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Spring in Savary.

Alice Brewer.

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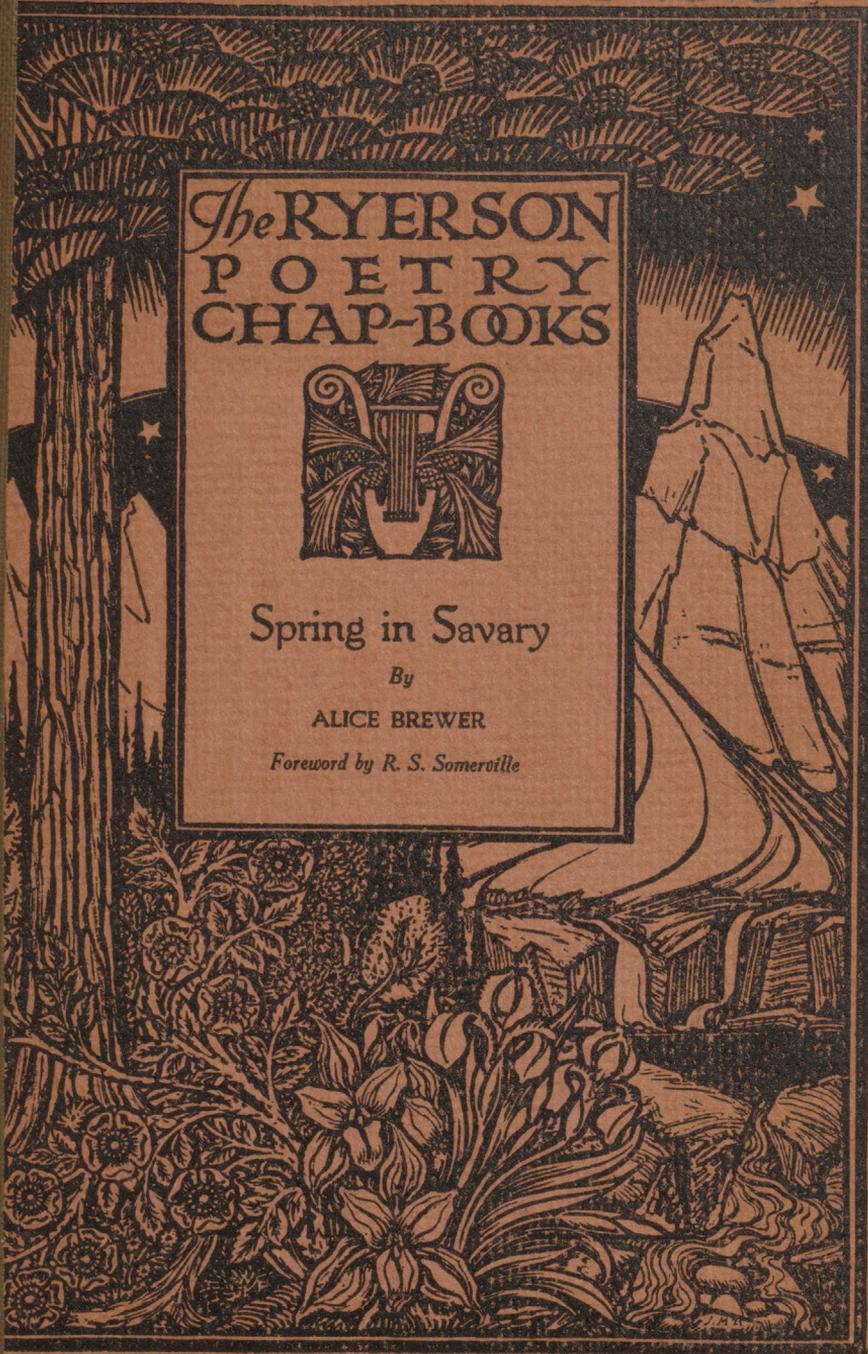


Spring in Savary

By

ALICE BREWER

Foreword by R. S. Somerville



OF THIS edition of SPRING
IN SAVARY, by Alice Brewer,
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FOREWORD

THE ARRIVAL of a new poet is an event in the field of Canadian letters. Intensity of effort in this still young Dominion is directed chiefly toward making a livelihood. The leisured class increases slowly, the development of a solid background of literary culture has had to await the fulfilment of more materialistic aims, and only a cloistered few have felt the call to sustained poetic expression.

Older Canada, that portion of the Dominion lying east of the Great Lakes, has produced several poets of rank, among them the well-known Civil Service trio of Campbell, Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott, of whom only the latter is left; the even more celebrated and related group of Charles G. D. Roberts and Bliss Carman and the younger Roberts; the poet of the habitant patois, the late Dr. Drummond; and a few younger singers of merit in Toronto and Montreal. The four western provinces, younger and less advanced in the accumulation of wealth and stabilized conditions, are just beginning to knock at the door for recognition as literary centres.

Alice Brewer is of British birth, transplanted early to the British Columbia coast. Vancouver has become accustomed to, and proud of, her versatility as a first-class amateur actress, a singer of charm, a musical critic of keen discernment, and a clever writer of prose and verse. Amidst such promising achievement she has remained almost painfully modest, and considerable pressure by her friends was exerted before she consented to submit this collection of verse to a publisher.

I feel confident that *Spring in Savary* will be warmly received by lovers of good poetry everywhere. Her poems gleam with keen imagination and vivid coloring and her sense of rhythm is striking. Comparatively few as they are in number they offer a wide range of thought and form of expression. Some of her verses invite comparison with the very best work of the best Canadian poets. The advent of this little volume adds one more name to that gallant band of pioneers who are holding high the torch of Canadian poesy amid the slow-lifting fog of materialism.

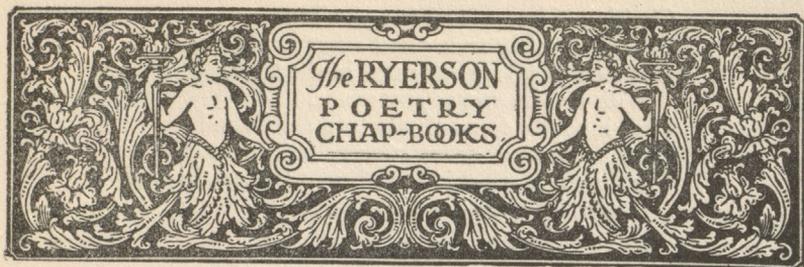
R. S. SOMERVILLE.

Montreal.

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1875



Spring in Savary

By Alice Brewer



SPRING IN SAVARY

LO AN ISLAND! a world of wings,
(Dipping and flashing and fluttering wings)
Of gulls and linnets and singing things
All singing different tunes.
The morning rings with the aching call
Of the gulls, while at twilight, over all
Sounds the fluting song of loons.

Daintily edging the netted foam
(The frosted silver of fretted foam),
Defying each breaker's crested comb
Sail a thousand mariner birds.
Poising, balancing, gaily they float,
Add to the chorus their piping note
Of a scale of minor thirds.

The new-clad trees in their robes of grace,
(Foliate, shimmering, lace-like grace)
Sing low, mayhap of their ancient race—
Or of robins' nests in Spring.
Each wave hymns high as he leaps to shore,
Casts his morning gold and returns for more,
While the blackbird bugles ring.

Choiring of linnets and wrens; a breeze
Of Spring, softly trying first songs in the trees,
(Just timidly trying out songs in the trees)
With a voice soft as any caress.
Fine, intricate drops of rain leap and bound
On the spikenard drums, who re-echo around
The "news," for behind this bright lattice of sound
Dame Nature is changing her dress.

* * *

REQUEST

THINK of me, friend,
When I am old and slow,
As once I was
With pulse and heart aglow;
Whose laughter rang,
Who sang and danced and loved;
With flying feet
Through starry pathways roved;
Forget the one
So weary, time-worn, done;
Remember, friend of mine,
The other one.

* * *

EVENING

AFAR I hear
A bird's wild, wistful calling;
It seems the voice
Of day itself is falling
Like benison upon the velvet of the dusk,
While touched with coming mystery the scent of musk
Floats like a forest of cloud-shadows on the air—
Evening is near!

Trailing white mists
Float softly—softly vanish;
A shy veiled moon
Strives timidly to banish
The glitt'ring scythes still flaming in the western sky;
Bright capes, the golden pomp of towering mountains high;
The amethystine clouds with crimson ocean soon
Will keep their trysts.

Rippling the air
His pointed wings a-dipping
Like dusky oars
A swallow sails, outstripping
The swift, wild flight of day; a chaste and icy spell
Falls o'er the shadowed surface of a pool; a bell
Rings from afar—the chimes like fugitives take flight—
Evening so fair!

Dun silv'ry peace
On shore and wave and wood;
Star-flowers a-shine;
A bird's song like a flood
Of dripping pearls; moonlight in silver clothes the foam,
Dimming the phosphorescent fires in sea's curled comb,
With purple folded pinions, star-crowned stands the Night;
Evening has flown.



SUNRISE ON GROUSE MOUNTAIN

VEILED with ethereal amethyst
Are fairy greens and airy mauves;
A star hangs low
As if the grave-eyed morn held out a lamp
To light the path by which her shining feet
Approach the planisphere.
Low in the west a tragic cloud a-fire
Hides, like a silver secret in its folds
A sickle moon.
The mountain spring,
Whose little jet has through the violet night
Flung clouds of lace, now gaily piles up diamonds.
Austere and sable-plumed
The pines below wave lightly in the thin east wind
Which leaping from the russet-purple sea
Leaves it yet mirror-still.
High in unfathomed space
A silver cloud-world moves, unfolding to the East
White gates of ivory with points and powderings of gold.
An argent rim, an aureate glow,
A sudden deep abyss of light,
The pearly phantoms vanish with the Night—
Another day is born.

DESIRE

COULD I but make one thing of beauty
Before I die,
If not with joy, contentedly
I would then lie
Mingled once more with that strange dust
Which Adam tilled,
Not drift inconsequent, as must
Dust unfulfilled.

I have no skill, no implement
Save strong desire;
Then to those sun-gilt, dazzling heights
Dare I aspire
With groping mind and untaught hand
Beauty to form
So true that it must ever stand
Through sun and storm?

Sometimes the Muses pitying
Will grant strong wings
To him, who unarmed strives and falls,
Yet upward springs
Renewed by contact with the earth,
Vibrant, alight.
He then on those God-given wings
Shall make his flight.



OLD LACE

FILMY-SOFT and cobweb-fine
Mine, a scarf of lace, 'tis Spanish;
Fairy-frost-like in design,
Blown, like thistle-down t'would vanish.
Years with reckless opulence
Raying beauty, have combined
Pearl with ivory, interlined
Each soft fold with palest gold;
Ambered into yellowness,
Clouded into mellowness
That which once so crudely white
Newly callow, palely bright,
Now is foamy gossamer.

Oh, I would old content abide
A soul en-skied
If that I might like this frail tissue set aside
"Time's ancient feud with Loveliness."

* * *

THE SCARF

For Dr. A.I.B.

MYRIADS of silken shells! A strand
Whose glimm'ring sheen so softly glows,
Presenting to the eye a band
Of decent seemliness, in rows.
But look! at either end a strange design;
What colour-driven fancy did combine
With mad revolt to break away
From decent neutral-tinted grey?

How like to life this silken scarf.
In spite of some few breaks away
Of tawny-orange, crimson gay—
There runs the steady even strand:—
Convention's neutral-tinted band.
This is the part that's seen of human kind:
Life's love of colour's hidden in the mind.
The scarf's bright ends are folded in your breast
Here is a thought when with my scarf you're dressed.

* * *

FEMININE

THROUGH the gates of the morning in crystal and silver
She came, with a dew-spangled wreath on her hair;
Faint dapplings of opaline green on her gown were,
All scented with balsam, and oh, she was fair.

She was lovely at noon in her poppy and purple
Diaphanous gown with white mists on her brow;
Webs of pearl laced her shoulders; a thistle-down kirtle
Draped butter-cup sandals—the gods but knew how.

But ah! I shall ever remember her splendour
When high up the mountain—a luminous ray—
She fled, clad in gold, which the sunset did lend her,
Veiled in ivory twilight; her name was—June Day.

COMPLICATION

MY WOUNDS, they would not heal
And none knew why;
Naught could my pain conceal—
I fain would die.

An anguished mind in throes
Was silent pent;
Teaching the body's woes
What suff'ring meant.

Time came with soothing lore
At my appeal,
"Both heart and pride are sore,
I cannot heal."

"Whom shall I call?" I cried
With sobbing breath.
"But one can heal," Time said—
"His name is Death."

* * *

APPEAL

(To William McFee after reading "Race")

GIVE us those tales of the sea, McFee,
That set our blood a-stirring;
Of the boom and the surge and the waves' wild urge,
And the ship's response to the ocean's dirge,
Of strange winds in the rigging whirring.

Give us those tales of a moon-lit shore,
And the fierce, wild music stealing
From an unknown source with a potent force,
(And down on the rocks lies a grisly corse)
And a meaningless bell goes pealing.

Tell us, oh, tell us, some more of those men
Who their quarter-decks walked like kings,
Yet whose life was rife with a hidden strife—
A passionate Creole—a dumb, strange wife
With scarred hands covered over with rings.

Sail, for all landsmen's sake, McFee,
To those harbours of Memory great;
Let our hearts leap again to the seaman, Dane,
To a female Macedoine's love and pain;
Tell us more of the scud, and the wash and the wake,
For all lubbers' and seamen's sake.



THE FLAGPOLE

FORCE the iron through my heart,
Bolt me to the sod;
Stand me straight and gaunt and stark,
Point my peak to God.

Torn my limbs and stripped my bark,
Gone my waving crest,
Roots and branches flung aside,
Shattered, stunned, distressed.

Mightiest of my mighty kin
A monarch once—and now—
Limbless, leafless, broken, mute,
A pennant on my brow.

Strange the dreams which haunt me now,
Eyes of glittering stars—
Singing summers—birds in Spring—
Autumn's avatars.

Bolt and chain my body, still
Soars my spirit free.
Flagpole! though man has named me,
God made me first, a tree.



BUSHEY PARK

SEE THE lovely chestnut tree,
A candelabra gay;
On every graceful finger-tip
The bloomy candles sway.

Through the leafy-tangled ways
The sun a bright beam launches,
Sets the candles all ablaze
In the chestnut's branches.

Comes the North Wind, rough and chill,
Summons with a shout
Autumn's soundless wraiths of mist—
Put the candles out.



MIDNIGHT

THE ROOM is chill (as life is bare)
Dull embers on the hearth are dying,
I stir them into life—a flare
Of light and warmth sends shadows flying.

Thus, on the altar of our hearts
Faint mem'ries lie (all gone life's gladness)
Fanned with a thought—their fragrance starts—
Suffusing joy amid our sadness.



THE VOICE

THUS spake the Voice in those mysterious hours
When space itself goes ticking like a clock:
"O Man! thy suff'ring now doth endless seem
Because, insatiate, thy mind cries out
For something more than it hath yet attained.
Desires are thine which seem to have no goal,
Searing with longings wild thy harassed soul;
Melted and tortured with the pain of love
Thy spirit writhes in shackled impotence;
Each day the hard-won battle fought with life
Seems doubly hard—because thou knowest not
For what high cause the fight. Thou sighest
"Could I but know, and why, my cyclic labour,
A warrior invincible, would fight for me."
Poor struggler, teach thou this thy failing soul:
The end of Life—in the high majesty
Of its unhasting process—is not ease,
Nor yet attainment, but Endeavour; for O Man,
Thou art the Pilgrim of Eternity.

LIFE'S BATHER

(A Sapphic from Savary)

SWIMMING in shallow water all the time,
How safe—but oh! how dull is life;
I long to pass into the deeper sea
Where strife and buoyancy are rife.

But there a whirlpool called "Despondency"
Affrights me quickly back to shore;
While just beyond a jagged, sharp-toothed rock
Adds greater menace to the roar.

By swimmers, whose strong strokes win bravely by,
"Fear of Extinction" this is called;
Those tigress teeth! That whirling vortex deep!
Venturing near, I turn appalled.

O for a little ship of dreams called "Faith,"
Or "Love," to sail me past the roar,
Then would I, joyous, plunge in that bright sea,
And LIVE—not lurk along the shore.



ALL SOULS' EVE : A Song

ON THIS dear night our thoughts take form again
And live, responsive to our joy or pain,
'Tis All Souls' Eve.
Listening, believing that the past is here
A short, sweet space, when those we loved so dear,
As angels, whisper without fear
" 'Tis All Souls' Eve."

Rising and falling, lost and long repined,
Voices from whence? "Oh, leave us not behind,
'Tis All Souls' Eve."
As on wings, a stream of silver sound
Brings back our joy—spreads ecstasy around,
A glorious light shines, as from ev'ry mound;
'Tis All Souls' Eve.

RETROSPECT

I LEAN against the broken, crannied wall;
Cradled in moonlight is the forest path
Whose winding ways with the infinity of stars seem leagued.
Somewhere afar a bubbling spring makes call
To streams that sing—then shatter to a fall.

In slow and mighty poise a brooding moon
'Mid planetary vapour softly floats,
Changing to golden spires the high pinetops, whose lower gloom
Turns now to friendly dreaminess attune
With mem'ry and the alchemy of June.

All is unchanged since when we two met here
And always leaned upon the crannied wall,
Youth in our hearts, about us the eternal magnitudes—
All but the little shrine-lamps shining clear
Within the gem-glassed chapel in the woods;
These now are quenched and you no longer near.

Oh! the sad splendour of the past, the pain!
Nought now is left but twilight and the rain.



A DREAM

I DREAMT I was in England
And oh! 'twas Spring time there;
From swelling throats
The liquid notes
Of birds filled all the air
With rivulets of music
And streams of silver sound;
The tumbling rills
And pearly trills
Gushed melody around.
(And oh! the flight of swallows
So long in exile mourning,
How they sing as they wing on their way.)

Blue sky or cloudy weather,
Early or late the day,
 The rippling song
 Still flutes along
In broken cascades gay;
Earth had unpent her fragrance,
A scent stole from the bowers;
 From tree and shoot
 And budding fruit
Flowed sweetness, as of flowers.
 (Oh! the bursting of calyx,
 The slipping of sheathes,
 The crowding of meadow-sweet shoots.)

A thousand greens of emerald
Are cradled in the lane,
 The pungent lime
 And spicy thyme
Recall the bees again.
Fine strings of slim wild roses
Weave webs of fragrant bloom
 Entangling hedge
 And thorn and sedge
In waves of creamy spume.
 (Oh! the blossoming bowers,
 The bubbling of sap,
 The whisper of leaf, bud and blade.)

The latticed leaves a-tremble
With shower drops for buds,
 Like diamonds shine
 In quiv'ring line
Bejewelling the woods.
Caught in a golden filament
A web of pearl there shines,
 The milky gleam
 Of jasmine's sheen
Is veiled with shimm'ring lines.
 (Faint mist of blue and silver,
 The pearl fan of the moon,
 And oh! the opal heart of morning's glow.)

As swells the lusty sapling
Beneath his vest of green,
 So swelled my heart
 As through each part
Flowed scent and sound a scene.

I cried "O home of beauty,
My land, of love the theme,
I nevermore
Will leave thy shore,"
Alas! 'twas but a dream!

✧ ✧ ✧

LIFE'S SUNSHINE

LIVING in light we know as that of day,
How transformed that same light engoldened by the sun;
A myriad jewels dancing in each ray—
A thousand beauties shining, where before were none.

So too is life—hooded and cloaked in grey
Until, unless, so glamorously bright breaks through
Love, with his warm felicity of ray;
Life then will cast her veil of dun; rose-gold and blue
Her vesture now; each every deed and thought
Become bright jewels with mosaic wrought.

How poor is that still radiance of the day
Without the flaming pageant of the sun above:
Life wrapped in ghost-ropes, harbouring decay
Is that sad life, her largesse scattered, without love.

✧ ✧ ✧

TIME

MY HEALING fingers which men call "the days"
I place upon each suff'ring silent soul;
And with my soothing hands, "the months," whose ways
Charm pain away—I make the broken whole.

If after all this soul still throbs and sighs,
Too dumb to moan, a grief that has no tears;
I fold it warmly, weaving kindly spells,
In the sweet solace of my arms, "the years."

✧ ✧ ✧

SONNET

OH IN what bitterness of grief I passed
The summer and the winter of that year,
When ruthlessly, without a sigh or tear,
You left me with the derelicts, outcast.

Grief built for me her spacious roof; "the past
Is dead," Time whispered, "soon the Spring will come
And ease thy pain, now tortured, tearless, dumb;
With songs of birds, flowers, leaves, green shadows cast."

But when—O God!—Spring sang her songs again
My garden's early beauty—all in vain;
With anguished eyes I gazed. I was unhealed.

No more to say; and no more tears to weep;
In Misery's cramped dwelling now I keep
My high head bowed, my lips for ever sealed.

—?—

IS IT a veil that time has drawn
Before my eyes?
Or one removed? Else why is born
This wild surprise?
That one whose looks I drank as
Earth in drouth drinks rain,
Whose presence, words, and ways
Were Heaven, whose absence pain,
Now looks to me so strangely grown—
So like to every other one?

Long past I saw those eyes disclose
—Ah what a goal!—
The lights, infinitudes and shadows
Of a soul
As gracious as a river flowing in the hills;
Now—those same eyes, that voice—
Each tender mem'ry kills.
O Time! have you the sterile truth revealed?
Or those august felicities concealed?
I pass you by
And something, shudd'ring deep within me, sighs—
How could I?

THE LONELY TREE

I NEVER saw a tree so sad
As one stands lone at Savary,
On once thick-wooded Savary;
Boughs that in backward time waved glad,
Folding a slender wood-sprite, clad
In leafy green, a gay dryad,
One of a throng at Savary.

Twisted and gnarled, his height leans down
In melancholy disarray;
No leaf upon the wildest day
Flutters in green, or rustling brown.
What storms have riven that high crown,
Broken that gallant spirit down,
Battered the friendly heart away?

Like shower-buds on other trees,
The small green diamonds of the rain
Hang on his face like tears of pain.
Holding vain hands towards those seas
Wherein his long-lost kin attain
Brief life as ships, or builded fane
On other shores, far, far from these.

When twilight browns the hills behind;
Poignant his aspect, mute, forlorn;
'Tis loneliness and not the storm
Has broken that great heart which pined
For those long vanished of his kind;
Now dark-twigg'd memories that bind
In sombre grief at Savary.

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CHAPTER 10

