

LONDON ROOFS

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Over the roofs I look to the hills.
What a turbulent forest of chimneys
fills

Those acres and acres and acres of
roofs

Untravelled by dogs and untouched
by hoofs—

A playground where sparrows and
pigeons meet

And where wanders the cat on un-
sounding feet.

There are gabled peaks and flat
expanses,

High spots that the sculptor's art
enhances.

Frail spirals of smoke, like aspiration,
Go up to achieve no definite station,
But to mix in a veil that softens the
shoulders

Of gaunt-looking buildings for all
beholders,

In a veil that seems made of butter-
flies' wings

Powdered and mixed—the many-
hued things.

Over the roofs, more light than a
feather,

My thoughts take wing to the pines
and the heather.

Untrammelled they fly on over the sea,
Even flutter through space into
mystery.

Then they come back refreshed and
settle like birds

To sing on the roofs in pliable words.
The smoke and the pigeons, the
quaint chimney-pots

Willingly measure to rhythms and
dots.

Some pots stand in rows, file after file,
Rank upon rank, mile upon mile,
Some gather in clusters as if they had
grown

From seeds sown at random or by
the wind blown.

Nature has taken them all on her knee,
Caressed them and treated them
tenderly.

Yonder there rises a mystic spire,
And farther afield there tower even
higher

Factory-chimneys purpled with smoke
Wrapped round the red bricks a
velvety cloak.

Over the roofs travel the clouds—
Hermes' good sheep browsing in
crowds,

Nibbling the grasses of the sky
In luscious pastures. Shepherds pass
by,

Or perhaps they are Bishops with
their crooks.

And are those Prophets with open
books?

While over the roofs I gaze and I gaze
Into the distance, into the haze,

Under the roofs, folk like a river
Flow on and on for ever and ever.

Babes rise up like bubbles day after
day;

Rippling to childhood they dance and
play.

Soon they are careworn—young
women, young men,

Workers and parents. And no one
sees when

Generations begin, or in what way
they end,

So smoothly the lappings of the
human stream blend.

Over the roofs, while I watch the
stars go

In orderly current, thought-swift, yet
age-slow,

And look down the vista of cycles to be,
Peer into past windings in eternity,

I glimpse the pattern in part, and I
dream

On the meanings of time and the way
of the stream.