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Songs out of Doors

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I

OF BIRDS AND FLOWERS

THE VEERY

The moonbeams over Arno's vale in silver flood were pouring,
When first I heard the nightingale a long-lost love deploring.
So passionate, so full of pain, it sounded strange and eerie;
I longed to hear a simpler strain, — the woodnotes of the veery.

The laverock sings a bonny lay above the Scottish heather;
It sprinkles down from far away like light and love together;
He drops the golden notes to greet his brooding mate, his dearie;
I only know one song more sweet, — the vespers of the veery.

In English gardens, green and bright and full of fruity treasure,
I heard the blackbird with delight repeat his merry measure:
The ballad was a pleasant one, the tune was loud and cheery,
And yet, with every setting sun, I listened for the veery.

But far away, and far away, the tawny thrush is singing;
New England woods, at close of day, with that clear chant are ring-
ing:
And when my light of life is low, and heart and flesh are weary,
I fain would hear, before I go, the wood-notes of the veery.

1895.

THE SONG-SPARROW

There is a bird I know so well,
It seems as if he must have sung
Beside my crib when I was young;
Before I knew the way to spell
The name of even the smallest bird,
His gentle-joyful song I heard.
Now see if you can tell, my dear,
What bird it is that, every year,
Sings "*Sweet – sweet – sweet – very merry cheer.*"

He comes in March, when winds are strong,
And snow returns to hide the earth;
But still he warms his heart with mirth,
And waits for May. He lingers long
While flowers fade; and every day
Repeats his small, contented lay;
As if to say, we need not fear
The season's change, if love is here
With "*Sweet – sweet – sweet – very merry cheer.*"

He does not wear a Joseph's-coat
Of many colours, smart and gay;
His suit is Quaker brown and gray,
With darker patches at his throat.
And yet of all the well-dressed throng
Not one can sing so brave a song.
It makes the pride of looks appear
A vain and foolish thing, to hear
His "*Sweet – sweet – sweet – very merry cheer.*"

A lofty place he does not love,
But sits by choice, and well at ease,
In hedges, and in little trees
That stretch their slender arms above
The meadow-brook; and there he sings
Till all the field with pleasure rings;

And so he tells in every ear,
That lowly homes to heaven are near
In "*Sweet – sweet – sweet – very merry cheer.*"

I like the tune, I like the words;
They seem so true, so free from art,
So friendly, and so full of heart,
That if but one of all the birds
Could be my comrade everywhere,
My little brother of the air,
I'd choose the song-sparrow, my dear,
Because he'd bless me, every year,
With "*Sweet – sweet – sweet – very merry cheer.*"

1895.

THE MARYLAND YELLOW-THROAT

When May bedecks the naked trees
With tassels and embroideries,
And many blue-eyed violets beam
Along the edges of the stream,
I hear a voice that seems to say,
Now near at hand, now far away,
"*Witchery – witchery – witchery.*"

An incantation so serene,
So innocent, befits the scene:
There's magic in that small bird's note –
See, there he flits – the Yellow-throat;
A living sunbeam, tipped with wings,
A spark of light that shines and sings
"*Witchery – witchery – witchery.*"

You prophet with a pleasant name,
If out of Mary-land you came,
You know the way that thither goes
Where Mary's lovely garden grows:
Fly swiftly back to her, I pray,
And try to call her down this way,
"Witchery – witchery – witchery."

Tell her to leave her cockle-shells,
And all her little silver bells
That blossom into melody,
And all her maids less fair than she.
She does not need these pretty things,
For everywhere she comes, she brings
"Witchery – witchery – witchery."

The woods are greening overhead,
And flowers adorn each mossy bed;
The waters babble as they run –
One thing is lacking, only one:
If Mary were but here to-day,
I would believe your charming lay,
"Witchery – witchery – witchery."

Along the shady road I look –
Who's coming now across the brook?
A woodland maid, all robed in white –
The leaves dance round her with delight,
The stream laughs out beneath her feet –
Sing, merry bird, the charm's complete,
"Witchery – witchery – witchery!"

1895.

THE WHIP-POOR-WILL

Do you remember, father, —
It seems so long ago, —
The day we fished together
Along the Pocono?
At dusk I waited for you,
Beside the lumber-mill,
And there I heard a hidden bird
That chanted, "whip-poor-will,"
"Whippoorwill! whippoorwill!"
Sad and shrill, — *"whippoorwill!"*

The place was all deserted;
The mill-wheel hung at rest;
The lonely star of evening
Was throbbing in the west;
The veil of night was falling;
The winds were folded still;
And everywhere the trembling air
Re-echoed "whip-poor-will!"
"Whippoorwill! whippoorwill!"
Sad and shrill, — *"whippoorwill!"*

You seemed so long in coming,
I felt so much alone;
The wide, dark world was round me,
And life was all unknown;
The hand of sorrow touched me,
And made my senses thrill
With all the pain that haunts the strain
Of mournful whip-poor-will.
"Whippoorwill! whippoorwill!"
Sad and shrill, — *"whippoorwill!"*

What knew I then of trouble?
An idle little lad,
I had not learned the lessons

That make men wise and sad.
I dreamed of grief and parting,
And something seemed to fill
My heart with tears, while in my ears
Resounded "whip-poor-will."
"Whippoorwill! whippoorwill!"
Sad and shrill, — *"whippoorwill!"*

'Twas but a cloud of sadness,
That lightly passed away;
But I have learned the meaning
Of sorrow, since that day.
For nevermore at twilight,
Beside the silent mill,
I'll wait for you, in the falling dew,
And hear the whip-poor-will.
"Whippoorwill! whippoorwill!"
Sad and shrill, — *"whippoorwill!"*

But if you still remember
In that fair land of light,
The pains and fears that touch us
Along this edge of night,
I think all earthly grieving,
And all our mortal ill,
To you must seem like a sad boy's dream
Who hears the whip-poor-will.
"Whippoorwill! whippoorwill!"
A passing thrill, — *"whippoorwill!"*

1894.

WINGS OF A DOVE

I

At sunset, when the rosy light was dying
Far down the pathway of the west,
I saw a lonely dove in silence flying,
To be at rest.

Pilgrim of air, I cried, could I but borrow
Thy wandering wings, thy freedom blest,
I'd fly away from every careful sorrow,
And find my rest.

