

**COLLECTED POEMS. VOL. I: THE
LOOM OF YEARS; THE FLOWER
OF OLD JAPAN; THE FOREST OF
WILD THYME; FORTY SINGING
SEAMEN**

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Collected Poems. Vol. I: The Loom of Years; The Flower of Old Japan; The Forest of Wild Thyme; Forty Singing Seamen by Alfred Noyes

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ALFRED NOYES

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COLLECTED POEMS

BY

ALFRED NOYES

VOL. I.

THE LOOM OF YEARS

THE FLOWER OF OLD JAPAN

THE FOREST OF WILD THYME

FORTY SINGING SEAMEN

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Edinburgh and London

1910

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COLLECTED POEMS.

THE LOOM OF YEARS AND OTHER POEMS.

*DEDICATED TO
THE MEMORY OF JAMES PAYN.*

THE LOOM OF YEARS.

In the light of the silent stars that shine on the struggling
sea,
In the weary cry of the wind and the whisper of flower and
tree,
Under the breath of laughter, deep in the tide of tears,
I hear the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web of
Years.

The leaves of the winter wither and sink in the forest
mould
To colour the flowers of April with purple and white and
gold :
Light and scent and music die and are born again
In the heart of a gray-haired woman who wakes in a world
of pain.

The hound, the fawn and the hawk, and the doves that
croon and coo,
We are all one woof of the weaving and the one warp
threads us through,
One flying cloud on the shuttle that carries our hopes and
fears
As it goes thro' the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the
Web of Years.

The green uncrumpling fern and the rustling dew-drenched
rose
Pass with our hearts to the Silence where the wings of
music close,
Pass and pass to the Timeless that never a moment mars,
Pass and pass to the Darkness that made the suns and
stars.

Has the soul gone out in the Darkness? Is the dust
sealed from sight?
Ah, hush, for the woof of the ages returns thro' the warp
of the night!
Never that shuttle loses one thread of our hopes and fears,
As it comes thro' the Loom of the Weaver that weaves
the Web of Years.

O, woven in one wide Loom thro' the throbbing web of
the whole,
One in spirit and flesh, one in body and soul,
Tho' the leaf were alone in its falling, the bird in its hour
to die,
The heart in its muffled anguish, the sea in its mournful cry,

One with the flower of a day, one with the withered moon,
One with the granite mountains that melt into the noon,
One with the dream that triumphs beyond the light of the
spheres,
We come from the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the
Web of Years.

MICHAEL OAKTREE.

UNDER an arch of glorious leaves I passed
 Out of the wood and saw the sickle moon
 Floating in daylight o'er the pale green sea.

It was the quiet hour before the sun
 Gathers the clouds to prayer and silently
 Utters his benediction on the waves
 That whisper round the death-bed of the day.
 The labourers were returning from the farms
 And children danced to meet them. From the doors
 Of cottages there came a pleasant clink
 Where busy hands laid out the evening meal.
 From smouldering chimneys around the village spire
 There soared and sank the caw of gathering rooks.
 The faint-flushed clouds were listening to the tale
 The sea tells to the sunset with one sigh.
 The last white wistful sea-bird sought for peace,
 And the last fishing-boat stole o'er the bar,
 And fragrant grasses, murmuring a prayer,
 Bowed all together to the holy west,
 Bowed all together thro' the golden hush,
 The breathing hush, the solemn scented hush,
 The holy, holy hush of eventide.

And, in among the ferns that crowned the hill
 With waving green and whispers of the wind,
 A boy and girl, carelessly linking hands,
 Into their golden dream drifted away.

On that rich afternoon of scent and song
Old Michael Oaktree died. It was not much
He wished for ; but indeed I think he longed
To see the light of summer once again
Blossoming o'er the far blue hills. I know
He used to like his rough-hewn wooden bench
Placed in the sun outside the cottage door
Where in the listening stillness he could hear,
Across the waving gilly-flowers that crowned
His crumbling garden wall, the long low sigh
Of supreme peace that whispers to the hills
The sacred consolation of the sea.
He did not hope for much : he longed to live
Until the winter came again, he said ;
But on the last sweet eve of May he died.

I wandered sadly through the dreaming lanes
Down to the cottage on that afternoon ;
For I had known old Michael Oaktree now
So many years, so many happy years.
When I was little he had carried me
High on his back to see the harvest home,
And given me many a ride upon his wagon
Among the dusty scents of sun and hay.
He showed me how to snare the bulky trout
That lurked under the bank of yonder brook.
Indeed, he taught me many a country craft,
For I was apt to learn, and, as I learnt,
I loved the teacher of that homely lore.
Deep in my boyish heart he shared the glad
Influence of the suns and winds and waves,
Giving my childhood what it hungered for—
The rude earth-wisdom of the primal man.

He had retained his childhood : Death for him
Had no more terror than his bed. He walked
With wind and sunlight like a brother, glad
Of their companionship and mutual aid.

We, toilers after truth, are weaned too soon
From earth's dark arms and naked barbarous breast.
Too soon, too soon, we leave the golden feast,
Fetter the dancing limbs and pluck the crown
Of roses from the dreaming brow. We pass
Our lives in most laborious idleness.
For we have lost the meaning of the world ;
We have gone out into the night too soon ;
We have mistaken all the means of grace
And over-rated our small power to learn.
And the years move so swiftly over us :
We have so little time to live in worlds
Unrealised and unknown realms of joy,
We are so old before we learn how vain
Our effort was, how fruitlessly we cast
Our Bread upon the waters, and how weak
Our hearts were, but our chance desires how strong !
Then, in the dark, our sense of light decays ;
We cannot cry to God as once we cried !
Lost in the gloom, our faith, perhaps our love,
Lies dead with years that never can return.

But Michael Oaktree was a man whose love
Had never waned through all his eighty years.
His faith was hardly faith. He seemed a part
Of all that he believed in. He had lived
In constant conversation with the sun,
The wind, the silence and the heart of peace ;
In absolute communion with the Power
That rules all action and all tides of thought,
And all the secret courses of the stars ;
The Power that still establishes on earth
Desire and worship, through the radiant laws
Of Duty, Love and Beauty ; for through these
As through three portals of the self-same gate
The soul of man attains infinity,
And enters into Godhead. So he gained
On earth a fore-taste of Nirvana, not

The void of eastern dream, but the desire
And goal of all of us, whether thro' lives
Innumerable, by slow degrees, we near
The death divine, or from this breaking body
Of earthly death we flash at once to God.
Through simple love and simple faith, this man
Attained a height above the hope of kings.

Yet, as I softly shut the little gate
And walked across the garden, all the scents
Of mingling blossom ached like inmost pain
Deep in my heart, I know not why. They seemed
Distinct, distinct as distant evening bells
Tolling, over the sea, a secret chime
That breaks and breaks and breaks upon the heart
In sorrow rather than in sound, a chime
Strange as a streak of sunset to the moon,
Strange as a rose upon a starlit grave,
Strange as a smile upon a dead man's lips ;
A chime of melancholy, mute as death
But strong as love, uttered in plangent tones
Of honeysuckle, jasmine, gilly-flowers,
Jonquils and aromatic musky leaves,
Lilac and lilies to the rose-wreathed porch.

At last I tapped and entered and was drawn
Into the bedroom of the dying man,
Who lay, propped up with pillows, quietly
Gazing ; for through his open casement far
Beyond the whispers of the gilly-flowers
He saw the mellow light of eventide
Hallow the west once more ; and, as he gazed,
I think I never saw so great a peace
On any human face. There was no sound
Except the slumbrous pulsing of a clock,
The whisper of the garden and, far off,
The sacred consolation of the sea.