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Orpheus by Arthur Dillon

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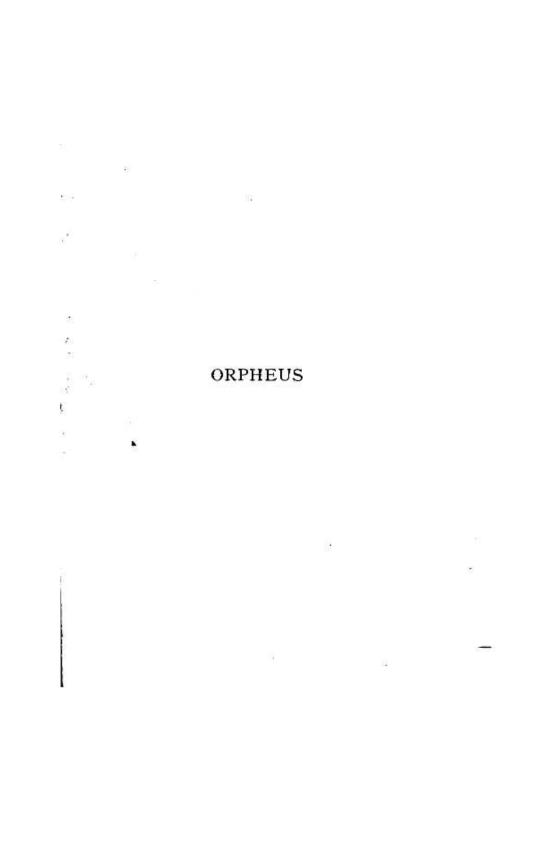
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ARTHUR DILLON

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

ARTHUR DILLON

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1907

NOTE

The poem has appeared before, but in different form.

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 bold?

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

....

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,

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 bung 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: