These thirty poems by Elizabeth Gibson Cheyne, selected by Judy Greenway, were written between 1904 and 1913. They represent just a fraction of her writing, and I will be adding more in the future, particularly relating to my ongoing research on her.

Elizabeth Gibson Cheyne's poems are out of copyright. This selection is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).


**Thirty Poems by Elizabeth Gibson Cheyne**

 **Selected by Judy Greenway**

**A Trinity**

‘On wings of streaming fire
That naught can tame or tire
Higher I mount and higher*.
I am Desire*!’

‘I meet you in mid-flight –
A shaft of quivering light
That breaks the trackless night*.
I am Delight!’*

‘I take of each the debt
That sprang when you two met:
I hug it close; and yet *…
I am Regret!’*

*(1904, A Flock of Dreams)*

**‘Between the dark and dark’**

Between the dark and dark I seize
A little joy to keep:
For once, life’s woe to drown in peace,
In Love’s white arms I sleep.

Between the dark and dark I sing
In praise of Love my song –
Perchance a note of ease to bring
To hearts that suffer long.

Between the dark and dark I drink
The draught of life and death –
With one frail act, beloved, link
My being to your breath.

*(1904, A Flock of Dreams)*

**Bonds**

I forge no links to bind
Your soul to mine.
Invisible as wind
And as divine;
As flames that none can find –
Long ceased to shine
Our bonds! Sand-cables spun,
Ropes woven of dew
That, after noon’s fierce sun,
Night must renew:
Such be my cords, or none,
Love, to hold you!

*(1904, A Flock of Dreams)*

**Triumph**

Love, I have lost, but only thus I gain you;
Only not-having can I hold you, Sweet;
Only in leaving me is your remaining;
I can but triumph through my hope’s defeat.

If I had found you by the singing water,
I had but lost you when the stream ran dry.
If we had roofed and walled Love’s spirit-dwelling,
How had we lost our heritage of sky!

Hark, the soul triumphs treading down fierce passion;
Charred are her feet, yet songs to heaven rise,
And every song that cleaves the cloudy portal
Brings down a benediction from the skies.

*(1904, A Flock of Dreams)*

**The Craftsman**

What art thou weaving so cheerily,
Craftsman, craftsman?
‘A cradle of willows as high as thy knee,
Where thy foot may rock young Love in his glee.’
Craftsman, craftsman, thank-thee.

What art thou shaping with faithful care,
Craftsman, craftsman?
‘An oaken coffin, for hope and despair;
Have I not wrought it, goodly and fair?’
Craftsman, craftsman, thank-thee.

What art thou building so heartfully,
Craftsman, craftsman?
‘A hostel of singing for thy roof-tree
To shield thee from storm in the lonely to-be.’
Craftsman, craftsman, thank-thee.

*(1904, From a Cloister)*

**Love’s Labour**

I fled afar to lose a once-loved face,
The singing of a woman to forget;
Love ever wandered with me pace by pace;
On my return one haunts my steading yet.

I sowed no barley in the northern field
Because a shadow lay upon my land:
Yet a gold harvest that same soil doth yield,
Sown in my absence by a lavish hand.

This morn I fell asleep for weariness
And woke, to find wide-spread upon the floor
Mine apples gathered for the cider-press,
And see Love flitting through the open door.

*(1905, Shadows*)

**Marriage**

There is peace upon the waters;
There is passion in the sky:
Who shall mate the black and scarlet
When the lord of love goes by—

Goes, fulfilling not his promise,
Flees, with desolating cry? …
Grey the sky goes, red the waters,
Mated by Humanity.

*(1907, By Many Streams)*

**To the Weaver**

O bring the long, black nets that they may cover me,
Not the nets of my sins, but the shadow of them,
That I may sleep in the shadow;
And I only long to sleep in the darkness,
In the darkness forever:
For there is quiet for the sons of men –
Peace from the torment of desire;
Refuge from the desolation of beauty;
An end of incessant striving
With the things that are not and the things that are;
Shelter from the pursuit of tongues;
Freedom from the forbearance of those that love me and from the bitterness of those that hate me;
Quiet from the cry of humanity;
And rest from the pitiless wheel of Pain, the avenger.
O bring the long, black nets that they may cover me forever.

*(1907, By Many Streams*)

**‘Peace is Bluer than the Sky**’

O peace is bluer than the sky,
And strife than blood more red,
And living human misery
More grey than cities dead.

O red must stain the vault of blue,
Before the grey be white;
O grey must stir itself and soar
Into the dome of light.

O blue must stoop and wash away,
With heavenly airs and clean,
The marring stains of red and grey
Till all the earth be green.

*(1907, By Many Streams)*

**To Arms**

Lift up, lift up the scarlet flag
Against the deep blue sky;
For shot our level lines must jag,
And many a man must die,
Ere justice reign on high.

Fling down, fling down the pomp and pride
Of false, usurping men,
Until into our ranks they ride,
And strike, and strike again
For Truth with sword and pen.

Write clear, write clear for all to read,
In blue and gold and red,
Humanity’s eternal creed,
That all men should have bread,
And none know shame, or dread.

*(1907, By Many Streams)*

**The Forge**

Into the furnace of despair my heart
I threw, for I was weary of its pain;
Then hammering on my anvil, wrought the dart
Whereby a host of ancient griefs was slain.

Who fears not passion’s baser self to fling
Into some furnace of refining fire,
From seven-fold heat his soul will surely bring
Keen-edged and bright as his unbreathed desire.

*(1907, By Many Streams)*

**Day and Night**

Day riots swiftly, madly,
Without a pause for rest:
Night wanders slowly, softly,
With blossoms in her breast.

Day’s black with bitter bondage,
And red with blood’s bright hue:
But night is white with slumber,
And as deep heaven blue.

Yet day and night shall mingle
In one deep throb of peace,
When earth, from human tyrants
Revolting, wins release.

*(1907, By Many Streams)*

**Let Go!**

You that have wedded a woman who loves you not,
Let go!
For she is not yours,
And her lover is tortured because of you.

You that have plundered the world with a net,
Let go!
The wealth is not yours,
For men are beggared because of you.

You that have darkened men’s days with labour,
Let go!
For the light is not yours,
And men weary for their share of the sunlight.

You that have straitened men’s lives with service,
Let go!
For the ease is not yours,
And men pant for rest.

Ye are all thieves and robbers.
The poor are crucified for you.
When you drive forth in your carriages
Your horses’ hoofs strike the mouths of the poor
Who have fainted by the highway.
Let go!

When the poor, who have seized bread to eat,
Stand before the judge and are sent to prison,
You grin with amusement,
Because they are paying the penalty of your sins,
Let go!

When you walk in your parks and pleasaunces,
You are suffocating the poor in an alley;
Let go!

When you clothe yourself with beauty as with a garment,
You are swathing the poor is squalor and ugliness;
Let go!

When you are showering gold for your children to play with,
You are aiming leaden bullets at the children of the poor;
Let go!

And if ye will let go,
Life will be bountiful unto you and to the poor also,
And all men shall be content.

But if ye will not let go,
After Death ye shall be born again
Poorer than those ye trod upon, No man having mercy upon you.
Let go!

*(1907, From the Shadow)*

**Pain and Death**

Who lieth down with Pain,
And riseth up with him,
And walketh and talketh with him,
Groweth ever wearier of him,
Until he saith unto him:
‘I love thee not, my lover;
I weary of thee
And of thy selfish embraces,
Therefore will I leave thee
For that other who woos me –
Even Death, my dark lover,
Whom I have not known.
For he speaketh gently,
Not as thou;
He moveth softly,
Not as thou;
He embraceth not, neither tormenteth.
Therefore will I leave thee
For Death, who woos me.

*(1907, From the Shadow)*

**Kings**

I have served many kings. Now I serve Death.
Love sold me into bondage to desire;
Life burned me in grim toil’s consuming fire;
Sorrow, for song, gave bread of bitterness;
Joy, for my years, a moment of sweet breath;
Pain, for my wisdom, fathomless distress.

Now I serve Death with eager, happy songs:
He bends his head and smiles, and with swift hand
Withdraws the mortal veil from sea and land;
Shows me all beauty that from life has fled,
And all the knowledge that to him belongs;
And cries: ‘Fear naught: they only live who’re dead.’

*(1907, From the Shadow)*

**Good and Evil**

*To M.B***.**

All life has sprung from the initial cloud
Of cold loose nebulae that whirled and whirled
And broke and scattered; each piece spun apace,
And centre-drawn, its atoms crashing loud,
Till light and heat won free, and each round world,
Its moons, and the great sun, appeared in space.

Goodness and evil from the selfsame source,
The whirling mind of Godhead, twin-linked, sprang,
Born of like love, fed on the same bright food,
But taking, as each chose, its diverse course.
Good is but evil conquered in the clang
And crash; and evil, misdirected good.

*(1908, In the Starlight)*

**The Marriage**

*To I.F.M.*
In the marriage of the soul
With the Universal Spirit,
Life’s small part in the great whole
Merges; heart and brain inherit
Height and depth and space and sound,
Silence, wondrous heat and light,
Secrets of the seed-strewn ground,
Ancient tales of day and night.

Now is then; and then is now;
Death is life; and Life is death;
Man, the God to whom we bow;
God, the man; and Beauty, breath,
Therefore tremble not, O bride,
When the Spirit seeks thy grace:
Thou in him art deified;
He through thee fills time and space.

*(1908, In the Starlight)*

**A Love**

*To E.B.M*

Weigh me the earth, and measure me the sun;
Survey the moon, and tell its wonder-tale;
Trace each dim star; but while time’s moments run,
you cannot gauge a love that does not fail.

Bind me the flood, or spill its waters still
In devastation on some peopled way:
I know a sea that no power lures at will,
Its wanton mandates ever to obey.

Shatter this planet, so that nought remains
of all the glowing paths our feet have trod:
We yet shall meet upon aerial planes,
Bound on the deathless quest – the search for God.

*(1908, In the Starlight)*

**Fishing**

On the wide reaches of the night
I loosed my sailing boat of thought,
And in my nets of longing caught
Full many a vision of delight.

Upon the narrows of the day
I oared my rowing boat of toil;
And still, in sense and action’s coil,
Drew from the deep my silver prey.

*(1908, In the Starlight)*

**Stars**

The glittering star on eve’s blue breast –
The star earth nightly gazes on –
That brings her ever-peaceful rest,
Is yet a blindly-crashing sun.

So God, to whom man bends the knee
In awe and wonder and delight,
As unto Guide and Guard, may be
A vext, bewildered lord of night.

*(1908, In the Starlight)*

**Suns**

*To M.R.*

There is no ray that floods the deeps of night
But ever is in desperate conflict won
By some swift-whirling, self-tormented sun –
Dark atom from dark atom striking light.

Circling through space the cloud of nebulae,
Rending, repelling, drawing, needs must glow
By beat on furious beat, by blow on blow
Of atoms, until warmth and light go free.

And shall the smiter and the smitten revile
Each other's blows, that feed the central heat?
Shall they begrudge the never-ending beat
Of pain that bathes far worlds in light meanwhile?

*(1908, In the Starlight)*

**Singers**

They do not grudge the thrust of woe,
Who needs must sing:
And wounded, they would never know
What herbs to bring
For suffering.

Nor do they weep, whom passing song
Has stricken dumb:
For the wild music of her throng
Again shall come
To the still home.

*(1908, In the Starlight)*

**To Any Religion**

O lift the flag of liberty
Where, on the plain, divinity,
Is worshipped by bewildered men!
And blow not from your tower again
The feeble blast that no man hears,
Save him who’s racked by desperate fears
Of the great adventure of the soul
To reach its dim, uncertain goal.
Fling down your puny, ill-wrought sword
That seeks to smite the Eternal Word.
Loose, or loose not, your feeble chains:
Your prison nought but dust contains;
For never dogma long shall bind
The freedom of the immortal mind.

*(1908, A Pilgrim’s Staff)*

**Freedom**

O Life, unpen thy prisoning bars,
For death, who comes, perchance full soon;
That I may tread the tracks of Mars,
And scale the mountains of the moon;

That I may hear cloud-thunders roll,
Run where the tameless lightning runs;
Traverse some planet’s snow-bound pole;
And gaze unblinded on the suns.

*(1908, A Pilgrim’s Staff)*

**Sense and Thought**

Sense gathers colour, form and sound
From day to give to following day,
As flowers store seeds, their nursing ground
Next year, with beauty to repay.

Thought flashes in the ancient dark
In countless, trembling points of light,
As star by star emits a spark
To burn the ageless blue of night**.**

*(1908, A Pilgrim’s Staff)*

**Woman**

I met a woman walking through the world,
And I stopped to bid her good-day.
She was walking with a will;
So I asked her where she was going.
‘Everywhere’ she replied.
I asked her whence she came,
and she answered: ‘From the ends of the earth.’
‘Of what land are you an inhabitant?’
‘Of every land I have heard of.’
‘Of what city are you a citizen?’
‘Of every city I can imagine.’
‘Where are your children?’
‘All over the earth. Every child that is born is mine. I suckle every living baby.’
‘Who is your husband?’
‘Every man is my husband.’
‘Why have you left him?’
‘That he may know the bitterness of life without me.’
‘When will you return to him?’
‘When he has learnt that I am his equal.’
Then she bade me good day; and I watched her ascend the summit of the world to see how man was faring.
And as she turned I heard God cry: ‘thou hast done well!’

*(1910, From the Wilderness)*

**A Unit**

I am a part of all that lives,
And all that lives is part of me:
Man evermore receives and gives,
Throughout his dim infinity;
And each from the whole his source derives

So, since I cannot keep my state,
In one small place, in one small world,
I’ll gladly take the common fate –
To be hither and thither forever whirled
By life’s eternal will to create.

*(1911? Oxford)*

**The Coloured**

There is a pale-faced man who is very conceited,
And insatiably greedy,
And inconceivably proud –
Not of ancient civilization, or quality of brain,
But of – (I cannot repress a smile) – the colour of his skin.
He seizes my countries by arms or by strategy;
He demoralizes my womenfolk;
He beats my children, and sometimes myself.
He will not sit at meat with me at the university,
Or allow me to use the students' swimming bath.
He will not travel with me in the same railway carriage, if he can help it.
Yet he sends missionaries to teach me the sayings of the Merciful Man,
Who was not very pale-faced,
And whom he pretends to worship.

*(nd., circa 1912, The Way of the Lord)*

**The Mother**

There are two mothers in the country where I live—
Another mother, and myself:
I am the mother of the rich children;
And the other mother is the mother of the poor children.
I am not jealous of the other mother—
Because my children have everything,
And hers have nothing.
I am not cruel to her:
I allow her to come and work for me,
As a nurse, a sewing-woman, and a charwoman,
And I pay her as much a day as my own breakfast costs me,
For that should feed and clothe herself and her children handsomely.
I give her my children’s old clothes;
And sometimes I give her their rejected food,
If their particular pet-animals do not need it.
I speak civilly to the other mother, because I am covertly thankful I am not she,
And because I am afraid that if I spoke otherwise
She might strike me or my children
And demand her and their share of everything,
Or steal it when we are not looking
I think that when people are poor it is their own fault
And that it is because they are lazy, or drunken, or both
It is a shame that I have to pay for the poor children's education,
As it takes all I can afford to send my own children
To the public school and to the university.
It is a greater shame that I have to pay for their school dinners and medical inspection,
As it takes all I can afford to feed my own children on epicure’s food,
And to send them to the best eye-specialists and physicians.
I take all that is given to me and my children;
But I am afraid of pauperising the poor mother and her children.
I think she ought also to save up for her old age pension.
One day, when I was explaining these things quite politely,
She retorted that it is I who am the pauper;
And that her children must go ragged
That mine may be smart;
That hers must go hungry that mine may be pampered;
That hers must die that mine may live.
So I told her she was talking politics, which are not women’s business,
And that the Socialists had been perverting her.
I shut the door in her face and gave her no more work
Till I could do without her no longer,
And had to send for her to come back,
She said that some of her children had died in the meantime,
As she had no money to buy food for them.
So I said: ‘That will teach you to keep your place, and not to call me a pauper.’
Now she comes and cleans my nurseries,
And feeds and tends my babies,
And makes elaborately embroidered clothes for them;
But she says nothing;
And I wonder why she is silent.
One night I dreamt that I asked her why,
And that she said:
‘My dead children are crying to me to kill you,
And my living children are crying to me to forgive you;
And I have not yet decided which to do.’

*(n.d., circa 1912) The Way of the Lord)*

**The Delight Song Of Women**

Many sing of the pains of women, but I will sing a song of their happy labours, and of their everlasting delights:

I will sing a love song, a service song, a labour song of women:
For I am the young bride when the doors are open to earth, and the windows are open to heaven, and when earth and heaven enter, singing of the holy mystery of oneness and of the life to come.

And I am, too, the wife of the infirm, the afflicted husband, spending herself in the ecstasy of the blessed service of her suffering beloved.
And I am the bride of no mortal lover: the bride of the book, the brush, the chisel, the instrument of music,

Whereby the bride's solitary delights are sown abroad, to bear multifold joys in the world's bosom.
I am the woman who is called Mother, in every tone of her children's voices;

And I am the unmated woman, who is the faithful minister to other women's children.
I am the patient nurse, who gives her life in the hospital, not for the sake of hire, but for the love of assuaging suffering;

And I am the teacher of the young, guiding them by paths of knowledge into wisdom, and by paths of sympathy into understanding.

I am the sayer, singer of the pride of women, that, in its full tide, washes the world like a flood, from uncleanliness, inhumanity and decay.
And I am the usherer into life.

The father is proud, and the mother is proud; and I also am proud;

I am needed to bring the secretly begotten and secretly cherished life to the visible world of open day.

It is my pride to baptise the newborn in the most sacred of elements – water; and to robe it with the offerings of its brother-beast and its sister-flower, for its warmth and protection.
I am the straightener, the straightener of the dead; and my life washes you clean for your new birth, clean for your passing from one stage to another in your immortal life. I cleanse you from the mortality adhering to you – the errors, the disappointments, and the sorrows; and I give you, glad and shining, to your new day.

I lift you from time into eternity, from death into life.

Through my washing of your body, your soul becomes pure.

I am the straightener, straightener unto life.
I am the Mother of Consolation upon whose breast every woman slumbers:
At the prayers of women I open my hands, and give them dawn, sunset, stars, smiles and flowers, and flowing waters;

For I am both the prayers of women and the fulfilment of the prayers

Blessed be Woman, and her untellable and everlasting delights!

*(1913, Social Worship Vol. 2)*

**Bibliography**

Before August 1911, author’s name given as Elizabeth Gibson; after that, as Elizabeth Gibson Cheyne.

*A Flock of Dreams*,1904, Elkin Mathews, London.
*A Pilgrim’s Staff, 1908,* Samurai Press, Cranleigh, Surrey. *By Many Streams,* 1907, Samurai Press, Cranleigh, Surrey*.
From a Cloister*, 1904, Elkin Mathews, London.
*From the Wilderness, 1910, E.Gibson, Hexham.
In the Starlight, 1908, Samurai Press, Cranleigh, Surrey.
Oxford*, nd., circa 1911, Mrs. Cheyne, Oxford.
*Shadows*, 1905, Elkin Mathews, London.
*Social Worship Vol. 2, pp.59-61,* 1913, ed. Stanton Coit, musical editor Charles Kennedy Scott, West London Ethical Society, London*.* NB. This version of *Delight Song* has been set to music, and may differ from any original, especially in respect of punctuation and layout. I have not so far discovered any other published version to compare it with. *The Way of the Lord*, nd., circa 1912, Mrs. Cheyne, Oxford.