



EDITH MAIDA STURGES

*Insurrection,
and Other Poems*

THE 1905 COLLECTION AND LATER SONG LYRICS

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

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A Critical Reading Edition

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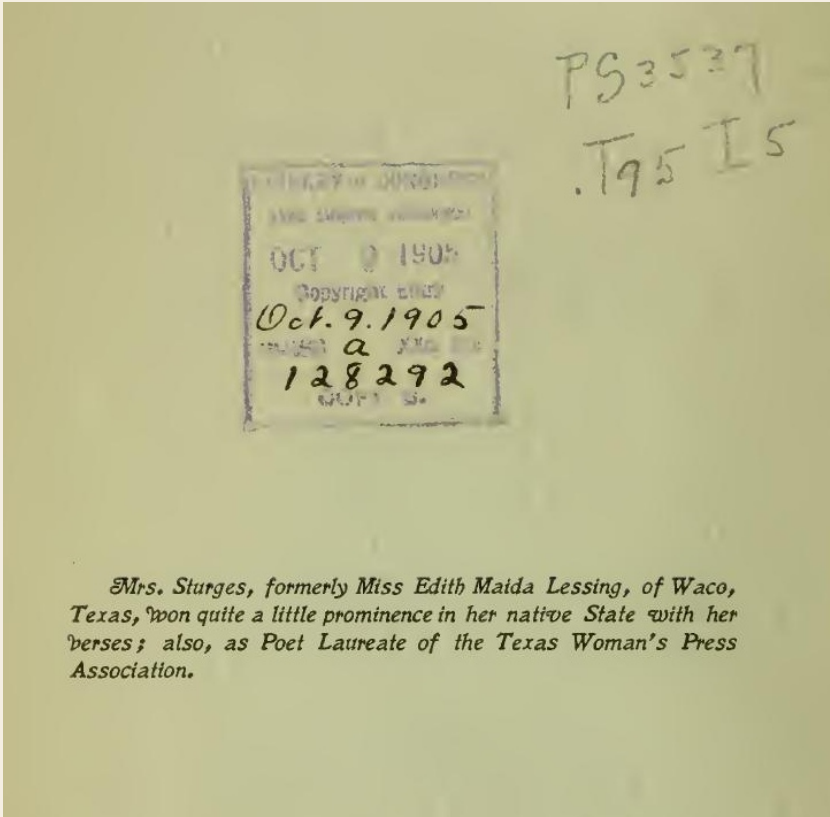
ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Portrait, publisher's note, reform work, and sheet-music covers

The images establish Sturges's changing public identities without repeating the same photograph. Sheet-music covers are retained as visual evidence of her Chicago commercial career; the portrait remains separate from the user-created cover artwork.



*Edith Maida Sturges, frontispiece portrait from *Insurrection, and Other Poems* (1905).*



*Publisher's note in *Insurrection, and Other Poems* (1905), identifying the poet with Waco and the Texas Woman's Press Association.*

Ask Aid at City for Food Kitchen

The establishment of a municipal kitchen, at which food may be dispensed to indigent men and women at cost, was asked today by Edith Maida Lessing, representing the St. Mary's Cradle, in a communication to the city council.

The letter stated that the St. Mary's Cradle has been conducting a free community kitchen at 223 West second street, but that the organization is meeting difficulties and needs aid.

The council referred the communication to the city's social service commission.

"Ask Aid at City for Food Kitchen," Los Angeles Herald, 12 January 1921. Lessing requested a municipal kitchen while St. Mary's Cradle operated a free community kitchen downtown.

Set Hearing Date in 'Love Colony' Case

Madame Edith Maida Lessing, charged with criminal syndicalism and with having attempted to establish a "love colony" on Mount Helios, Glassell Park, will appear in Justice Brown's court July 28 for her preliminary hearing. Bail was set at \$5000. The woman was unable to furnish the sum and was remanded to jail.

"Set Hearing Date in 'Love Colony' Case," 1921. The clipping records the criminal-syndicalism complaint surrounding Mount Helios without treating the newspaper's label as a neutral description.

JUST AS THE SHIP WENT DOWN



The above illustration used by courtesy of Chicago Record-Herald.

A SONG OF THE SEA

Words by
EDITH MAIDA LESSING

Music by
GIBSON AND ADLER

PUBLISHED BY
HAROLD ROSSITER MUSIC COMPANY
CHICAGO, ILL.

Cover of Just as the Ship Went Down: A Song of the Sea (1912), words by Edith Maida Lessing and music by Bernie Adler and Sidney Gibson.



Cover of *Oh! You Circus Day* (1912), by Edith Maida Lessing and Jimmie V. Monaco.



Cover of *When Crazy Joe Did the Alligator Slide* (1912), words by Edith Maida Lessing and music by Dennison Cook.

INTRODUCTION

Poet, popular-song writer, organizer, and censorship defendant

Edith Maida Sturges—born Edith Maida Lessing and later known as Edith Maida Cook—moved through several literary and political worlds that have rarely been understood as one career. Her 1905 collection *Insurrection, and Other Poems* joined romantic, devotional, maternal, comic, topical, and socially skeptical verse; in Chicago she wrote popular songs about the *Titanic*, the circus, and vaudeville spectacle; in Los Angeles she organized food relief and the radical Mount Helios community, opposed civil marriage and private property, and twice faced federal prosecution for mailing writings judged obscene. Her reform commitments coexisted with the virulent racism of her 1916 anti-Japanese song *Lookout! California Beware!*. This edition resets all thirty-three poems in the 1905 book—including “Lost,” omitted from an earlier contents list—and the three later song lyrics preserved in complete scores. It follows the original book’s divisions and lineation while removing narrow-page hanging wraps and correcting unmistakable typographical damage.

Names, family, and Texas beginnings

Edith Maida Lessing was born on 29 January 1875 in San Saba County, Texas, according to the genealogical record presently available; a civil birth certificate has not yet been independently located. Her parents are identified as William Herman Lessing and Edith Eugenia Triplett Lessing. The sequence of her marriages remains incomplete. She published her poetry book as Edith Maida Sturges, resumed Lessing for her Chicago sheet-music work and Los Angeles activism, and died under the surname Cook. A 1903 newspaper notice states that she had recently married a Mr. Sturges, had previously used Lessing, and had been married three times. A modern cemetery record names Willis Joseph Daugherty as a spouse, but the identities and chronology of Mr. Sturges and Mr. Cook remain unresolved.

Her early public identity was centered in Waco. The publisher's note in her 1905 book calls her "Mrs. Sturges, formerly Miss Edith Maida Lessing, of Waco, Texas," says that she had gained prominence in her native state, and credits her as poet laureate of the Texas Woman's Press Association. The claim is contemporary but promotional; no association roster or minute has yet been found to confirm the title independently. A Waco Easter notice from 1915 remembered that she had contributed poetry continually to the local press as a girl and during her early married years. It also described literary compositions by her mother, making writing a visible part of the family's public life.

The 1903 report concerns her seven-year-old son, Reginald Daugherty, who petitioned through his mother to become Reginald Lessing Sturges. Later records identify him as Dr. Roy Reginald Lessing-Sturges, or Roy Sturges, a California physician. The surviving evidence supports identifying him as her only known child, though it does not settle every question raised by the names in the early records.

The 1905 collection

Silver Gate Press of San Diego published *Insurrection, and Other Poems* in 1905. The surviving Library of Congress copy, later digitized through the Internet Archive, includes Sturges's photographic portrait, a presentation inscription to the University of California library, a publisher's biographical note, and thirty-three poems. An earlier project inventory counted thirty-two because it missed "Lost," the final poem in the book's "Child Poems" division. The present edition follows the actual printed sequence rather than the imperfect contents transcription.

The collection moves from the title poem's attack on fate, convention, and social confinement through romantic and erotic lyrics, meditations on aging and death, a Spanish-American War monologue, maternal elegies, comic and occasional poems, Texas regional pieces, and San Diego verse. Its mixture of sentiment, topicality, devotion, humor, and proto-radical rhetoric belongs to turn-of-the-century newspaper and association culture, but the distrust of law and convention in "Insurrection" also gives a genuine prehistory to Sturges's later assault on civil marriage. The volume demonstrates that she had already built a regional literary identity well before Los Angeles newspapers reduced her to the spectacle of Mount Helios.

Chicago popular song

By 1912, writing as Edith Maida Lessing, she was active in Chicago's commercial sheet-music trade. *Just as the Ship Went Down: A Song of the Sea*, with music by Bernie Adler and Sidney Gibson, answered the *Titanic* disaster almost immediately; the Harold Rossiter Music Company cover used a sinking-ship image credited to the *Chicago Record-Herald*, and a contemporary notice reported performances in Chicago show houses. *Oh! You Circus Day*, written with James V. Monaco and published by Will Rossiter, was associated with Lew Fields's Broadway musical *Hanky Panky* and was recorded by Arthur Collins and Byron G. Harlan. The complete score credits both words and music to Lessing and Monaco. *When Crazy Joe Did the Alligator Slide*, with music by Dennison Cook, survives in an eight-page score and was cataloged by the Library of Congress Edison Sheet Music Collection. Its minstrel dialect and racial slur show how readily popular entertainment converted Black caricature into commercial amusement.

A 1915 Waco notice documents another Chicago-published song, *My Beautiful Passion Flower*, with an accompaniment by Roy Ingraham, but no complete score has been located. A possible title, *The Jitney Bus*, remains unverified and is not admitted to the confirmed bibliography.

Propaganda, relief work, and Mount Helios

Lessing's social radicalism did not make her free of the racism of her period. In 1916 Hearst newspapers published *Lookout! California Beware!*, with words and music attributed to her. Sidney L. Gulick reproduced and condemned passages in *Anti-Japanese War-Scare Stories* (1917), calling the work an anti-Japanese "Hymn of Hate." The song advocated removing Japanese residents and participated directly in the West Coast "yellow peril" campaign. The complete score has not been found, so this edition documents rather than reconstructs it. Any account that emphasized only her later emancipatory positions would conceal a central and disturbing contradiction in her public writing.

In Los Angeles, Lessing first appears in a different reform context. On 12 January 1921, representing St. Mary's Cradle, she asked the city council to establish a municipal kitchen that would distribute food at cost to people in need. Her organization was already operating a free community kitchen at 223

West Second Street. The episode connects her later doctrines to practical hunger relief rather than to sensational religious publicity alone.

Later in 1921 she organized Mount Helios in Glassell Park, a small community or teaching center marked by a red flag bearing the word “Love” and placards that included “Revolution.” Contemporary summaries credit her with opposing civil marriage and private property and advocating freer sexual relationships, collective responsibility for children, profit sharing, free trade, and free transportation for workers. Police and newspapers called the place a “love cult,” alleged “weird rites,” and described her as a priestess controlling large numbers of men. The surviving record verifies the center, its political signs, lectures, pamphlets, and reform program; it does not verify the lurid sexual claims. In July 1921 she faced a criminal-syndicalism complaint. Lessing denied the police claim that the group pursued violent world conquest and described her teachings as grounded in Plato’s *Symposium* and selected Biblical passages. No final state conviction has been found.

Federal prosecutions and later life

Two federal obscenity-mailing episodes can be distinguished. In 1922 Lessing received a sentence of two years at the Federal Reformatory for Women in Leeds, Missouri, and later reporting says that she served about eighteen months. The suppressed publication has not been recovered. A second prosecution began in 1925. After conviction, she rejected probation because its terms required her to stop publishing and circulating her writings. One newspaper called the work *Civil Marriage and Why It Should Be Abolished*; another called it *Syllabus*. The titles may denote separate documents, a section and a larger work, or inconsistent reporting, and they should not be silently merged. She chose imprisonment rather than renunciation, but in April 1926, while awaiting transfer, she promised not to mail *Syllabus* and was released on probation.

The public record becomes sparse after 1926. A 1941 Chicago classified notice seeking information about her does not prove that she was then alive. The available memorial record identifies her at death as Edith Maida Lessing Cook, gives 27 January 1939 as her death date in Los Angeles County, and places her burial at Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, Sunrise Slope, Map 1, Lot 5788, Space 2. A death certificate, obituary, probate record, and the Cook marriage remain archival priorities.

Sturges belongs simultaneously to Texas women's press culture, San Diego poetry publishing, Chicago popular song, early *Titanic* memorial culture, anti-Japanese propaganda, Los Angeles mutual aid, free-love and communal experiments, and federal censorship. Her shifting surnames and the press fixation on Mount Helios have divided those activities into apparently unrelated lives. The recovered record makes her both more consequential and less comfortable: a poet of insurrection who entered commercial theater, fed hungry Angelenos, trafficked in racial nationalism, and finally made the freedom to publish the ground of a prison-or-probation decision.

EDITORIAL NOTE AND SOURCES

Corpus, source control, and reading-text policy

The base text for the 1905 poems is the complete Library of Congress scan of *Insurrection, and Other Poems*, not an earlier project PDF or its OCR. The collection contains thirty-three poems. “Lost,” visibly printed after “Missed,” is restored here. The book’s opening sequence, “Child Poems,” and “Miscellaneous” divisions are retained, and the physical order of the poems governs where the contents list and bound sequence differ.

Every poem begins on a new page. Stanza divisions and intentional line indents are retained from the original scan. Line endings caused only by the narrow source page are rejoined, so a hanging continuation is not mistaken for authorial lineation. Book and periodical titles are italicized; poem titles are not. The verse is reset throughout at one consistent size and leading.

Obvious OCR corruption and unmistakable printer damage are corrected silently: examples include “touch or Eros” to “touch of Eros,” a damaged “mirage,” missing possessives, and broken words at page endings. Authorial diction and dialect are otherwise preserved. Em dashes replace damaged or spaced dash forms without extra surrounding spaces.

The three complete 1912 song lyrics are transcribed from their scores. *When Crazy Joe Did the Alligator Slide* contains a racial slur and minstrel caricature; both are retained as historical evidence and contextualized in the biography. The incomplete 1915 and 1916 songs are documented but not reconstructed from fragments.

INSURRECTION, AND OTHER POEMS

Opening sequence | 1905

Insurrection

What does this Life amount to—after all,
We love—or hate—and then grow old and die,
And thus unsatisfied, escape the thrall,
That holds us prisoners here, we know not why.

We plan and dream, and dream and plan again,
And watch both dreams and plans escape and pass,
Brief as the rainbow, glittering in the rain,
Brief as summer dew, upon the grass.

'Tis such a little while we linger here;
We barely learn to live or love our life,
Ere we like soldiers on the battle field,
Are cut down in the midst of battle strife.

Miserable puppets of a Master hand,
Made to smirk and smile, and weep and rage,
Held in subjection by Divine command,
We storm and strut about our mimic stage.

What futile buffetings of Fate are we,
What thistle down, tossed by the restless wind,
What miller's chaff—what dust—what nothingness!
Seeking a hope, we do not dare to find.



Some of us who hunger for the sea,
Must inland live, land bound on every side,
And never know its glad waves tumbling free,
Its windswept shore, nor hear its murmuring tide.

And those of us who crave the distant plain,
With wealth of prairie, wide and wild and lone,
Vast, grand, immutable, must live entombed,
By four grim walls, of mortar, brick and stone.

And there are we who love the city mart,
Crowded, noisy, restless, guilt and sin,
And these awake to find themselves, for life,

In little sleepy country towns, shut in.
Some of us long for glory swift and sweet,
And live a life of pain, and die unknown,
And some for love do cast our every die,
And find ourselves betrayed, wrecked—left alone.
Some sit with idle, loveless, empty, hearts,
And crave a child to play about our door,
Envyng the brawling beggar who,
May count his dozen half-starved brats—or more.
And thus we tread our little measured track,
Like pawns about a chess board, moved and set,
We must go on—we do not dare go back,
We long to cease and end it all, and yet—
And yet the pitiless power that placed us here,
Will leave us not until the game is done,
A game too deep for us to comprehend,
Or even know the pieces lost and won.
Always the same, we have no power nor will,
We can but drift upon a mighty tide,
Until a Voice shall say to us “Be Still,”
And once more in oblivion we abide.
Always the same—the same since guilty Cain,
Crept out of sight to hide his shame’s despair,
We spring like fungus grown up in a night,
And like fungus, useless—anywhere.
Always the same—we grasp but Dead sea fruit,
The soul’s mute call, no answer hears—nor can,
There is a God whom we do never reach,
By Him forgotten, in the world’s great plan.
What are we for? Each in his little rut,
Does grind and grind, and walk his weary round,
And wait for better things, defying Fate,
Until at last effaced from sight and sound.

And this is the sum—content—a piteous farce,
Fame—a delusion—Hope a sad defeat;
And Love, a thing to fool us mortals with,
A game where two must play and both shall cheat.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

The Race

Come—fill up your flagon—there's plenty here.

Drink to the winner's name,
See! there he stands in his purple robes
Another draught to his fame!

But the weary wretch who creeps along,
Curse him nor count the cost,
Jostle him out—give him a blow,
Not a tear for him—who lost.

Bring on your garlands—heap them high
Fling out the rose of Love,
For Beauty stands in servile grace,
As timid as a dove.

The rose of Love—to the vanquished goes?
No crush it nor count the cost—
Better dead 'neath the victor's feet,
Than to be flung to him—who lost.

Praise the winner and shout his name,
Smile in his greedy face.
Cower and tremble low at his knee,
And praise his coveted place.

Sneer at the vanquished—crowd him out,
Crush him at any cost,
Bubble—oh, wine, for the winner's lips,
There's nothing for him who lost.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Love's Garden

Love wants no precept, of rod or priest.
Love yields a lifetime, in one brief hour.
And that one hour were more at least,
Than a thousand life-times, without its power.

Love wants no chains, but its own desire.
No bonds to hold—no prison-cells.
At the thought of restraint, Love chafes and flies.
As morning dew that the sun dispells.

Touch your butterfly to confine,
And its broken wings, from your finger fall.
Imprison the Luccioles, wanton light,
And the wandering firefly dies to all.

Love wants no answer, but love-sweet eyes,
No music but whisper of soul, and smile.
No hope—but the quickening that comes but once,
And makes crucifixion well worth while.

No eloquence, but the lingering kiss,
Warm and silent, and passion-fraught,
Beside whose exultant, awakening thrill,
Speech were vacant and words were naught.

Love wants no walls, but crimson aisles,
Of dreaming lillies, to wander by;
No light but that of the throbbing stars;
No roof, but the night's tender canopy.

And in Love's garden the thorns are hid,
By the flush of poppies blood-red glow.
A garden of passion, and hopes and dreams,
And bitter-sweet longing—that all must know.

Here peace bends low o'er the water's edge,
When comes as a whisper from gods on high,
Laden with the breath of a thousand flowers,
The touch of Eros, in passing by.

In its fairness, to some, is the lost mirage

And deep in its melodies madness creeps,
And hid in its cold, white magnolia blooms,
The dark dread, death-stinging aspic sleeps.

And having once dreamed, for an hour here,
The heart rebels, at the rugged plain
For the spell of the garden's poisoned sweets,
Ever comes haunting the soul again.

Ay, the soul rebels at the rugged plain,
Through the fire of hate—and the stab of pride,
And ever in longing, looks back, and wails—
“Unsatisfied, unsatisfied.”

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Moonlight

Oh, give me a draught of the moonlight wine,
Poured out white, from her heart to mine;
Oh, never was quaffing of port or Rhine,
That could blot out my life's despair
Like this subtle sense—so deep—so thrilling—
As sad as death, and as sweet and chilling,
That steeps all my soul, by its splendor stilling
The smile of the moon so fair.

Oh, give me a draught of the moonlight wine,
When friends grow cold and creditors whine
Like perfume from hidden crypt or shrine
It steals to my heart and brain,
Till I swoon to her kiss—the world forgetting,
Nor ruin, nor wreck, nor love, regretting,
Nor the tangled skein that my Fate is netting,
With the sable threads of pain.

O, give me a draught of the moonlight's wine,
Let me be drowned in its power divine,
Let me bathe in it, lave in it—mine, all mine!
Till my soul be soothed and still.
What is the world and its empty madness,
Its running and cunning—and wanton badness,
Its surfeits of sin or its wails of sadness,
When the white moon works her will.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Tuberoses

Oh tuberoses! fragrant, waxen, white—
How your touch chills me and thrills me tonight!
And that old dead June drifts out from the past,
So sudden, so sweet, and too brief to last.

Tuberoses! Ah, and he kissed my throat,
And he crushed your perfume against my face.
We parted—and he from my side passed out
Into the world's unfathomable space.

And oh, since then, when I feel your breath,
It goes to my heart like a draught of wine:
The pain and the madness, sweet as death,
Scorch me again with a fire divine.

For one brief moment the past uncloses
To the cold, sweet touch of white tuberoses.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

“You”

I wonder, sometimes, why I hate you,
 Why my heart, when you go by,
Quickens its beating, within my breast,
Like the ocean’s ceaseless mad unrest,
 Why do I hate you—why?

I hated you first, when you passed me,
 ’Twas chill and growing late;
Though I knew you not, nor yet your name,
Your dusky eyes set my heart aflame,
 With the maddening thirst of hate.

I hate your red lips smiling,
 And I burn with enkindled wrath;
And a look in your eyes, as they meet mine,
Brings a memory back, I cannot define,
 That you once have crossed my path.

Your face is as pure as the haw-buds,
 That sweet in the springtime blow.
But your windswept gown, and flying feet,
When you pass me by in the noisy street,
 Makes the hate in my heart to glow.

Can it be that in some past ages,
 ’Neath a tropical, foreign, sun,
We battled together—you and I,
For something desired, in days gone by,
 And I the defeated one?

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Mine!

“Mine!”—and the infant weeps to hold
The dandled toy in his baby hands;
“Mine!”—and the man in the money mart
Sets his seal upon love or lands.

“Mine!”—and a nation’s voice proclaims;
And blood is spilled upon sea and plain,
And men go down with prayer, or with curse,
Under the hell of the bullet’s rain.

From the throne of grace, an all-wise God
Looks down in pity and love divine,
On the handful of restless, warring things
That His will hath made, and calls them “Mine!”

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

When He Cometh

He shall come in princely power most splendid,
By the glory and pomp of heaven attended.

He shall sit on His throne and command His own,
And the reign of earthly kings be ended.

And wind and storm and hurricane,
Wild things that swept across the world,
And tossed and tore and leaped and whirled
Like wild dogs leashed, shall leap in vain.

No more shall thunder bolts be hurled,
Or lightning pierce the earth again.

Volcano's blast or earthquake's shock,
That once were wont to rend and rock,
Shall feel His hand, and trembling, cease
Before the Prince of Power and Peace.

The sea that sweeps from shore to shore
Shall beat itself about no more,
But lie at rest upon the sands
Subjected to Divine commands.

The beasts of the wood, untamed and wild,
Shall do no hurt to man or child,
But come in meek, submissive awe,
To recognize Him—Love and Law.

And birds shall come in flocks and droves
From crags and nooks, and fields and groves;
Shall chant a matin loud and long,
Shall burst their little throats with song—
One grand, majestic anthem sing,
Acknowledging Him God and King.

And toads and worms, and creeping things,
Shall lose their vileness and their stings,
And from their curse shall be set free
To creep to Him in purity.

From out their revels and haunts of sin,
Men and women shall gather in

To learn His judgment, shall there assemble,
Shall crouch and cower, and whine and tremble.
Shall crouch and cower and beg and whine
For the bartered light of His smile divine.

Rulers and potentates and kings
Shall feel his knowledge and power take wings,
And before Him come, awe-struck and dumb,
Piteous, wretched, cringing things.

The wise shall gather from all the earth,
The pompous and proud, and vain of birth,
And fall at His feet and pray and entreat,
And know their nothingness then, complete.

And they who have ground their fellows down,
Hoarding each atom, and tithe of gold,
Who have trampled and crushed to the very dust,
And left the good in their hearts to rust,
Shall swoon in despair before His face,
Pleading for mercy and pardon and grace.

They shall boast of the good their gold has done
And prate of the little course they run.
And each little, starved-out, narrow soul,
Shall lie before Him, unchanged and whole,
Naked as lies the child, new-born,
To crave His pity and feel His scorn.

And beggars, like rats, from their haunts shall creep,
Dirty, diseased, and dull with sleep.
They shall kiss His garment and feel His touch,
Humble and lowly, and trusting much.
They shall rise in splendor and join the horde
Of purified souls, who shall praise His word.

The halt and maimed and blind shall come,
And they shall see that He is truth
And stand before Him, mute and dumb,
Feeling again the thrill of youth.

The spawn of hell, and filth and crime,
All prisoners in prison kept,

Shall fall before His face sublime,
And weeping, feel that He has wept.



For a thousand years the King shall reign,
With wrong subdued and right upheld.
Poverty, pitiful, and pain,
By His dear love shall be repelled,
And then shall drunkenness and vice
And all the hidden deeds of night
Of ribald man and wanton maid
From out the universe take flight.

Anarchy shall cease its being,
Hatred and unjust law shall cease
Before the powerful Prince of Peace,
All torturing tribunes gives release,
And Justice—live, not blind, but seeing.

No more shall warring hordes go forth
To seek and slay their fellowmen,
Nor barter kingdoms for a song,
Nor sell their very souls for gain.

Virtuous women, fair and true,
And noble men as true and brave,
Steadfast of purpose, staunch and strong,
Shall use the power the Giver gave,
And honor and truth shall dwell round the throne
When the Lord God of Hosts comes back to His own.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Waiting

I do not know if her face be fair,
If her eyes be blue or brown.
I only know, it is always there—
The sweetest voice in town.

“Waiting?”—So still and soft it comes
That low sweet undertone.
So close in my ear it startles me,
The voice of the girl at the 'phone.

She does not know that she stirs me so,
That my thoughts go flying away,
To those old sweet childish dreams of mine,
That are vanished—and gone, for aye.

□

“Waiting?”—For what, am I waiting?
For a few idle words, with a friend,
Who, three miles across the city,
Hears—at the other end?

Waiting! For what are we waiting?
For glory, or wealth, or love?
Waiting for fall of empire?
Or for battle clouds to move?

Some of us wait and are waiting,
And have waited—all these years,
To kiss once more a mother's face,
That we parted from—in tears.

Some of us wait, in agony,
For a tortured soul's release,
Waiting—for mercy and pardon,
Waiting—for rest and peace.

We wait—Oh yes—for forgiveness,
And we wait, and are waiting—still,
As we grope, in Life's Gethsemane,

To know our Father's will.

Some of us wait, for a ship to come home,
To its harbor through wind and wave,
And some of us wait for flowers to bloom,
On a little infant's grave.

"Waiting?"—And I awaken,
From the dream, where my thoughts have flown.
To answer the gentle voice of the girl,
At the other end of the 'phone.

Sometimes—I almost tell her—
That I long have ceased to wait,
To attain my old ambitions—
That I bend to the hand of fate.

And I drift where the tide will take me,
Away to the open sea—
But I hope to enter the haven,
By the Hand, that is guiding me.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

When We Are Old

The car was crowded—the seats were full—

 All going out to their homes to rest,
Idle and gay and tired and sad,
 Satin and rags and Sunday best.

One more passenger straggled in
 And found a corner in which to stand,
Glancing in vain for an empty seat,
 As she clung to the strap with her palsied hand.

A shabby old woman, crooked and bent,
 With life's sad story on face and form,
A frail old craft that had sailed the sea,
 And was nearing the haven through wind and storm.

Nobody gave her a seat, and all
 Gazed at her coldly and turned aside
And drew in their skirts from her soiled gown,
 And sat and chattered in empty pride.

A wave of pity swept over my heart.
 Though my arms with bundles were laden down,
And I gave the trembling thing my place,
 And stood and watched the passengers frown.

Ah, her miserable smile, how it cut my heart.
 Oh, why is the world so hard and cold?
We scorn the wretched and shun the poor,
 And show contempt for the weak and old.

We, too, may some day be worn and bent,
 And weary and old, and forlorn and sad,
With no tender hands to smooth our way,
 And no sweet voices to make us glad.

We may shiver and tremble before the crowd,
 The gay, idle crowd that knows no care,
That softens no heartache, stills not pain,
 Whose sky is all sunny and sweet and fair.

With worn, tired feet, and sorrowing hearts,

We may feebly totter toward our rest,
Outliving our hopes, and desires, and youth,
With life's sad secrets—and sorely prest.

Ah, then for a tender hand or a smile,
When the night draws near and the winds are cold,
God pity us all who are so bereft
Of all life's sweetness—when we are old.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

In Havana the Year We Fought with Spain

I am tired of the city's deafening roar,
I am tired of the constant ceaseless tread,
Of the many feet that pass my door,
Of busy seekers for daily bread.

I am tired of the rush and noise and crowd,
I want to go back to the shores again,
Where the showers of bullets fell like rain,
Where men were cut down like garnered grain,
Where shell and shrapnel, tore and plowed,
Where sunset or sunrise, either, found,
A harvest of dead men stretched on the ground.

When a man has once been through the hell,
Of the battle's fury of shot and shell,
It is not easy to settle down,
To a desk and a pen in a busy town,
Though some men can, but not the man,
Who has known the sorrow that came to me,
In that old world city beside the sea;
Who found Heaven and Hell in a month's brief span,
In Havana the year
That we fought with Spain.

It was after the battle's roar was done,
I lay on the field while the stars shone down,
And thought of the victory we had won,
That would bring to our nation a world's renown.
The blood crept out from a wound in my side,
And I felt that the ebbing crimson tide would bear out my soul—and I grew weak.
Then I felt Death's coldness on hand and cheek,
And came a blackness—I knew no more.

I opened my eyes after many days,
When burning fever, had spent its way.
Opened my eyes to a woman's face,
Whose wondrous beauty filled all the place.
A little brown maiden with dusky eyes,
Who held in the touch of her little hand,
A power I never could understand.

She started the blood in my veins to life,
And set me to loving her. When she turned,
And looked at me soft-eyed—then I learned,
That the hope of earth, and the far off skies,
Is centered sometimes in a woman's eyes.

She was a Cuban, and lived alone,
In a hut, that stood on the edge of the town,
Father and mother and brothers had died.
They called her a witch for her strength and pride,
A strength and pride—they could not break down.
She stabbed a man once who had come too near,
She struck him down—the dog that he was,
She put her foot on the coward's neck,
And dared them to touch her. Half in fear,
Half in jesting they shrunk away,
All of them cowards with nothing to say.

How she hated and loathed them, but to me
She was all that endurance and love could be,
She tended the wound that the shell had shattered,
And gave me to eat. Ah, but little it mattered,
That the summer days were hot and long,
That nations were warring for right or wrong,
If she could but soothe me with smile or song,
And make one to know, I was growing strong.
When the wound had healed I made her my wife,
Then one short week—It was all my life,
And I marched off to the front again,
To shoot and be shot at by dogs of Spain,
Back to the horror and blood and dying,
Back to the shell and bullets flying,
And the summer breeze o'er the dead men sighing.
Then it came to an end—as all things end,
Over the land, breathed the voice of peace,
And we tired soldiers found release,
And set us to longing for home and friend.

Then I sought out her hut, but all I found,
Was a heap of ashes spread on the ground,
And the chimney standing, a spectre lone,

Guarding the spot, that our love had known.

I have never found her, nor do I know
If she be in Heaven or here below,
But I get restless on nights like these,
And the moonlight yonder across the town,
And the touch on the face of the soft night breeze,
Blowing fresh and damp from the southern seas,
Makes a mad thing of me, I seem to feel,
The clasp of warm brown arms that are clinging,
A voice that low in my ear is ringing,
The scent of her breath and her dusky hair,
Her rose blossom mouth, and her face so fair,
And the silken sweep of her gown.
Nor raging nor raving can still the pain,
That comes back to torture my heart again,
The pain of the love that I found and lost,
In Havana the year that
We fought with Spain.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Kismet

He wished her “Good-bye” at the gate,
 To leave her was a task,
He craved to speak, and learn his fate,
 But did not dare to ask.
A cloud went drifting o’er the moon,
 He bent and kissed her hand;
She stood and coldly smiled at him,
 And would not understand.

He wished her “Good-bye” at the gate,
 And when he’d left her side,
She knew that she had marred her fate,
 By her relentless pride.
Before her stretched the hopeless years;
 She might live to be old!
She stayed and sobbed an hour there,
 Whom he had thought so cold.

They met once more, in after life,
 As people often meet;
He, with his grown-up sons, and wife
 In a crowded city street;
He shivered as he met her gaze,
 And when he touched her hand,
Too late—across the waste of years,
 They both did understand.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Good-bye

Say “good-bye” and let us part,
What’s the use o’ crying?
What means words atween us two?
Ther’ ain’t no use a sighin’.

Tears my heart to leave you so,
’D rather die to-morrow,
Than let them eyes o’ yourn meet mine
With such a look o’ sorrow.

Thought she’s dead a year ago,
She went and lef’ me weepin’
Lef’ the home-nes’ an’ the vines,
Lef’ the baby sleepin’.

Heard she’s dead—an’ then found you—
Don’t look at me so, “Honey;”
Rather ’n you’d think I’m to blame,
I’d rather lose a world o’ money.

Put your arms around my neck,
An’ kiss me once—jes’ so, dear;
The game’s called ’fore we’d turned the cards;
Good-bye—I’ll hev’ ter go, dear.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

At Christmas-tide

Oh, the dull cold grey of the afternoon,
The chill of winter is in the sky,
The birds go Southward in search of June,
And a few poor roses have bloomed to die.
I think of you and your face so fair,
And the silken gleam of your yellow hair.

It was Christmas tide—four years ago,
Christmas tide—that you broke your vow,
A Christmas white with the drifted snow.
I wonder little one, where you are now?
Out in the world, I guess, somewhere,
Tangling lives with your yellow hair.

Your yellow hair, that gleamed and shone,
And clung round your head a halo of gold,
You looked like a queen of days long gone,
Told in legends of Norsetime old.
And I thrilled at the thought, and would sometimes dare
Kiss the silken ends of your golden hair.

How I trusted and dreamed—how I trusted and dreamed,
By the dead Christ's pain, I'd have sworn you true,
For of all sweet women on earth there seemed,
None other so faithful and sweet as you.
And you bound me stronger than vows could swear,
By each shining thread of your yellow hair.

It was madman's folly I know—and still
I dream of you always—on days like this,
For you swayed me once like a slave at your will,
And bent me to dust at your feet for a kiss.
And I risked my all on your face so fair,
And the glittering coils of your golden hair.

You are his by law—you are mine by love,
Mine by your vow that you reckless, gave,

In the sight of the King of the court above.
You are mine and shall be—beyond the grave.
For though you were false as you were fair,
You chained my soul with your yellow hair.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Ice Bound

My ship sailed out in the Summer time
When the sunny skies were blue,
And its hold was laden with hopes and dreams
And the plan of a purpose true.
I watched it across the sunlit sea
'Till my waiting eyes grew dim,
And I said "God send it back to me,
Safe, through its perils grim."

I found it again—after many years,
Afar in the frozen north—
Shattered its sails, and its beauty wrecked,
Which in majesty, had sailed forth.
The frozen bergs, on either side,
Towered up to a frozen sky,
While borne on the bosom of the tide,
The isles of ice sailed by.

□

I gathered my wreck and I brought it in,
To my sunlit shores with me,
But the treasure I laid, in its secret hold,
Was lost in that frozen sea.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Love's Threnody

Oh tender maiden, life is sweet,
Love's votive offering at your feet,
Your rapture seems almost complete—
Then tell me why you falter.

Is it because—Oh timid maid,
Within your heart you are afraid,
This Love for which your soul has prayed,
May one day change and alter?

I would that words of mine could still,
The doubts and fears that bode you ill,
That oft recur against your will,
But could I, would I do it?
I know that life is dim and strange,
We grope for shadows at long range,
And all things subjected to change—
So those who love must rue it.

For when the fires of love have died,
And cold has grown the scarlet tide,
Which scorched the soul, and rent the pride,
In mad relentless fashion.
No law on earth, no prince in hell,
No power, no pain, can force a spell,
By cross, or crown, by ring or bell,
Whose bonds will fetter passion!

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Haunted

What can it be that calls me—calls me—calls me—
Calls me at night—at dawn—at burning noon.
From out the waves—from out the sighing trees,
From out the cloud dimmed splendour of the moon,
Why do I stop sometimes and dazed stand,
And with a strange vague ecstasy rejoice?—
Because some vagrant tone amid the throng,
Awakes the memoried music of your voice.

Why do I pause sometimes in revels gay,
And feel the world slip from me like a dream,
Seeing a sea of dim blurred faces pass,
Which suddenly most strange and vacant seem?—
Because for one mad moment I forget
The awful wrecking of our Paradise,
And see through misty tears that drain my soul
The well remembered heaven of your eyes.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

CHILD POEMS

From Insurrection, and Other Poems | 1905

A Christmas Lullaby

Sleep Baby.

In the silent hours of slumber,
Once a mother watched like me,
Kissed her babe's soft crumpled fingers,
Stroked his fair cheek tenderly.
And the herds stood all about her,
For the cradle where he lay,
Was an old and dingy manger,
Hard and cold and filled with hay.

Could she feel he was divine?

Baby mine.

Sleep Baby.

No rich walls adorned with pictures,
As there are for you and me.
Cobwebbed rafters, wild-eyed cattle,
All there were for her to see.
"All the little birds have nests,"
But in all the world 'tis said,
The Son of Man had on his birth-night,
Not a place to lay his head.

No soft cushions as are thine,

Baby mine.

Sleep Baby.

I can feel her mother's passion,
In the stable's midnight dim,
Fearful even of the Wise Men,
Who had come to worship Him,
Till she heard the Angels singing,
"Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men,
For to you is born a Saviour,
Lift your hearts to God again."

Kissed His eyes as I kiss thine,

Baby mine.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

My Little Lad

He grows more boyish, day by day;
He comes in, breathless, from his play,
And has such funny things to say;
I sometimes wonder where can be,
The warm, soft, tiny, nestling, thing,
That used to cuddle close by me,
And slumber gently, while I'd sing.

Some day he'll be a cold, hard man,
To take his part in life's great plan,
And crush and trample as men can;
And with my shadows, I shall sit,
Too empty hearted then—to weep,
While hallowed memories, round me flit,
And rock my shadow—babe, to sleep.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

When Baby Died

When baby died and went away,
Polly en' me was out at play,
En' ol' Miss Jones stuck out her head:
"Children, come in—the baby's dead,
D'you want ter see the corpse?" en' we
Jes' run in awful fast to see.
We didn't know what a corpse was then.
We thought 'twas somethin' skeery—en'
We slipped in so still en' soft,
For fear 'twould get us—never laughed
Nor nothen. On her little bed,
With sunshine streamin' 'round her head,
En' her ol' raggy doll hugged up tight.
She was asleep, en' not a mite
Of noise. I looked at Polly, en' her at me,
En' we wondered where the corpse could be,
En' all the neighbors sat en' sighed,
When baby died.

When baby died
The whole big room
Was filled with flowers, en' their perfume
Comed stealin' out along the hall,
En' nobody noticed us at all,
Nor washed my face nor combed my hair,
Nor even heard my little prayer.
En' Polly, she runned down the street,
Without her hat, in her stockin' feet,
En' didn't git spanked. I could a stole
A great big pie en' eat it whole,
But I didn't want ter. Took no pride
In eatin',
After baby died.

When baby died—
My grandpa come,
En' set around like he was dumb,
En' a million carriages or more
Was packed en' jammed about our door,

En' two men passed en' one said, "Whew!
I guess they's a party here, don't you?"
En' Jim, the bootblack, frowned, en' said:
"This here boy's little sister's dead,"
En' I felt awful proud, you see,
Like the whole blame thing belonged to me,
Fer Polly en' me, we stood outside,
To see the show—
 When baby died.

When baby died—
 The whole long night
Pa walked the floor 'til plum daylight,
En' Polly en' me kept wide awake,
Countin' the steps that he would take,
En' sweet Aunt Nell come in en' said
We had ter be good, now sis was dead,
So that after while, when we come to die
She would flutter down from the big, blue sky,
A soft white angel, en' lift us in,
Out o' this big ol' world of sin.
But mother—she just cried en' cried,
Like her heart was broke,
 When baby died.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

In Memory

“Lines to your Darling’s memory!”

Oh yes, I will gladly write,
If thoughts of mine can picture,
Your baby to you, tonight.

But oh, can my words awaken
The form, the grave bonds hold,
Or touch into living beauty,
Once more those curls of gold?

Can I fill the room with her laughter,
Or the sound of her flying feet,
Or press to your hungry lips again,
Her kisses, so moist and sweet?

Can I still that fierce dumb longing,
In the solemn hours of night,
When you wake with a rush of memory
That her soul has winged its flight.

Wherever you look you miss her.
How bleak seems your life and chill!
When you realize that through all the way,
To the end you will miss her still.

Do you feel when you go home at even,
A terror far worse than Death?
Do you tremble at sight of her doll or toys,
With a sob that chokes your breath?

Then what can I say to comfort,
Since the light of your life is gone,
To help you to bravely bear your pain,
Till “the coming of the dawn?”

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Missed

We stood beside his little grave today;
Dead leaves had piled in drifts upon the mound.
We hushed our voices, there above his clay,
So unresponsive, now to any sound.
The wind kept sighing—sighing as it passed.
We bent our heads, the blinding tears to hide.
The house has been a lonely, lonely place,
To “Mother,” since the day that “Baby” died.

His toys lie scattered all about the yard.
A broken bicycle—a little rusty gun.
Marbles and tops, and bits of iron and sticks,
Just as he left them when the day was done.
The room is never littered now with scraps,
Or little muddy boot-tracks on the floor;
His little busy, planning, hands are still;
His sweet voice answers to our call no more.

The doves he played with, coo the whole day long,
Mournful and sad as if they miss him, yet.
The dog he petted, hunts for him and whines,
Whines at his name, and faithful can’t forget.
When night comes on, his little form we miss,
His soft, brown eyes, and golden curly head;
The rosy lips we used to love to kiss—
For oh! The little laughing boy is dead.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Lost

The baby fingers,
Are cold and still,
That warm to my heart I've pressed.
And the form so slight,
Lies rigid and white,
In the mocking grave clothes dressed.

There is something I miss,
From my path today,
That was of my life a part.
And the clutching pain,
Comes again and again,
And tightens about my heart.

I hear the clods,
Fall one by one,
I hold my trembling breath.
'Tis not a prayer,
I utter there,
I hate, I hate you death!

I have tasted the cup,
With the bitterness,
Perhaps the clouds may lift.
Have I turned from the grace
Of the Giver's face,
To idolize the gift?

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

MISCELLANEOUS

From Insurrection, and Other Poems | 1905

Was It You?

'Twas not the sound of martial notes
 Upon the pulsing air,
That made her to the window fly
 And breathlessly stand there.

'Twas not the sight of banners gay,
 Nor knightly troops arrayed,
That held the quick and pulsing gaze
 Of this entrancing maid.

'Twas neither grand nor pomp nor show,
 It was—it was—alas!
She had but to the window flown
 To watch the postman—pass.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

To the Texas Press Association

In the days of old—so run an ancient tale,
The gods made men, then came from far and wide,
The Fates, to them endow with all things good,
Each with her gift bag hanging at her side.

Then Ate sitting in a safe retreat
Their mischief planned, and, shame to tell of,
As each Fate passed, her hand went in the pot
Of gifts, and slyly filched therefrom a bit.

To some was given genius, to some hope
Courage to some, and faith to do and dare;
But she who carried truth, had spent her store,
And emptiness was all Ate found there.

When far dispersed the gods, and Fate had gone,
Ate crept forth and in the twilight dim,
Beautiful and grand, she fashioned out a man,
And lavished all her golden gifts on him.

Then startled, half drew back, afraid,
Her red lips closing in a childish pout
Courage and genius, faith and hope were his,
And yet the maiden mischief was in doubt.

“No truth, what is the creature worth,” she said,
“No truth, no truth, what can I use him for?”
Then suddenly her rippling laugh rang out:
She kissed him saying: “Be an Editor.”

And that delightful charm all others lack,
Which never in an Editor you miss,
That light, insouciant bon camaraderie,
Is consequent of naughty Ate’s kiss.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

The Indians

Long years ago, when the echoing wind
Swept o'er miles of prairie land,
When the white-robed moon only rose at night,
Swept o'er miles of prairie land,

Here on the banks of the Brazos wide,
Dwelt a tribe of Indians, fierce and proud,
And oft in the stillness of the night,
The hills would ring with their war-cry loud.

Harsh in battle, stern in peace,
They kept the other tribes at bay.
And death to the ones who dared rebel,
Very kings of their land were they.

The little village thrived and grew,
Till the pale-face came with weapons strong,
And then the brave chiefs dying sang,
Their last and lonely battle song.

The brown skinned babes, lay cold and dead,
In the shadow of the old chief's tent,
And in the glowing of the dawn,
The whites in triumph, came and went.

The years slipped by—The river's depths
Are spanned by the bridges wide and tall
Where the wigwams stood, great factories are,
And engine smoke drifts over all.

The beaten path is a wide paved street,
And here in the spot where the wild mustang,
Shook its flowing mane in the silence free
Here where the dove to its loved mate sang,
Stand houses and trees, and tall church spires,
And electric cars glide swiftly on,
And the hillside spring gushes forth in a stream,
But we sometimes think of the race long gone.

And we wonder what would the Wacoes say
Could they see their struggling village—now,

Would they stand submissive, with sad dazed eyes
And low at the feet of the conqueror bow?

And we dream of a phantom shape that flits,
High in the moonlight over the town,
And lost in the memory of the past,
With a weary sigh looks wistfully down.

And we think the old chief is reconciled
When he looks on the change the years have wrought,
And content to sleep with his own loved tribe,
And give way to the peace with his own blood bought.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

That Cow

He passes sometimes in the early dawn
 With rope hung over his arm.
A stout little man with a quick, brisk step
 And a face of meek alarm.

He fastens his eyes upon each grazing herd.
 To see if his own be there,
Then lost in the distance, I watch him go,
 To look for her everywhere.

He is always hunting that cow of his;
 Though he fastens her up at night,
With morning's dawn she is out and gone,
 O'er hill and away from sight.

She evades his search sometimes for days.
 One night with a lantern he passed,
On his same old weary, monotonous trail,
 While rain fell thick and fast.

I've grown to watch for him now to come,
 Quick o'er the low hill's brow.
He's part of the landscape—part of the day,
 For he's always hunting his cow.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

The Death of Mr. Cox—An Artist

Like one who lieth down to pleasant dreams,
He fell asleep upon a Summer's day.
Brief was his summons—briefer still the end,
When passed from earth to heav'n his soul away.

Surrounded by the work he loved so well,
Among enchanted mountain's purple mist,
While wild birds poured to heav'n their vesper song,
From vales by Summer's wanton glory kissed.

He fell asleep, his long, long journey done,
Leaving no half regret or hope behind;
And they he strove by gentle means, to teach,
Not soon his kind and simple like may find.

He loved his Art, with that unerring faith,
Which makes its object dear as honor is.
He was content when canvas held, and kept
Some one of Nature's wondrous mysteries.

The fields of sunflowers he was wont to limn,
Fading away in one pale, yellow drift,
And Texas skies, so sunny, blue and fair,
Or prairie, swept by sand-storm—blinding, swift,
Cool little streams, where light and shadow played,
Cotton fields, which seemed like Summer snow,
Vistas of humble azure clover bloom,
These were his own—because he loved them so.

His purpose was to lift to purer heights,
Love of the Beautiful, and thus impart
A yearning for the Good, and deep desire
To reach Perfection's goal in every heart.

Sonorous as the chime which told his hour,
Sonorous as his solemn funeral knell,
The hearts of they who followed to his tomb,
Did beat in mournful measure a farewell.

Oh, Clover! Blossom on his silent grave;
Oh Mockingbird, pour out your melody
Above the semblance of the man we loved,
Whose soul has put on Immortality!

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Taps

Taps! Lights out! Stacked arms!
At the end is the last long tramp.
Let him sleep till the bugles' reveille call
Shall awake the celestial camp.

One more picket off duty,
Who the silent vigils kept;
No matter how stormy or dark the night,
He faltered not—nor slept.

Gone from the fray and action,
Is his pure and spotless soul,
No more will he stand on the tented field,
In answer to muster roll.

With the hosts of troops supernal,
He shall pass in glad review;
And the King on His throne will find him,
Honored and trusted and true.

Breathe softly one last bugle tribute,
As sounds each falling clod;
“Loyal to home and country—
Faithful to man and God.”

Taps! Lights out! Off duty!
Furl the flag across his breast;
And leave him to sleep, till reveille's sound,
The sleep of a hero at rest.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

When the “Boys” Go Marching By

A bit of verse dedicated to my cousin, Capt. Robley D. Evans.

When the boys go marching by,
 With their guns and coats of blue,
I think that I feel what our mothers felt,
 In the days of sixty-two.
There’s a tremor about my heart,
 And soft tears in my eye;
And to me they all are heroes,
 When the boys go marching by.

When the boys go marching by,
 In the gray of the early dawn,
I turn from the window away to hide
 My tears—when they are gone.
And I wonder if some mother’s son
 Will in far off Cuba die,
Away from the sun-kissed soil of his birth,
 When the boys go marching by.

When the boys go marching by,
 So proud and erect and true,
Who have offered their lives and hearts and hands
 Their country’s will to do;
I catch up my toddling boy,
 And I turn away and sigh,
And I’m glad—and I’m sorry he is not one
 Of the boys that are marching by.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Christmas in San Diego

Christmas? Yes? Why it seems like June!
Hear the wildbird's melody, all in tune.
See the Summer's glory, on sky and sea!
Christmas, you say? Can it really be?
The bells ring out on the perfumed air,
With the odor of roses everywhere.
The violet droops and hangs its head,
In the shadow cool of its mossy bed,
While the butterfly poised on its silken wing,
Flits past—a shimmering, shadowy thing,
Like a soul drawn back by the love of earth,
To visit once more its place of birth.
How the bold poinsettia's scarlet flame,
Flaunts her wanton beauty, to all the same,
And the odor of tuberose pale and sweet,
Sends its cloying breath to our very feet,
While the regal lilly stands in pride,
Arrayed in white, like a virgin bride.
Like a ball of fire the sun glides on,
Through the blaze of noon, from the birth of dawn,
And crimson the sky in his majesty,
As he drops from sight in a golden sea,
In a languorous dream we scan the bay,
At the glorious end of Christmas day.

Christmas? Strange! Then we close our eyes,
And shut out the gleam of sunkissed skies,
And before our vision, in dim review,
Comes another Christmas, that once we knew,
The air is crisp and the wind is chill,
And the soft snow drifts over vale and hill.
And smoke curls up from each chimney throat,
As robins utter a tender note.
The trees are leafless—the gardens bare.
Not a vestige of blossom, anywhere,
And even the snowdrop reaching up,
To catch the light in her crystal cup,
Catches instead, from His icy breath,

In her perfumed chalice, the wine of Death.

But Ah! what a happy busy throng,
Treads the market place, the whole day long.
The streets are gay with noise and mirth,
In festive joy for the Saviour's birth,
While the very beggar, whose wrinkled hand,
Makes of your purse a just demand,
Smiles as he hobbles and limps away,
And shows he is glad it is Christmas day.
The children shout, and the snowballs fly,
As the jingling bells of the sleigh go by,
And a glad cry rings through the world again.
"Peace on Earth and Good Will to Men!"

We sigh for the East—and we sing with the West.
Which Christmas day do we love the best?

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

Her Charity

It was Christmas time—it was Christmas tide,
By the soft, pure, garment of drifted snow,
That lay outspread on the whole world wide;
Within a mansion there shone a glow,
And gleam of light; and clear sweet strains,
A chanting of Yuletide's glad refrains.

With holly and cedar the room was decked,
The tree in the midst hung a glitter with toys,
With flash of candle and tinsel hung,
With gift and gladness and Christmas joys;
And around were gathered in youth's delight,
A crowd to welcome the Christmas night.

Silk and satin and jewel and fur,
Dark eyes lit with a joy intense,
But Ruth was the fairest of all and her
Sweet face shone in its innocence,
Quick and eager and gay was she,
And the belle of the Christmas revelry.

In the midst of the frolic a cry was heard.
Out in the dark—in the street alone,
Cold as a poor little wounded bird,
Stood a beggar child on the cold step stone;
And with curious eyes that meant no sin,
To amaze and dazzle—they let her in.

"Give her some cake," one said, and turned
Away to a corner with dainties piled,
Where a beautiful silver astral burned,
And brought and gave to the weeping child.
"No! let's give her a book," said one;
"The pictures will be to her lots of fun."

But in piteous grief the child wept on—
Though with joy and mirth the room was rife.
'Till—"Let us give her a doll"—said one.
"She may never have had one, in all her life."
From the topmost bough, they reached it down;

But she hid her face in her tattered gown.

“Then what do you want little girl?” said Ruth.
Ruth could have melted a heart of stone,
When she lifted her eyes full of innocent truth,
And coaxed and pleaded in such a tone.
Then the child flashed up—“Can I help crying,
When hungry and cold, my mother is dying?”

“You offer me food and toys—but who
Of all this crowd would follow me there,
Where in dirt and rags, she is lying alone,
And kiss her and breathe for her soul a prayer?
I do not want your toys and cake—
But a woman’s love—for my mother’s sake.”

There was breathless silence—then one by one,
With murmur and jest away they turned,
And the same old wrong again was done,
And the beggar was left unpitied and spurned;
She crouched in a corner, and shivered and cried,
And none of them thought of the crucified.

“I will go,” said Ruth. Then they said, “Ah, why,
Should you for this beggar, our evening spoil?
What is the use if the woman must die?
She will be released from a life of toil.”
“Take care of the child, help her,” they said,
“Anyhow, beggars are better off—dead.”

Her beautiful eyes, and beautiful face!
She put them to shame as she stood like a queen,
Wrapping the beggar with tender grace,
And gentle dignity seldom seen.
Then she threw on her hood and cloak and smiled,
And out in the darkness went with the child.

Ah, why should I tell of what she found,
Of hunger, poverty, want and despair,
Of starved out body and starved out soul,
Of rickety roof or of rickety stair;
In pity she watched all night by her side,
And in Ruth’s white arms the woman—died.

Ah, Ruth! It is years since that Christmas night.
The snows have for twenty years whitened your mound,
Covering you over with mantel white,
Folding you in from all sight and all sound—
But hot tears fall and lashes are wet,
Recalling a Christmas I cannot forget.

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

A Summer Day

Do you recall the day on the sands,
And the sound of the waves soft sighing,
Your eyes sought mine, and we clasped our hands,
And our hearts were in joy replying.
For oh it was sweet by the low tuned sea,
To picture our lives auspicious—
The cup was full—we took but a sip—
But oh was it not delicious.

We wrote our names, do you still recall,
And we drew a ring around them,
Then our rioting hearts made us blind to all,
Till the mad hearted waves had found them,
Like our sweet summer dream, they were washed from sight,
By a hateful tide—and vicious,
The cup was full—we took but a sip—
But, oh was it not delicious?

Publication. *Insurrection, and Other Poems*. San Diego: Silver Gate Press, 1905.

LATER SONG LYRICS

Complete sheet-music texts | 1912

Just as the Ship Went Down

A cold dark night, a sea of ice;
A ship out on the ocean;
All fitted out by man's device,
She rode in perfect motion.
A jar, a crash, a fearful clash,
A sound like awful thunder;
The dying groan, the living moan,
As the splendid ship went under.

The sky grows black, the icebergs crack,
And Death hangs o'er the water;
But "Women first!" the orders rang,
For mother and for daughter.
A cry, a shriek, but who can speak?
For then the waters parted;
The sea was cleft; and what was left,
For the living broken-hearted?

Chorus

Out on the sea, when the ship went down,
Out where the lifeboats rocked;
Husbands were parted from loving wives,
Captain and sailors, they gave up their lives;
Wireless rang with the awful news,
By which the whole world was shocked.
Out on the sea, near Eternity,
Where the angry waters frown,
"Nearer, my God," they sang,
Just as the ship went down.

Publication. *Just as the Ship Went Down: A Song of the Sea.* Words by Edith Maida Lessing; music by Bernie Adler and Sidney Gibson. Chicago: Harold Rossiter Music Company, 1912.

Oh! You Circus Day

Oh my little Honey pin a rose on me—
For I'm just as happy as a bumble bee,
To see that big parade—
Hear that old steam piano played.
Got to hear the band a-playing down the street—
Got to buy the tickets for a big box seat.
Oh see them, oh hear them, ain't that music grand?
Let's go, let's go, I've got to see that show.

Listen Honey listen to the bugle blow,
Keep your eyes wide open and we'll see the show.
See that bare-back rider jump—
See that camel's great big hump.
Elephants are dancing to the circus tune—
See the possum riding on the big baboon.
Just hear them, they cheer them, hear the people yell.
Sit down, sit down, I want to see that clown.

Chorus

On circus day just see that mule dressed up in pants,
See Salome do the hootchie dance,
Watch the acrobats tumbling down,
See that great big funny clown.
Look out for that big grizzly bear,
He's a fright, he will bite.
Oh! circus day just comes around but once a year.
Oh! my Honey, ain't you glad we're here?
All the side shows we'll investigate,
And the monkeys we will pester-cate.
Oh! you circus day. On circus day.

Publication. *Oh! You Circus Day*. Words and music by Edith Maida Lessing and Jimmie V. Monaco. Chicago: Will Rossiter, 1912.

When Crazy Joe Did the Alligator Slide

Down in the sunny South,
Big pancakes fill your mouth,
Watermelons, oh! how sweet,
That's where old nigger Joe,
With his fiddle and his bow,
Used to shake his feet.
Could he do the sand dance? My! Oh my!
He unloosened all his joints and he made his fiddle cry,
Danced until he lost his breath,
Danced himself almost to death,
Doing the Alligator slide.

He would play there all night
Till it got plum daylight,
People called him crazy Joe,
"Hey, there Joe!" they'd shout,
When he'd get his fiddle out,
Watching where he'd go.
Then he'd do the sand dance, Oh! what fun,
Till his woolly hair got straight, see the perspiration run,
Dance till folks were hypnotized,
Dance till he was paralyzed,
Doing the Alligator slide.

Chorus

When Joe began to fiddle,
Folks all began to wiggle,
Shake their feet a little,
And then how they would jiggle.
Alligators came from miles around,
Just to hear his fiddle sound,
And on their stomachs they would slide,
Jump on each other's backs and ride.
Dance till day was breaking,
And all the roosters waking,
Their big tails a-shaking,
Their sides with laughter quaking,
When old crazy Joe,

Down on the old bayou,
Played the Alligator,
Played the Alligator,
Played the Alligator Slide.

Publication. *When Crazy Joe Did the Alligator Slide*. Words by Edith Maida Lessing; music by Dennison Cook. Chicago: Will Rossiter, 1912. The lyric's racial slur and minstrel caricature are reproduced because they are part of the historical text; the editorial introduction places them in context.

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Colophon

Prepared from the original 1905 scan, complete 1912 sheet-music scores, the poet's local biographical dossier, and documentary sources preserved in the project folder, August 2026. Designed in EB Garamond at six by nine inches. The cover uses the unlettered artwork preserved in the user's layered Sturges cover file, recentered and set in the established Extremes/Green palette and geometry.