

**ORPHEUS**

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Orpheus by Arthur Dillon

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**ARTHUR DILLON**

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## ORPHEUS

*By the same Author*

RIVER SONGS AND OTHER POEMS  
THE GREEK KALENDS  
KING WILLIAM I, THE CONQUEROR  
THE MAID OF ARTEMIS  
KING ARTHUR PENDRAGON

# ORPHEUS

BY

ARTHUR DILLON

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1907

**NOTE**

**The poem has appeared before, but in different form.**



## ORPHEUS

Poor rime before old beauties manifold!  
Not Orpheus' nor Eurydice's, all mine  
The fault, or they had made my verse divine  
As their sweet parable which fitly told  
Art only hopes for. Is my tongue too bold,  
When I shall speak of Dis and Proserpine?  
Would it were given, in the measured line,  
To sing of Helens with the bards of old.  
Fareway I seek upon the adventurous tide  
Of poesy and story; weapon sound  
My mother-tongue lends free, not bought nor sold,  
Within our armory of English found.  
But what are arms if skill be not their guide;  
Or arms or skill except great purpose hold?

God-dowered Orpheus on the twisted root  
Of forest giant, mournful and alone,

ORPHEUS

Sat day and night, and day and night was mute  
Lute to his hand ; too sad to wake its tone,  
Forgetful of its power of delight  
Attuning every spirit to its own,  
So hungering he sat, until one night  
He faintly lifteth hand unto the strings—  
A blue-veined hand with faltering fingers white—  
Nor ponders art. Withal, unpondered, springs  
Surpassing music, for in very truth  
Sorrowing love a heavenly sweetness brings  
That fills all flesh that is with quickening ruth ;  
Makes brute not brutal. Through each midnight glen  
Around him crept the verderers uncouth  
Of that deep Thracian forest ; cave and den  
Lay tenantless ; the kingfisher was ware  
Of tremor strange across the standing fen ;  
The starved wolf left the hill ; through harkening air  
Sailed meek as doves, the eagles fierce and proud ;  
The lizard listened, aurox and elk and bear,  
While ravishment of sound now low, now loud,  
Filled them with wonder dimly understood,  
To hear the mournful minstrel cypress-browed  
Playing his music as his only good,  
Among the birds and beasts ; where towards him stole  
Two tigers such as range the Indian wood,

## ORPHEUS

Yoked side by side, behind whose steps did roll  
Bright wheels beneath a bright car wreathed in vine,  
Wherein two Gods, each with a drinking bowl  
Brimful, sat indolent. The Lord of Wine  
Was one; upon his locks no festal crown,  
But rushes rank, and over snow divine  
A wild goat's fleece hung from his shoulder down.  
Sad were his eyes with sadness not of man;  
He looked as one weary of all renown.  
Upon his left reclined Arcadian Pan.  
Unshorn and rough was he, yet all his mind  
Melted with melody; the rich wine ran  
Yet down his beard as he at ease reclined.  
A chlamys, fair from Asian needles, bound  
His rugged middle, and one hand entwined  
An ivy garland round his horns. The sound  
That drew all creatures drew the savage steeds  
Near and more near over the broken ground,  
While Dionysus guides them not nor heeds,  
Suffers them couch and lay the chin on paw,  
Gives back to Pan the Pan-pipes' homely reeds,  
Claps his own cymbals, and, in rhythmic law,  
Wakes mirthful echoes. Orpheus, in surprise,  
Looks up, grief-stricken to a wondrous awe,  
While the God's voice, to tinkling clash replies: