

Jennie Kiefer
Selected Poems



Jennie Kiefer

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Sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste natus error sit voluptatem accusantium doloremque laudantium, totam rem aperiam, eaque ipsa quae ab illo inventore veritatis et quasi architecto beatae vitae dicta sunt explicabo. Nemo enim ipsam voluptatem quia voluptas sit aspernatur aut odit aut fugit, sed quia consequuntur magni dolores eos qui ratione voluptatem sequi nesciunt. Neque porro quisquam est, qui dolorem ipsum quia dolor sit amet, consectetur, adipisci velit, sed quia non numquam eius modi tempora incidunt ut labore et dolore magnam aliquam quaerat voluptatem. Ut enim ad minima veniam, quis nostrum exercitationem ullam corporis suscipit laboriosam, nisi ut aliquid ex ea commodi consequatur? Quis autem vel eum iure reprehenderit qui in ea voluptate velit esse quam nihil molestiae consequatur, vel illum qui dolorem eum fugiat quo voluptas nulla pariatur?

Meadow-lark, and other poems. Los Angeles: the Parsifal Press, 1910.

Fugitive Poems. Los Angeles: Self-Published, 1923.

Meadow-lark!

Meadow-lark, in beauty dressed—
Wood-brown coat and primrose vest,

Loving meadows wide and sweet,
Where no arching branches meet,

Naught to check thy upward gaze,
Through the long, bright summer days.

Is it world-old pain that wells,
In thy heart 'neath asphodels?

Did thy love from English lane,
Soar to heaven on liquid strain?

Seeks thy heart in song relief,
Lest the meadows know thy grief?

Would'st thou lure, by that sweet note,
Sky-lark love from clouds remote?

Ease thy heart with that refrain,
Flute-like: "She will come again!"

Luna

From wondrous temple of the Sun,
The Earth with Luna fled;
Through darkest night, o'er ether plains
The radiant wanderers sped.

Nine times ten-million miles were told,
Since loud the temple rang,
And brazen gates were outward flung
Then shut with thunderous clang.

Still with the joy of ways untried,
And youth, and hearts of fire,
The wanderers, self-illumed and free,
Nor time nor space could tire.

But distance dimmed the altar-glow —
All noble souls are true —
And now the wanderers' faltering hearts
The exile's anguish knew.

When strong wills yield, the hour has struck
For Primal Power to guide;
And being, led by unseen hand,
Finds naught of worth denied.

Four times ten-million years are told,
Still Earth with Luna sweet
O'er primrose pathway through the skies,
The vows of youth repeat.

The ardent Earth, Time's record keeps
In beauteous Seasons' flight;
And Luna's face, in liliated grace,
Reflects the altar-light.

The Mission Of The Oregon

(One of the finest armored cruisers of the United States navy is to make the run from San Francisco around the Horn to the Atlantic fleet. But the trip will not arouse the world like the journey of the Oregon during the Spanish-American war, with Captain Clark on the bridge. That was an epoch-making journey.

—Los Angeles Times, August 23, 1910.)

White heat, and hammer's smothering blows,
Their Titan wills have sped,
And steel with steel, in giant strength,
The lightning-bolts have wed.

And now in San Francisco's Bay
An armored cruiser rides,
Who waits impatient for the bells
That chant for swelling tides.

Long vigils o'er, Valkyrie-like
With youthful heart elate,
The Oregon — her vows to keep —
Clears wide the Golden Gate l

Far out ! sealed orders bid the stress,
No power that helps nor bars;
Alone on ocean's shoreless waste,
No convoy but the stars.

A nation's message! Noble ship,
Guard well the written scroll,
Ten thousand miles of stubborn seas
Between thee and thy goal.

Sea-mountains rise, her course to stay,
Then swing and lash and wrack,
To wreath their garlands, sea-foam white,
And fling them round her track.

Soft luring airs from Tropic Isles
With siren sweets are sent
o'erwhelming all the sense and soul,
Like spice with attar blent.

Then gales sweep on in fearful might,
The heavens and waters reel,
And stricken seas and stricken hearts
The Powers of Darkness feel.

Now well for thee, O valiant ship,
By wave and tempest tried,
Thy builder spurned the rotten steel
As thou the seething tide.

No broken screws nor sluing bolts,
To make thy timbers start;
Each gliding shaft with joy obeys
Thine engine's throbbing heart.

In southern seas where ice-fleets launch,
Beneath the Southern Cross,
An omen from the skies descends:
The white-winged albatross.

Magellan's tortuous Strait is won,
Again the wide seas bound,
Again the midnight watcher lone
The North-star's light has found.

Now foes may lurk, a hostile fleet
In sheltering waters bides,
And warily her armored breast
The leaden seas divides.

The goal is reached where Moro's rock
Defiant greets the main

And alien hands rule alien hearts
Beneath the flag of Spain.

In sulphurous smoke the message speeds,
Writ large, the world to tell,
The light that makes the meaning plain
Is burning Christobel !

* * * *

Her mission o'er, the Oregon,
All samite-robed, elate,
Turns westward to beloved shores,
And far-off Golden Gate!

The Chauffeur

No longer on the “Field of Mars”
Alone, are heroes bred;
No longer ‘neath the heel of war
Alone, the turf is red, —

For chauffeur hosts are charging down, —
The wayside flowers are red —
The wage of battle fills the land:
The dying and the dead.

San Gabriel’s horn the echoes wakes,
On highways near and far
Stand wide! a conquering hero comes
Triumphant in his car!

No space on earth for careless feet,
Where sleuth-like autos roam;
To cross their path means quick dispatch
To your eternal home.

Drift-wood

[Dedicated to L S.]

The light boat, like a cygnet, dipped
To blue Mendota's wave,
And youthful vikings sought the coves
Mendota's waters lave, —

For wind and wave, free-hooters wild,
Had gathered drift-wood store,
And into coves and inlets deep
Their garnered treasure bore.

Not fairer, Ellen of the Isle
Than she, whose light oar plied
In time to kinsman's lengthened stroke,
O'er waters deep and wide.

They gathered faggots, lichen'd o'er
With woodland memories dear,
And homeward bore, with toiling oar,
For wide hearth's evening cheer.

When frosts and shadows closer crept,
In crackling driftwood blaze
To light and life once more came forth
The scenes of by-gone days.

From Black Hawk Point the deer, pursued,
In beauty cleft the wave,
And darkling waters joyous leapt,
The antlered life to save.

The muskrat builded strong and well
His castle, moated deep;
And safely slept, a baron bold,
Within his donjon keep.

With lore of wood, the birch canoe
Was fashioned strong and light;
With Indian craft, the arrow-heads
Outsped the wild bird's flight.

The springtime came with glorious life,
And call like wood-dove loud
A wild heart heard, and dusky cheek
Outshone the sunset cloud.

The Indian summers came and went,
The harvest moons grew bold,
The giant forests cast their shields
And dared the winter's cold;

The Seasons brought their full-armed gifts
From forest, field and waves;
And wild and sweet, the life that beat
Around these Indian graves.

The drift-wood smoldered, whitened, fell;
The Night Wind downward crept,
And from the hearth, with gentle hand,
The furrowed ashes swept.

Then Helen's dreaming heart beheld
A scene most dear — the last —
Like smoke of Peace-Pipe drifted wide —
The Spirit of the Past.

Blue Dragon-ocean

With breathings deep and bellowings on the shore,
Blue Dragon-Ocean clutches at the land,
And seeks to drag to protoplasmic night
All patient Time has wrought, or destined being planned.

Chained by a law, eternal and serene,
It strains its fettered limbs when full moon bides,
The strong will breaks on headlands bleak and bold,
Then foiled and beaten, raging, backward glides.

Its dazzling helmet rests where ice-floes start,
Where Arctic monsters range, and penguin calls,
Where quivering Boreal-lights wield vigils keep
And deck in fearful splendor vast celestial walls.

To far Antarctic bourne it sinuous wends,
Where petrel screams, whose soul is tempest-tossed,
Lest 'mid the waste of Polar nights and snows,
Its all of light and life, its one dear mate is lost.

Its scales are blinding in the noon-day sun,
At morn and eve the steel-blue armor gleams;
From it, when silvered by the moonlight pale
And gemmed with countless stars, unearthly beauty streams.

Lashed by sirrocco's breath, or fell simoom
Its heavy undulous bulk resents the blow,
And mountainous heavings show the Dragon's blood
In warmer currents through arterial gulf streams flow.

When Trade-winds wild o'er trackless highways fleet,
And ships go down to night and rayless day,
No more the Dragon heeds the loss and wreck,
Than were it gliding seal, or dolphin at his play.

Anon the angered heavens reach down to smite,

And sabers flash, and thunderous blows resound,
Far off the tumult rolls, the armor's clang
Ensanguined heavens proclaim how wide the Dragon's wound.

When every grain of sand on every shore
In glass of Time its heavenly message brings,
The Dragon-Ocean, free, unchained, shall soar,
Transmuted up to Heaven, on wide-spread misty wings.

Passing

The temple was deserted. The High Altar of the Heart was fallen! The casements whence the soul looked forth to bind or loose, to bless or ban, were closed and barred.

The erstwhile ministrant with swift and noiseless footsteps had departed, leaving no tidings — whence the command, whither the journeying, when the hoped return.

Sometime votary, blinded and stunned, groping like Nydia with extended hand, fain would detain by force or pleadings the departing soul.

The yielding wall let in the cool, embracing, silent air.

Silent all answering things when Light and Life and Love wreathed arms: the sunlit hills, enfolding vales, the welcoming uplands flung with cloth-of-gold, the living 'rocks climbing to heaven, close breath of pine, wide-spread or folded wing, swift messenger from flower to flower, the censer-swinging breeze, — all dumb, apart, as if the soul of all things too had fled.

Death is common? Ay, plenteous as the stars; but in the Passing, to the riven soul, a tidal wave engulfs the world, and leaves it tenantless.

My Religion

O Soul that bears with seeming loss,
For kindred souls the heavy cross, —

Like one who gathered to his heart
The spears which made the life-blood start,

That rubies from his affluent veins
Might ransom Liberty in chains —

Hast thou in time the meaning guessed,
Of bruised feet and wounded breast?

Tell o'er the scheme of life, and show
Why hearts must bleed, why tears must flow.

“The seed will be a seed, till sun
And soil and rain their work have done;

“In branch and leaf and flower expressed
Is meaning in the seed confessed.

“Take heed, for in thy being dwells
The need which every change compels.

“Perhaps for thee, the earthquake shock,
The lightning-bolt, the hidden rock.

“Whate'er the cost, thyself must know
The lesson taught in joy and woe.

“Perfected being, is the quest —
The goal — of every earth-bound guest.”

A War Garden

Where shot and shell the garden tilled,
All life and beauty fled,
And Nature grieved o'er wreck and loss,
As one whose hope is dead.

By ancient tower, Verdun and Marne,
Were lilies thickest strown,
On Flanders' field and Ypres' swamps,
Were roses reddest blown.

As leaves in Vallombrosa's wood,
Were leaves of maple cast
At Aisne and Somme and Malvern hill,
Swept down by cannon blast.

Shrill as the pibroch, whistling steel
Cleft thistle ranks in twain,
And far and wide by stream and wood
The purple bloom was slain.

* * * *

Stars trooping nightly, softly tread
On trench and weltering sod,
Where fell the matchless fleur~de-lis,
With rose—and golden-rod!

The Archer

The Archer bent his strongest bow
And deftly launched his keenest dart,
The shining barb with dire intent
Plunged deep into a steel-chilled heart.

The cleavage of that chilled-steel heart
No art nor dart before had found,
Small wonder, then, that panic spread
Through inky pages, vellum bound,—

That Blackstone tumbled from his shelf,
And dust-grimed tomes were thundering hurled,
That chaos reigned and ruin spread;
Such cause, ere this, had wrecked a world.

* * * *

The carnage, pillage, conflict o'er,
Aloft enthroned sat Cupid's self;
While Attic sage, in happiest mood,
Kicked Law and Blackstone 'neath the shelf.

The Fevered Patient

Again the fevered patient slept,
Again his dreams ran wild,
And with a cry that stilled the blast,
He called for wife and child.

Where's Alice? Christian? Neighbors, friends,
Drive back those murderous bands;
Their swords, for Harold's childish rage,
Have severed face and hands!

The faithful midnight watcher strove
To calm the frenzied mind,
But storm wraiths loud, in boisterous mood,
Rode fast upon the wind—

The children all are sleeping, sire,
Dreams fold each curly head,
They'll come, pell-mell, at peep of dawn,
Right here, beside your bed !

* * * *

Just last night, Hansen, while you slept,
Right through this room defiled
Six million ghosts, with silent tread,
And glance of anguish wild.

I beckoned one, more pale, distraught,
Than all the hurrying throng,
And kindly said : "Whence came you, friend?
And is your journey long?"

He said: "From fields of slaughter, Sire,
We come, what each befell,
Of sights and sounds, to mortal ears
No fleeing ghost dares tell ! "

* *

Say, Hansen, quick, undo these bands,
Tomorrow, well begun,
I'll drive the devil's brood back home,
Before the set of sun!

* * * *

Tear down that double-eagles' perch,
I hate their blood-red beaks,
I can not get my needed rest,
Disturbed by hideous shrieks.

* * * *

Come closer, Hansen, for the walls
Have ears, and human speech,
And I would tell a thing to you,
Which no man dares to preach!

Our fathers' God is dead! Henceforth,
This old Earth blindly reels,
No opening Heaven, besieged by prayers,
The Will of God reveals!

* * * *

The storm is over. Hansen, look
Without; do stars give light?
What is the hour? I'll sleep till dawn,
Now seek your rest; good night!

The Beggars

They came, the beggars, to the mart,
Accosting, with their wares, the throng,
Each striving harmlessly with each,
No claim preferred as weak or strong.

The sun for all. Each comrade's worth,
The beggars told through shining hours,
When swift, as from a cloudless sky,
Mid summer's heat, the tempest lowers—

With gaze star-fixed and sullen mien,
One strode, and raving of his woes,
Vaunted Jehovah's sword to slay,
Unsparring, all his midnight foes.

Some sought by courteous words, to stay
The headlong wrath of monstrous fool,
But who by wrath his cause would win,
Hath little cause his wrath to cool.

One gentle beggar, roused from dreams
By this unseemly noise and rout,
Barred with his slender arm the road
Of loud declaiming, swaggering lout.

“Make room!” the brawler cried, but first
The mailed hand the fore-word spake,
And beggars basking near fore-saw
The white uplifted arm must break.

The arm fell crushed, the fingers held
A tiny scroll the blow unfurled,
It fluttered out across the land,
It lengthened till it bound the world—

There traced that human hearts might read,

Upon its folds in lines of light:
“Diviner than the Right of Kings
Is weakest beggar’s chartered right.”

Erin's Celebration

The month was August; well, why tell
The century or day?
The Isle was "wearin' of the green,"
Home Rule, had come to stay.

The harp was strung, and Tara's lights,
Dispelled a nation's gloom;
The blarney stone was hangin' high,
And grief for joy, made room.

Said Patrick: "Shure we're in the sun,
This day so bloomin' foine,
We'll cilibrate with peaceful sports,
Upon the faeld of Boyne."

"Upon that grreat, historric faeld,
Warm Irish hearts, in pain,
Beheld the aegis of their hopes
Go down in battle rain.

"But peaceful victories hinceforth,
Shall win that faeld's renown,
The ash bough with the shamrock twined
This day shall victors crown.

"Lowly and sthrong, to honor's call
Our patriot hearts will wake,
And like the ash bough rocked by storms,
We'll bind, but will not break."

Well, cut the cable; books must end;
The scenes and actors shift;
And Patrick found, orations o'er,
Within his lute the rift.

Der Tag had come, the Day foretold,

Die Wacht am Shannon rung,
The breezes caught the stirring strains,
And wide the banners flung.

The purpose, hour, united hearts,
And tented field spread wide,
The kultur of the sports, that Day
Filled all the land with pride!

The lists were long, the Salient Smash,
And Underseas gave place,
To Centimeters' conquering blows
And Scouting Aircraft race.

The Pyrrhic dance moved west and east,
And south and north in turn,
And Patrick boob, was first and last,
With health and strength to burn.

But Patrick yet no prize had won,
When Day was near its close.
"Am I," said he, "with kultur, Mike,
To stand for things like those?"

"While dew was gleamin' on the sod,
Before der Tag begun,
I planned extinsions to me brist,
To hold me medals won!

"Ach, Mike, those Ontonts don't stay put,
They race all o'er the faeld;
And whin they're baten, still they cry:
'We'll niver, niver yaeld !'

"Unsportsmanlike !" But worse befell,
As Patrick moaned his loss,
For Ontont judges next bestowed,
The double iron cross.

Love

Love wrought, and Toil forgot the load,
Forgot the heavy stinging goad.

Love wrought, and Sorrow joyous sped,
Where rocks had torn and thorns had bled.

Love wrought, and back from wrong and blame
With heart of gold the wandering came.

