

SWORD BLADES AND POPPY SEED

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Sword blades and poppy seed by Amy Lowell

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BY

AMY LOWELL

AUTHOR OF

"A DOME OF MANY-COLOURED GLASS"

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1917

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*“ Face invisible ! je t’ai gravés en médailles
D’argent doux comme l’aube pâle,
D’or ardent comme le soleil,
D’airain sombre comme la nuit ;
Il y en a de tout métal,
Qui tintent clair comme la joie,
Qui sonnent lourd comme la gloire,
Comme l’amour, comme la mort ;
Et j’ai fait les plus belles de belle argile
Sèche et fragile.*

*“ Une à une, vous les compliez en souriant,
Et vous disiez : Il est habile ;
Et vous passiez en souriant.*

*“ Aucun de vous n’a donc vu
Que mes mains tremblaient de tendresse,
Que tout le grand songe terrestre
Vivait en moi pour vivre en eux
Que je gravais aux métaux pieux,
Mes Dieux.”*

Henri de Régnier, “ LES MÉDAILLES D’ARGILE.”



PREFACE

No one expects a man to make a chair without first learning how, but there is a popular impression that the poet is born, not made, and that his verses burst from his overflowing heart of themselves. As a matter of fact, the poet must learn his trade in the same manner, and with the same painstaking care, as the cabinet-maker. His heart may overflow with high thoughts and sparkling fancies, but if he cannot convey them to his reader by means of the written word he has no claim to be considered a poet. A workman may be pardoned, therefore, for spending a few moments to explain and describe the technique of his trade. A work of beauty which cannot stand an intimate examination is a poor and jerry-built thing.

In the first place, I wish to state my firm belief that poetry should not try to teach, that it should exist simply because it is a created beauty,

even if sometimes the beauty of a gothic grotesque. We do not ask the trees to teach us moral lessons, and only the Salvation Army feels it necessary to pin texts upon them. We know that these texts are ridiculous, but many of us do not yet see that to write an obvious moral all over a work of art, picture, statue, or poem, is not only ridiculous, but timid and vulgar. We distrust a beauty we only half understand, and rush in with our impertinent suggestions. How far we are from "admitting the Universe"! The Universe, which flings down its continents and seas, and leaves them without comment. Art is as much a function of the Universe as an Equinoctial gale, or the Law of Gravitation; and we insist upon considering it merely a little scroll-work, of no great importance unless it be studded with nails from which pretty and uplifting sentiments may be hung!

For the purely technical side I must state my immense debt to the French, and perhaps above