjust and ungiving,  
And you in our ranks shall be 'listed, our hands fast clasped in each other's!

'For in the night of our sorrow cold lights are breaking and brightening  
Out in the eastern sky; through the drifting clouds, wind-driven,  
Over the earth new gleams and glories are laughing and lightening,  
Clearer the air grows each moment, brighter the face of the heaven.  
Turn we our face to the east--oh, wind of the dawn, blow to us  
Freshness and strength and resolve! The star of old faith grows paler  
Before the eyes of our Freedom, though still wrath's red mists veil her,  
For this is our battle day; revenge, like our blood, runs through us.

'This is our vengeance day. Our masters, made fat with our fasting,  
Shall fall before us like corn when the sickle for harvest is strong:  
Old wrong shall give might to our arm--remembrance of wrong shall make lasting

The graves we will dig for the tyrants we bore with too much and too long.  
The sobs of our starving children, the tears of our heart-sick mothers,

The moan of your murdered manhood crushed out by their wanton pressure,  
The wail of the life-long anguish that paid the price of their pleasure,  
These will make funeral music to speed the lost souls of them, brothers!

'Shoulder to shoulder we march, and for those who go down mid the fighting  
With rifles in hand and pikes, and the red flag over them flying,  
Glad shall our hearts be for them--who die when our sun is lighting  
The warm, wide heavens, and sheds its lovely light on their dying.  
Fight, though we lose our dearest--fight, though the battle rages  
Fiercer and hotter than ever was fight in the world before:  
We must fight--how can men do less? If we die, what can men do more?  
And the sun of Freedom shall shine across our graves to the ages!'

Edith Nesbit

# Unofficial

ONE morning, my heart can remember,  
I sat dreaming there,  
In the 'governor's' chair  
In the office. The month was November,  
And the weather a subject for prayer.

My mind strayed through visions unbounded--  
Far-off seemed the din  
That King William Street's in,  
And the quill of the 'junior' sounded  
Like the squeak of an elf's violin.

I was roused with a start--some one entered.  
Though ground-glass divide  
Off the sanctum inside,  
The star where my homage was centred  
In the office without I descried.

'Oh, kind Fate, to bring me my Kitty!  
The boy I can send  
At the bank to attend:  
One partner's just gone from the City,  
And the other is at the West End.

'Change two pounds, boy, for threepenny pieces!  
And there isn't a franc  
In the place!--I will thank  
You to take down these coupons from Creasy's  
To the London and Westminster Bank.'

He is gone! This can never be Kitty,  
Alone here with me!  
Can this ever be she,  
Laughing here in the heart of the City,

With the old office cat on her knee?

'I hope, Ben,' she says, 'you are stronger,  
And I hope it's not true  
Work is injuring you;  
And I'd better not stay any longer,  
As you seem to have so much to do!'

But she does not go yet. Still she lingers,  
Dry deed-boxes press  
The crisp folds of her dress,  
While the desk feels inquisitive fingers  
In a touch that is half a caress.

Now, dreary and quiet the place is;  
Here's the space on the floor  
I remember of yore,  
Which was brushed by her ribbons and laces  
As she smiled her 'good-bye' at the door.

The violets she wore in her bosom,  
So scented, dew-wet,  
Are hard to forget;  
The dim office grew fair with each blossom,  
And their fragrance seems haunting it yet.

I'm in partnership now with old Bradley;  
His brother is dead,  
So I stand as the Head  
Of affairs; and I'm thinking thus sadly  
Of the sweetness of days that have fled.

My Wimbledon house--all that's in it--  
My life, with its dower  
Of money-bag power--  
I would throw to the dogs in a minute,



To recall from those days but one hour.

Lost light of my eyes, little Kitty!  
Too late now, too late;  
But I'd give my estate  
To be once more a clerk in the City--  
In the office with you tête-à-tête.

Edith Nesbit

# Until The Dawn

WHEN head and hands and heart alike are weary;  
When Hope with folded wings sinks out of sight;  
When all thy striving fails to disentangle  
From out wrong's skein the golden thread of right;  
When all thy knowledge seems a marsh-light's glimmer,  
That only shows the blackness of the night;

In the dark hour when victory seems hopeless,  
Against thy lance when armies are arrayed,  
When failure writes itself upon thy forehead,  
By foes outnumbered and by friends betrayed;  
Still stand thou fast, though faith be bruised and wounded,  
Still face thy future, still be undismayed!

While one true man speaks out against injustice,  
While through men's chorused 'Right!' clear rings his 'Wrong!'

Freedom still lives. One day she will reward him  
Who trusted in her though she tarried long,  
Who held her creed, was faithful till her coming,  
Who, for her sake, strove, suffered, and was strong.

She will bring crowns for those who love and serve her;  
If thou canst live for her, be satisfied;  
If thou canst die for her, rejoice! Our brothers  
At least shall crown our graves and say, 'These died  
Believing in the sun when night was blackest,  
And by our dawn their faith is justified!'

Edith Nesbit

# Values

Did you deceive me? Did I trust  
A heart of fire to a heart of dust?  
What matter? Since once the world was fair,  
And you gave me the rose of the world to wear.

That was the time to live for! Flowers,  
Sunshine and starshine and magic hours,  
Summer about me, Heaven above,  
And all seemed immortal, even Love.

Well, the mortal rose of your love was worth  
The pains of death and the pains of birth;  
And the thorns may be sharper than death--who knows? -  
That crowd round the stem of a deathless rose.

Edith Nesbit

# Via Amoris

I.

IT is not Love, this beautiful unrest,  
This tremor of longing that invades my breast:  
For Love is in his grave this many a year,  
He will not rise--I do not wish him here.  
It is not memory, for your face and eyes  
Are not reflected where that dark pool lies:  
It is not hope, for life makes no amends,  
And hope and I are long no longer friends:  
It is a ghost out of another Spring  
It needs but little for its comforting--  
That I should hold your hand and see your face  
And muse a little in this quiet place,  
Where, through the silence, I can hear you sigh  
And feel you sadden, O Virgin Mystery,  
And know my thought has in your thought begot  
Sadness, its child, and that you know it not.

II.

If this were Love, if all this bitter pain  
Were but the birth-pang of Love born again,  
If through the doubts and dreams resolved, smiled  
The prophetic promise of the holy child,  
What should I gain? The Love whose dream-lips smiled  
Could never be my own and only child,  
But to Love's birth would come, with the last pain,  
Renunciation, also born again.

III.

If this were Love why should I turn away?  
Am I not, too, made of the common clay?  
Is life so fair, am I so fortunate,  
I can refuse the capricious gift of Fate,  
The sudden glory, the unhoped-for flowers,  
The transfiguration of my earthly hours?

Come, Love! the house is garnished and is swept,  
Washed clean with all the tears that I have wept,  
Washed from the stain of my unworthy fears,  
Hung with the splendid spoils of wasted years,  
Lighted with lamps of hope, and curtained fast  
Against the gathered darkness of the past.

I draw the bolts! I throw the portals wide,  
The darkness rushes shivering to my side,  
Love is not here--the darkness creeps about  
My house wherein the lamps of hope die out.  
Ah Love! it was not then your hand that came  
Beating my door? your voice that called my name?

IV.

'It is not Love, it is not Love,' I said,  
And bowed in fearful hope my trembling head.  
'It is not Love, for Love could never rise  
Out of the rock-hewn grave wherein he lies.'  
But as I spake, the heavenly form drew near  
Where close I clasped a hope grown keen as fear,  
Upon my head His very hand He laid  
And whispered, 'It is I, be not afraid!'

V.

And this is Love, no rose-crowned laughing guest  
By whom my passionate heart should be caressed,  
But one re-risen from the grave; austere,  
Cold as the grave, and infinitely dear,  
To follow whom I lay the whole world down,  
Take up the cross, bind on the thorny crown;  
And, following whom, my bleeding pilgrim feet  
Find the rough pathway sure and very sweet.  
The august environment of mighty wings  
Shuts out the snare of vain imaginings,  
For by my side, crowned with Love's death-white rose,  
The Angel of Renunciation goes.

Edith Nesbit

# Vies Manquees

A YEAR ago we walked the wood--  
A year ago to-day;  
A blackbird fluttered round her brood  
Deep in the white-flowered may.

We trod the happy woodland ways,  
Where sunset streamed between  
The hazel stems in long dusk rays,  
And turned to gold the green.

A thrush sang where the ferns uncurled,  
And clouds of wind-flowers grew:  
I missed the meaning of the world  
From lack of love for you.

You missed the beauty of the year,  
And failed its self to see,  
Through too much doubt and too much fear,  
And too much love of me.

This year we hear the birds' glad strain,  
Again the sunset glows,  
We walk the wild wet woods again,  
Again the wind-flower blows.

In cloudy white the falling may  
Drifts down the scented wind,  
And so the secret drifts away  
Which we shall never find.

Our drifted spirits are not free  
Spring's secret springs to touch,  
For now you do not care for me,

And I love you too much.

Edith Nesbit

# Villeggiature

My window, framed in pear-tree bloom,  
White-curtained shone, and softly lighted:  
So, by the pear-tree, to my room  
Your ghost last night climbed uninvited.

Your solid self, long leagues away,  
Deep in dull books, had hardly missed me;  
And yet you found this Romeo's way,  
And through the blossom climbed and kissed me.

I watched the still and dewy lawn,  
The pear-tree boughs hung white above you;  
I listened to you till the dawn,  
And half forgot I did not love you.

Od, dear! what pretty things you said,  
What pearls of song you threaded for me!  
I did not-till your ghost had fled-  
Remember how you always bore me!

Edith Nesbit



# Waterloo Day

THIS is the day of our glory; this is our day to weep.  
Under her dusty laurels England stirs in her sleep;  
Dreams of her days of honour, terrible days that are dead,  
Days of the making of story, days when the sword was red,

When all her fate and her future hung on the naked blade,  
When by the sword of her children her place in the world was made,  
When Honour sounded the trumpet and Valour leapt to obey,  
And Heroes bought us the Empire that statesmen would sell to-day.

England, wanton and weary, sunk in a slothful ease,  
Has slain in her wars her thousands, but her tens of thousands in peace:  
And the cowards grieve for her glory; their glory is in their shame;  
They are glad of the moth in her banners, and the rust on her shining name.

Oh, if the gods would send us a balm for our sick, sad years,  
Let them send us a sight of the scarlet, and the sound of the guns in our ears!  
For valour and faith and honour--these grow where the red flower grows,  
And the leaves for the Nation's healing must spring from the blood of her foes.

Edith Nesbit

# Wedding Day

The enchanted hour,  
The magic bower,  
Where, crowned with roses,  
Love love discloses.

'Kiss me, my lover;  
Doubting is over,  
Over is waiting;  
Love lights our mating!'

'But roses wither,  
Chill winds blow hither,  
One thing all say, dear,  
Love lives a day, dear!'

'Heed those old stories?  
New glowing glories  
Blot out those lies, love!  
Look in my eyes, love!

'Ah, but the world knows -  
Naught of the true rose;  
Back the world slips, love!  
Give me your lips, love!

'Even were their lies true,  
Yet were you wise to  
Swear, at Love's portal,  
The god's immortal.'

Edith Nesbit

# When!

WHEN I am young again I'll hoard my bliss,  
Nor deem that inexhaustible it is,  
Remembering old age comes after this,  
Joy grows to pain;  
Nor waste one moment of youth's rose-sweet hours,  
Nor trample one of all its countless flowers,  
But drink the summer sun and soft spring showers,  
When I am young again.

I will be wise with wisdom dearly won  
By those who through life's wood have nearly run;  
Learn what to do, and what to leave undone,  
Risk or refrain.  
I will not seek into my mouth to take  
The bitter apple of the acrid lake,  
But at clear fountains all my thirsts will slake,  
When I am young again.

I will not brush the bloom to reach the core,  
Remembering how it chanced with me before,  
And bloom once lost returns not any more,  
Hard cores remain:  
I will fence round with prudence and secure  
A lasting bloom whose freshness shall endure;  
Oh, I will guard my peach of youth, be sure,  
When I am young again.

When I am young again, I'll spend no breath  
On bitter words the heart remembereth  
When bitterness is swallowed up by Death  
Holding sole reign;  
I'll love so well that if they pass to sleep  
Before me, I shall have no watch to keep  
Over their tears-only my tears to weep  
When I am young again.

I will not lightly joy nor idly grieve,  
Nor for a heaven itself one soul deceive,  
Nor will I be deceived, vainly believe,  
Nor love in vain.  
Come back, lost youth! Ah, Fate, that one gift give!  
Then I will show that I have learned to live;  
Youth shall be wise--and two and two make five--  
When I am young again!

Edith Nesbit

# White Magic

This is the room to which she came,  
And Spring itself came with her;  
She stirred the fire of life to flame,  
She called all music hither.  
Her glance upon the lean white walls  
Hung them with cloth of splendour,  
And still the rose she dropped recalls  
The graces that attend her.

The same poor room, so dull and bare  
Before, in consecration,  
She breathed upon its common air  
The true transfiguration . . .?  
This room the same to which she came  
For one immortal minute? -  
How can it ever be the same  
Since she has once been in it!

Edith Nesbit

# Windflowers

When I was little and good  
I walked in the dappled wood  
Where light white windflowers grew,  
And hyacinths heavy and blue.

The windflowers fluttered light,  
Like butterflies white and bright;  
The bluebells tremulous stood  
Deep in the heart of the wood.

I gathered the white and the blue,  
The wild wet woodland through,  
With hands too silly and small  
To clasp and carry them all.

Some dropped from my hands and died  
By the home-road's grassy side;  
And those that my fond hands pressed  
Died even before the rest.

Edith Nesbit

# Winter

Hold your hands to the blaze;  
Winter is here  
With the short cold days,  
Bleak, keen and drear.  
Was there ever a day  
With hawthorn along the way  
Where you wandered in mild mid-May  
With your dear?

That was when you were young  
And the world was gold;  
Now all the songs are sung,  
The tales all told.  
You shiver now by the fire  
Where the last red sparks expire;  
Dead are delight and desire:  
You are old.

Edith Nesbit

# Work

WHEN I am busying about,  
Sewing on buttons, tapes, and strings,  
Hanging the week's wet washing out  
Or ironing the children's things,  
Sweeping and dusting, cleaning grates,  
Scrubbing the dresser or the floors,  
Washing the greasy dinner plates,  
Scouring the brasses on the doors--

I wonder what it's all about,  
And when did people first begin  
To keep the dirt and wornness out  
And keep the wholesome comfort in:  
How long it is since women bore  
This round of wash and make and mend,  
And what God makes us do it for  
And whether it will ever end!

When God began to do His work  
He made a new thing every day--  
Even now He is not one to shirk,  
But makes things, always some new way  
He made the earth, and sky, and sun,  
The creatures of the sea and wood,  
And when his first week's work was done  
He saw that it was very good.

But He--for all He worked so fast  
To finish air, and wave, and shore,  
Knew that this work of His would last  
For ever and for evermore.  
On Saturday night He was content,  
He knew that Monday would not bring  
Need for another firmament,  
Another set of everything.

But though my work is easier far  
Than making sky and sea and sun,  
It's harder than God's labours are,



Because my work is never done.  
I sweep and churn, save and contrive,  
I bake and brew, I don't complain,  
But every Monday morning I've  
Last Monday's work to do again.

I'm good at work--I work away;  
Always the same my work must go;  
The flowers grow different every day,  
That's why I like to see them grow.  
If, up in Heaven, God understood  
He'd let me for my Paradise  
Make all things new and very good  
And never make the same thing twice!

Edith Nesbit