

Classic Poetry Series

**Marjorie Lowry Christie
Pickthall
- poems -**

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Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall(14 September 1883 – 19 April 1922)

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall (September 14, 1883, Gunnersbury, London, – April 19, 1922, Vancouver), was a Canadian writer who was born in England but lived in Canada from the time she was seven. She was once "thought to be the best Canadian poet of her generation."

Marjorie Pickthall was born in 1883 in the west London district of Gunnersbury, to Arthur Christie Pickthall, a surveyor and the son of a Church of England clergyman, and Elizabeth Helen Mary Pickthall (née Mallard), daughter of an officer in the Royal Navy, part Irish and part Huguenot.

According to her father, Pickthall had planned her career before she was six; she would be a writer and illustrator of books. Her parents encouraged her artistic talents with lessons in drawing and music; an accomplished violinist, she continued studying violin until she was twenty.

By 1890, Pickthall and her family had moved to Toronto, Canada where her father initially worked at the city's waterworks before becoming an electrical draftsman. Her only brother died in 1894. Marjorie was educated at the Church of England day school on Beverley Street in Toronto, (possibly St. Mildred's College) and from 1899 at the Bishop Strachan School. She developed her skills at composition and made lasting friendships at these schools, despite suffering poor health, suffering from headaches, dental, eye and back problems. Summers were spent walking and studying nature on the Toronto islands. As well, she read poetry: her favourite English poets were Fiona Macleod, William Morris, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Canadian Writing Career

According to the The Canadian Encyclopedia From an early age contributed stories to the magazines and newspapers; and before her first book appeared, her genius was recognized. She sold her first story, -"Two-Ears", to the Toronto Globe for \$3 in 1898, when she was still a student at Bishop Strachan.

"Two-Ears" (along with one of Pickthall's poems) would go on the next year to win The Mail and Empire's writing competition. By the age of 17 she was writing for both the Mail and Empire and the Globe, contributing to their "Young people's corner" and "Circle of young Canada" pages.

Pickthall won the Mail and Empire contest again in 1900, this time for her poem "O keep the world for ever at the dawn." "With its Canadian inflection of the dream landscapes of late-19th-century aestheticism and its impassioned language and musicality," says the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, "it attracted the attention of professors whose critical support would ensure Pickthall's lasting reputation." To those academics, Pickthall's "rejection of modernism ... and futurism's abrasive forms represented continuity with the idealism of the 'confederation poets'." In that year, she quit school and began to write full-time.

In July 1903 Pickthall's short story *The Greater Gift* was featured in the first edition of *East and West* (Toronto), a church magazine for young people. She became a regular contributor. Three serials she wrote for the magazine – *Dick's desertion: a boy's adventures in Canadian forests* (1905), *The straight road* (1906), and *Billy's hero, or, The valley of gold* (1908) – were published as juvenile novels, illustrated by Charles William Jefferys.

In 1904 her poem "The Homecomers" won third prize in a poetry contest and caught the attention of Pelham Edgar, professor of English at the University of Toronto's Victoria College. He began publishing her work regularly in the college magazine, *Acta Victoriana*. He also introduced her to Sir Andrew Macphail, editor of the prestigious *University Magazine*, who also began regularly printing her poetry from 1907 on.

In 1905 Pickthall hired a New York agent, and soon began appearing in American magazines like the *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Century Magazine*, *Harper's*, *McClure's*, and *Scribner's*. "Pickthall wrote more fiction during her very productive decade after 1905. Her poetry might be highly praised, but it paid little, while stories fetched as much as \$150."

Pickthall was devastated by her mother's death in February, 1910. With the help of poet Helena Coleman, she got a job at the Victoria College library to make ends meet. However, back problems (and possibly a nervous breakdown) caused her to take a leave of absence in spring 1912. Later that year, determined to see some of the world, Pickthall went to England.

In her absence from Canada, Macphail's *University Magazine* published Pickthall's first collection of poetry, *The Drift of Pinions*, "in an edition of 1,000 boxed copies that sold out in ten days in November, 1913."

In England, Pickthall first stayed with her uncle, Dr. Frank Reginald Mallard, in Hammersmith and then began renting Chalke Cottage in Bowerchalke, Wiltshire,

with her second cousin Edith Emma Whillier. Successive summers were spent at Chalke Cottage. She began writing again and in 1914 wrote the historical novel *Poursuite Joyeuse*, which was published in 1915 as *Little Hearts*. The book was a failure; "it earned no more than £15. Nor, despite favourable reviews, did it facilitate Pickthall's entry into the London literary world, which she felt was closed to her as a colonial.... Moreover, she was out of touch with the American market."

In 1916 she published *The Lamp of Poor Souls*, an expanded volume of poetry. During 1915 and 1916 Pickthall trained in automobile mechanics to do her part in the war effort. She was not accepted, so instead took work as a secretary and market gardener. This experience formed the basis of an essay, *Women on the land in England*, which was subsequently published in *East and West*. It also led to an unsuccessful commercial venture in 1917, growing vegetables at Chalke Cottage with a woman known as Long-John.

In May 1918 health problems forced her to quit as assistant librarian in the South Kensington Meteorological Office, so she returned to Bowerchalke and completed 20 stories by the end of the year, "half of which were sold by January. Another creative burst between September and December 1919 produced a novel (*The bridge: a story of the Great Lakes*), a verse drama (*The wood carver's wife*), and 16 stories."

On 22 May 1920 she sailed from Liverpool for Toronto, and then journeyed on to Lang Bay in the Sunshine Coast area of British Columbia with Edith Joan Lyttleton; then on to the Boundary Bay summer camp of Isabel Ecclestone Mackay where she revised *The Bridge*. She then began a new novel, *The Beaten Man*: "She struggled over this novel in Victoria in the winter of 1920–21 ... and rejected five drafts."

'*The Wood-Carver's Wife*', published in the *University Magazine* in April 1920, "was staged at the New Empire Theatre in Montreal in March 1921 and later at Hart House Theatre in Toronto." Audiences and reviewers responded enthusiastically.

In 1921 Pickthall settled in the Clo-oose community of the Ditidaht people on the west coast of Vancouver Island (a community immortalized in her poem, "*The Sailor's Grave at Clo-oose, V.I.*"). Soon, though, her health failed and she was admitted to a nursing home in Victoria, British Columbia.

Death and commemoration

Pickthall was 38 years old when, 12 days after surgery, she died of an embolism

in Vancouver in 1922. She is buried beside her mother in St. James Cemetery (Toronto). Although her father was her executor her estate was bequeathed to her aunt, Laura Mallard, in whose home she had done most of her writing. A collection of her poems and a volume of her collected short stories were both published posthumously. "Her father compiled and published her Collected Poems in 1925 and again, definitively, in 1936."

Writing

Marjorie Pickthall "stood as proof in the eyes of the next generation of female poets that women could indeed earn the respect and attention of a literary establishment dominated by men."

Poetry

"Pickthall's literary reputation rests ultimately on the ... poetry published during her lifetime." During her lifetime, that was a high reputation indeed. For John Garvin, writing in *Canadian Poets* in 1916, even back in Pickthall's days on the youth pages it had been "evident that a genius of a rare order had appeared in Canadian literature." Nor was he alone in thinking that. By 1913, when her first book of poetry was released: "For once the reviewers and critics generally were of one opinion that the work was the product of genius undefiled and radiant, dwelling in the realm of pure beauty and singing with perfect naturalness its divine message." Garvin quoted from the book review in *Saturday Night* magazine:

"The *Drift of Pinions* is exquisitely lyrical, with a flawless rhythm and melody.... This poet pays no heed to the headlines of to-day ... but goes her way in the world of iris-buds and golden fern, hearing and seeing only the things that are most excellent.... It is impossible in comment or quotation to give an idea of the subtle beauty of execution, the ideal spirituality of conception, which make such poems as 'The Lamp of Poor Souls' and 'A Mother in Egypt' poetic achievements of the rarest kind.... The singer's gifts are splendour and tenderness of colour, sweetness of silvery phrase, and a true poet's unwavering belief in 'the subtle thing called spirit.

At Pickthall's death, Pelham Edgar wrote: "Her talent was strong and pure and tender, and her feeling for beauty was not more remarkable than her unrivalled gift for expressing it." Archibald MacMechan called her "the truest, sweetest singing voice ever praised in Canada." In his 1925 biography, *Marjorie Pickthall: A Book of Remembrance*, Lorne Pierce could point to ten poetic tributes from top Canadian poets. Pierce himself praised her "Colour, Cadence, Contour,

Craftsmanship."

Yet, as Donald A. Precosky writes in Pickthall's Poetry Foundation biography of today: "Probably no other Canadian writer has suffered such a plunge in reputation as Marjorie Pickthall.... Now her work, except for two or three anthologized pieces, goes unread."

For Precosky, the reason for that change was simple: "The fact is that her initial popularity was based upon extraliterary criteria. Her rejection of modernism in style and attitude made her the darling of conservative Canadian critics." Such an artificial popularity would be transitory almost by definition. "But she has fallen victim to time.... modernism has replaced nineteenth-century romantic verse."

To a modernist like Precosky, the very things Saturday Night saw to praise in Pickthall's work a century ago – its flawless rhyme and rhythm, and that the poet does not write with an eye on the headlines – are the very things wrong with it: The verses are gentle, dreamy, and musical yet somehow empty. She has nothing to say but she says it harmoniously. The world of her poetry, with its ivory towers, Persian lovers, and 'amber bars' of sunlight, is not drawn from life but from her reading of romantic literature."

Pickthall's poetry became, to an extent, a pawn in a literary game between traditionalists and modernists. Just as traditionalists like MacPhail boosted her poetry due to their rejection of modernism, modernists deprecated it due to their rejection of traditionalism; her decline in popularity was no less based on "extraliterary criteria" than her earlier popularity.

To take one notorious example: "In his *On Canadian Poetry* (1943), E.K. Brown ridiculed the poetry of Marjorie Pickthall with such malicious conviction that it is perhaps not surprising to find Lorne Pierce, whose loyal appreciation for Pickthall knew no bounds, rescinding his evaluation of the poet in the same year." Brown saw Pickthall as "the object of a cult" – the anti-modernist cult. To him, her verses represented "the final phase" of English Canada's tradition of Romantic poetry.

Pierce subsequently tried to offer a balanced judgement of her work in his Introduction to her 1957 *Selected Poems*, where he talked about both strengths and weaknesses. Pickthall's strengths, as he saw them, were "grace and charm, restrained Christian mysticism, and unfailing cadence;" her weaknesses, "preoccupation with the unearthly, with death and regret, with loneliness and grief, where the tendency is toward emotional interpretations of life, and rapture

and intuition are substituted for the discipline of reason."

For Pierce, Pickthall had already begun to repeat herself by the time of her first book: "'Bega,' 'The Little Sister of the Prophet,' and 'The Bridegroom of Cana,' all published in 1909, ... [show] the full maturity of her powers. When *Drift of Pinions* ... appeared in 1913, she had already written much of her best poetry, and was to continue not only the repetition of her favourite attitudes and metaphors, but even the vocabulary that included such words as gray, little, silver, rose, dreams, mist, dove, and moth."

Northrop Frye, for one, found Pierce's judgement too dismissive: "The introduction is written with much sympathy, but tends to confirm the usual view of this poet as a diaphanous late romantic whose tradition died with her.... I have some reservations about this. She died at thirty-nine: if Yeats had died at the same age, in 1904, we should have had an overwhelming impression of the end of a road to Milton that we now realize would have been pretty inadequate.... Pickthall was, of course, no Yeats, but her Biblical- Oriental pastiches were not so unlike the kind of thing that Ezra Pound was producing at about the same time, and there are many signs of undeveloped possibilities in this book."

The comparisons to Yeats and Pound are apt. Like Pound and his mentor Eliot, Pickthall crammed her verses with literary allusions; but while this made Pound and Eliot cutting-edge to some, all it got her was the epithet, "Pickthall the Obscure." Like Yeats, she used recurring symbols (like the rose) throughout her poems; but while Yeats's symbolism has long been admired, Pickthall received only the criticism that she was repeating "even the vocabulary" of her older work.

"However," as Wanda Campbell noted in her essay on Pickthall in *Hidden Rooms: Early Canadian Women Poets*, "an increasing number of scholars are discovering that Pickthall, once labelled 'Pickthall the Obscure,' did indeed have something to say, though it was often buried beneath traditional forms, decorative surfaces, and Pre-Raphaelite lushness. Both Diana Relke and Alex Kizuk explore aspects of a feminist poetic and offer new interpretations of individual poems."

Kizuk's interpretation is interesting: "Pickthall's verse achieves that quality of poetic autonomy that Roman Jakobson called 'literariness.' Her verse might best be introduced as an intense apostrophe to literary beauty: a turning away from the trial to address the judges in impassioned language that an audience may only overhear. Her poems draw upon a body of literary precedents in order to construct a coherent and fantastic defence against unsatisfied desire and what she perceived to be a fundamental incoherence in modern life."

Discussing Pierce's later judgement, Sandra Campbell cautions the reader against accepting anyone's interpretations or judgements, urging him or her to read the poems instead and make a judgement of his or her own: "Sandra Campbell explains that Pierce had his own reasons for presenting Pickthall in this way, and argues for a reconsideration of her as 'A woman writer of pain and presence whom we all, male and female alike, ought to read, hear, see, and assess with new eyes.'"

Fiction

Much of Pickthall's fiction is disposable. Her three juvenile novels, for instance, were magazine serials, written to a formula to meet a deadline. "In each book a boy or young man, isolated by orphanhood or financial straits, is forced to undertake a journey, during which he must solve a trying problem; its solution, through a combination of luck ('Providence'), a new spiritual and moral rectitude, and a fresh sense of duty, leads to his re-integration into the family or society."

The Encyclopedia of Literature says: "Of Pickthall's adult fiction, *Little hearts* (1915), set in the eighteenth-century Devonshire countryside, and *The bridge; a story of the Great Lakes* (1922), employ melodramatic incident." (The Bridge, like her juveniles, began as a magazine serial.) "As in most of her short stories, Pickthall in these novels fails to integrate fully descriptive detail, character, and incident."

Others have had more favorable impressions. Poet and critic Anne Compton wrote of Pickthall's first novel: "Little Hearts (1915) reveals an Impressionist's awareness of light and confirms Robert Garrett's observation that '[f]ew writers know how to paint air as she does.' Light erases outlines, turns landscapes fluid: ... 'a small wood lay, long and narrow, like a river turned to trees'.... Not only landscapes, but also characters, and their conditions, are depicted in terms of light.... As Oakshott expectantly enters the wood for a meeting, 'the world was a cool silver light that dazzled him.'"

In *The Bridge*, Pickthall "attempted a sharper psychological characterization and a realistic style culled from reading Balzac."

Drama

Because "Pickthall's reputation rests predominantly on her career as a poet," says the Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama, "her play *The Woodcarver's Wife* has only recently gained the critical attention it deserves." Many have expressed their surprise on reading the play. Frye, for instance, wrote: "I

expected to find it Celtic twilight with a lot of early Yeats in it. It turned out to be a violent, almost brutal melodrama with a lot of Browning in it."

Others have been surprised, considering Pickthall's reputation as the poster child for traditionalism, to find it to be a "modernist drama", "not typical of Pickthall's ... poetry." As a Modern Drama article by P. L. Badir was headlined: "'So entirely unexpected': the modernist dramaturgy of Marjorie Pickthall's *The wood carver's wife*." The plot, set in pre-Conquest Quebec, concerns a carver who "murders his wife's lover in order to have a model for the proper expression of grief for his wooden pietà. Here Pickthall's use of synaesthesia conveys her vision of the complex web of human and natural realms, in which masculine containment contrasts with feminine intertwining. 'The cedar must have known ... I should love and carve you so,' the sculptor sang to his wife/model." "*The Woodcarver's Wife* touches on issues of gender, race, and eroticism, all charged with violence and intensity that though not easily accessible in the 1920s ultimately became an object of great interest for modern feminist critics."

A Child's Song

WHEN the Child played in Galilee,
He had no wine-clear maple leaves,
No west winds singing of the sea
Over the frosted sheaves;
But with pale myrrh His head was bound
And crowned.

When the Child lived in Nazareth,
He watched the golden anise seed,
With daisies white in the wind's breath,
And hyssop flowering for His need,
While the late crocus from the sod
Flamed for her God.

When the Child dwelt in Palestine,
Over the brooks the willow grew,
Olive and aspen, oak and pine,
Sweet sycamore and yew,
But one dark Tree of all the seven
Stood high as heaven.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

A Child's Song Of Christmas

MY counterpane is soft as silk,
My blankets white as creamy milk.
The hay was soft to Him, I know,
Our little Lord of long ago.

Above the roof the pigeons fly
In silver wheels across the sky.
The stable-doves they cooed to them,
Mary and Christ in Bethlehem.

Bright shines the sun across the drifts,
And bright upon my Christmas gifts.
They brought Him incense, myrrh, and gold,
Our little Lord who lived of old.

O, soft and clear our mother sings
Of Christmas joys and Christmas things.
God's holy angels sang to them,
Mary and Christ in Bethlehem.

Our hearts they hold all Christmas dear,
And earth seems sweet and heaven seems near.
O, heaven was in His sight, I know,
That little Child of long ago.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

A Mother In Egypt

'About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon the throne, even unto the firstborn of the maid-servant that is behind the mill.'

IS the noise of grief in the palace over the river
For this silent one at my side?
There came a hush in the night, and he rose with his hands a-quiver
Like lotus petals adrift on the swing of the tide.
O small soft hands, the day groweth old for sleeping!
O small still feet, rise up, for the hour is late!
Rise up, my son, for I hear them mourning and weeping
In the temple down by the gate.

Hushed is the face that was wont to brighten with laughter
When I sang at the mill,
And silence unbroken shall greet the sorrowful dawns hereafter,
The house shall be still.
Voice after voice takes up the burden of wailing,–
Do you heed, do you hear?–in the high-priest's house by the wall;
But mine is the grief, and their sorrow is all unavailing.
Will he wake at their call ?

Something I saw of the broad, dim wings half folding
The passionless brow.
Something I saw of the sword the shadowy hands were holding,–
What matters it now?
I held you close, dear face, as I knelt and harkened
To the wind that cried last night like a soul in sin,
When the broad, bright stars dropped down and the soft sky darkened,
And the Presence moved therein.

I have heard men speak in the market-place of the city,
Low voiced, in a breath,
Of a god who is stronger than ours, and who knows not changing nor pity,
Whose anger is death.
Nothing I know of the lords of the outland races,
But Amun is gentle and Hathor the Mother is mild,
And who would descend from the light of the peaceful places

To war on a child?

Yet here he lies, with a scarlet pomegranate petal

Blown down on his cheek.

The slow sun sinks to the sand like a shield of some burnished metal,

But he does not speak.

I have called, I have sung, but he neither will hear nor waken;

So lightly, so whitely he lies in the curve of my arm,

Like a feather let fall from the bird that the arrow hath taken.

Who could see him, and harm?

'The swallow flies home to her sleep in the eaves of the altar,

And the crane to her nest,'—

So do we sing o'er the mill, and why, ah, why should I falter,

Since he goes to his rest?

Does he play in their flowers as he played among these with his mother?

Do the gods smile downward and love him and give him their care?

Guard him well, O ye gods, till I come; lest the wrath of that Other

Should reach to him there!

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

A Saxon Epitaph

The earth builds on the earth
Castles and towers;
The earth saith of the earth:
All shall be ours.

Yea, though they plan and reap
The rye and the corn,
Lo, they were bond to Sleep
Ere they were born.

Yea, though the blind earth sows
For the fruit and the sheaf,
They shall harvest the leaf of the rose
And the dust of the leaf.

Pride of the sword and power
Are theirs at their need
Who shall rule but the root of the flower
The fall of the seed.

They who follow the flesh
In splendour and tears,
They shall rest and clothe them afresh
In the fulness of years.

From the dream of the dust they came
As the dawn set free.
They shall pass as the flower of the flame
Or the foam of the sea.

The earth builds on the earth
Castles and towers.
The earth saith of the earth:
All shall be ours.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Adam And Eve

When the first dark had fallen around them
And the leaves were weary of praise,
In the clear silence Beauty found them
And shewed them all her ways.

In the high noon of the heavenly garden
Where the angels sunned with the birds,
Beauty, before their hearts could harden,
Had taught them heavenly words.

When they fled in the burning weather
And nothing dawned but a dream,
Beauty fasted their hands together
And cooled them at her stream.

And when day wearied and night grew stronger,
And they slept as the beautiful must,
Then she bided a little longer,
And blossomed from their dust.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Again

JUST to live under green leaves and see them
Just to lie under low stars and watch them wane,
Just to sleep by a kind heart and know it loving
Again-

Just to wake on a sunny day and the wind blowing,
Just to walk on a bare road in the bright rain,-
These, O God, and the night, and the moon showing
Again-

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Armored

WHEN within the rippling tide
Shakes the silver-pointed moon,
When the rainbow flies of noon
All have died,
When the bats go wheeling far,
And the mournful owl has cried
Twice or thrice a-down the glen
Gray with gathering shade, and when
Gates o' dream are held ajar,-
From the alders in the dell,
From the bracken fronds astir,
Elfin voices call to her,-
'Armored !'

She shall glide the garden down,
Treading softly, treading slow,
And with silent feet shall go
Past the Mary-lilies white,
Past the pansies, gold and brown,
Grown for her delight.

One white moth her guide shall be,
She shall follow where he flies,
Patiently, with dream-lit eyes;
Past the thyme and savoury,
Past the mystic asphodel,
For the voices in her ear
Call her softly, call her clear,-
'Armored !'

Into valleys strange and dim,
All unseen and all unknown,
Fleetly shall she follow him,
Fairy-led, alone.
She shall hear within the brake
Elfin crickets pipe and sing,
While the elfin spiders make
Sendal for her furnishing,
Red as pimpernel.

She shall see the dreams go by,
Silver-pinioned, through the sky;
Where she wanders none may tell,
But the voices come and go,
Calling sweetly, calling low,
'Armored !'

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Bartimeus Grown Old

YEA, I am he that dwelt beside this tomb.
I was a child. God smote me from the sun.
A little while, I had forgot to run
Under the rain-sweet roof of almond bloom.
I had forgotten summer, and the flaw
Ruffling the gray sea and the yellowed grain.
Now I am old and I forget again,
But a man came and touched me, and I saw.

Long years he dowered me with imperial day,
Bright-blossomed night and all the stars in trust.
Now I am blind again, and by the way
Wait still to catch his footsteps in the dust.
Surely he comes?—and he will hear my cry,
Though he were stricken and dim and old as I.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Bega

FROM the clouded belfry calling,
Hear my soft ascending swells;
Hear my notes like swallows falling;
I am Bega, least of bells.
When great Turkeful rolls and rings
All the storm-touched turret swings,
Echoing battle, loud and long.
When great Tatwin wakening roars
To the far-off shining shores,
All the seamen know his song.
I am Bega, least of bells:
In my throat my message swells.
I with all the winds a-thrill,
Murmuring softly, murmuring still,
'God around me, God above me,
God to guard me, God to love me.'

I am Bega, least of bells,
Weaving wonder, wind-born spells.
High above the morning mist,
Wreathed in rose and amethyst,
Still the dreams of music float
Silver from my silver throat,
Whispering beauty, whispering peace.
When great Tatwin's golden voice
Bids the listening land rejoice,

When great Turkeful rings and rolls
Thunder down to trembling souls,
Then my notes like curlews flying,
Lifting, falling, sinking, sighing,
Softly answer, softly cease.
I with all the airs at play
Murmuring sweetly, murmuring say,
'God around me, God above me,
God to guard me, God to love me.'

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Canada To England

Great names of thy great captains gone before
Beat with our blood, who have that blood of thee;
Raleigh and Grenville, Wolfe, and all the free
Fine souls who dared to front a world in war.
Such only may outreach the envious years
Where feebler crowns and fainter stars remove,
Nurtured in one remembrance and one love
Too high for passion and too stern for tears.

O little isle our fathers held for home,
Not, not alone thy standards and thy hosts
Lead where thy sons shall follow, Mother Land:
Quick as the north wind, ardent as the foam,
Behold, behold the invulnerable ghosts
Of all past greatnesses about thee stand.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Christ In The Museum

BRONZE bells and incense burners, and a flight
Of birds born out of iron, and fine as spray;
A dial that told the longest summer day
How sure, how swift the night:
And o'er the silent treasury, so high
No lips may kiss, no grieving hands have clung,
Numbered and ticketed, the Christ is hung.
The many pass Him by,
None pause. Here come no agonies, no dreams.
Nothing is here to hurt Him, nor to wake.
Year after year the golden iris gleams
A little paler by her lacquered lake,
And the dust gathers on the hands, the side,
The lonely head of Love the crucified.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Daisy Time

See, the grass is full of stars,
Fallen in their brightness;
Hearts they have of shining gold,
Rays of shining whiteness.

Buttercups have honeyed hearts,
Bees they love the clover,
But I love the daisies' dance
All the meadow over.

Blow, O blow, you happy winds,
Singing summer's praises,
Up the field and down the field
A-dancing with the daisies.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Dawn

O KEEP the world forever at the dawn,
Ere yet the opals, cobweb-strung, have dried,
Ere yet too bounteous gifts have marred the morn
Or fading stars have died.
O, keep the eastern gold no wider than
An angel's finger-span,
And hush the increasing thunder of the sea
To murmuring melody
In those fair coves where tempests ne'er should be.

Hold back the line of shoreward-sweeping surge
And veil each deep sea-pool in pearlier mist,
Ere yet the silver ripples on the verge
Have turned to amethyst.
Fling back the chariot of encroaching day
And call the winds away
Ere yet they sigh, and let the hastening sun
Along his path in heaven no higher run,
But show through all the years his golden rim
With shadows lingering dim
Forever o'er the world awaiting him.

Hold every bird with still and drowsy wing,
That in the breathless hush no clamorous throat
Shall break the peace that hangs on everything
With shrill awakening note;
Keep fast the half-seen beauties of the rose
In undisturbed repose,
Check all the iris buds where they unfold
Impatient from their hold,
And close the cowslips' cups of honeyed gold.

Keep all things hushed, so hushed we seem to hear
The sounds of low-swung clouds that sweep the trees;
Let now no harsher music reach the ear,
No earthlier sounds than these,
When whispering shadows move within the grass,
And airy tremors pass
Through all the earth with life awakening thrilled,

And so forever stilled,
Too sweet in promise e'er to be fulfilled.

O keep the world forever at the dawn,
Yet, keeping so, let nothing lifeless seem,
But hushed, as if the miracle of morn
Were trembling in its dream.
Some shadowy moth may pass with downy flight
And fade before the sight,
While in the unlightened darkness of the wall
The chirping crickets call;
From forest pools where fragrant lilies are
A breath shall pass afar,
And o'er the crested pine shall hang one star.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Dedication

LORD, on this paper white,
My soul would write
Tales that were heard of old
Of perilous things and bold;
Kings as young lions for pride;
Lost cities where they died
Last in the gate; the cry
That told some Eastern throng
A prophet was gone by;
The song of swords; the song
Of beautiful, fierce lords
Gone down among the swords;
The traffick and the breath
Of nations spilled in death;
The glory and the gleam
Of a whole age
Snared in a golden page,—
Such is my dream.

Yet thanks, if yet You give
The crumbs by which I live,—
Blown shreds of beauty, broken
Words half unspoken,
So faint, so faltering,
They may not truly show
The blue on a crow's wing,
The berry of a brier
Cupped in new snow
As though the snow lit fire, . . .

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Deus Misereatur

PLEASANT the ways whereon our feet were led,
Sweet the young hills, the valleys of content,
But now the hours of dew and dream have fled.
Lord, we are spent.

We did not heed Thy warning in the skies,
We have not heard Thy voice nor known Thy fold;
But now the world is darkening to our eyes.
Lord, we grow old.

Now the sweet stream turns bitter with our tears,
Now dies the star we followed in the west,
Now are we sad and ill at ease with years.
Lord, we would rest.

Lo, our proud lamps are emptied of their light,
Weary our hands to toil, our feet to roam;
Our day is past and swiftly falls Thy night.
Lord, lead us home.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Dream River

WIND-SILVERED willows hedge the stream,
And all within is hushed and cool.
The water, in an endless dream,
Goes sliding down from pool to pool.
And every pool a sapphire is,
From shadowy deep to sunlit edge,
Ribbioned around with irises
And cleft with emerald spears of sedge.

O, every morn the winds are stilled,
The sunlight falls in amber bars.
O, every night the pools are filled
With silver brede of shaken stars.
O, every morn the sparrow flings
His elfin trills athwart the hush,
And here unseen at eve there sings
One crystal-throated hermit-thrush.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Duna

WHEN I was a little lad
With folly on my lips,
Fain was I for journeying
All the seas in ships.
But now across the southern swell,
Every dawn I hear
The little streams of Duna
Running clear.

When I was a young man,
Before my beard was gray,
All to ships and sailormen
I gave my heart away.
But I'm weary of the sea-wind,
I'm weary of the foam,
And the little stars of Duna
Call me home.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Ecclesiastes

UNDER the fluent folds of needlework,
Where Balkis prick'd the histories of kings
Once great as he, that were as greatly loved,
Solomon stooped, and saw the dusk unfold
Over the apple orchards like a flower.
'O bloom of eve,' he said, 'diviner loss
Of all light gave us, dove of the whole world,
Bearing the branch of peace, the dark, sweet bough,—
Endure a little longer, ere full night
Comes stark from God and terrible with stars,
Eternal as He or love.

Now no one wakes,
But a lean gardener by my apricots,
Sweeping the withered leaves, the yellowing leaves
Down the wind's road. Perish our years with them,
Our griefs, our little hungers, our poor sins,
Leaves that the Lord hath scattered. He shall quench
The fierce, impetuous torches of the sun,—
Yea, from our dead dust He shall quicken kings,
Unleash new battles, sharpen spears unborn,
Shadow on shadow; but His stars remain
Immortal, and love immortal crowned with them.'

Night came, and all the hosts thereof. He saw
Arcturus clear the doorways of the cloud,
And One that followed with his shining sons,
In the likeness of a gardener that strode
Over the windy hollows of the sky,
And with a great broom drove the stars in heaps,—
The yellow stars, the little withering stars,
Faint drifts along the darkness. New stars came,
Budded, and flowered, and fell. These too He swept,
And all the heavens were changed.

Then Solomon stood
Silent, nor ever turned to the Queen's kiss.

English Flowers

YE have been bought
With an immortal price,
O, windflowers quick as thought
Of love in solitude,
And daffodils, the year's young sacrifice
When summer's on the wood.

In no forgetful hour
Through the wind-trodden gold,
I follow the springs dower
Of leaf and sallow spray,
Men gave the flower of life that I might hold
Blossom and leaf to-day.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Evening

WHEN the white iris folds the drowsing bee,
When the first cricket wakes
The fairy hosts of his enchanted brakes,
When the dark moth has sought the lilac tree,
And the young stars, like jasmine of the skies,
Are opening on the silence, Lord, there lies
Dew on Thy rose and dream upon mine eyes.

Lovely the day, when life is robed in splendour,
Walking the ways of God and strong with wine,
But the pale eve is wonderful and tender,
And night is more divine.
Fold my faint olives from their shimmering plain,
O shadow of sweet darkness fringed with rain.
Give me to night again.

Give me to day no more. I have bethought me
Silence is more than laughter, sleep than tears.
Sleep like a lover faithfully hath sought me
Down the enduring years.
Where stray the first white fatlings of the fold,
Where the Lent-lily droops her earlier gold
Sleep waits me as of old.

Grant me sweet sleep, for light is unavailing
When patient eyes grow weary of the day.
Young lambs creep close and tender wings are failing,
And I grow tired as they.
Light as the long wave leaves the lonely shore,
Our boughs have lost the bloom that morning bore.
Give me to day no more.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Exile

I chose the place where I would rest
When death should come to claim me,
With the red-rose roots to wrap my breast
And a quiet stone to name me.

But I am laid on a northern steep
With the roaring tides below me,
And only the frosts to bind my sleep,
And only the winds to know me.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Fame

HAVE I played fellowship with night, to see
The allied armies break our gates at dawn
And let our general in ? By Bacchus, no !
I have not left my stall, sir, I'm too poor
For lazy prentices to hand my wares,–
Such delicate chains, like amber linked with love !
Such silvered pins, like hate to let love out !–
What know I ? But my Guidarello went
To the fountain of the coppersmiths, when first
The double cypress showed upon the east.
He's home, poor fool, hoarse as a moulting bird
From loud throat-loyalty.
'The banners burn
Still in my soul,' he cries, 'as then in air.
The gray air, the gray houses, and the flowers,
The flowers, my father! Thyme and twisted sweets
From the blue hills I dream of, and thin bells
Of faery folds; pomegranates spun in flame,
Flame of red rose and golden, flame of sound
Blown from hot-throated trumpets, and the flame
Of her proud eyes !–
She rode beside the duke
In velvet coloured as a pansy is
And threaded round with gold. Her mantle strained
On the warm wind behind her, golden too,
Gold as the spires of lilies, and her hair
And her dark eyes were danced across with gold.'
Gold, gold, poor fool, and she was bought for gold,
A golden grief to ride at a duke's rein.
Eh well ! The great grow love-in-idleness
About their courts. Did Guidarello see
Our general too ? 'A little, tired old man,
Clad in worn sables with a silver star,'
He told me, 'fain to find his house and sleep.'

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Finis

Give me a few more hours to pass
With the mellow flower of the elm-bough falling,
And then no more than the lonely grass
And the birds calling.

Give me a few more days to keep
With a little love and a little sorrow,
And then the dawn in the skies of sleep
And a clear to-morrow.

Give me a few more years to fill
With a little work and a little lending,
And then the night on a starry hill
And the road's ending.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

For All Prisoners And Captives

OVER the English trees and the English meadows
Twilight is falling clear,
But my heart walks far in the homeless winds and the shadows
For those who are not here.

Youth and pleasure and peace and the strong flesh clothing
The freeman's soul, they gave;
Beauty they gave for a scar and honour for loathing
And life for a living grave.

But not of the least they gave was the English, mellow
Sunlight on beech leaves spread,
And the Squirrel flickering earthward to find his fellow
Where the chestnut husks lie dead.

And not of the least they lost was the calm star climbing
Over the elm tree's height,
And the heron high in the mists, and the hoar frost riming
The ivy leaves at night.

Night and the early moon, and the dead leaves burning,
And England secure and free
By the price of uncounted heartbreaks toward her turning
Across her kindred sea.

Night, and the smell of the earth, and the blue reek lifting
Straight as a prayer from the plain.
Loose them, O Sleep, to the sun and the beech leaves drifting
And the stubble fields again!

Night, and the robins still, and the long smoke folding,
The fallow on either hand,
And the spirits of those who sorrow afar, beholding
In dreams their native land.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Frost Song

HERE where the bee slept and the orchis lifted
Her honeying pipes of pearl, her velvet lip,
Only the swart leaves of the oak lie drifted
In sombre fellowship.
Here where the flame-weed set the lands alight,
Lies the bleak upland, webbed and crowned with white.

Build high the logs, O love, and in thine eyes
Let me believe the summer lingers late.
We shall not miss her passive pageantries,
We are not desolate,
When on the sill, across the window bars,
Kind winter flings her flowers and her stars.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Going Home

UNDER the young moon's slender shield
With the wind's cool lips on mine,
I went home from the Rabitty Field
As the clocks were striking nine.

The yews were dark in the level light,
The thorn-trees dropped with gold,
And a partridge called where the dew was white
In the grass on the edge of the fold.

O, had your hand been in my hand
As the long chalk-road I trod,
The green hills of the lovely land
Had seemed the hills of God.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

I Shall Not Go With Pain

I shall not go with pain
Whether you hold me, whether you forget
My little loss and my immortal gain.
O flower unseen, O fountain sealed apart!
Give me one look, one look remembering yet,
Sweet heart.

I shall not go with grief,
Whether you call me, whether you deny
The crowning vintage and the golden sheaf.
O, April hopes that blossom but to close!
Give me one look, one look and so good-bye,
Red rose.

I shall not go with sighs,
But as full-crowned the warrior leaves the fight,
Dawn on his shield and death upon his eyes.
O, life so bitter-sweet and heaven so far!
Give me one look, one look and so good night,
My star.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

In A Monastery Garden

OVER the long salt ridges
And the gold sea-poppies between,
They builded them wild-briar hedges,
A church and a cloistered green.
And when they were done with their praises,
And the tides on the Fore beat slow,
Under the white cliff-daisies
They laid them down in a row.

Porphyry, Paul, and Peter,
Jasper, and Joachim,—
Was the psaltery music sweeter
Than the throat of the thrush to him ?
Tired of their drones and their dirges,
Where the young cliff-rabbits play,
Wet with the salt of the surges,
They laid them down for a day.

One may not call to the other
There on the rim of the deep,
Only the youngest brother
Lies and smiles in his sleep.
When the wild swan's shadow passes,
When the ripe fruit falls to the sod,
When the faint moth flies in the grasses
He dreams in the hands of God.

Here for his hopes there follow
The violets one by one.
The dove is here and the swallow
And the young leaf seeking the sun.
And here when the last sail darkens
And the last lone path is trod,
Under the rose he harkens
And smiles in the eyes of God.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

In The Gardens Of Shushan

BE pitiful ! Her lips have touched this cool
Clear stream that sets the long green leaves astir.
The very doves that dream beside the pool
Sang their soft notes to her.

For her these doors that claim the amorous south,
Bound in red bronze and stayed with cedar-wood.
And here the bees sought honey from her mouth,
So like a flower she stood.

For her the globed pomegranates grew, and all
Sweet savoury fruits rose perfect from their flower.
Here has her soul known silence and the fall
Of each enchanted hour.

Under her feet all beauty was laid low,
In her deep eyes all beauty was made clear.
When the king called her through the evening glow,
'O Vashti, I am here !'

Still the sweet wells return to me her face,
Still her lost name on every wind is blown.
The shadows and the silence of this place
Are hers alone.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Inheritance

DESOLATE strange sleep and wild
Came on me while yet a child;
I, before I tasted tears,
Knew the grief of all the years.

I, before I fronted pain,
Felt creation writhe and strain,
Sending ancient terrors through,
My small pulses, sweet and new.

I, before I learned how time
Robs all summers at their prime,
I, few seasons gone from birth,
Felt my body change to earth.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Jasper's Song

WHO goes down through the slim green sallows,
Soon, so soon ?

Dawn is hard on the heels of the moon,
But never a lily the day-star knows
Is white, so white as the one who goes
Armed and shod, when the hyacinths darken.
Then hark, O harken !

And rouse the moths from the deep rose-mallows,
Call the wild hares down from the fallows,
Gather the silk of the young sea-poppies,
The bloom of the thistle, the bells of the foam;
Bind them all with a brown owl's feather,
Snare the winds in a golden tether,
Chase the clouds from the gipsy's weather, and follow, O follow, the white spring
home.

Who goes past with the wind that chilled us,
Late, so late ?

Fortune leans on the farmer's gate,
Watching the round sun low in the south,

With a plume in his cap and a rose at his mouth.

But O, for the folk who were free and merry
There's never so much as a red rose-berry.

But old earth's warm as the wine that filled us,
And the fox and the little gray mouse skull build us

Walls of the sweet green gloom of the cedar,

A roof of bracken, a curtain of whin;

One more rouse ere the bowl reposes

Low in the dust of our lost red roses,

One more song ere the cold night closes, and welcome, O welcome the dark
death in !

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Jennifer's Lad

SWEET Jennifer came calling me
Along the shining beach.
'There's green upon the hawthorn tree
There's bloom upon the peach.
O, April's found the upland larch,
The hazel in the hollow,'-
But louder was the snare-drum with it's 'March, march, march !'
And clearer called the bugle, 'Will you follow ?'

Young Jennifer came seeking me
With love upon her lips.
'O, all kind angels keep the sea
And fortune guard the ships.
The Autumn winds have rent the larch,
The south has won the swallow,'-
But clearer beat the snare-drum with it's 'March, march, march !'
And sweeter sang the bugle, 'Will you follow ?'

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Kwannon

[Kwannon, the Japanese goddess of mercy, is represented with many hands, typifying generosity and kindness. In one of these hands she is supposed to hold an axe, wherewith she severs the threads of human lives.]

I am the ancient one, the many-handed,
The merciful am I.
Here where the black pine bends above the sea
They bring their gifts to me --
Spoil of the foreshore where the corals lie,
Fishes of ivory, and amber stranded,
And carven beads
Green as the fretted fringes of the weeds.

Age after age, I watch the long sails pass.
Age after age, I see them come once more
Home, as the grey-winged pigeon to the grass,
The white crane to the shore.
Goddess am I of heaven and this small town
Above the beaches brown.
And here the children bring me cakes, and flowers,
And all the strange sea-creatures that they find,
For "She," they say, "the Merciful, is ours,
And she," they say, "is kind."

Camphor and wave-worn sandalwood for burning
They bring to me alone,
Shells that are veined like irises, and those
Curved like the clear bright petals of a rose.
Wherefore an hundredfold again returning
I render them their own --

Full-freighted nets that flash among the foam,
Laughter and love, and gentle eyes at home,
Cool of the night, and the soft air that swells
My silver temple bells.
Winds of the spring, the little flowers that shine
Where the young barley slopes to meet the pine,
Gold of the charlock, guerdon of the rain,

I give to them again.

Yet though the fishing boats return full-laden
Out of the broad blue east,
Under the brown roofs pain is their handmaiden,
And mourning is their feast.
Yea, though my many hands are raised to bless,
I am not strong to give them happiness.

Sorrow comes swiftly as the swallow flying,
O, little lives, that are so quickly done!
Peace is my raiment, mercy is my breath,
I am the gentle one.
When they are tired of sorrow and of sighing
I give them death.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Marching Men

Under the level winter sky
I saw a thousand Christs go by.
They sang an idle song and free
As they went up to calvary.

Careless of eye and coarse of lip,
They marched in holiest fellowship.
That heaven might heal the world, they gave
Their earth-born dreams to deck the grave.

With souls unpurged and steadfast breath
They supped the sacrament of death.
And for each one, far off, apart,
Seven swords have rent a woman's heart.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Mary Tired

Through the starred Judean night
She went, in travail of the Light,
With the earliest hush she saw
God beside her in the straw.

One poor taper glimmered clear,
Drowsing Joseph nodded near,
All the glooms were rosed with wings.
She that knew the Spirit's kiss
Wearied of the bright abyss.
She was tired of heavenly things.
There between the day and night
These she counted for delight:

Baby kids that butted hard
In the shadowy stable yard;
Silken doves that dipped and preened
Where the crumbling well-curb greened;
Sparrows in the vine, and small
Sapphired flies upon the wall,
So lovely they seemed musical.

In the roof a swift had built.
All the new-born airs were spilt
Out of cups the morning made
Of a glory and a shade.
These her solemn eyelids felt
While unseen the seraphs knelt.
Then a young mouse, sleek and bold,
Rustling in the winnowed gold,
To her shadow crept, and curled
Near the Ransom of the World.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Merlin's Isle

O, I went down to Merlin's Isle,
And when that I had found it,
I kneeled me down a little while
And praised the peace that bound it.
There were no seas around it,
But the full tide of turf in flood
To the rim of the berried hawthorn wood,
And a dew-pond where the dear stars stood
Too deep for me to sound it.

O, I went down to Merlin's Isle
And there I soon did learn-a,
The winds they did implore me,
How sweet two beech-brown eyes may smile
Among the maiden fern-a.
My poor heart took a turn-a.
In a warm wind the whitebeam foam
Ran quick along the silvering loam,
And I was young and far from home,
As you may well discern-a

O, I went home from Merlin's Isle,
My dear was there before me.
In the moonshine by the shepherd's stile
A kind of grief came o'er me.
The winds they did implore me,
'And come,' they said, but I said 'Nay,
For the honey star hath closed the day,
And love that borrowed my soul away,
Sweet love shall now restore me.'

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Miranda's Tomb

MIRANDA? She died soon, and sick for home.
And dark Ilario the Milanese
Carved her in garments 'scutcheoned to the knees,
Holding one orchard-spray as fresh as foam.
One heart broke, many grieved. Ilario said:
'The summer is gone after her. Who knows
If any season shall renew his rose?
But this rose lives till Beauty's self be dead.'
So wrought he, days and years, and half aware
Of a small, striving, sorrowing quick thing,
Wrapped in a furred sea-cloak, and deft to bring
Tools to his hand or light to the dull air.
Ghost, spirit, flame, he knew not,—could but tell
It had loved her, and its name was Ariel.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Mons Angelorum

MOSES, JOSHUA, THE THREE ANGELS OF THE UNIVERSE

Evening: a slope of Pisgah

Moses –Our span of life is lessening with the years,
Our little sun rolls swiftnier to its end
Among the eternal stars. It is a feather
Blown from a careless lip into the dark,
A fallen feather, the lily of a day,
Brimming with blood and tears instead of dew,
And dying with its sleep. Having known life,
Having known day, I pass into the night;
Having long spoken with God, I hold my peace;
Having long held the sword, I lay it down,
And the new watch believes me. Is all well ?

Joshua –O father of my soul, I cannot tell.
The burden of the Lord is heavy on me,
And I am broken beneath it.

Moses – Since I knew,
All my desires and cares have gone from me.
Rather I think on old forgotten things–
A song within the temple-court, to her,
Isis, the Lady of Love. How white she sat
Above the crowded gate ! I was a boy:
I ran and laid a lotus on her knees,
Dreaming she smiled in answer. Ah, those dreams
Far on the shining level of the sands,–
Thebes and old Tanis builded of a cloud !
The reeds beside the river, those sweet trees
Full of warm buds that ripen and uncloset
At eve; the barges passing on the Nile
Like golden water-fowl with ivory wings;
The gardens and the great pomegranate flowers,
And she, my gentle mother in Mizraim,
Calling me, 'Mesu, Mesu.'

Joshua – I cannot think.

My sorrow stays me and my grief prevents.
Yet there are heathen foes and wars to come.
I take thy sword. I cannot take thy soul,
Master of Law, unshaken friend of God,
But I can fight for Israel.

Moses – Fight, and stand
Firmly for God. Jehovah is salvation.
And now, beloved son in all but blood,
Go, get you down again.

Joshua – A little longer,
Leave me a little longer with you, lord !

Moses –No longer, for the gates of life are lonely.
Out of the dark man cometh to his life,
Into the dark he goeth.
Down, look down,
Down to the clustered tents, each with its lives
Of foolish children, vexed with many fears,
Agonies, hopes, beliefs inherited,
Dark hates, fond dreams, divine humilities.
Shall they go leaderless from stream to stream,
Following the far-flung visions of despair,
These that have been my sheep ?

Joshua – I cannot, father..
I am a man of war and not of wisdom.
They will not know my voice nor follow me.

Moses –Man, is it thy faint voice shall be uplifted,
To soothe the fearful and uphold the strong.
To lead the unshaken tribes to victory
Against the men of Amalek and Ai,
Lords of the plain and coast ? Is it thy strength ?
Nay, but Jehovah's in thee. As the cloud
Filling the empty valley of the hills,
As the white flood along the water courses
That once were barren, so His strength will pass
Into the pits and runnels of thy soul.
Fight, for the Lord is with thee. Stand thou firm.

Joshua –Lo, I would rather stay and die with thee
Than pass with shining banners and with song
Of silver shawms and trumpets, in thy place
Over the river Jordan.

Moses – Nay, I pass
Over a deeper river, with no songs,
No mighty trumpetings, no pride of banners.
Toil have I borne but triumph is not mine.
Once, once mine eyes shall see the Promised Land,
Her forts and towers, cities and pleasant fields,
Her palms and cedars, vines and olive trees,
And then be darkened. Here's my heritage,
Here by these mighty chasms, these Godward peaks,
My last resort, my lone abiding place.
See, the night comes. How is it with thee, son?

Joshua –A cloud has drawn between us and the plain,
A darkness moves between us and the sky,
Full of vague voices, mighty whisperings,
Wings, and the sound of them.

O, never man
Has breathed such chilling air as this which blows
Out of the dark. O, never man has heard
Such sounds as these which beat upon my soul,
Known, yet unknown; familiar, yet most dread !
Lord, must I go ?

Moses – This is the wind of death,
And this the cold that lies without the world,
And these the sounds that thrill the untrodden void
Beyond the lonelier stars. Go down, go down
To darkened Israel mourning in his tents.
I can no longer see thee. Stand thou firm.

(Joshua goes; the cloud surrounds Moses.)

O ye celestial presences, great shapes
With terrible fair faces, towering wings,–
Wings with the wine-deep glow of amethyst,
Sheath over sheath like folded waterbuds
Lit with an inward flame; wings pale as foam,

Faint plumes showered with silver; wings serene
Uplifted in a radiant arc of dawn,–
Unchain the prisoned pinions of this soul,
Say to the blind bird, Fly. Bid life recede,
A bubble before the advancing wave of death.
From my youth upward I have spoken of death,
Nor knew the word so sweet. There's music in it,
Music to break the heart. O, heavenly guards,
Looking so long in your immortal eyes
I am grown old. Death calls me as a sleep,
A rest desired, a rich forgetfulness,
After too much of life.

Angel of Darkness – Life is no more.
A little flame soon swallowed in the night,
A harp that hath no voice, a bow unstrung.
Pride of the grass and power of the reed,
Life is as swift in breaking. Peace be on thee;
Mine are the wings of peace. Men call me death,
But so God hath not named me.

Angel of Light – Life is past,
Thy ground is taken, thy tent is pitched forever.
Drink of these wells and be forsworn of sorrow,
Forsaken of weeping. Men have called me death,
Yet am I less and greater.

Angel of Dreams – Peace be on thee.
Peace and good rest. Mine are the wings of silence
Folded in silver sleep before my face;
This in my hand is golden fruit of Eden,
Whose scent is sleep; its flame-white flower grew
Along the glades where Adam walked with God.
Death have men called me, yet I am not death
Take thy last look on life.

Moses – O, Land of Promise.
From the great plains of Moab to the sea,–
Thy blossoming orchards, streams, and palaces
Like golden beads threaded on silver strings,
Thy towering walls and pinnacles of pride,–
A fruitful field it is, ripe for the harvest,

The harvest of the sword.
I shall not reap it,
The winepress of His wrath I shall not tread.
Plighted am I to silence; I go down,
Dead, to the dead, and am no more remembered
Upon the lips of men.
Those sceptred kings,
The solemn dead of old Mizraim, who sit
Forever in the sun beside their tombs,
With blank eyes smiling on eternity,
Crowned with the reed and lotus, do they live
More than their grass and lilies? Those I knew,
Princes and scribes, lords of the desert, priests
Learned above the wit of common minds,
Captains and merchants, rulers over gold,
Feathers and spices, emeralds, ivories,
Brought to the feet of Pharaoh: what of them ?
What of the King, Lord of the North and South,
Son of the Sun, like to the Sun forever?
A sun? A darkened light, a star o'erwhelmed,
When his fierce horsemen sank beneath that surge
Whose crest was blood and terror,—when there died
On one hushed night, all the firstborn of Egypt.

O night divine, I set thine excellence
Above the twice-crowned noon. Here is no star,
No slenderest crescent poised above the world,
No lingering love of day. But the soft dark
Folds inward as a flower, enfolding me,
My length of little days, wisdom and grief,
Light as a drop of rain.

Angel of Dreams – Tender is night,
But tenderer far the limits of this death,
This dream-encompassed city. Here no sound
Shall wake thee, from thy sleep no storm disturb,
Though here all storms are born. Tempest and cloud,
Thunder and hail, the mightiest airs of God,
The hosts of night, the hot triumphant dawn,
Seasons, and times, and days, unknown shall march
O'er thy surrendered head.

Moses – O loneliest rest !
On my lost grave only the winds shall mourn,
The white rain do me service, the sad stars
Age after age with endless circling eyes
View this last desolation. In thy hands,
Into thy hands, O death. Break the worn thread
That binds the rifted pattern of the loom.
O King of kings, forsake not now Thy servant.

Angel of Darkness – Lo, the black crags leap to the vaulted cloud,
Towering without a sound. The dark takes substance
In domes and depths of mightiest design
And seals him from the world. Pillared like Thebes,
Straight as the tall palm-orchard lift the walls
Of this vast grave. Life has no meaning here,
Light has no name nor place. O human heart,
Fain for the little shows of grief, for tears
And kindlier sepulchre, no king shall sleep
So royally housed as thou.

Moses – Draw near, draw near.
The string is all but parted. Shape thy wings
Into a roof of silver silences,
A dome of deep repose. O murmuring flood,
O tide of death lifting the weed of life,
O passive arbiter, indifferent power
In whose still hand the kingdoms of the world
Lie like a beggar's coin, beneath whose heel
Nations are drifted dust, accept thou me.
The bubble of life is broken.

Angel of Light – Life begins
Cover his face, kind Darkness, with thy wings
Smooth as the wild swan's breast. Let no wind wake
An echo in this holy solitude.
Let the enduring seasons with soft tread
Circle these sacred hills; no falling star
Shiver the fine perfection of repose.
God hath his life. Guard Thou his mighty dust.

Angel of Darkness – I am the firstborn angel. Ere this world
Was shapen, I endured within the void

Waiting the word of God. Beyond this world
I shall endure, when the young stars are driven
Outworn in dust along the roads of space,
Blown by the breath of chaos. When this plan,
This present firmament, vision and light,
Princes of heaven, dominions, powers, are past,
I shall remain about the eternal throne
Veiling the thoughts of God. Leave him with me,
Ye younger spirits; such silence is too old
For your bright souls to bear. Leave me my dead.

(The angels of Light and Dreams take flight.
The angel of Darkness covers Moses with his wings.)

The dead are mine. Swift they come down to me.
The little life they suffer, their frail dream
Is past. Here is no memory, here no hope,
No reason, no despair nor happiness.
Only the dust and I. It is His will.

Voices of Israel –Who now shall stand between us and our God ?

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

My Father He Was A Fisherman

MY father he was a fisherman,
That wrought at the break o' day,
And hither and thither the long tides ran
I' the long blue bay.

'The tides go up and the tides go down,
But what do you know of the sea ?'
Her voice, i' the long gray streets o' the town,
Is singing to me.

'What do you know of the sails at dawn,
What of the shell-white foam ?'
Cheerly and sweet, from a world withdrawn,
They are calling me home.

'What is the grief you fain would tell
When your eyes are turned on me ?'
O, well it was taught and I learned it well,–
The grief o' the sea.

'Where do you travel and where do you sleep,
Where shall you take your rest ?'
At the inn that shelters my father, deep
I' the seas o' the west.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

O Silver Rose

THE dark hour turns so slowly and so sweet,
The last still hour soft-fallen from the stars.
To-morrow I may kneel and touch thy feet,
O Rose of all Shiraz.

Lay wide thine amorous lattice to the south,
O Silver Rose, when roses breathe thy name,
And thou at dawn shalt feel upon thy mouth
The kiss I dared not claim.

Discrowned, dishonoured, reft of pride and power,
From the red battle where they hailed me lord,
O Silver Rose, O sweet Pomegranate Flower,
I turn me to their sword.

Life hath so held me to an empty part,
Life hath so snared me, bound and made me blind.
To-morrow I may rest upon thy heart,
For death shall prove more kind.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

On Lac Sainte Ireneé

ON Lac Sainte Ireneé the morn
Lay rimmed with pine and roped with mist.
The old moon hid her silver horn
In shadow that the sun had kissed.
One went by like a wandering soul,
And followed ever,
By reed and river,
The silent canoe of the lake patrol.

On Lac Sainte Ireneé the noon
Lay wolf-like waiting by her hills.
No voice was heard but the sad loon
And the wild-throated whip-poor-wills.
But one went by on the bitter flaw,
And followed ever,
By rapid and river,
The swift canoe of the white man's law.

On Lac Sainte Ireneé the moose
Broke from his balsams, breathing hot.
The bittern and the great wild goose
Pled south before the sudden shot.
One fled with them like a hunted soul,
And followed ever,
By ford and river,
The little canoe of the lake patrol.

On Lac Sainte Ireneé the blue
Vast arch of night was starred and deep.
No footsteps scared the caribou
Nor waked the wolverine from his sleep.
Loosed indeed was the hunted soul,
And homeward ever,
By rapid and river,
Slipped the canoe of the lake patrol.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Père Lalemant

I LIFT the Lord on high,
Under the murmuring hemlock boughs, and see
The small birds of the forest lingering by
And making melody.
These are mine acolytes and these my choir,
And this mine altar in the cool green shade,
Where the wild soft-eyed does draw nigh
Wondering, as in the byre
Of Bethlehem the oxen heard Thy cry
And saw Thee, unafraid.

My boatmen sit apart,
Wolf-eyed, wolf-sinewed, stiller than the trees.
Help me, O Lord, for very slow of heart
And hard of faith are these.
Cruel are they, yet Thy children. Foul are they,
Yet wert Thou born to save them utterly.
Then make me as I pray,
Just to their hates, kind to their sorrows, wise
After their speech, and strong before their free
Indomitable eyes.

Do the French lilies reign
O'er Mont Royal and Stadacona still ?
Up the St. Lawrence comes the spring again,
Crowning each southward hill
And blossoming pool with beauty, while I roam
Far from the perilous folds that are my home,
There where we built St. Ignace for our needs,
Shaped the rough roof tree, turned the first sweet sod,
St. Ignace and St. Louis, little beads
On the rosary of God.

Pines shall Thy pillars be,
Fairer than those Sidonian cedars brought
By Hiram out of Tyre, and each birch-tree
Shines like a holy thought.
But come no worshippers; shall I confess,
St. Francis-like, the birds of the wilderness?

O, with Thy love my lonely head uphold.
A wandering shepherd I, who hath no sheep;
A wandering soul, who hath no scrip, nor gold,
Nor anywhere to sleep.

My hour of rest is done;
On the smooth ripple lifts the long canoe;
The hemlocks murmur sadly as the sun
Slants his dim arrows through.
Whither I go I know not, nor the way,
Dark with strange passions, vexed with heathen charms,
Holding I know not what of life or death;
Only be Thou beside me day by day,
Thy rod my guide and comfort, underneath
Thy everlasting arms.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Pieter Marinus

LORD, I have known all fruits of this thy world;
Like Solomon king, I have been fain of all,—
War, women, and wine,—but mine was spirit of Nantes.
And now, O Lord, I'm old and fain for Thee.
But, Lord, my soul's so grimed and weather-worn,
So warped and wrung with all iniquities,
Piracies, brawls, and cheated revenues,
There's not a saint but would look twice at it.

So, when my time comes, send no angels down
With lutes, and harps, and foreign instruments,
To pipe old Pieter's spirit up to heaven
Past his tall namesake sturdy at his post.

But let me lie awhile in these Thy seas.
Let the soft Gulf Stream and the long South Drift,
And the swift tides that rim the Labrador,
Beat on my soul and wash it clean again.

And when Thy waves have smoothed me of my sins,
White as the sea-mew or the wind-spun foam,
Clean as the clear-cut images of stars
That swing between the swells,—then, then, O Lord,
Lean out, lean out from heaven and call me thus,
'Come up, thou soul of Pieter Marinus,'
And I'll go home.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Quiet

COME not the earliest petal here, but only
Wind, cloud, and star,
Lovely and far,
Make it less lonely.

Few are the feet that seek her here, but sleeping
Thoughts sweet as flowers
Linger for hours,
Things winged, yet weeping.

Here in the immortal empire of the grasses,
Time, like one wrong
Note in a song,
With their bloom, passes.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Riding

IF I should live again,
O God, let me be young,
Quick of sinew and vein
With the honeycomb on my tongue,
All in a moment flung
With the dawn on a flowing plain,
Riding, riding, riding, riding
Between the sun and the rain.

If I, having been, must be,
O God, let it be so,
Swift and supple and free
With a long journey to go,
And the clink of the curb and the blow
Of hooves, and the wind at my knee,
Riding, riding, riding, riding
Between the hills and the sea.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Serenade

DARK is the iris meadow,
Dark is the ivory tower,
And lightly the young moth's shadow
Sleeps on the passion-flower.

Gone are our day's red roses.
So lovely and lost and few,
But the first star uncloses
A silver bud in the blue.

Night, and a flame in the embers
Where the seal of the years was set,—
When the almond-bough remembers
How shall my heart forget ?

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Sheep

LIKE the slow thunder of long seas on the height
Where God has set no sea,
Voices of folded sheep in the quiet of night
Came on the wind to me.

Like the low murmur of full tide on a beach
Where tide shall never roll,
They sent their mournful, inarticulate speech
Heavily on my soul.

Past is my sorrow, the night past, and the morn
Bright on her golden sills.
Only the hill-fold voices drowsily scorn
The comfort of the hills.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Singing Children

IN the streets of Bethlehem sang the children
So merry and so shrill,
'He shall have sweet cedars in his garden
And a house on Hermon Hill.
He shall have the king's daughter for his fellow,
A king's crown to bind upon his head.'
And with bracken buds and straw, brown and yellow,
Mary made His bed.

In the streets of Nazareth sang the children
So clearly and so sweet,
'He shall lead us to the spoiling of the nations,
He shall bruise them with his feet.
His standards shall outface the stars for number,
Red as field-lilies when the rains are done.'
And Mary heard them singing in her slumber.
And woke to kiss her Son.

In the streets of Jerusalem the children
Sang, passing to their play,
'The king's daughter waits in her apparel
All glorious as day.
We charge you, O ye watchmen, of your pity
Reveal us our beloved, call his name.'
And the shadow of a cross beyond the city
Fell softly o'er their game.

In the ways of all the world sing the children,
'We know Him, we have named Him, He is ours,
Like leaves we have fluttered to His shadow,
He has gathered us as flowers.
And when the bud falls all too soon for blossom
And when the play has wearied of its charm,
He bears the tired lambs within His bosom
And the young lambs in His arm.'

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Sleep

HERE is a house, so great, so wide
It will take in the whole world's pride.
Yet, when I looked, it seemed I saw
Only a vast room strewn with straw
That was threshed of moony gleams
And dew of branches and star beams.
Here cheek by cheek the drowsed souls lay
Still as leverets in the hay.
Merry it was to see in Sleep
How each soul had found his brother;
Here a king and there a sweep
Lay hand-fast and kissed each other,
There a queen that had been sad
Mothered in Sleep a shepherd lad,
And lovers saw the loved one's face
Star-like in a lonely place.
But the Lamp that gave them light
Was lovelier than the dreams of night.
Angels watched lest any steal it,–
Christ's own heart, laid here to heal it.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Song

I shall not go with pain
Whether you hold me, whether you forget
My little loss and my immortal gain.
O flower unseen, O fountain sealed apart!
Give me one look, one look remembering yet,
Sweet heart.

I shall not go with grief,
Whether you call me, whether you deny
The crowning vintage and the golden sheaf.
O, April hopes that blossom but to close!
Give me one look, one look and so good-bye,
Red rose.

I shall not go with sighs,
But as full-crowned the warrior leaves the fight,
Dawn on his shield and death upon his eyes.
O, life so bitter-sweet and heaven so far!
Give me one look, one look and so good night,
My star.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

St. Yve's Poor

JEFFIK was there, and Matthieu, and brown Bran,
Warped in old wars and babbling of the sword,
And Jannedik, a white rose pinched and paled
With the world's frosts, and many more beside,
Lamed, rheumed and palsied, aged, impotent
Of all but hunger and blind lifted hands.
I set the doors wide at the given hour,
Took the great baskets piled with bread, the fish
Yet silvered of the sea, the curds of milk,
And called them, Brethren, brake, and blest, and gave.

For O, my Lord, the house dove knows her nest
Above my window builded from the rain;
In the brown mere the heron finds her rest,
But these shall seek in vain.
And O, my Lord, the thrush may fold her wing,
The curlew seek the long lift of the seas,
The wild swan sleep amid his journeying,—
There is no rest for these.

Thy dead are sheltered; housed and warmed they wait
Under the golden fern, the falling foam;
But these, Thy living, wander desolate
And have not any home.

I called them, Brethren, brake, and blest, and gave.
Old Jeffik had her withered hand to show,
Young Jannedik had dreamed of death, and Bran
Would tell me wonders wrought on fields of war,
When Michael and his warriors rode the storm,
And all the heavens were thrilled with clanging spears,—
Ah, God, my poor, my poor.—Till there came one
Wrapped in foul rags, who caught me by the robe,
And pleaded, 'Bread, my father.'

In his hand
I laid the last loaf of the daily dole,
Saw on the palm a red wound like a star,
And bade him, 'Let me bind it.'

'These my wounds,'
He answered softly, 'daily dost thou bind.'
And I, 'My son, I have not seen thy face.
But thy bruised feet have trodden on my heart.
I will get water for thee.'
'These my hurts,'
Again he answered, 'daily dost thou wash.'
And I once more, 'My son, I know thee not,
But the bleak wind blows bitter from the sea,
And even the gorse is perished. Rest thou here.'
And he again, 'My rest is in thy heart.
I take from thee as I have given to thee.
Dost thou not know Me, Breton ?'
I,—'My Lord!'—

A scent of lilies on the cold sea-wind,
A thin, white blaze of wings, a face of flame
Over the gateway, and the vision passed,
And there were only Matthieu and brown Bran,
And the young girl, the foam-white Jannedik,
Wondering to see their father rapt from them,
And Jeffik weeping o'er her withered hand.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Stars

Now in the West the slender moon lies low,
And now Orion glimmers through the trees,
Clearing the earth with even pace and slow,
And now the stately-moving Pleiades,
In that soft infinite darkness overhead
Hang jewel-wise upon a silver thread.

And all the lonelier stars that have their place,
Calm lamps within the distant southern sky,
And planet-dust upon the edge of space,
Look down upon the fretful world, and I
Look up to outer vastness unafraid
And see the stars which sang when earth was made.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Swallows

O LITTLE hearts, beat home, beat home,
Here is no place to rest.
Night darkens on the falling foam
And on the fading west.
O little wings, beat home, beat home.
Love may no longer roam.

O, Love has touched the fields of wheat
And Love has crowned the corn,
And we must follow Love's white feet
Through all the ways of morn.
Through all the silver roads of air
We pass and have no care.

The silver roads of Love are wide,
O winds that turn, O stars that guide.
Sweet are the ways that Love has trod
Through the clear skies that reach to God.
But in the cliff-grass Love builds deep
A place where wandering wings may sleep.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Bridegroom Of Cana

'There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. . . . And both Jesus was called, and His disciples, to the marriage.'

VEIL thine eyes, O belovéd, my spouse,
Turn them away,
Lest in their light my life withdrawn
Dies as a star, as a star in the day,
As a dream in the dawn.

Slenderly hang the olive leaves
Sighing apart;
The rose and silver doves in the eaves
With a murmur of music bind our house.
Honey and wine in thy words are stored,
Thy lips are bright as the edge of a sword
That hath found my heart,
That hath found my heart.

Sweet, I have waked from a dream of thee,—
And of Him.
He who came when the songs were done.
From the net of thy smiles my heart went free
And the golden lure of thy love grew dim.
I turned to them asking, 'Who is He,
Royal and sad, who comes to the feast
And sits Him down in the place of the least?'
And they said, 'He is Jesus, the carpenter's son.'

Hear how my harp on a single string
Murmurs of love.
Down in the fields the thrushes sing
And the lark is lost in the light above,
Lost in the infinite, glowing whole,
As I in thy soul,
As I in thy soul.

Love, I am fain for thy glowing grace
As the pool for the star, as the rain for the rill.

Turn to me, trust to me, mirror me
As the star in the pool, as the cloud in the sea.
Love, I looked awhile in His face
And was still.

The shaft of the dawn strikes clear and sharp;
Hush, my harp.
Hush my harp, for the day is begun,
And the lifting, shimmering flight of the swallow
Breaks in a curve on the brink of morn,
Over the sycamores, over the corn,
Cling to me, cleave to me, prison me
As the mote in the flame, as the shell in the sea,
For the winds of the dawn say, 'Follow, follow
Jesus Bar-Joseph, the carpenter's son.'

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Chosen

CALLED to a way too high for me, I lean
Out from my narrow window o'er the street,
and know the fields I cannot see are green,
And guess the songs I cannot hear are sweet.

Break up the vision round me, Lord, and thrust
Me from Thy side, unhoused without the bars,
For all my heart is hungry for the dust
And all my soul is weary of the stars.

I would seek out a little roof instead,
A little lamp to make my darkness brave.
'For though she heal a multitude,' Love said,
'Herself she cannot save.'

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Coloured Hours

GRAY hours have cities,
Green hours have rhymes
Of hearts grown loving
In old summertimes,
But the white hours have only
A cloud in the sky
And a star, bright and lonely,
To remember them by.

Gold hours have laughter,
Red hours have song
Drawn from lost fountains
Of beauty and wrong.
But the white hours, -O, tender
As rose-flakes they lie,
With youth's fallen splendour
To remember them by.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Fortune Seeker

HOLLYHOCKS slant in the wind,
Gallantly blowing,
Crinkled and purpled and lined,
Thank God for their growing.
Their burden is only of bees,
Banded and brown,
But she, O, she's
The worth of my world on her head for a crown.
How can she step it so freely, so lightly,
Her head like a star on a stem showing whitely,
How can she carry her
Wealth with that innocent air?
I'm going to marry her, marry her, marry her,
Just for the wealth of her hair.

Larkspurs as deep as a pool,
Lilies like ladies,
Silvered and silked where the cool
Elder tree shade is,
These are the queens of the sun,
Splendid and sweet,
But she, my one
Flower's without price from her head to her feet.
How can she go by the lanes and the ditches,
Her little proud head unbowed by its riches?
How can she carry her
Fortune so light in the air?
I'm going to marry her, marry her, marry her,
Just for the gold of her hair.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Gardener's Boy

ALL day I have fed on lilled thoughts of her,'
The gardener's boy sang in Gethsemane.
'She is quick, her garments make a lovely stir,
Like the wind going in an almond tree.
She is young, she hath doves' eyes, and like the vine
Her hands enclose me,–hers as she is mine.

'She shall feed among the lilies where I am,
Learning their silver names. When evening grows,
One bower shall hold me and my love, my lamb.
Which shall I clasp,' he sang, 'her or the rose?'
When the palm shadow barred the juniper
He lay at last to sleep and dream of her.

He saw not those who came when night was deep
Up from the city, walking hastily.
One seemed a strong man wan for fear and sleep.
One bore a lantern. One moved stumblingly.
The gardener's boy dreamed on the sunburned sod,
Smiling beside the agony of God.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Green Month

WHAT of all the colours shall I bring you for your fairing,
Fit to lay your fingers on, fine enough for you ?-
Yellow for the ripened rye, white for ladies' wearing,
Red for briar-roses, or the skies' own blue ?

Nay, for spring has touched the elm, spring has found the willow,
Winds that call the swallow home sway the boughs apart;
Green shall all my curtains be, green shall be my pillow,
Green I'll wear within my hair, and green upon my heart.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Hearer

'SING of the things we know and love.'
But the singer made reply,
'There are greater lands to tell you of
And stars to steer you by.'

So he sang of worlds austere and strange,
Of seas so wildly wide
That only the journeying swan might range
The marches of the tide.

Men heard the thunder and the rain,
The tempest in his song,
They turned to their hearth fires again
And thought the night too long.

And only one man dared to hear
The deeds that singer told;
Against the stars he swung his spear
And died ere he was old.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Hillman's Lass

OVER the field where the grass is cool,
(Follow the road who must !)
With a song for the beech and the brown pool,
And the noiseless tread in the dust,
With a laugh for the lazy hours that go,
And the folk who pass us by.
(The trees they grow so broad, so low,
They shut me from the sky.)

Here be strawberries wild and sweet,
(Follow the road who may !)
And here's a rest for a bairn's feet
And a kiss at the close o' day.
And here's a cloud from the shining sea
Like a white moth in the night.
(On the edge o' the barley field, may be
The stars would show more bright.)

Cut me a flute where the reeds are brown.
(Follow the road who will !)
O, I'll dress you fair in a green gown
And a cloak that is finer still.
Your sleeves shall be o' the fairies' lawn,
Your shoon as red as the rose.
(Do you think that the wind which wakes at dawn
Will bring us a breath o' the snows ?)

O, the world's wide, and the world is long.
(Follow the road who may !)
And here's a lilt of the wild song
The Romany pipers play.
And 'Mine,' it sings, 'is the moon's shield,
And the cloak o' the cloud is mine.'
(Do you think that the lowland clover field
Is sweet as the upland pine ?)

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The House's Setting

HERE is no hedge of yewe to hold in grieffe,
No cypresse nor long willow for despaire.
But the young birch displayes his cheerfulle leaf
In tracerie most faire.

Where the sunne falls at morn stand poplars seven
Where freely I of all sweete joyes may borrowe,
An elm that lifts his prayerfulle arms to Heaven,
And three tall pines for sorrowe.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Immortal

BEAUTY is still immortal in our eyes;
When sways no more the spirit-haunted reed,
When the wild grape shall build
No more her canopies,
When blows no more the moon-gray thistle seed,
When the last bell has lulled the white flocks home,
When the last eve has stilled
The wandering wing and touched the dying foam,
When the last moon burns low, and, spark by spark,
The little worlds die out along the dark,-

Beauty that rosed the moth-wing, touched the land
With clover-horns and delicate faint flowers,
Beauty that bade the showers
Beat on the violet's face,
Shall hold the eternal heavens within their place
And hear new stars come singing from God's hand.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Lamp Of Poor Souls

[In many English churches before the Reformation there was kept a little lamp continually burning, called the Lamp of Poor Souls. People were reminded thereby to pray for the souls of those dead whose kinsfolk were too poor to pay for prayers and masses.]

Above my head the shields are stained with rust,
The wind has taken his spoil, the moth his part;
Dust of dead men beneath my knees, and dust,
Lord, in my heart.

Lay Thou the hand of faith upon my fears;
The priest has prayed, the silver bell has rung,
But not for him. O unforgotten tears,
He was so young!

Shine, little lamp, nor let thy light grow dim.
Into what vast, dread dreams, what lonely lands,
Into what griefs hath death delivered him,
Far from my hands?

Cradled is he, with half his prayers forgot.
I cannot learn the level way he goes.
He whom the harvest hath remembered not
Sleeps with the rose.

Shine, little lamp, fed with sweet oil of prayers.
Shine, little lamp, as God's own eyes may shine,
When He treads softly down His starry stairs
And whispers, "Thou art Mine."

Shine, little lamp, for love hath fed thy gleam.
Sleep, little soul, by God's own hands set free.
Cling to His arms and sleep, and sleeping, dream,
And dreaming, look for me.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Little Fauns To Proserpine

BROWNER than the hazel-husk, swifter than the wind,
Though you turn from heath and hill, we are hard behind,
Singing, 'Ere the sorrows rise, ere the gates unclose
Bind above your wistful eyes the memory of a rose.'

Dark Iacchus pipes the kine shivering from the whin,
Wraps him in a she-goat's fell above the panther skin.
Now we husk the corn for bread, turn the mill for hire,
Hoof by hoof and head by head about the herdsman's fire.

Ai, Adonis, where he gleams, slender and at rest,
One has built a roof of dreams where the white doves nest.
Ere they bring the wine-dark bowl, ere the gates unbar,
Take, O take within your soul the shadow of a star.

Now the vintage feast is done, now the melons glow
Gold along the raftered thatch beneath a thread of snow.
Dian's bugle bids the dawn sweep the upland clear,
Where we snared the silken fawn, where we ran the deer.

Through the dark reeds wet with rain, past the singing foam
Went the light-foot Mysian maids, calling Hylas home.
Syrinx felt the silver spell fold her at her need.
Hear, ere yet you say farewell, the wind along the reed.

Golden as the earliest leaf loosened from the spray,
Grave Alcestis drank of grief for her lord's delay.
Ere you choose the bitter part, learn the changeless wrong,
Bind above your breaking heart the echo of a song.

Now the chestnut burrs are down; aspen-shaws are pale;
Now across the plunging reef reels the last red sail.
Ere the wild, black horses cry, ere the night has birth,
Take, ere yet you say good-bye, the love of all the earth.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Little Sister Of The Prophet

'If there arise among you a prophet or dreamer. . .'

I HAVE left a basket of dates

In the cool dark room that is under the vine,

Some curds set out in two little crimson plates

And a flask of the amber wine,

And cakes most cunningly beaten

Of savoury herbs, and spice, and the delicate wheaten

Flour that is best,

And all to lighten his spirit and sweeten his rest.

This morning he cried, 'Awake,

And see what the wonderful grace of the Lord hath revealed!'

And we ran for his sake,

But 'twas only the dawn outspread o'er our father's field,

And the house of the potter white in the valley below.

But his hands were upraised to the east and he cried to us, 'So

Ye may ponder and read

The strength and the beauty of God outrolled in a fiery screed !'

Then the little brown mother smiled,

As one does on the words of a well-loved child,

And, 'Son,' she replied, 'have the oxen been watered and fed ?

For work is to do, though the skies be never so red,

And already the first sweet hours of the day are spent.'

And he sighed, and went.

Will he come from the byre

With his head all misty with dreams, and his eyes on fire,

Shaking us all with the weight of the words of his passion ?

I will give him raisins instead of dates,

And wreath the young leaves on the little red plates.

I will put on my new head-tyre,

And braid my hair in a comelier fashion.

Will he note ? Will he mind ?

Will he touch my cheek as he used to, and laugh and be kind ?

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Lovers Of Marchaid

Dominic came riding down, sworded, straight and splendid,
Drove his hilt against her door, flung a golden chain.
Said: 'I'll teach your lips a song sweet as his that's ended,
Ere the white rose call the bee, the almond flower again.'

But he only saw her head bent within the gloom
Over heaps of bridal thread bright as apple-bloom,
Silver silk like rain that spread across the driving loom.

Dreaming Fanch, the cobbler's son, took his tools and laces,
Wrought her shoes of scarlet dye, shoes as pale as snow;
'They shall lead her wildrose feet all the fairy paces
Danced along the road of love, the road such feet should go' -

But he only saw her eyes turning from his gift
Out towards the silver skies where the white clouds drift,
Where the wild gerfalcon flies, where the last sails lift.

Bran has built his homestead high where the hills may shield her,
Where the young bird waits the spring, where the dawns are fair,
Said: 'I'll name my trees for her, since I may not yield her
Stars of morning for her feet, of evening for her hair.'

But he did not see them ride, seven dim sail and more,
All along the harbor-side, white from shore to shore,
Nor heard the voices of the tide crying at her door.

Jean-Marie has touched his pipe down beside the river
When the young fox bends the fern, when the folds are still,
Said: 'I send her all the gifts that my love may give her, -
Golden notes like golden birds to seek her at my will.'

But he only found the waves, heard the sea-gull's cry,
In and out the ocean caves, underneath the sky,
All above the wind-washed graves where dead seamen lie.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Pool

COME with me, follow me, swift as a moth,
Ere the wood-doves waken.
Lift the long leaves and look down, look down
Where the light is shaken,
Amber and brown,
On the woven ivory roots of the reed,
On a floating flower and a weft of weed
And a feather of froth.

Here in the night all wonders are,
Lapped in the lift of the ripple's swing,—
A silver shell and a shaken star,
And a white moth's wing.
Here the young moon when the mists unclose
Swims like the bud of a golden rose.

I would live like an elf where the wild grapes cling,
I would chase the thrush
From the red rose-berries.
All the day long I would laugh and swing
With the black choke-cherries.

I would shake the bees from the milkweed blooms,
And cool, O cool,
Night after night I would leap in the pool,
And sleep with the fish in the roots of the rush.
Clear, O clear my dreams should be made
Of emerald light and amber shade,
Of silver shallows and golden glooms.
Sweet, O sweet my dreams should be
As the dark, sweet water enfolding me
Safe as a blind shell under the sea.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Sailor's Grave At Clo-Oose, V.I.

Out of the winds' and the waves' riot,
Out of the loud foam,
He has put in to a great quiet
And a still home.

Here he may lie at ease and wonder
Why the old ship waits,
And hark for the surge and the strong thunder
Of the full Straits,

And look for the fishing fleet at morning,
Shadows like lost souls,
Slide through the fog where the seal's warning
Betrays the shoals,

And watch for the deep-sea liner climbing
Out of the bright West,
With a salmon-sky and her wake shining
Like a tern's breast, --

And never know he is done for ever
With the old sea's pride,
Borne from the fight and the full endeavour
On an ebb tide.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Sea Witch

ENDLESSLY fell her chestnut flowers,
Faint snow throughout the honeyed dark;
The myrtle spread his boughs to drink
Deep draughts of salt from the sea's brink,
And like a moon-dial swung her tower's
Straight shadow o'er her warded park.

From her calm coasts the galleons fled,
The fisher steered him further west,
No port was hailed, no keel came home
Across that pale, enchanted foam,
But by her roof the thrushes fed
And wandering swallows found their rest.

The shadows touched her tenderly,
The red beam lingered on her dress;
The white gull and the osprey knew
Her tower across the leagues of blue.
The wild swan when he sought the sea
Was laggard through her loveliness.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Shepherd Boy

WHEN the red moon hangs over the fold,
And the cypress shadow is rimmed with gold,
O little sheep, I have laid me low,
My face against the old earth's face,
Where one by one the white moths go,
And the brown bee has his sleeping place.
And then I have whispered, Mother, hear,
For the owls are awake and the night is near,
And whether I lay me near or far
No lip shall kiss me,
No eye shall miss me,
Saving the eye of a cold white star.

And the old brown woman answers mild,
Rest you safe on my heart, O child.
Many a shepherd, many a king,
I fold them safe from their sorrowing.
Gwenever's heart is bound with dust,
Tristram dreams of the dappled doe,
But the bugle moulders, the blade is rust;
Stilled are the trumpets of Jericho,
And the tired men sleep by the walls of Troy.

Little and lonely,
Knowing me only,
Shall I not comfort you, shepherd-boy?

When the wind wakes in the apple-tree,
And the shy hare feeds on the wild fern stem,
I say my prayers to the Trinity,-
The prayers that are three and the charms that are seven
To the angels guarding the towers of heaven,-
And I lay my head on her raiment's hem,
Where the young grass darkens the strawberry star,
Where the iris buds and the bellworts are.
All night I hear her breath go by
Under the arch of the empty sky.
All night her heart beats under my head,
And I lie as still as the ancient dead,

Warm as the young lambs there with the sheep.
I and no other
Close to my Mother,
Fold my hands in her hands, and sleep.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Tree

IN the dim woods, one tree
Was by the cunning seasons builded fair
With the rain's masonry
And delicate craft of air.

Unknown of anyone,
She was the wind's green daughter. Her the dove
Made, between leaf and sun,
His murmuring house of love.

Quiet as a seemly thought
Her infinite strength of shade she stretched around.
Peace like a spell she wrought
On that enclosed ground.

Bred of such lowly stuff,–
Blown mast, a sheltering day, a tender night,–
Now stars seem kin enough
To company her height.

She knows not whence she grew.
So in my heart, from some forgotten seed,
The lovely thought of you
Towered to the lovelier need.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Wife

Living, I had no might
To make you hear,
Now, in the inmost night,
I am so near
No whisper, falling light,
Divides us, dear.

Living, I had no claim
On your great hours.
Now the thin candle-flame,
The closing flowers,
Wed summer with my name, --
And these are ours.

Your shadow on the dust,
Strength, and a cry,
Delight, despair, mistrust, --
All these am I.
Dawn, and the far hills thrust
To a far sky.

Living, I had no skill
To stay your tread,
Now all that was my will
Silence has said.
We are one for good and ill
Since I am dead.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

The Woodsman In The Foundry

WHERE the trolley's rumble
Jars the bones,
He hears waves that tumble
Green-linked weed along the golden stones.

Where the crane goes clanging
Chains and bars,
He sees branches hanging
Little leaves against the laughing stars.

Where the molten metals
Curdle bright,
He sees cherry petals
Fallen on blue violets in the night.

When the glow is leaping
Redly hurled,
He sees roses sleeping,
Forest-roses in a windy world.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Thoughts

I gave my thoughts a golden peach,
A silver citron tree;
They clustered dumbly out of reach
And would not sing for me.

I built my thoughts a roof of rush,
A little byre beside;
They left my music to the thrush
And flew at eveningtide.

I went my way and would not care
If they should come and go;
A thousand birds seemed up in air,
My thoughts were singing so.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Three Island Songs

AFTER the wind in the wood,
Peace, and the night.
After the bond and the brood,
Flight.
After the height and the hush
Where the wild hawk swings,
Heart of the earth-loving thrush
Shaken with wings.

After the bloom and the leaf
Rain on the nest.
After the splendour and grief,
Rest.
After the hills and the far
Glories and gleams,
Cloud, and the dawn of a star,
And dreams.

O, THE gray rocks of the islands and the hemlock green above them,
The foam beneath the wild rose bloom, the star above the shoal.
When I am old and weary I'll wake my heart to love them,
For the blue ways of the islands are wound about my soul.
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Here in the early even when the young gray dew is falling,
And the king-heron seeks his mate beyond the loneliest wild,
Still your heart in the twilight, and you'll hear the river calling
Through all her outmost islands to seek her lastborn child.

I SAT among the green leaves, and heard the nuts falling,
The broad red butterflies were gold against the sun,
But in between the silence and the sweet birds calling
The nuts fell one by one.

Why should they fall and the year but half over ?
Why should sorrow seek me and I so young and kind ?
The leaf is on the bough and the dew is on the clover,
But the green nuts are falling in the wind.

O, I gave my lips away and all my soul behind them.
Why should trouble follow and the quick tears start ?
The little birds may love and fly with only God to mind them,
But the green nuts are falling on my heart.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

To Alcithoë

IN your dim Greece of old, Alcithoë,
Death like a lover sought and crowned you young,
Between the olive orchards and the sea.

When they had twined your myrtle-buds, and hung
The stately cypress at your door, they said,
'Alcithoë is dead,
Before whose feet the flaming crocus sprung,
For whom the red rose opened ere the prime;
Those the gods love are taken before their time.'—

Ah! why did no one, watching you alone,
Snare your dead beauty in undying stone ?
The gold hair bound beneath its golden band,
The milk-white poppies closed within your hand;
That the harsh world a little space might keep
The last, still, exquisite vision of your sleep.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

To Timarion

HAD I the thrush's throat, I could not sing you
Songs sweeter than his own. And I'm too poor
To lay the gifts that other lovers bring you
Low at your silver door.

Such as I have, I give. See, for your taking
Tired hands are here, and feet grown dark with dust.
Here's a lost hope, and here a heart whose aching
Grows greater than its trust.

Sleep on, you will not hear me. But to-morrow
You will remember in your fragrant ways,
Finding the voice of twilight and my sorrow
Lovelier than all men's praise.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Vision

I have not walked on common ground,
Nor drunk of earthly streams;
A shining figure, mailed and crowned,
Moves softly through my dreams.

He makes the air so keen and strange,
The stars so fiercely bright;
The rocks of time, the tides of change,
Are nothing in his sight.

Death lays no shadow on his smile;
Life is a race fore-run;
Look in his face a little while,
And life and death are one.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Wanderlied

O, WEST of all the westward roads that woo ye to their winding,
O, south of all the southward ways that call ye to the sea,
There's a little lonely garden that would pay ye for the finding,
With a fairy-ring within it and an old thorn tree.

O, there upon the brink of morn the thrushes would be calling,
And the little lilting linnets, sure they'd wake me from the dead;
With the lime trees all in blossom and the soft leaf-shadows falling,
O, there I'd have a place at last to lay my head.

O, would I had a swallow's wings, for then I'd fly and find it;
O, would I had a swallow's heart, for then I'd love to roam !
With an orchard on the hillside and an old, old man to mind it,
O, there I'd lift my lodge at last and make my home.

O, there I'd see the tide come in along the whispering reaches,
O, there I'd lie and watch the sails go shining to the west.
And where the fir-wood follows on the wide unswerving beaches,
It's there I'd lay me down at last and take my rest.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

When I Was A Tall Lad

WHEN I was a tall lad with money in my hand,
I'd pots and pans a plenty, and friends about the land.
I'd golden roads in sunshine and silver roads in rain,
And a little gray donkey and a girl out of Spain.

Now I am an old man with rings in my ears,
All too sad for laughter, all too wise for tears.
And the Spanish girl has left me, and the money's coming slow
And the little gray donkey he was lamed long ago.

When I get to heaven where tinkers may be seen,
I'll wear a yellow kerchief and a coat of velveteen,
And out beyond the shining streets I'll take the road again
With a little gray donkey and a girl out of Spain.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

When It Is Finished

WHEN it is finished, Father, and we set
The war-stained buckler and the bright blade by,
Bid us remember then what bloody sweat,
What thorns, what agony
Purchased our wreaths of harvest and ripe ears,
Whose empty hands, whose empty hearts, whose tears
Ransomed the days to be.

We leave them to Thee, Father, we've no price,
No utmost treasure of the seas and lands,
No words, no deeds, to pay their sacrifice.
Only while England stands,
Their pearl, their pride, their altar, not their grave,
Bid us remember in what days they gave
All that mankind may give
That we might live.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Youth's End

I HAVE held my life too high,
Spring and harvest, love and laughter, smile and sigh.
I should have held it lightly, like a young leaf rent in haste
From the willow in the waste.
A moment in my fingers; then it fluttered, then it fled,
A little flame of red,
To the God-beholding desert where the soundless years go by,-
I have held my life too high.

I have held my death too dear,
Shame or honour, peace or peril, pride or fear.
I should have held it softly, as the little cloud that flies
When the heron takes the skies.
I should have held it kindly as a passing whisper,-'Friend,
Here's the end,
Here the silver cord is loosened and the bowl is broken here,'-
But I held my death too dear.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall