WHITE AND CRUEL WOMANKIND

BY ROBERT P. TRISTRAM COFFIN

Now thanks be
For white and cruel womankind!
Who taught men how to slay,
And sing as they were slain.
  They smiled upon us,
  When we were cattle,
  And called upon us,
  When we were dumb. . . .
  Song and glances and harps astrum . . .
  And we turned red and mad and whirled
  Our swords and levelled
  Our lances out across the world.
And shining splendid Launcelots
Went riding out of Camelots.

Praise to God
For cruel and white beauty!
That made our days of living
Great pearls of price
To be thrown and scattered in thorns and mold.
  The Mother of the Snows,
  Whose Son was God,
  Lives her everlasting death
  And dies her everlasting life,
  And she is frail and white and very fair. . . .
  Men have loved the thorns within her hair . . .
  They have turned their backs upon
  The day,
  And said to sunshine,
  "Go thy way."
  And the children of their brains,

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Joy, peace, and ease,
And the children of their loins
Who might have climbed their knees
They have left unborn
For the cruelest loveliness
And the Rose of bitterest thorn,
For the Kiss that scars and sears,
And walked the way of Francis and of tears.

Glory and praise
To the cruel beauty that has taught us
To tread thorns,
To the women who have taught us
To wear crowns!
They have made the midnight blossom
Morning stars;
They have reared us temples, towers,
Faith, and wars.
They have given us oath and hymn,
Have winged us like the cherubim;
Out of clay our feet had trod
They have shaped and fashioned for us
Everlasting, everlasting God.

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MY BABIES ASLEEP

BY ROBERT P. TRISTRAM COFFIN

April Patience sleeps like dew
Or opal clouds the moon comes through,
The little moonlit clouds that rest
Like down upon an angel's breast.
She is first primrose petals,
All gentle, tender things, and blue
Morning glories,
Cricket songs, roses damp and new.
She sleeps with all the wistfulness
That mothers have when they caress.

July Glory sleeps like dawn
Fiercely eastern hills upon;
Her hands are gripped in dreamful zest,
Proud passions on her lids lie pressed;
Each separate curl is twisted
Into a flaming phoenix' nest
Tightly and hotly;
Albrecht Dürer might have etched them.
She is all spices, Troy's old stress,
And Helen's terrific tenderness.

January Fire yearns
Like clean, clear youths on Grecian urns;
Heat and cold and mystery
Deeper than the midmost sea.
He is the flame of icicles
More splendid than the sunlight is,
Softer than dewdrops
Should he melt to running laughter.
He is the promise mornings are
And the dewy, breathless morning star.

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