

The Rose

By Henry W. Nevinson

(A mediæval citizen speaks)

STEPHEN, clerk of Oxford town,
Oh, the weary while he lies,
Wrapt in his old college gown,
Burning, burning till he dies !
And 'tis very surely said,
He shall burn when he is dead,
All aflame from foot to head.

Stephen said he knew a rose—
One and two, yea, roses three—
Lovelier far than any those
Which at service-time we see,
Emblems of atonement done,
And of Christ's beloved One,
And of Mary's mystic Son.

Stephen

The Rose

Stephen said his roses grew
 All upon a milk-white stem,
 Side by side together two,
 One a little up from them,
 Sweeter than the rose's breath,
 Rosy as the sun riseth,
 Warm beside ; that was his death.

Stephen swore, as God knows well,
 Just to touch that topmost bud,
 He would give his soul to hell—
 Soul and body, bones and blood.
 Hell has come before he dies ;
 Burning, burning there he lies,
 But he neither speaks nor cries.

Ah, what might those roses be ?
 Once, before the dawn was red,
 Did he wander out to see
 If the rose were still a-bed ?
 Did he find a rose-tree tall
 Standing by the garden wall ?
 Did he touch the rose of all ?

Stephen, was it worth the pain,
 Just to touch a breathing rose ?
 Ah, to think of it again,
 Look, he smiles despite his throes.
 Did he dream that hell would be
 Years hereafter ? Now, you see,
 Hell is here, and where is she ?

At my word, through all his face
Flames the infernal fire within,
Mary, Mary, grant me grace,
Still to keep my soul from sin !
Thanks to God, my rose was grown
Not so sweet, but all my own,
Not so fair, but mine alone.