

TO AN OLD MAN

TERROR you bring into this room;
Your smile and cheerful mien are lies,
There is no youth within your eyes,
And though your cheeks still bravely bloom
You are in league with death and doom;
Therefore you come with laughter bright,
With wine and flowers of the night
And flashing in a fool's costume.

We hate the jest upon your tongue,
The merriment of your glad song,
Your happiness will do us wrong,
Who, unlike you, are really young,
You stifle us, who have not sung,
And when you dance with ease and grace
There is a look upon your face
That leaves us shaken and unstrung.

The words you say are fine and sweet,
And every step you take is sure,
And seemingly you shall endure
When we are dust within the deep.
You walk erect while still we creep.
No blunders mar your perfect parts—
Master you are of human hearts,
And yet with evilness replete.

Such wit as yours we cannot spin,
Nor so much kindness show to man,
And with such delicacy span
The awkward breach 'twixt right and sin.
But still you lose, who always win,
And in the moment of your gain
We mark the poignant rush of pain
That makes your victory harsh and thin.

You are a ghost by Time begot,
You are a thing that should not be.
Startled at times we sharply see
Ourselves in your exquisite rot.
Some day we, too, shall share your lot
And be so faultless and bizarre,
The sheen of some soft silver star,
Whose light lives on, though it is out.

JOSEPH BERNARD RETHY.

REMINISCENCES

THE other side of Death, one night,
Walked out a youth and maid;
And they reviewed (as children might
A game that they had played)
The battle they had died to fight,
The cost they both had paid.

"I heard—or seemed to hear," she said,
"Far voices, seemed to see
St. Michael point me to a sword
To set my country free;
With men, a man, I fought," her head
Drooped forward wearily.

The boy assented with a nod.
"Like me," he said, "beguiled.
A dove—a voice from heaven—odd
My fancies were, and wild!
I thought I was the son of God,"
He said, and, sadly, smiled.

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES.

SISTERS OF THE CROSS
OF SHAME

THE Sisters of the Cross of Shame,
They smile along the night;
Their houses stand with shuttered souls
And painted eyes of light.

Their houses look with scarlet eyes
Upon a world of sin;
And every man cries, "Woe, alas!"
And every man goes in.

The sober Senate meets at noon,
To pass the Woman's Law,
The portly Churchmen vote to stem
The torrent with a straw.

The Sister of the Cross of Shame,
She smiles beneath her cloud—
(She does not laugh till ten o'clock,
And then she laughs too loud.)

And still she hears the throb of feet
Upon the scarlet stair,
And still she dons the cloak of shame
That is not hers to wear.

The sons of saintly women come
To kiss the Cross of Shame;
Before them, in another time,
Their worthy fathers came.

And no man tells his son the truth,
And no man dares to tell;
And Innocence goes laughing through
The little doors of hell.

The Sisters of the Cross of Shame,
They smile along the night,
And on their shadowed window sills,
They place a scarlet light—

They place a scarlet light to draw
The soul that flutters by—
And still the portly Churchman prays,
And still the young men die.

And still the portly Churchmen pray,
And still the Senate meets,
And still the scarlet houses stand
Along the bitter streets—

And no man tells his son the truth,
Lest he should speak of sin;
And every man cries, "Woe, alas!"
And every man goes in.

F. DANA BURNET.

TOP O' THE POT

I HAD an old grandam and she was blind,
And she had lived from time out of mind.
And she knew all the sage old saws
That ever were known since the gray world was.

And when she heard one who vaunted himself
Of his pedigree's length or the pride of his pelf,
Then with a wag of her knowing head,
"The top o' the pot is the scum," she said.

The edge of her tongue was a thing to fear;
Heedless she was who might hear.
"He thinks he's God; and Who but He!
But the top o' the pot is the scum," said she.

ELIZABETH WADDELL.

BUTTONS

I HAVE been watching the war map slammed up for
advertising in front of the newspaper office.
Buttons—red and yellow buttons—blue and black but-
tons—are shoved back and forth across the map.

A laughing young man, sunny with freckles,
Climbs a ladder, yells a joke to somebody in the crowd,
And then fixes a yellow button one inch west
And follows the yellow button with a black button one
inch west.

(Ten thousand men and boys twist on their bodies in
a red soak along a river edge,
Gasp of wounds, calling for water, some rattling
death in their throats.)

Who by Christ would guess what it cost to move two
buttons one inch on the war map here in front of
the newspaper office where the freckle-faced young
man is laughing to us?

CARL SANDBURG.

TO THE SUICIDES

UNHALLOWED Ones;
Your vice was Impatience:
You might have done better
Had you waited for War.

Then Kings had praised you,
Bishops had blessed you,
Calling you holy—
Women had knitted for you
Mittens and socks,
Holding the needles and yarn cutely
On their Laps
In the Theatre
Between the Acts—
Poets had sung of you,
Calling your dying heroic.
Civilization—poor hussy—had wept for you
"Out of her Million Eyes—
Bankers and Gamblers,
Profiteers and Dealers in powder,
Students and Doctors and Dustmen—
All, all had wept for you,
Sniffing, Blubbing, Culture and Duty—
Calling you Saviors.

Unhallowed Ones,
Your Vice was impatience.

EDMOND MCKENNA.

VENUS AND MARS

VENUS and Mars looked from the cloudless blue,
Down on the bloody and disordered field
Where buzzards, surfeited and heavy, flew.
"See, Love," said Mars, "this is my choicest yield.

"And I need men. The farmer when he fears
The pinch of famine, more abundant sows.
I pray you dry the women's flood of tears
And make love blossom in them like a rose.

"Lure each, though weeping, to embrace a man,
No matter who, so that his strength be good.
Breed for my banquets, 'tis a goodly plan:
For when I drink I drain the best of blood."

"My lord, my warrior," smiling Venus said,
"I will seduce them to your high behest;
And though the father lie among the dead,
His son shall wait for you beneath the breast."

CHARLES ERSKINE SCOTT WOOD.