

**MAURICE
HEWLETT**

**HELEN
REDEEMED
AND OTHER
POEMS**

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Maurice Hewlett

Helen Redeemed and Other Poems

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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Three of the Poems here published have appeared in book form already, in the Volume called *Songs and Meditations*, long out of print.

HELEN REDEEMED

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PROEM

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Sing of the end of Troy, and of that flood
Of passion by the blood
Of heroes consecrate, by poet's craft
Hallowed, if that thin waft
Of godhead blown upon thee stretch thy song
To span such store of strong
And splendid vision of immortal themes
Late harvested in dreams,
Albeit long years laid up in tilth. Most meet
Thou sing that slim and sweet
Fair woman for whose bosom and delight
Paris, as well he might,
Wrought all the woe, and held her to his cost
And Troy's, and won and lost
Perforce; for who could look on her or feel
Her near and not dare steal
One hour of her, or hope to hold in bars

Such wonder of the stars
Undimmed? As soon expect to cage the rose
Of dawn which comes and goes
Fitful, or leash the shadows of the hills,
Or music of upland rills
As Helen's beauty and not tarnish it
With thy poor market wit,
Adept to hue the wanton in the wild,
Defile the undefiled!
Yet by the oath thou swearest, standing high
Where piled rocks testify
The holy dust, and from Therapnai's hold
Over the rippling wold
Didst look upon Amyklai's, where sunrise
First dawned in Helen's eyes,
Take up thy tale, good poet, strain thine art
To sing her rendered heart,
Given last to him who loved her first, nor swerved
From loving, but was nerved
To see through years of robbery and shame
Her spirit, a clear flame,
Eloquent of her birthright. Tell his peace,
And hers who at last found ease
In white-arm'd Heré, holy husbander
Of purer fire than e'er
To wife gave Kypris. Helen, and Thee sing
In whom her beauties ring,
Fair body of fair mind fair acolyte,
Star of my day and night!

18th September 1912.

FIRST STAVE

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THE DEATH OF ACHILLES

Where Simoeis and Xanthos, holy streams,
Flow brimming on the level, and chance gleams
Betray far Ida through a rended cloud
And hint the awful home of Zeus, whose shroud
The thunder is—'twixt Ida and the main
Behold gray Ilios, Priam's fee, the plain
About her like a carpet; from whose height
The watchman, ten years watching, every night
Counteth the beacon fires and sees no less
Their number as the years wax and duress
Of hunger thins the townsmen day by day—
More than the Greeks kill plague and famine slay.
Here in their wind-swept city, ten long years
Beset and in this tenth in blood and tears
And havocry to fall, old Priam's sons
Guard still their gods, their wives and little ones,
Guard Helen still, for whose fair womanhood
The sin was done, woe wrought, and all the blood
Of Danaan and Dardan in their pride
Shed; nor yet so the end, for Heré cried
Shrill on the heights more vengeance on wrong done,
And Greek or Trojan paid it. Late or soon
By sword or bitter arrow they went hence,
Each with their goodliest paying one man's offence.
Goodliest in Troy fell Hector; back to Greek
Then swung the doomstroke, and to Dis the bleak

Must pass great Hector's slayer. Zeus on high,
Hidden from men, held up the scales; the sky
Told Thetis that her son must go the way
He sent Queen Hecuba's—himself must pay,
Himself though young, splendid Achilles' self,
The price of manslaying, with blood for pelf.
A grief immortal took her, and she grieved
Deep in sea-cave, whereover restless heaved
The wine-dark ocean—silently, not moving,
Tearless, a god. O Gods, however loving,
That is a lonely grief that must go dry
About the graves where the beloved lie,
And knows too much to doubt if death ends all
Pleasure in strength of limb, joy musical,
Mother-love, maiden-love, which never more
Must the dead look for on the further shore
Of Acheron, and past the willow-wood
Of Proserpine!

But when he understood,
Achilles, that his end was near at hand,
Darkling he heard the news, and on the strand
Beyond the ships he stood awhile, then cried
The Sea-God that high-hearted and clear-eyed
He might go down; and this for utmost grace
He asked, that not by battle might his face
Be marred, nor fighting might some Dardan best
Him who had conquered ever. For the rest,
Fate, which had given, might take, as fate should be.
So prayed he, and Poseidon out of the sea,
There where the deep blue into sand doth fade

And the long wave rolls in, a bar of jade,
Sent him a portent in that sea-blue bird
Swifter than light, the halcyon; and men heard
The trumpet of his praise: "Shaker of Earth,
Hail to thee! Now I fare to death in mirth,
As to a banquet!"
So when day was come
Lightly arose the prince to meet his doom,
And kissed Briseïs where she lay abed
And never more by hers might rest his head:
"Farewell, my dear, farewell, my joy," said he;
"Farewell to all delights 'twixt thee and me!
For now I take a road whose harsh alarms
Forbid so sweet a burden to my arms."
Then his clean limbs his weeping squires bedight
In all the mail Hephaistos served his might
Withal, of breastplate shining like the sun
Upon flood-water, three-topped helm whereon
Gleamed the gold basilisk, and goodly greaves.
These bore he without word; but when from sheaves
Of spears they picked the great ash Pelian
Poseidon gave to Peleus, God to a man,
For no man's manège else—than all men's fear:
"Dry and cold fighting for thee this day, my spear,"
Quoth he. And so when one the golden shield
Immortal, daedal, for no one else to wield,
Cast o'er his head, he frowned: "On thy bright face
Let me see who shall dare a dint," he says,
And stood in thought full-armed; thereafter poured
Libation at the tent-door to the Lord

Of earth and sky, and prayed, saying: "O Thou
That hauntest dark Dodona, hear me now,
Since that the shadowing arm of Time is flung
Far over me, but cloudeth me full young.
Scatheless I vow them. Let one Trojan cast
His spear and loose my spirit. Rage is past
Though I go forth my most provocative
Adventure: 'tis not I that seek. Receive
My prayer Thou as I have earned it—lo,
Dying I stand, and hail Thee as I go
Lord of the Ægis, wonderful, most great!"
Which done, he took his stand, and bid his mate
Urge on the steeds; and all the Achaian host
Followed him, not with outcry or loud boast
Of deeds to do or done, but silent, grim
As to a shambles—so they followed him,
Eyeing that nodding crest and swaying spear
Shake with the chariot. Solemn thus they near
The Trojan walls, slow-moving, as by a Fate
Driven; and thus before the Skaian Gate
Stands he in pomp of dreadful calm, to die,
As once in dreadful haste to slay.

Thereby

The walls were thick with men, and in the towers
Women stood gazing, clustered close as flowers
That blur the rocks in some high mountain pass
With delicate hues; but like the gray hill-grass
Which the wind sweepeth, till in waves of light
It tideth backwards—so all gray or white
Showed they, as sudden surges moved them cloak

Their heads, or bare their faces. And none spoke
Among them, for there stood not woman there
But mourned her dead, or sensed not in the air
Her pendent doom of death, or worse than death.
Frail as flowers were their faces, and all breath
Came short and quick, as on this dreadful show
Staring, they pondered it done far below
As on a stage where the thin players seem
Unkith to them who watch, the stuff of dream.
Nor else about the plain showed living thing
Save high in the blue where sailed on outspread wing
A vulture bird intent, with mighty span
Of pinion.

In the hush spake the dead man,
Hollow-voiced, terrible: "Ye tribes of Troy,
Here stand I out for death, and ye for joy
Of killing as ye will, by cast of spear,
By bowshot or with sword. If any peer
Of Hector or Sarpedon care the bout
Which they both tried aforetime let him out
With speed, and bring his many against one,
Fearing no treachery, for there shall be none
To aid me, God nor man; nor yet will I
Stir finger in the business, but will die
By murder sooner than in battle fall
Under some Trojan hand."

Breathless stood all,
Not moving out; but Paris on the roof
Of his high house, where snug he sat aloof,
Drew taut the bowstring home, and notched a shaft,

Soft whistling to himself, what time with craft
Of peering eyes and narrow twisted face
He sought an aim.
Swift from her hiding-place
Came burning Helen then, in her blue eyes
A fire unquenchable, but cold as ice
That scorcheth ere it strike a mortal chill
Upon the heart. "Darest thou...?"
Smiling still,
He heeded not her warning, nor he read
The terror of her eyes, but drew and sped
A screaming arrow, deadly, swerving not—
Then stood to watch the ruin he had wrought.
He heard the sob of breath o'er all the host
Of hushing men; he marked, but then he lost,
The blood-spurt at the shaft-head; for the crest
Upheaved, the shoulders stiffen'd, ere to the breast
Bent down the head, as though the glazing sight
Curious would mark the death-spot. Still upright
Stood he; but as a tree that on the side
Of Ida yields to axe her soaring pride
And lightlier waves her leafy crown, and swings
From side to side—so on his crest the wings
Erect seemed shaking upwards, and to sag
The spear's point, and the burden'd head to wag
Before the stricken body felt the stroke,
Or the strong knees grew lax, or the heart broke.
Breathless they waited; then the failing man
Stiffened anew his neck, and changed and wan
Looked for the last time in the face of day,

And seemed to dare the Gods such might to slay
As this, the sanguine splendid thing he was,
Withal now gray of face and pinched. Alas,
For pride of life! Now he had heard his knell.
His spirit passed, and crashing down he fell,
Mighty Achilles, and struck the earth, and lay
A huddled mass, a bulk of bronze and clay
Bestuck with guilt and glitter, like a toy.
There dropt a forest hush on watching Troy,
Upon the plain and watching ranks of men;
And from a tower some woman keened him then
With long thin cry that wavered in the air—
As once before one wailed her Hector there.

SECOND STAVE

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MENELAUS' DREAM: HELEN ON THE WALL

So he who wore his honour like a wreath
About his brows went the dark way of death;
Which being done, that deed of ruth and doom
Gave breath to Troy; but on the Achaians gloom
Settled like pall of cloud upon a land
That swoons beneath it. Desperate they scanned
Each other, saying: "Now we are left by God,"
And in the huts behind the wall abode,
Heeding not Diomedes, Idomeneus,
Nor keen Odysseus, nor that friend of Zeus
Mykenai's king, nor that robbed Menelaus,
Nor bowman Teukros, Nestor wise, nor Aias—

Huge Aias, cursed in death! Peleides bare
Himself with pride, but he went raving there.
For in the high assembly Thetis made
In honour of her son, to waft his shade
In peace to Hades' house, after the fire
Twice a man's height for him who did suspire
Twice a man's heart and render it to Heaven
Who gave it, after offerings paid and given,
And games of men and horses, she brought forth
His regal arms for hero of most worth
In the broad Danaan host, who was adjudged
Odysseus by all voices. Aias grudged
The vote and wandered brooding, drawn apart
From his room-fellows, seeding in his heart
Envy, which biting inwards did corrode
His mettle, and his ill blood plied the goad
Upon his brain, until the wretch made mad
Went muttering his wrongs, ill-trimmed, ill-clad,
Sightless and careless, with slack mouth awry,
And working tongue, and danger in the eye;
And oft would stare at Heaven and laugh his scorn:
"O fools, think not to trick me!" then forlorn
Would gaze about green earth or out to sea:
"This is the end of man in his degree"—
Thus would he moralise in those bare lands
With hopeless brows and tossing up of hands—
"To sow in sweat and see another reap!"
Then, pitying himself, he'd fall to weep
His desolation, scorned by Gods, by men
Slighted; but in a flash he'd rage again

And shake his naked sword at unseen foes,
And dare them bring Odysseus to his blows:
Or let the man but flaunt himself in arms...!
So threatening God knows what of savage harms,
On him the oxen patient in the marsh,
Knee-deep in rushes, gazed to hear his harsh
Outcry; and then his madness taught for Greeks,
So on their dumb immensity he wreaks
His vengeance, driving in the press with shout
Of "Aias! Aias!" hurtling, carving out
A way with mighty swordstroke, cut and thrust,
And makes a shambles in his witless lust;
And in the midst, bloodshot, with blank wild eyes
Stands frothing at the lips, and after lies
All reeking in his madman's battlefield,
And sleeps nightlong. But with the dawn's revealed
The pity of his folly; then he sees
Himself at his fool's work. With shaking knees
He stands amid his slaughter, and his own
Adds to the wreck, plunging without a groan
Upon his planted sword. So Aias died
Lonely; and he who, never from his side
Removed, had shared his fame, the Lokrian,
Abode the fate foreordered in the plan
Which the Blind Women ignorantly weave.

But think not on the dead, who die and leave
A memory more fragrant than their deeds,
But to the remnant rather and their needs
Give thought with me. What comfort in their swords
Have they, robbed of the might of two such lords

As Peleus' son and Telamon's? What art
Can drive the blood back to the stricken heart?
Like huddled sheep cowed obstinate, as dull
As oxen impotent the wain to pull
Out of a rut, which, failing at first lunge,
Answer not voice nor goad, but sideways plunge
Or backward urge with lowered heads, or stand
Dumb monuments of sufferance—so unmanned
The Achaians brooded, nor their chiefs had care
To drive them forth, since they too knew despair,
And neither saw in battle nor retreat
A way of honour.
And the plain grew sweet
Again with living green; the spring o' the year
Came in with flush of flower and bird-call clear;
And Nature, for whom nothing wrought is vain,
Out of shed blood caused grass to spring amain,
And seemed with tender irony to flout
Man's folly and pain when twixt dead spears sprang out
The crocus-point and pied the plain with fires
More gracious than his beacons; and from pyres
Of burnt dead men the asphodel uprose
Like fleecy clouds flushed with the morning rose,
A holy pall to hide his folly and pain.
Thus upon earth hope fell like a new rain,
And by and by the pent folk within walls
Took heart and ploughed the glebe and from the stalls
Led out their kine to pasture. Goats and sheep
Cropt at their ease, and herd-boys now did keep
Watch, where before stood armèd sentinels;

And battle-grounds were musical with bells
Of feeding beasts. Afar, high-beacht, the ships
Loomed through the tender mist, their prows—like lips
Of thirsty birds which, lacking water, cry
Salvation out of Heaven—flung on high:
Which marking, Ilios deemed her worst of road
Was travelled, and held Paris for a God
Who winged the shaft that brought them all this peace.

He in their love went sunning, took his ease
In house and hall, at council or at feast,
Careless of what was greatest or what least
Of all his deeds, so only by his side
She lay, the blush-rose Helen, stolen bride,
The lovely harbour of his arms. But she,
A thrall, now her own thralldom plain could see,
And sick of dalliance, loathed herself, and him
Who had beguiled her. Now through eyes made dim
With tears she looked towards the salt sea-beach
Where stood the ships, and sought for sign in each
If it might be her people's, and so hers,
Poor alien!—Argive now herself she avers
And proudly slave of Paris and no wife:
Minion she calls herself; and when to strife
Of love he claims her, secret her heart surges
Back to her lord; and when to kiss he urges,
And when to play he woos her with soft words,
Secret her fond heart calleth, like a bird's,
Towards that honoured mate who honoured her,
Making her wife indeed, not paramour,
Mother, and sharer of his hearth and all