

Two Poems

By Edmund Gosse

I—Alere Flammam

To A. C. B.

IN ancient Rome, the secret fire,—
An intimate and holy thing,—
Was guarded by a tender choir
Of kindred maidens in a ring ;
Deep, deep within the house it lay,
No stranger ever gazed thereon,
But, flickering still by night and day,
The beacon of the house, it shone ;
Thro' birth and death, from age to age,
It passed, a quenchless heritage ;

And there were hymns of mystic tone
Sung round about the family flame,
Beyond the threshold all unknown,
Fast-welded to an ancient name ;
There sacrificed the sire as priest,
Before that altar, none but he,

Alone

Two Poems

Alone he spread the solemn feast
For a most secret deity ;
He knew the god had once been sire,
And served the same memorial fire.

Ah ! so, untouched by windy roar
Of public issues loud and long,
The Poet holds the sacred door,
And guards the glowing coal of song ;
Not his to grasp at praise or blame,
Red gold, or crowns beneath the sun,
His only pride to tend the flame
That Homer and that Virgil won,
Retain the rite, preserve the act,
And pass the worship on intact.

Before the shrine at last he falls ;
The crowd rush in, a chattering band
But, ere he fades in death, he calls
Another priest to ward the brand ;
He, with a gesture of disdain,
Flings back the ringing brazen gate,
Reproves, repressing, the profane,
And feeds the flame in primal state ;
Content to toil and fade in turn,
If still the sacred embers burn.

II—A Dream of November

FAR, far away, I know not where, I know not how,
The skies are grey, the boughs are bare, bare boughs in
flower :

Long lilac silk is softly drawn from bough to bough,
With flowers of milk and buds of fawn, a brodered shower.

Beneath that tent an Empress sits, with slanted eyes,
And wafts of scent from censers flit, a lilac flood ;
Around her throne bloom peach and plum in lacquered dyes,
And many a blown chrysanthemum, and many a bud.

She sits and dreams, while bonzes twain strike some rich bell,
Whose music seems a metal rain of radiant dye ;
In this strange birth of various blooms, I cannot tell
Which spring from earth, which slipped from looms, which
sank from sky :

Beneath her wings of lilac dim, in robes of blue,
The Empress sings a wordless hymn that thrills her bower ;
My trance unweaves, and winds, and shreds, and forms anew
Dark bronze, bright leaves, pure silken threads, in triple flower.