

# RUE DES VENTS

BY ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE

## I

It was an old house, and there seemed to live  
Along its mousey corridors still a gloom  
Of lives long-cancelled. In my quiet room  
Among my books, I could hear fugitive  
Hesitant faint intrusions that withdrew  
Before they had entered to my presence there.  
The very light was thick, and on the stair  
The darkness glowed and flickered. So I knew  
I was at home there; for on every side  
Beyond these walls life to me thus had seemed  
Always a hush where ancient voices hide—  
A dusk where candles had so lately gleamed—  
A masque of those who went and us who bide—  
A dream that many another ghost has dreamed.

## II

Here in the quiet chambers that I love  
Evening comes gently; from the garden, cries  
Of laughing children float; and there above  
The old roofs, toward the western glow, there flies  
A swallow from the south thus early come  
To seek a summer that is still a dream.  
The chestnut buds to wooly pods have grown  
Green-lit beyond the window where I lean.  
Summer is singing and the night is still,  
Now listening to that song; I too, oppressed  
By some old faith in beauty, yield my will  
To that which lights the gold lights of the west,—  
And long for summer though it come again  
With dreams of beauty and with proof of pain.

## III

This is the dusk-hour when for old love's sake  
Ghosts in this garden might arise and move  
Down vanished paths, and memories might awake  
Out of the death that is so chill to love.  
You whose old sins have in the later time  
Become a legend perilous and sweet  
With tragic whisperings of courtly rhyme,—  
Lovely dead chatelaine!—are these your feet  
That now across my silence slowly pace  
Thrilling the darkness of this garden-close?  
Turn! . . . No, this is no golden harlot's face,—  
This is the bud that is not yet the rose,  
This is a ghost of things that never were,  
This is a child. The dusk grows sweet with her.

## IV

Be wise, be wise, O heart forever seeking  
A wine whose fervor must the goblet break!  
Let now the Sleeping Beauty lie a-sleeping;  
Her lips could not speak sweeter did she wake.  
Her dreams may last some happy moments still  
Before the dawn's first resonance of grey  
Shall stir the east and, growing swiftly, fill  
Her soul with joy and terror of the day.  
Yet as the Sleeper lifts her quiet eyes  
And to my troubled gaze their laughing glow  
With loveliness and love of love replies,  
I know that she has dreamed more than I know—  
And lights outshining wisdom flush and start,  
And summer sweeps wild wings across my heart.

## V

Psyche! whose fairness of the rain-swept brow  
And delicate breast and smooth unquiet hair  
So long have filled my dreams,—what wonder now  
That I again come and again find fair  
The curve and color of these vestments worn  
In mortal semblance for a little while?

Out of the far isles of the past reborn  
 You still keep, as in marble, this dim smile—  
 And I, the recurrent mortal lover, follow  
 Your pale recurrent dream of youthful love,  
 And seek as seeks in April's track the swallow  
 To trail your secret footsteps as you move;  
 Even like the swallow little knowing why  
 Your look should light the earth and flush the sky.

## VI

This day is all a greyness of dim rain.  
 Earth and the sky alike are wrapped in fold  
 Of the dim memory of some ancient pain,  
 Some wrong of bitter gods endured of old;  
 All grey and spent, save where I see you move  
 With lifted golden head and laughing eyes  
 And breast so delicate that no power but love  
 Could dwell there with his singing sorceries.  
 Proud little head, lifted amid the gloom!  
 Gay serious little heart, swift-running feet!  
 Into the shadowed broodings of this room  
 You bring the light of regions far and sweet—  
 So sweet, that if you left me here alone  
 It would be life and sunlight that were gone.

## VII

Your body's beauty is an air that blows  
 Out of some garden where the spring has come—  
 Where never yet has faded any rose  
 And never any singing bird is dumb.  
 You are white waterfalls in piney woods  
 Touched by the freshness of October wind.  
 You are the slim young silver moon that broods  
 Over a dusk where lovers wander blind.  
 And how shall these eyes ever have their fill  
 Of you, alight with loveliness and love—  
 My starlit water, tremulous or still,  
 Across which music wakens, as you move!  
 Over the floor laughing and white you pass. . . .  
 I see all April light that ever was.

## VIII

When the mad tempest of the blood has died  
And sleep comes on, still I am half aware  
Of the long sloping music of your side,  
And windy light is round me with your hair.  
I move through dusks between the day and night  
Where night and day and vision interwine;  
The breast of Her who was the gods' delight  
Touches a cheek I vaguely know is mine.  
Doubt and believing mingle while there stirs  
Your hand that wakens mine out of its dream;  
Hope knows not what is hers, nor Memory hers,  
Amid the marble curves that change and stream;  
And only Beauty, through dim lights, can claim  
These hours that have no time or place or name.

## IX

O happy heart, O heart of loveliness!  
Against the morning you lift up your face,  
And smile against the morning's smile, no less  
Beautiful than her beauty; and the grace  
Of her long-limbed and sweet processional hours  
Is but attendant on your morning laughter.  
Trailing her wreaths and scattering her flowers,  
Where your light footsteps go, she follows after—  
Follows your feet with sunlight. . . . Till we are  
Silent again and lonely, where there rise  
Dark evening trees, over them one great star,  
While other stars come slowly to the skies—  
And hand in hand, where the world goes to rest  
I am lost in wonder, and silent is your breast.

## X

Your beauty shall not save you from despair  
In after-days when life is not so sweet  
Along the garden-paths. That you were fair  
And well-belovèd, can it ease your feet  
Down through the dark upon whose edge I stand  
And see the shadows deepening on ahead  
Even to the borders of the empty land  
Where beauty ends and all the dreams are dead?

Child! drink the sunlight of this perfect hour  
Which makes a slender blossom of your breast!  
Time has gone dreaming, that your heart may flower  
And while he sleeps, be happy. That is best;  
And laugh in triumphing beauty, even at one  
Who in each flower sees flowers that now are gone.

## XI

Here at my window, in the waning light  
Of afternoon, with serious bended head  
You labor at a letter; as you write  
I wonder, can words say what should be said?  
I wonder if the misspelled lines can hold  
Anything of this rapt and dreaming face,  
The delicate brow, the carven wavy gold,  
The white neck bent in dim abstracted grace?  
That lad in battle to whom your message flies—  
I in my madness wish that he could share  
This hour. No inky page of your replies  
Could speak to him as speaks this gold-shot hair  
To me who linger, near yet more afar  
Than you, boy, can be, wheresoever you are.

## XII

Since beauty holds no lease of settled date,  
And youth has tenure but while roses blow,  
And mortal hope must yield to mortal fate,  
And every dream that comes must surely go—  
Since these most lovely phantoms cannot be  
Companion of the grey years that confess  
Wild love to hold life's chiefest sovereignty,  
Yet must without it seek for happiness—  
Then let the autumn of the soul become  
Transfigured with its own appropriate hues;  
As in high pageant, when the flowers are dumb,  
Old forests lift the splendor earth must lose,  
And hills with solemn foliage of the fall  
Outvaunt the spring, in phantom festival.

## XIII

Go by! but go not lightly; as you pass  
Send back such gleam as the departing sun  
Pours down the hillslope where the fading grass  
Turns to a path of gold. The day is done  
And evening stars come on. Yet you shall rise  
To-morrow to a world once more complete,  
And green shall be the valleys to your eyes  
And wild shall be the paths before your feet.  
But as you tread your way across the earth,  
Look back sometimes, beloved, and recall  
I taught you love and laughter at their worth;  
And of the bitterness, I knew it all  
And would have spared you, had the power been mine.  
Dreams, dreams again! There is no anodyne.

## XIV

Birds that are beautiful and sing in the sun  
Fly southward when the summer day is done.  
Oh may the fountains of the golden south  
Be worthy of your delicate thirsting mouth!  
Oh may the magic of the tropic isles  
Where the great palm-trees lift their tufted crests  
Answer the light and music of your smiles,  
And may the waves curl gently round your breasts.  
Southward as goes the swallow to the sun  
May you go ever till the race be run—  
And at the end, may Time, whose terrible feet  
With the swift splendor of your limbs compete,  
May he be merciful, and just at the goal  
Smite suddenly the beautiful body and soul.

# THE SHAKESPEARE SKEPTICS

BY KARL YOUNG

DURING the last generation or two, and especially during our own, the art of Shakespeare has been undergoing an energetic re-examination. One may fairly say, indeed, that we live in a new period of Shakespeare criticism, a period characterized by skepticism. One evidence of this new critical temper is the apprehensiveness of those who have no share in it. On the occasion of the recent tercentenary observances, for example, Mr. John Palmer could write such disheartened words as these: "At no time in our literary history was the English public, as represented by its critics and leaders of taste, less qualified to admire and celebrate William Shakespeare. Never was his fame so low or so confused." Although I must squarely combat Mr. Palmer's opinion, and can have no part in his despair, I recognize the source of his critical disaffection; for, I repeat, a skeptical attitude toward Shakespeare's art is characteristic of our time, and may be discerned in contemporary critics of every degree of professional responsibility. I may add also that the expressions of this temper show almost every degree of discretion, from judicial candor to impish abandon. The British poet laureate writes:

Shakespeare should not be put into the hands of the young without the warning that the foolish things in his plays were written to please the foolish, the filthy for the filthy, and the brutal for the brutal; and that, if out of veneration for his genius we are led to admire or even tolerate such things, we may be thereby not conforming ourselves to him, but only degrading ourselves to the level of his audience, and learning contamination from those wretched beings who can never be forgiven their share in preventing the greatest poet and dramatist of the world from being the best artist.

The most provocative theatrical critic in contemporary England—no other than Mr. Shaw—presses the matter further:

It is possible, perhaps, to cure people of admiring, as distinctly characteristic of Shakespeare, the false, forced rhetoric, the callous sensation-mongering in