

Poems of the Past and the Present

POEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

By Thomas Hardy



Contents:

V.R. 1819-1901

WAR POEMS -

EMBARCATION  
DEPARTURE  
THE COLONEL'S SOLILOQUY  
THE GOING OF THE BATTERY  
AT THE WAR OFFICE, LONDON  
A CHRISTMAS GHOST-STORY  
THE DEAD DRUMMER  
A WIFE IN LONDON  
THE SOULS OF THE SLAIN  
SONG OF THE SOLDIERS' WIVES  
THE SICK GOD

POEMS OF PILGRIMAGE -

GENOA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN  
SHELLEY'S SKYLARK  
IN THE OLD THEATRE, FIESOLE  
ROME: ON THE PALATINE  
ROME: BUILDING A NEW STREET IN THE ANCIENT QUARTER  
ROME: THE VATICAN--SALA DELLE MUSE  
ROME: AT THE PYRAMID OF CESTIUS  
LAUSANNE: IN GIBBON'S OLD GARDEN  
ZERMATT: TO THE MATTERHORN  
THE BRIDGE OF LODI  
ON AN INVITATION TO THE UNITED STATES  
THE MOTHER MOURNS  
"I SAID TO LOVE"  
A COMMONPLACE DAY  
AT A LUNAR ECLIPSE  
THE LACKING SENSE  
TO LIFE  
DOOM AND SHE  
THE PROBLEM  
THE SUBALTERNS  
THE SLEEP-WORKER  
THE BULLFINCHES  
GOD-FORGOTTEN  
THE BEDRIDDEN PEASANT TO AN UNKNOWING GOD  
BY THE EARTH'S CORPSE  
MUTE OPINION  
TO AN UNBORN PAUPER CHILD  
TO FLOWERS FROM ITALY IN WINTER  
ON A FINE MORNING  
TO LIZBIE BROWNE  
SONG OF HOPE  
THE WELL-BELOVED  
HER REPROACH  
THE INCONSISTENT  
A BROKEN APPOINTMENT  
"BETWEEN US NOW"  
"HOW GREAT MY GRIEF"  
"I NEED NOT GO"  
THE COQUETTE, AND AFTER  
A SPOT  
LONG PLIGHTED  
THE WIDOW  
AT A HASTY WEDDING  
THE DREAM-FOLLOWER

Poems of the Past and the Present

HIS IMMORTALITY  
THE TO-BE-FORGOTTEN  
WIVES IN THE SERE  
THE SUPERSEDED  
AN AUGUST MIDNIGHT  
THE CAGED THRUSH FREED AND HOME AGAIN  
BIRDS AT WINTER NIGHTFALL  
THE PUZZLED GAME-BIRDS  
WINTER IN DURNOVER FIELD  
THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM  
THE DARKLING THRUSH  
THE COMET AT YALBURY OR YELL'HAM  
MAD JUDY  
A WASTED ILLNESS  
A MAN  
THE DAME OF ATHELHALL  
THE SEASONS OF HER YEAR  
THE MILKMAID  
THE LEVELLED CHURCHYARD  
THE RUINED MAID  
THE RESPECTABLE BURGHER ON "THE HIGHER CRITICISM"  
ARCHITECTURAL MASKS  
THE TENANT-FOR-LIFE  
THE KING'S EXPERIMENT  
THE TREE: AN OLD MAN'S STORY  
HER LATE HUSBAND  
THE SELF-UNSEEING  
DE PROFUNDIS I.  
DE PROFUNDIS II.  
DE PROFUNDIS III.  
THE CHURCH-BUILDER  
THE LOST PYX: A MEDIAEVAL LEGEND  
TESS'S LAMENT  
THE SUPPLANTER: A TALE  
IMITATIONS, ETC. -  
SAPPHIC FRAGMENT  
CATULLUS: XXXI  
AFTER SCHILLER  
SONG: FROM HEINE  
FROM VICTOR HUGO  
CARDINAL BEMBO'S EPITAPH ON RAPHAEL  
RETROSPECT -  
"I HAVE LIVED WITH SHADES"  
MEMORY AND I  
[GREEK TITLE]

V.R. 1819-1901  
A REVERIE

Moments the mightiest pass uncalendared,  
And when the Absolute  
In backward Time outgave the deedful word  
Whereby all life is stirred:  
"Let one be born and throned whose mould shall constitute  
The norm of every royal-reckoned attribute,"  
No mortal knew or heard.  
But in due days the purposed Life outshone -  
Serene, sagacious, free;  
--Her waxing seasons bloomed with deeds well done,  
And the world's heart was won . . .  
Yet may the deed of hers most bright in eyes to be  
Lie hid from ours--as in the All-One's thought lay she -  
Till ripening years have run.

Poems of the Past and the Present

SUNDAY NIGHT,  
27th January 1901.

EMBARCATION  
(Southampton Docks: October, 1899)

Here, where Vespasian's legions struck the sands,  
And Cerdic with his Saxons entered in,  
And Henry's army leapt afloat to win  
Convincing triumphs over neighbour lands,

Vaster battalions press for further strands,  
To argue in the self-same bloody mode  
Which this late age of thought, and pact, and code,  
Still fails to mend.--Now deckward tramp the bands,  
Yellow as autumn leaves, alive as spring;  
And as each host draws out upon the sea  
Beyond which lies the tragical To-be,  
None dubious of the cause, none murmuring,

Wives, sisters, parents, wave white hands and smile,  
As if they knew not that they weep the while.

DEPARTURE  
(Southampton Docks: October, 1899)

While the far farewell music thins and fails,  
And the broad bottoms rip the bearing brine -  
All smalling slowly to the gray sea line -  
And each significant red smoke-shaft pales,

Keen sense of severance everywhere prevails,  
Which shapes the late long tramp of mounting men  
To seeming words that ask and ask again:  
"How long, O striving Teutons, Slavs, and Gaels

Must your wroth reasonings trade on lives like these,  
That are as puppets in a playing hand? -  
When shall the saner softer polities  
Whereof we dream, have play in each proud land,  
And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand  
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?"

THE COLONEL'S SOLILOQUY  
(Southampton Docks: October, 1899)

"The quay recedes. Hurrah! Ahead we go! . . .  
It's true I've been accustomed now to home,  
And joints get rusty, and one's limbs may grow  
More fit to rest than roam.

"But I can stand as yet fair stress and strain;  
There's not a little steel beneath the rust;  
My years mount somewhat, but here's to't again!  
And if I fall, I must.

Poems of the Past and the Present

"God knows that for myself I've scanty care;  
Past scimmages have proved as much to all;  
In Eastern lands and South I've had my share  
Both of the blade and ball.

"And where those villains ripped me in the flitch  
With their old iron in my early time,  
I'm apt at change of wind to feel a twitch,  
Or at a change of clime.

"And what my mirror shows me in the morning  
Has more of blotch and wrinkle than of bloom;  
My eyes, too, heretofore all glasses scorning,  
Have just a touch of rheum . . .

"Now sounds 'The Girl I've left behind me,'--Ah,  
The years, the ardours, wakened by that tune!  
Time was when, with the crowd's farewell 'Hurrah!'  
'Twould lift me to the moon.

"But now it's late to leave behind me one  
Who if, poor soul, her man goes underground,  
Will not recover as she might have done  
In days when hopes abound.

"She's waving from the wharfside, palely grieving,  
As down we draw . . . Her tears make little show,  
Yet now she suffers more than at my leaving  
Some twenty years ago.

"I pray those left at home will care for her!  
I shall come back; I have before; though when  
The Girl you leave behind you is a grandmother,  
Things may not be as then."

THE GOING OF THE BATTERY  
WIVES' LAMENT  
(November 2, 1899)

I

O it was sad enough, weak enough, mad enough -  
Light in their loving as soldiers can be -  
First to risk choosing them, leave alone losing them  
Now, in far battle, beyond the South Sea! . . .

II

- Rain came down drenchingly; but we unblenchingly  
Trudged on beside them through mirk and through mire,  
They stepping steadily--only too readily! -  
Scarce as if stepping brought parting-time nigher.

III

Great guns were gleaming there, living things seeming there,  
Cloaked in their tar-cloths, upmouthed to the night;  
wheels wet and yellow from axle to felloe,  
Throats blank of sound, but prophetic to sight.

IV

Gas-glimmers drearily, blearily, eerily  
Lit our pale faces outstretched for one kiss,

Poems of the Past and the Present

While we stood prest to them, with a last quest to them  
Not to court perils that honour could miss.

V

Sharp were those sighs of ours, blinded these eyes of ours,  
When at last moved away under the arch  
All we loved. Aid for them each woman prayed for them,  
Treading back slowly the track of their march.

VI

Someone said: "Nevermore will they come: evermore  
Are they now lost to us." O it was wrong!  
Though may be hard their ways, some Hand will guard their ways,  
Bear them through safely, in brief time or long.

VII

- Yet, voices haunting us, daunting us, taunting us,  
Hint in the night-time when life beats are low  
Other and graver things . . . Hold we to braver things,  
Wait we, in trust, what Time's fulness shall show.

AT THE WAR OFFICE, LONDON

(Affixing the Lists of Killed and wounded: December, 1899)

I

Last year I called this world of gain-givings  
The darkest thinkable, and questioned sadly  
If my own land could heave its pulse less gladly,  
So charged it seemed with circumstance whence springs  
The tragedy of things.

II

Yet at that censured time no heart was rent  
Or feature blanched of parent, wife, or daughter  
By hourly blazoned sheets of listed slaughter;  
Death waited Nature's wont; Peace smiled unshent  
From Ind to Occident.

A CHRISTMAS GHOST-STORY

South of the Line, inland from far Durban,  
A mouldering soldier lies--your countryman.  
Awry and doubled up are his gray bones,  
And on the breeze his puzzled phantom moans  
Nightly to clear Canopus: "I would know  
By whom and when the All-Earth-gladdening Law  
Of Peace, brought in by that Man Crucified,  
Was ruled to be inept, and set aside?

And what of logic or of truth appears  
In tacking 'Anno Domini' to the years?  
Near twenty-hundred livened thus have hied,  
But tarries yet the Cause for which He died."

Christmas-eve, 1899.

THE DEAD DRUMMER

I

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest  
Uncoffined--just as found:  
His landmark is a kopje-crest  
That breaks the veldt around;  
And foreign constellations west  
Each night above his mound.

II

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew -  
Fresh from his Wessex home -  
The meaning of the broad Karoo,  
The Bush, the dusty loam,  
And why uprose to nightly view  
Strange stars amid the gloam.

III

Yet portion of that unknown plain  
Will Hodge for ever be;  
His homely Northern breast and brain  
Grow up a Southern tree.  
And strange-eyed constellations reign  
His stars eternally.

A WIFE IN LONDON  
(December, 1899)

I--THE TRAGEDY

She sits in the tawny vapour  
That the City lanes have uprolled,  
Behind whose webby fold on fold  
Like a waning taper  
The street-lamp glimmers cold.

A messenger's knock cracks smartly,  
Flashed news is in her hand  
Of meaning it dazes to understand  
Though shaped so shortly:  
He--has fallen--in the far South Land . . .

II--THE IRONY

'Tis the morrow; the fog hangs thicker,  
The postman nears and goes:  
A letter is brought whose lines disclose  
By the firelight flicker  
His hand, whom the worm now knows:

Fresh--firm--penned in highest feather -  
Page-full of his hoped return,  
And of home-planned jaunts by brake and burn  
In the summer weather,

Poems of the Past and the Present  
And of new love that they would learn.

THE SOULS OF THE SLAIN

I

The thick lids of Night closed upon me  
Alone at the Bill  
Of the Isle by the Race {1} -  
Many-caverned, bald, wrinkled of face -  
And with darkness and silence the spirit was on me  
To brood and be still.

II

No wind fanned the flats of the ocean,  
Or promontory sides,  
Or the ooze by the strand,  
Or the bent-bearded slope of the land,  
whose base took its rest amid everlong motion  
Of criss-crossing tides.

III

Soon from out of the Southward seemed nearing  
A whirr, as of wings  
Waved by mighty-vanned flies,  
Or by night-moths of measureless size,  
And in softness and smoothness well-nigh beyond hearing  
Of corporal things.

IV

And they bore to the bluff, and alighted -  
A dim-discerned train  
Of sprites without mould,  
Frameless souls none might touch or might hold -  
On the ledge by the turreted lantern, farsighted  
By men of the main.

V

And I heard them say "Home!" and I knew them  
For souls of the felled  
On the earth's nether bord  
Under Capricorn, whither they'd warred,  
And I neared in my awe, and gave heedfulness to them  
With breathings inheld.

VI

Then, it seemed, there approached from the northward  
A senior soul-flame  
Of the like filmy hue:  
And he met them and spake: "Is it you,  
O my men?" said they, "Aye! we bear homeward and hearthward  
To list to our fame!"

VII

"I've flown there before you," he said then:  
"Your households are well;  
But--your kin linger less  
On your glory arid war-mightiness

Poems of the Past and the Present

Than on dearer things."--"Dearer?" cried these from the dead then,  
"Of what do they tell?"

VIII

"Some mothers muse sadly, and murmur  
Your doings as boys -  
Recall the quaint ways  
Of your babyhood's innocent days.  
Some pray that, ere dying, your faith had grown firmer,  
And higher your joys.

IX

"A father broods: 'would I had set him  
To some humble trade,  
And so slacked his high fire,  
And his passionate martial desire;  
Had told him no stories to woo him and whet him  
To this due crusade!"

X

"And, General, how hold out our sweethearts,  
Sworn loyal as doves?"  
--"Many mourn; many think  
It is not unattractive to prink  
Them in sables for heroes. Some fickle and fleet hearts  
Have found them new loves."

XI

"And our wives?" quoth another resignedly,  
"Dwell they on our deeds?"  
--"Deeds of home; that live yet  
Fresh as new--deeds of fondness or fret;  
Ancient words that were kindly expressed or unkindly,  
These, these have their heeds."

XII

--"Alas! then it seems that our glory  
Weighs less in their thought  
Than our old homely acts,  
And the long-ago commonplace facts  
Of our lives--held by us as scarce part of our story,  
And rated as nought!"

XIII

Then bitterly some: "was it wise now  
To raise the tomb-door  
For such knowledge? Away!"  
But the rest: "Fame we prized till to-day;  
Yet that hearts keep us green for old kindness we prize now  
A thousand times more!"

XIV

Thus speaking, the trooped apparitions  
Began to disband  
And resolve them in two:  
Those whose record was lovely and true  
Bore to northward for home: those of bitter traditions  
Again left the land,

XV



Poems of the Past and the Present

And, towering to seaward in legions,  
They paused at a spot  
Overbending the Race -  
That engulfing, ghastr, sinister place -  
Whither headlong they plunged, to the fathomless regions  
Of myriads forgot.

XVI

And the spirits of those who were homing  
Passed on, rushingly,  
Like the Pentecost Wind;  
And the whirr of their wayfaring thinned  
And surceased on the sky, and but left in the gloaming  
Sea-mutterings and me.

December 1899.

SONG OF THE SOLDIERS' WIVES

I

At last! In sight of home again,  
Of home again;  
No more to range and roam again  
As at that bygone time?  
No more to go away from us  
And stay from us? -  
Dawn, hold not long the day from us,  
But quicken it to prime!

II

Now all the town shall ring to them,  
Shall ring to them,  
And we who love them cling to them  
And clasp them joyfully;  
And cry, "O much we'll do for you  
Anew for you,  
Dear Loves!--aye, draw and hew for you,  
Come back from oversea."

III

Some told us we should meet no more,  
Should meet no more;  
Should wait, and wish, but greet no more  
Your faces round our fires;  
That, in a while, uncharily  
And drearily  
Men gave their lives--even wearily,  
Like those whom living tires.

IV

And now you are nearing home again,  
Dears, home again;  
No more, may be, to roam again  
As at that bygone time,  
Which took you far away from us  
To stay from us;  
Dawn, hold not long the day from us,  
But quicken it to prime!

Poems of the Past and the Present

THE SICK GOD

I

In days when men had joy of war,  
A God of Battles sped each mortal jar;  
The peoples pledged him heart and hand,  
From Israel's land to isles afar.

II

His crimson form, with clang and chime,  
Flashed on each murk and murderous meeting-time,  
And kings invoked, for rape and raid,  
His fearsome aid in rune and rhyme.

III

On bruise and blood-hole, scar and seam,  
On blade and bolt, he flung his fulgid beam:  
His haloes rayed the very gore,  
And corpses wore his glory-gleam.

IV

Often an early King or Queen,  
And storied hero onward, knew his sheen;  
'Twas glimpsed by Wolfe, by Ney anon,  
And Nelson on his blue demesne.

V

But new light spread. That god's gold nimb  
And blazon have waned dimmer and more dim;  
Even his flushed form begins to fade,  
Till but a shade is left of him.

VI

That modern meditation broke  
His spell, that penmen's pleadings dealt a stroke,  
Say some; and some that crimes too dire  
Did much to mire his crimson cloak.

VII

Yea, seeds of crescive sympathy  
Were sown by those more excellent than he,  
Long known, though long contemned till then -  
The gods of men in amity.

VIII

Souls have grown seers, and thought out-brings  
The mournful many-sidedness of things  
With foes as friends, enfeebling ire  
And fury-fires by gaingivings!

IX

He scarce impassions champions now;  
They do and dare, but tensely--pale of brow;  
And would they fain uplift the arm  
Of that faint form they know not how.

Poems of the Past and the Present

X

Yet wars arise, though zest grows cold;  
Wherefore, at whiles, as 'twere in ancient mould  
He looms, bepatched with paint and lath;  
But never hath he seemed the old!

XI

Let men rejoice, let men deplore.  
The lurid Deity of heretofore  
Succumbs to one of saner nod;  
The Battle-god is god no more.

GENOA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN  
(March, 1887)

O epic-famed, god-haunted Central Sea,  
Heave careless of the deep wrong done to thee  
When from Torino's track I saw thy face first flash on me.

And multimarbled Genova the Proud,  
Gleam all unconscious how, wide-lipped, up-browed,  
I first beheld thee clad--not as the Beauty but the Dowd.

Out from a deep-delved way my vision lit  
On housebacks pink, green, ochreous--where a slit  
Shoreward 'twixt row and row revealed the classic blue through it.

And thereacross waved fishwives' high-hung smocks,  
Chrome kerchiefs, scarlet hose, darned underfrocks;  
Since when too oft my dreams of thee, O Queen, that frippery mocks:

Whereat I grieve, Superba! . . . Afterhours  
Within Palazzo Doria's orange bowers  
Went far to mend these marrings of thy soul-subliming powers.

But, Queen, such squalid undress none should see,  
Those dream-endangering eyewounds no more be  
Where lovers first behold thy form in pilgrimage to thee.

SHELLEY'S SKYLARK  
(The neighbourhood of Leghorn: March, 1887)

Somewhere afield here something lies  
In Earth's oblivious eyeless trust  
That moved a poet to prophecies -  
A pinch of unseen, unguarded dust

The dust of the lark that Shelley heard,  
And made immortal through times to be; -  
Though it only lived like another bird,  
And knew not its immortality.

Lived its meek life; then, one day, fell -  
A little ball of feather and bone;  
And how it perished, when piped farewell,  
And where it wastes, are alike unknown.

Poems of the Past and the Present

Maybe it rests in the loam I view,  
Maybe it throbs in a myrtle's green,  
Maybe it sleeps in the coming hue  
Of a grape on the slopes of yon inland scene.

Go find it, faeries, go and find  
That tiny pinch of priceless dust,  
And bring a casket silver-lined,  
And framed of gold that gems encrust;

And we will lay it safe therein,  
And consecrate it to endless time;  
For it inspired a bard to win  
Ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme.

IN THE OLD THEATRE, FIESOLE  
(April, 1887)

I traced the Circus whose gray stones incline  
Where Rome and dim Etruria interjoin,  
Till came a child who showed an ancient coin  
That bore the image of a Constantine.

She lightly passed; nor did she once opine  
How, better than all books, she had raised for me  
In swift perspective Europe's history  
Through the vast years of Caesar's sceptred line.

For in my distant plot of English loam  
'Twas but to delve, and straightway there to find  
Coins of like impress. As with one half blind  
Whom common simples cure, her act flashed home  
In that mute moment to my opened mind  
The power, the pride, the reach of perished Rome.

ROME: ON THE PALATINE  
(April, 1887)

We walked where Victor Jove was shrined awhile,  
And passed to Livia's rich red mural show,  
Whence, thridding cave and Criptoportico,  
We gained Caligula's dissolving pile.

And each ranked ruin tended to beguile  
The outer sense, and shape itself as though  
It wore its marble hues, its pristine glow  
Of scenic frieze and pompous peristyle.

When lo, swift hands, on strings nigh over-head,  
Began to melodize a waltz by Strauss:  
It stirred me as I stood, in Caesar's house,  
Raised the old routs Imperial lyres had led,

And blended pulsing life with lives long done,  
Till Time seemed fiction, Past and Present one.

ROME  
BUILDING A NEW STREET IN THE ANCIENT QUARTER  
(April, 1887)

Poems of the Past and the Present

These numbered cliffs and gnarls of masonry  
Outskeleton Time's central city, Rome;  
Whereof each arch, entablature, and dome  
Lies bare in all its gaunt anatomy.

And cracking frieze and rotten metope  
Express, as though they were an open tome  
Top-lined with caustic monitory gnome;  
"Dunces, Learn here to spell Humanity!"

And yet within these ruins' very shade  
The singing workmen shape and set and join  
Their frail new mansion's stuccoed cove and quoin  
With no apparent sense that years abrade,  
Though each rent wall their feeble works invade  
Once shamed all such in power of pier and groin.

ROME  
THE VATICAN--SALA DELLE MUSE  
(1887)

I sat in the Muses' Hall at the mid of the day,  
And it seemed to grow still, and the people to pass away,  
And the chiselled shapes to combine in a haze of sun,  
Till beside a Carrara column there gleamed forth One.

She was nor this nor that of those beings divine,  
But each and the whole--an essence of all the Nine;  
With tentative foot she neared to my halting-place,  
A pensive smile on her sweet, small, marvellous face.

"Regarded so long, we render thee sad?" said she.  
"Not you," sighed I, "but my own inconstancy!  
I worship each and each; in the morning one,  
And then, alas! another at sink of sun.

"To-day my soul clasps Form; but where is my troth  
Of yesternight with Tune: can one cleave to both?"  
- "Be not perturbed," said she. "Though apart in fame,  
As I and my sisters are one, those, too, are the same.

- "But my loves go further--to Story, and Dance, and Hymn,  
The lover of all in a sun-sweep is fool to whim -  
Is swayed like a river-weed as the ripples run!"  
- "Nay, wight, thou sway'st not. These are but phases of one;

"And that one is I; and I am projected from thee,  
One that out of thy brain and heart thou causest to be -  
Extern to thee nothing. Grieve not, nor thyself becall,  
Woo where thou wilt; and rejoice thou canst love at all!

ROME  
AT THE PYRAMID OF CESTIUS  
NEAR THE GRAVES OF SHELLEY AND KEATS  
(1887)

Who, then, was Cestius,

Poems of the Past and the Present

And what is he to me? -  
Amid thick thoughts and memories multitudinous  
One thought alone brings he.

I can recall no word  
Of anything he did;  
For me he is a man who died and was interred  
To leave a pyramid

Whose purpose was exprest  
Not with its first design,  
Nor till, far down in Time, beside it found their rest  
Two countrymen of mine.

Cestius in life, maybe,  
Slew, breathed out threatening;  
I know not. This I know: in death all silently  
He does a kindlier thing,

In beckoning pilgrim feet  
With marble finger high  
To where, by shadowy wall and history-haunted street,  
Those matchless singers lie . . .

--Say, then, he lived and died  
That stones which bear his name  
Should mark, through Time, where two immortal shades abide;  
It is an ample fame.

LAUSANNE

IN GIBBON'S OLD GARDEN: 11-12 P.M.

June 27, 1897

(The 110th anniversary of the completion of the "Decline and Fall" at  
the same hour and place)

A spirit seems to pass,  
Formal in pose, but grave and grand withal:  
He contemplates a volume stout and tall,  
And far lamps fleck him through the thin acacias.

Anon the book is closed,  
With "It is finished!" And at the alley's end  
He turns, and soon on me his glances bend;  
And, as from earth, comes speech--small, muted, yet composed.

"How fares the Truth now?--Ill?  
--Do pens but slily further her advance?  
May one not speed her but in phrase askance?  
Do scribes aver the Comic to be Reverend still?"

"Still rule those minds on earth  
At whom sage Milton's wormwood words were hurled:  
'Truth like a bastard comes into the world  
Never without ill-fame to him who gives her birth?'"

ZERMATT

TO THE MATTERHORN

(June-July, 1897)

Thirty-two years since, up against the sun,

Poems of the Past and the Present

Seven shapes, thin atomies to lower sight,  
Labouringly leapt and gained thy gabled height,  
And four lives paid for what the seven had won.

They were the first by whom the deed was done,  
And when I look at thee, my mind takes flight  
To that day's tragic feat of manly might,  
As though, till then, of history thou hadst none.

Yet ages ere men topped thee, late and soon  
Thou watch'dst each night the planets lift and lower;  
Thou gleam'dst to Joshua's pausing sun and moon,  
And brav'dst the tokening sky when Caesar's power  
Approached its bloody end: yea, saw'st that Noon  
When darkness filled the earth till the ninth hour.

THE BRIDGE OF LODI {2}  
(Spring, 1887)

I

When of tender mind and body  
I was moved by minstrelsy,  
And that strain "The Bridge of Lodi"  
Brought a strange delight to me.

II

In the battle-breathing jingle  
Of its forward-footing tune  
I could see the armies mingle,  
And the columns cleft and hewn

III

On that far-famed spot by Lodi  
Where Napoleon clove his way  
To his fame, when like a god he  
Bent the nations to his sway.

IV

Hence the tune came capering to me  
While I traced the Rhone and Po;  
Nor could Milan's Marvel woo me  
From the spot englamoured so.

V

And to-day, sunlit and smiling,  
Here I stand upon the scene,  
With its saffron walls, dun tiling,  
And its meads of maiden green,

VI

Even as when the trackway thundered  
With the charge of grenadiers,  
And the blood of forty hundred  
Splashed its parapets and piers . . .

VII

Any ancient crone I'd toady

Poems of the Past and the Present

Like a lass in young-eyed prime,  
Could she tell some tale of Lodi  
At that moving mighty time.

VIII

So, I ask the wives of Lodi  
For traditions of that day;  
But alas! not anybody  
Seems to know of such a fray.

IX

And they heed but transitory  
Marketings in cheese and meat,  
Till I judge that Lodi's story  
Is extinct in Lodi's street.

X

Yet while here and there they thrid them  
In their zest to sell and buy,  
Let me sit me down amid them  
And behold those thousands die . . .

XI

- Not a creature cares in Lodi  
How Napoleon swept each arch,  
Or where up and downward trod he,  
Or for his memorial March!

XII

So that wherefore should I be here,  
Watching Adda lip the lea,  
When the whole romance to see here  
Is the dream I bring with me?

XIII

And why sing "The Bridge of Lodi"  
As I sit thereon and swing,  
When none shows by smile or nod he  
Guesses why or what I sing? . . .

XIV

Since all Lodi, low and head ones,  
Seem to pass that story by,  
It may be the Lodi-bred ones  
Rate it truly, and not I.

XV

Once engrossing Bridge of Lodi,  
Is thy claim to glory gone?  
Must I pipe a palinody,  
Or be silent thereupon?

XVI

And if here, from strand to steeple,  
Be no stone to fame the fight,  
Must I say the Lodi people  
Are but viewing crime aright?

XVII



Poems of the Past and the Present

Nay; I'll sing "The Bridge of Lodi" -  
That long-loved, romantic thing,  
Though none show by smile or nod he  
Guesses why and what I sing!

ON AN INVITATION TO THE UNITED STATES

I

My ardours for emprise nigh lost  
Since Life has bared its bones to me,  
I shrink to seek a modern coast  
Whose riper times have yet to be;  
Where the new regions claim them free  
From that long drip of human tears  
Which peoples old in tragedy  
Have left upon the centuried years.

II

For, winning in these ancient lands,  
Enchased and lettered as a tomb,  
And scored with prints of perished hands,  
And chronicled with dates of doom,  
Though my own Being bear no bloom  
I trace the lives such scenes enshrine,  
Give past exemplars present room,  
And their experience count as mine.

THE MOTHER MOURNS

When mid-autumn's moan shook the night-time,  
And sedges were horny,  
And summer's green wonderwork faltered  
On leaze and in lane,

I fared Yell'ham-Firs way, where dimly  
Came wheeling around me  
Those phantoms obscure and insistent  
That shadows unchain.

Till airs from the needle-thicks brought me  
A low lamentation,  
As 'twere of a tree-god disheartened,  
Perplexed, or in pain.

And, heeding, it awed me to gather  
That Nature herself there  
Was breathing in aerie accents,  
With dirgeful refrain,

Weary plaint that Mankind, in these late days,  
Had grieved her by holding  
Her ancient high fame of perfection  
In doubt and disdain . . .

- "I had not proposed me a Creature  
(She soughed) so excelling  
All else of my kingdom in compass

Poems of the Past and the Present  
And brightness of brain

"As to read my defects with a god-glance,  
Uncover each vestige  
Of old inadvertence, annunciate  
Each flaw and each stain!

"My purpose went not to develop  
Such insight in Earthland;  
Such potent appraisements affront me,  
And sadden my reign!

"Why loosened I olden control here  
To mechanize skywards,  
Undeeming great scope could outshape in  
A globe of such grain?

"Man's mountings of mind-sight I checked not,  
Till range of his vision  
Has topped my intent, and found blemish  
Throughout my domain.

"He holds as inept his own soul-shell -  
My deftest achievement -  
Contemns me for fitful inventions  
Ill-timed and inane:

"No more sees my sun as a Sanct-shape,  
My moon as the Night-queen,  
My stars as august and sublime ones  
That influences rain:

"Reckons gross and ignoble my teaching,  
Immoral my story,  
My love-lights a lure, that my species  
May gather and gain.

"'Give me,' he has said, 'but the matter  
And means the gods lot her,  
My brain could evolve a creation  
More seemly, more sane.'

- "If ever a naughtiness seized me  
To woo adulation  
From creatures more keen than those crude ones  
That first formed my train -

"If inly a moment I murmured,  
'The simple praise sweetly,  
But sweetlier the sage'--and did rashly  
Man's vision unrein,

"I rue it! . . . His guileless forerunners,  
Whose brains I could blandish,  
To measure the deeps of my mysteries  
Applied them in vain.

"From them my waste aimings and futile  
I subtly could cover;  
'Every best thing,' said they, 'to best purpose  
Her powers preordain.' -

"No more such! . . . My species are dwindling,  
My forests grow barren,  
My popinjays fail from their tappings,  
My larks from their strain.

"My leopardine beauties are rarer,

Poems of the Past and the Present

My tusky ones vanish,  
My children have aped mine own slaughters  
To quicken my wane.

"Let me grow, then, but mildews and mandrakes,  
And slimy distortions,  
Let nevermore things good and lovely  
To me appertain;

"For Reason is rank in my temples,  
And Vision unruly,  
And chivalrous laud of my cunning  
Is heard not again!"

"I SAID TO LOVE"

I said to Love,  
"It is not now as in old days  
When men adored thee and thy ways  
All else above;  
Named thee the Boy, the Bright, the One  
Who spread a heaven beneath the sun,"  
I said to Love.

I said to him,  
"We now know more of thee than then;  
We were but weak in judgment when,  
With hearts abrim,  
We clamoured thee that thou would'st please  
Inflict on us thine agonies,"  
I said to him.

I said to Love,  
"Thou art not young, thou art not fair,  
No faery darts, no cherub air,  
Nor swan, nor dove  
Are thine; but features pitiless,  
And iron daggers of distress,"  
I said to Love.

"Depart then, Love! . . .  
- Man's race shall end, dost threaten thou?  
The age to come the man of now  
Know nothing of? -  
We fear not such a threat from thee;  
We are too old in apathy!  
Mankind shall cease.--So let it be,"  
I said to Love.

A COMMONPLACE DAY

The day is turning ghost,  
And scuttles from the kalendar in fits and furtively,  
To join the anonymous host  
Of those that throng oblivion; ceding his place, maybe,  
To one of like degree.

I part the fire-gnawed logs,  
Rake forth the embers, spoil the busy flames, and lay the ends  
Upon the shining dogs;

Poems of the Past and the Present

Further and further from the nooks the twilight's stride extends,  
And beamless black impends.

Nothing of tiniest worth  
Have I wrought, pondered, planned; no one thing asking blame or  
praise,  
Since the pale corpse-like birth  
Of this diurnal unit, bearing blanks in all its rays -  
Dullest of dull-hued Days!

Wanly upon the panes  
The rain slides as have slid since morn my colourless thoughts; and  
yet  
Here, while Day's presence wanes,  
And over him the sepulchre-lid is slowly lowered and set,  
He wakens my regret.

Regret--though nothing dear  
That I wot of, was toward in the wide world at his prime,  
Or bloomed elsewhere than here,  
To die with his decease, and leave a memory sweet, sublime,  
Or mark him out in Time . . .

--Yet, maybe, in some soul,  
In some spot undiscerned on sea or land, some impulse rose,  
Or some intent upstole  
Of that enkindling ardency from whose maturer glows  
The world's amendment flows;

But which, benumbed at birth  
By momentary chance or wile, has missed its hope to be  
Embodied on the earth;  
And undervoicings of this loss to man's futurity  
May wake regret in me.

AT A LUNAR ECLIPSE

Thy shadow, Earth, from Pole to Central Sea,  
Now steals along upon the Moon's meek shine  
In even monochrome and curving line  
Of imperturbable serenity.

How shall I link such sun-cast symmetry  
With the torn troubled form I know as thine,  
That profile, placid as a brow divine,  
With continents of moil and misery?

And can immense Mortality but throw  
So small a shade, and Heaven's high human scheme  
Be hemmed within the coasts yon arc implies?

Is such the stellar gauge of earthly show,  
Nation at war with nation, brains that teem,  
Heroes, and women fairer than the skies?

THE LACKING SENSE

SCENE.--A sad-coloured landscape, waddon Vale

I

Poems of the Past and the Present

"O Time, whence comes the Mother's moody look amid her labours,  
As of one who all unwittingly has wounded where she loves?  
Why weaves she not her world-webs to according lutes and tabors,  
With nevermore this too remorseful air upon her face,  
As of angel fallen from grace?"

II

- "Her look is but her story: construe not its symbols keenly:  
In her wonderworks yea surely has she wounded where she loves.  
The sense of ills misdealt for blisses blanks the mien most  
queenly,  
Self-smitings kill self-joys; and everywhere beneath the sun  
Such deeds her hands have done."

III

- "And how explains thy Ancient Mind her crimes upon her creatures,  
These fallings from her fair beginnings, woundings where she  
loves,  
Into her would-be perfect motions, modes, effects, and features  
Admitting cramps, black humours, wan decay, and baleful blights,  
Distress into delights?"

IV

- "Ah! know'st thou not her secret yet, her vainly veiled deficiency,  
Whence it comes that all unwittingly she wounds the lives she  
loves?  
That sightless are those orbs of hers?--which bar to her  
omniscience  
Brings those fearful unfulfilments, that red ravage through her zones  
Whereat all creation groans.

V

"She whispers it in each pathetic strenuous slow endeavour,  
When in mothering she unwittingly sets wounds on what she loves;  
Yet her primal doom pursues her, faultful, fatal is she ever;  
Though so deft and nigh to vision is her facile finger-touch  
That the seers marvel much.

VI

"Deal, then, her groping skill no scorn, no note of malediction;  
Not long on thee will press the hand that hurts the lives it  
loves;  
And while she dares dead-reckoning on, in darkness of affliction,  
Assist her where thy creaturely dependence can or may,  
For thou art of her clay."

TO LIFE

O life with the sad seared face,  
I weary of seeing thee,  
And thy draggled cloak, and thy hobbling pace,  
And thy too-forced pleasantries!

I know what thou would'st tell  
Of Death, Time, Destiny -  
I have known it long, and know, too, well  
What it all means for me.

But canst thou not array

Poems of the Past and the Present

Thyself in rare disguise,  
And feign like truth, for one mad day,  
That Earth is Paradise?

I'll tune me to the mood,  
And mumm with thee till eve;  
And maybe what as interlude  
I feign, I shall believe!

DOOM AND SHE

I

There dwells a mighty pair -  
Slow, statuesque, intense -  
Amid the vague Immense:  
None can their chronicle declare,  
Nor why they be, nor whence.

II

Mother of all things made,  
Matchless in artistry,  
Unlit with sight is she. -  
And though her ever well-obeyed  
Vacant of feeling he.

III

The Matron mildly asks -  
A throb in every word -  
"Our clay-made creatures, lord,  
How fare they in their mortal tasks  
Upon Earth's bounded bord?

IV

"The fate of those I bear,  
Dear lord, pray turn and view,  
And notify me true;  
Shapings that eyelessly I dare  
Maybe I would undo.

V

"Sometimes from lairs of life  
Methinks I catch a groan,  
Or multitudinous moan,  
As though I had schemed a world of strife,  
Working by touch alone."

VI

"world-weaver!" he replies,  
"I scan all thy domain;  
But since nor joy nor pain  
Doth my clear substance recognize,  
I read thy realms in vain.

VII

"world-weaver! what IS Grief?  
And what are Right, and Wrong,  
And Feeling, that belong

Poems of the Past and the Present

To creatures all who owe thee fief?  
What worse is weak than strong?" . . .

VIII

--Unlightened, curious, meek,  
She broods in sad surmise . . .  
--Some say they have heard her sighs  
On Alpine height or Polar peak  
When the night tempests rise.

THE PROBLEM

Shall we conceal the case, or tell it -  
We who believe the evidence?  
Here and there the watch-towers knell it  
With a sullen significance,  
Heard of the few who hearken intently and carry an eagerly upstrained  
sense.

Hearts that are happiest hold not by it;  
Better we let, then, the old view reign;  
Since there is peace in it, why decry it?  
Since there is comfort, why disdain?  
Note not the pigment the while that the painting determines  
humanity's joy and pain!

THE SUBALTERNS

I

"Poor wanderer," said the leaden sky,  
"I fain would lighten thee,  
But there be laws in force on high  
Which say it must not be."

II

- "I would not freeze thee, shorn one," cried  
The North, "knew I but how  
To warm my breath, to slack my stride;  
But I am ruled as thou."

III

- "To-morrow I attack thee, wight,"  
Said Sickness. "Yet I swear  
I bear thy little ark no spite,  
But am bid enter there."

IV

- "Come hither, son," I heard Death say;  
"I did not will a grave  
Should end thy pilgrimage to-day,  
But I, too, am a slave!"

V

We smiled upon each other then,

Poems of the Past and the Present

And life to me wore less  
That fell contour it wore ere when  
They owned their passiveness.

THE SLEEP-WORKER

When wilt thou wake, O Mother, wake and see -  
As one who, held in trance, has laboured long  
By vacant rote and prepossession strong -  
The coils that thou hast wrought unwittingly;

Wherein have place, unrealized by thee,  
Fair growths, foul cankers, right enmeshed with wrong,  
Strange orchestras of victim-shriek and song,  
And curious blends of ache and ecstasy? -

Should that morn come, and show thy opened eyes  
All that Life's palpitating tissues feel,  
How wilt thou bear thyself in thy surprise? -

Wilt thou destroy, in one wild shock of shame,  
Thy whole high heaving firmamental frame,  
Or patiently adjust, amend, and heal?

THE BULLFINCHES

Bother Bulleys, let us sing  
From the dawn till evening! -  
For we know not that we go not  
When the day's pale pinions fold  
Unto those who sang of old.

When I flew to Blackmoor Vale,  
Whence the green-gowned faeries hail,  
Roosting near them I could hear them  
Speak of queenly Nature's ways,  
Means, and moods,--well known to fays.

All we creatures, nigh and far  
(Said they there), the Mother's are:  
Yet she never shows endeavour  
To protect from warrings wild  
Bird or beast she calls her child.

Busy in her handsome house  
Known as Space, she falls a-drowse;  
Yet, in seeming, works on dreaming,  
While beneath her groping hands  
Fiends make havoc in her bands.

How her hussif'ry succeeds  
She unknaws or she unheeds,  
All things making for Death's taking!  
--So the green-gowned faeries say  
Living over Blackmoor way.

Come then, brethren, let us sing,  
From the dawn till evening! -  
For we know not that we go not  
When the day's pale pinions fold



Poems of the Past and the Present  
Unto those who sang of old.

GOD-FORGOTTEN

I towered far, and lo! I stood within  
The presence of the Lord Most High,  
Sent thither by the sons of earth, to win  
Some answer to their cry.

--"The Earth, say'st thou? The Human race?  
By Me created? Sad its lot?  
Nay: I have no remembrance of such place:  
Such world I fashioned not." -

--"O Lord, forgive me when I say  
Thou spak'st the word, and mad'st it all." -  
"The Earth of men--let me bethink me . . . Yea!  
I dimly do recall

"Some tiny sphere I built long back  
(Mid millions of such shapes of mine)  
So named . . . It perished, surely--not a wrack  
Remaining, or a sign?

"It lost my interest from the first,  
My aims therefor succeeding ill;  
Haply it died of doing as it durst?" -  
"Lord, it existeth still." -

"Dark, then, its life! For not a cry  
Of aught it bears do I now hear;  
Of its own act the threads were snapt whereby  
Its plaints had reached mine ear.

"It used to ask for gifts of good,  
Till came its severance self-entailed,  
When sudden silence on that side ensued,  
And has till now prevailed.

"All other orbs have kept in touch;  
Their voicings reach me speedily:  
Thy people took upon them overmuch  
In sundering them from me!

"And it is strange--though sad enough -  
Earth's race should think that one whose call  
Frames, daily, shining spheres of flawless stuff  
Must heed their tainted ball! . . .

"But say'st thou 'tis by pangs distraught,  
And strife, and silent suffering? -  
Deep grieved am I that injury should be wrought  
Even on so poor a thing!

"Thou should'st have learnt that Not to Mend  
For Me could mean but Not to Know:  
Hence, Messengers! and straightway put an end  
To what men undergo." . . .

Homing at dawn, I thought to see  
One of the Messengers standing by.  
- Oh, childish thought! . . . Yet oft it comes to me  
When trouble hovers nigh.

Poems of the Past and the Present

THE BEDRIDDEN PEASANT  
TO AN UNKNOWING GOD

Much wonder I--here long low-laid -  
That this dead wall should be  
Betwixt the Maker and the made,  
Between Thyself and me!

For, say one puts a child to nurse,  
He eyes it now and then  
To know if better 'tis, or worse,  
And if it mourn, and when.

But Thou, Lord, giv'st us men our clay  
In helpless bondage thus  
To Time and Chance, and seem'st straightway  
To think no more of us!

That some disaster cleft Thy scheme  
And tore us wide apart,  
So that no cry can cross, I deem;  
For Thou art mild of heart,

And would'st not shape and shut us in  
Where voice can not be heard:  
'Tis plain Thou meant'st that we should win  
Thy succour by a word.

Might but Thy sense flash down the skies  
Like man's from clime to clime,  
Thou would'st not let me agonize  
Through my remaining time;

But, seeing how much Thy creatures bear -  
Lame, starved, or maimed, or blind -  
Thou'dst heal the ills with quickest care  
Of me and all my kind.

Then, since Thou mak'st not these things be,  
But these things dost not know,  
I'll praise Thee as were shown to me  
The mercies Thou would'st show!

BY THE EARTH'S CORPSE

I

"O Lord, why grievest Thou? -  
Since Life has ceased to be  
Upon this globe, now cold  
As lunar land and sea,  
And humankind, and fowl, and fur  
Are gone eternally,  
All is the same to Thee as ere  
They knew mortality."

II

"O Time," replied the Lord,  
"Thou read'st me ill, I ween;

Poems of the Past and the Present

Were all THE SAME, I should not grieve  
At that late earthly scene,  
Now blestly past--though planned by me  
With interest close and keen! -  
Nay, nay: things now are NOT the same  
As they have earlier been.

III

"Written indelibly  
On my eternal mind  
Are all the wrongs endured  
By Earth's poor patient kind,  
Which my too oft unconscious hand  
Let enter undesigned.  
No god can cancel deeds foredone,  
Or thy old coils unwind!

IV

"As when, in Noe's days,  
I whelmed the plains with sea,  
So at this last, when flesh  
And herb but fossils be,  
And, all extinct, their piteous dust  
Revolves obliviously,  
That I made Earth, and life, and man,  
It still repenteth me!"

MUTE OPINION

I

I traversed a dominion  
Whose spokesmen spake out strong  
Their purpose and opinion  
Through pulpit, press, and song.  
I scarce had means to note there  
A large-eyed few, and dumb,  
Who thought not as those thought there  
That stirred the heat and hum.

II

When, grown a Shade, beholding  
That land in lifetime trode,  
To learn if its unfolding  
Fulfilled its clamoured code,  
I saw, in web unbroken,  
Its history outwrought  
Not as the loud had spoken,  
But as the mute had thought.

TO AN UNBORN PAUPER CHILD

I

Breathe not, hid Heart: cease silently,  
And though thy birth-hour beckons thee,  
Sleep the long sleep:

Poems of the Past and the Present

The Doomsters heap  
Travails and teens around us here,  
And Time-wraiths turn our songsingings to fear.

II

Hark, how the peoples surge and sigh,  
And laughters fail, and greetings die:  
Hopes dwindle; yea,  
Faiths waste away,  
Affections and enthusiasms numb;  
Thou canst not mend these things if thou dost come.

III

Had I the ear of wombed souls  
Ere their terrestrial chart unrolls,  
And thou wert free  
To cease, or be,  
Then would I tell thee all I know,  
And put it to thee: wilt thou take Life so?

IV

Vain vow! No hint of mine may hence  
To theeward fly: to thy locked sense  
Explain none can  
Life's pending plan:  
Thou wilt thy ignorant entry make  
Though skies spout fire and blood and nations quake.

V

Fain would I, dear, find some shut plot  
Of earth's wide wold for thee, where not  
One tear, one qualm,  
Should break the calm.  
But I am weak as thou and bare;  
No man can change the common lot to rare.

VI

Must come and bide. And such are we -  
Unreasoning, sanguine, visionary -  
That I can hope  
Health, love, friends, scope  
In full for thee; can dream thou'lt find  
Joys seldom yet attained by humankind!

TO FLOWERS FROM ITALY IN WINTER

Sunned in the south, and here to-day;  
--If all organic things  
Be sentient, Flowers, as some men say,  
What are your ponderings?

How can you stay, nor vanish quite  
From this bleak spot of thorn,  
And birch, and fir, and frozen white  
Expanse of the forlorn?

Frail luckless exiles hither brought!  
Your dust will not regain  
Old sunny haunts of Classic thought

Poems of the Past and the Present

When you shall waste and wane;

But mix with alien earth, be lit  
With frigid Boreal flame,  
And not a sign remain in it  
To tell men whence you came.

ON A FINE MORNING

Whence comes Solace?--Not from seeing  
What is doing, suffering, being,  
Not from noting Life's conditions,  
Nor from heeding Time's monitions;  
But in cleaving to the Dream,  
And in gazing at the gleam  
Whereby gray things golden seem.

II

Thus do I this heyday, holding  
Shadows but as lights unfolding,  
As no specious show this moment  
With its irised embowment;  
But as nothing other than  
Part of a benignant plan;  
Proof that earth was made for man.

February 1899.

TO LIZBIE BROWNE

I

Dear Lizbie Browne,  
Where are you now?  
In sun, in rain? -  
Or is your brow  
Past joy, past pain,  
Dear Lizbie Browne?

II

Sweet Lizbie Browne  
How you could smile,  
How you could sing! -  
How archly wile  
In glance-giving,  
Sweet Lizbie Browne!

III

And, Lizbie Browne,  
Who else had hair  
Bay-red as yours,  
Or flesh so fair  
Bred out of doors,  
Sweet Lizbie Browne?

IV

Poems of the Past and the Present

When, Lizbie Browne,  
You had just begun  
To be endeared  
By stealth to one,  
You disappeared  
My Lizbie Browne!

V

Ay, Lizbie Browne,  
So swift your life,  
And mine so slow,  
You were a wife  
Ere I could show  
Love, Lizbie Browne.

VI

Still, Lizbie Browne,  
You won, they said,  
The best of men  
When you were wed . . .  
Where went you then,  
O Lizbie Browne?

VII

Dear Lizbie Browne,  
I should have thought,  
"Girls ripen fast,"  
And coaxed and caught  
You ere you passed,  
Dear Lizbie Browne!

VIII

But, Lizbie Browne,  
I let you slip;  
Shaped not a sign;  
Touched never your lip  
With lip of mine,  
Lost Lizbie Browne!

IX

So, Lizbie Browne,  
When on a day  
Men speak of me  
As not, you'll say,  
"And who was he?" -  
Yes, Lizbie Browne!

SONG OF HOPE

O sweet To-morrow! -  
After to-day  
There will away  
This sense of sorrow.  
Then let us borrow  
Hope, for a gleaming  
Soon will be streaming,  
Dimmed by no gray -  
No gray!

Poems of the Past and the Present

While the winds wing us  
Sighs from The Gone,  
Nearer to dawn  
Minute-beats bring us;  
When there will sing us  
Larks of a glory  
Waiting our story  
Further anon -  
Anon!

Doff the black token,  
Don the red shoon,  
Right and retune  
Viol-strings broken;  
Null the words spoken  
In speeches of rueing,  
The night cloud is hueing,  
To-morrow shines soon -  
Shines soon!

THE WELL-BELOVED

I wayed by star and planet shine  
Towards the dear one's home  
At Kingsbere, there to make her mine  
When the next sun upclomb.

I edged the ancient hill and wood  
Beside the Ikling way,  
Nigh where the Pagan temple stood  
In the world's earlier day.

And as I quick and quicker walked  
On gravel and on green,  
I sang to sky, and tree, or talked  
Of her I called my queen.

- "O faultless is her dainty form,  
And luminous her mind;  
She is the God-created norm  
Of perfect womankind!"

A shape whereon one star-blink gleamed  
Glode softly by my side,  
A woman's; and her motion seemed  
The motion of my bride.

And yet methought she'd drawn erstwhile  
Adown the ancient leaze,  
Where once were pile and peristyle  
For men's idolatries.

- "O maiden lithe and lone, what may  
Thy name and lineage be,  
Who so resembllest by this ray  
My darling?--Art thou she?"

The Shape: "Thy bride remains within  
Her father's grange and grove."  
- "Thou speakest rightly," I broke in,  
"Thou art not she I love."

- "Nay: though thy bride remains inside  
Her father's walls," said she,

Poems of the Past and the Present

"The one most dear is with thee here,  
For thou dost love but me."

Then I: "But she, my only choice,  
Is now at Kingsbere Grove?"  
Again her soft mysterious voice:  
"I am thy only Love."

Thus still she vouched, and still I said,  
"O sprite, that cannot be!" . . .  
It was as if my bosom bled,  
So much she troubled me.

The sprite resumed: "Thou hast transferred  
To her dull form awhile  
My beauty, fame, and deed, and word,  
My gestures and my smile.

"O fatuous man, this truth infer,  
Brides are not what they seem;  
Thou lovest what thou dreamest her;  
I am thy very dream!"

- "O then," I answered miserably,  
Speaking as scarce I knew,  
"My loved one, I must wed with thee  
If what thou say'st be true!"

She, proudly, thinning in the gloom:  
"Though, since troth-plight began,  
I've ever stood as bride to groom,  
I wed no mortal man!"

Thereat she vanished by the Cross  
That, entering Kingsbere town,  
The two long lanes form, near the fosse  
Below the faneless Down.

- When I arrived and met my bride,  
Her look was pinched and thin,  
As if her soul had shrunk and died,  
And left a waste within.

HER REPROACH

Con the dead page as 'twere live love: press on!  
Cold wisdom's words will ease thy track for thee;  
Aye, go; cast off sweet ways, and leave me wan  
To biting blasts that are intent on me.

But if thy object Fame's far summits be,  
Whose inclines many a skeleton o'erlies  
That missed both dream and substance, stop and see  
How absence wears these cheeks and dims these eyes!

It surely is far sweeter and more wise  
To water love, than toil to leave anon  
A name whose glory-gleam will but advise  
Invidious minds to quench it with their own,

And over which the kindest will but stay  
A moment, musing, "He, too, had his day!"

WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS,



1867.

THE INCONSISTENT

I say, "She was as good as fair,"  
When standing by her mound;  
"Such passing sweetness," I declare,  
"No longer treads the ground."  
I say, "what living Love can catch  
Her bloom and bonhomie,  
And what in newer maidens match  
Her olden warmth to me!"

- There stands within yon vestry-nook  
Where bonded lovers sign,  
Her name upon a faded book  
With one that is not mine.  
To him she breathed the tender vow  
She once had breathed to me,  
But yet I say, "O love, even now  
Would I had died for thee!"

A BROKEN APPOINTMENT

You did not come,  
And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb. -  
Yet less for loss of your dear presence there  
Than that I thus found lacking in your make  
That high compassion which can overbear  
Reluctance for pure lovingkindness' sake  
Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,  
You did not come.

You love not me,  
And love alone can lend you loyalty;  
- I know and knew it. But, unto the store  
Of human deeds divine in all but name,  
Was it not worth a little hour or more  
To add yet this: Once, you, a woman, came  
To soothe a time-torn man; even though it be  
You love not me?

"BETWEEN US NOW"

Between us now and here -  
Two thrown together  
Who are not wont to wear  
Life's flushest feather -  
Who see the scenes slide past,  
The daytimes dimming fast,  
Let there be truth at last,  
Even if despair.

So thoroughly and long  
Have you now known me,  
So real in faith and strong

Poems of the Past and the Present

Have I now shown me,  
That nothing needs disguise  
Further in any wise,  
Or asks or justifies  
A guarded tongue.

Face unto face, then, say,  
Eyes mine own meeting,  
Is your heart far away,  
Or with mine beating?  
When false things are brought low,  
And swift things have grown slow,  
Feigning like froth shall go,  
Faith be for aye.

"HOW GREAT MY GRIEF"  
(TRIOLET)

How great my grief, my joys how few,  
Since first it was my fate to know thee!  
- Have the slow years not brought to view  
How great my grief, my joys how few,  
Nor memory shaped old times anew,  
Nor loving-kindness helped to show thee  
How great my grief, my joys how few,  
Since first it was my fate to know thee?

"I NEED NOT GO"

I need not go  
Through sleet and snow  
To where I know  
She waits for me;  
She will wait me there  
Till I find it fair,  
And have time to spare  
From company.

When I've overgot  
The world somewhat,  
When things cost not  
Such stress and strain,  
Is soon enough  
By cypress sough  
To tell my Love  
I am come again.

And if some day,  
When none cries nay,  
I still delay  
To seek her side,  
(Though ample measure  
Of fitting leisure  
Await my pleasure)  
She will riot chide.

What--not upbraid me  
That I delayed me,  
Nor ask what stayed me  
So long? Ah, no! -  
New cares may claim me,

Poems of the Past and the Present

New loves inflame me,  
She will not blame me,  
But suffer it so.

THE COQUETTE, AND AFTER  
(TRIOLETS)

I

For long the cruel wish I knew  
That your free heart should ache for me  
While mine should bear no ache for you;  
For, long--the cruel wish!--I knew  
How men can feel, and craved to view  
My triumph--fated not to be  
For long! . . . The cruel wish I knew  
That your free heart should ache for me!

II

At last one pays the penalty -  
The woman--women always do.  
My farce, I found, was tragedy  
At last!--One pays the penalty  
With interest when one, fancy-free,  
Learns love, learns shame . . . Of sinners two  
At last ONE pays the penalty -  
The woman--women always do!

A SPOT

In years defaced and lost,  
Two sat here, transport-tossed,  
Lit by a living love  
The wilted world knew nothing of:  
Scared momentarily  
By gaingivings,  
Then hoping things  
That could not be.

Of love and us no trace  
Abides upon the place;  
The sun and shadows wheel,  
Season and season sereward steal;  
Foul days and fair  
Here, too, prevail,  
And gust and gale  
As everywhere.

But lonely shepherd souls  
Who bask amid these knolls  
May catch a faery sound  
On sleepy noontides from the ground:  
"O not again  
Till Earth outwears  
Shall love like theirs  
Suffuse this glen!"

Poems of the Past and the Present

LONG PLIGHTED

Is it worth while, dear, now,  
To call for bells, and sally forth arrayed  
For marriage-rites -- discussed, decried, delayed  
So many years?

Is it worth while, dear, now,  
To stir desire for old fond purposings,  
By feints that Time still serves for dallyings,  
Though quittance nears?

Is it worth while, dear, when  
The day being so far spent, so low the sun,  
The undone thing will soon be as the done,  
And smiles as tears?

Is it worth while, dear, when  
Our cheeks are worn, our early brown is gray;  
When, meet or part we, none says yea or nay,  
Or heeds, or cares?

Is it worth while, dear, since  
We still can climb old Yell'ham's wooded mounds  
Together, as each season steals its rounds  
And disappears?

Is it worth while, dear, since  
As mates in Mellstock churchyard we can lie,  
Till the last crash of all things low and high  
Shall end the spheres?

THE WIDOW

By Mellstock Lodge and Avenue  
Towards her door I went,  
And sunset on her window-panes  
Reflected our intent.

The creeper on the gable nigh  
Was fired to more than red  
And when I came to halt thereby  
"Bright as my joy!" I said.

Of late days it had been her aim  
To meet me in the hall;  
Now at my footsteps no one came;  
And no one to my call.

Again I knocked; and tardily  
An inner step was heard,  
And I was shown her presence then  
With scarce an answering word.

She met me, and but barely took  
My proffered warm embrace;  
Preoccupation weighed her look,  
And hardened her sweet face.

"To-morrow--could you--would you call?  
Make brief your present stay?  
My child is ill--my one, my all! -

Poems of the Past and the Present  
And can't be left to-day."

And then she turns, and gives commands  
As I were out of sound,  
Or were no more to her and hers  
Than any neighbour round . . .

- As maid I wooed her; but one came  
And coaxed her heart away,  
And when in time he wedded her  
I deemed her gone for aye.

He won, I lost her; and my loss  
I bore I know not how;  
But I do think I suffered then  
Less wretchedness than now.

For Time, in taking him, had oped  
An unexpected door  
Of bliss for me, which grew to seem  
Far surer than before . . .

Her word is steadfast, and I know  
That plighted firm are we:  
But she has caught new love-calls since  
She smiled as maid on me!

AT A HASTY WEDDING  
(TRIOLET)

If hours be years the twain are blest,  
For now they solace swift desire  
By bonds of every bond the best,  
If hours be years. The twain are blest  
Do eastern stars slope never west,  
Nor pallid ashes follow fire:  
If hours be years the twain are blest,  
For now they solace swift desire.

THE DREAM-FOLLOWER

A dream of mine flew over the mead  
To the halls where my old Love reigns;  
And it drew me on to follow its lead:  
And I stood at her window-panes;

And I saw but a thing of flesh and bone  
Speeding on to its cleft in the clay;  
And my dream was scared, and expired on a moan,  
And I whitely hastened away.

HIS IMMORTALITY

I

I saw a dead man's finer part

Poems of the Past and the Present

Shining within each faithful heart  
Of those bereft. Then said I: "This must be  
His immortality."

II

I looked there as the seasons wore,  
And still his soul continuously upbore  
Its life in theirs. But less its shine excelled  
Than when I first beheld.

III

His fellow-years-men passed, and then  
In later hearts I looked for him again;  
And found him--shrunk, alas! into a thin  
And spectral mannikin.

IV

Lastly I ask--now old and chill -  
If aught of him remain unperished still;  
And find, in me alone, a feeble spark,  
Dying amid the dark.

February 1899.

THE TO-BE-FORGOTTEN

I

I heard a small sad sound,  
And stood awhile amid the tombs around:  
"Wherefore, old friends," said I, "are ye distressed,  
Now, screened from life's unrest?"

II

--"O not at being here;  
But that our future second death is drear;  
When, with the living, memory of us numbs,  
And blank oblivion comes!

III

"Those who our grandsires be  
Lie here embraced by deeper death than we;  
Nor shape nor thought of theirs canst thou descry  
With keenest backward eye.

IV

"They bide as quite forgot;  
They are as men who have existed not;  
Theirs is a loss past loss of fitful breath;  
It is the second death.

V

"We here, as yet, each day  
Are blest with dear recall; as yet, always  
In some soul hold a loved continuance  
Of shape and voice and glance.

Poems of the Past and the Present

VI

"But what has been will be -  
First memory, then oblivion's turbid sea;  
Like men foregone, shall we merge into those  
Whose story no one knows.

VII

"For which of us could hope  
To show in life that world-awakening scope  
Granted the few whose memory none lets die,  
But all men magnify?

VIII

"We were but Fortune's sport;  
Things true, things lovely, things of good report  
We neither shunned nor sought . . . We see our bourne,  
And seeing it we mourn."

WIVES IN THE SERE

I

Never a careworn wife but shows,  
If a joy suffuse her,  
Something beautiful to those  
Patient to peruse her,  
Some one charm the world unknowns  
Precious to a muser,  
Haply what, ere years were foes,  
Moved her mate to choose her.

II

But, be it a hint of rose  
That an instant hues her,  
Or some early light or pose  
Wherewith thought renews her -  
Seen by him at full, ere woes  
Practised to abuse her -  
Sparely comes it, swiftly goes,  
Time again subdues her.

THE SUPERSEDED

I

As newer comers crowd the fore,  
We drop behind.  
- We who have laboured long and sore  
Times out of mind,  
And keen are yet, must not regret  
To drop behind.

II

Yet there are of us some who grieve  
To go behind;

Poems of the Past and the Present

Staunch, strenuous souls who scarce believe  
Their fires declined,  
And know none cares, remembers, spares  
Who go behind.

III

'Tis not that we have unforecast  
The drop behind;  
We feel the new must oust the old  
In every kind;  
But yet we think, must we, must WE,  
Too, drop behind?

AN AUGUST MIDNIGHT

I

A shaded lamp and a waving blind,  
And the beat of a clock from a distant floor:  
On this scene enter--winged, horned, and spined -  
A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore;  
while 'mid my page there idly stands  
A sleepy fly, that rubs its hands . . .

II

Thus meet we five, in this still place,  
At this point of time, at this point in space.  
- My guests parade my new-penned ink,  
Or bang at the lamp-glass, whirl, and sink.  
"God's humblest, they!" I muse. Yet why?  
They know Earth-secrets that know not I.

MAX GATE, 1899.

THE CAGED THRUSH FREED AND HOME AGAIN  
(VILLANELLE)

"Men know but little more than we,  
who count us least of things terrene,  
How happy days are made to be!

"Of such strange tidings what think ye,  
O birds in brown that peck and preen?  
Men know but little more than we!

"When I was borne from yonder tree  
In bonds to them, I hoped to glean  
How happy days are made to be,

"And want and wailing turned to glee;  
Alas, despite their mighty mien  
Men know but little more than we!

"They cannot change the Frost's decree,  
They cannot keep the skies serene;  
How happy days are made to be

"Eludes great Man's sagacity  
No less than ours, O tribes in treen!



Poems of the Past and the Present

Men know but little more than we  
How happy days are made to be."

BIRDS AT WINTER NIGHTFALL  
(TRIOLET)

Around the house the flakes fly faster,  
And all the berries now are gone  
From holly and cotoneaster  
Around the house. The flakes fly!--faster  
Shutting indoors that crumb-outcaster  
We used to see upon the lawn  
Around the house. The flakes fly faster,  
And all the berries now are gone!

MAX GATE.

THE PUZZLED GAME-BIRDS  
(TRIOLET)

They are not those who used to feed us  
When we were young--they cannot be -  
These shapes that now bereave and bleed us?  
They are not those who used to feed us, -  
For would they not fair terms concede us?  
- If hearts can house such treachery  
They are not those who used to feed us  
When we were young--they cannot be!

WINTER IN DURNOVER FIELD

SCENE.--A wide stretch of fallow ground recently sown with wheat, and  
frozen to iron hardness. Three large birds walking about thereon,  
and wistfully eyeing the surface. Wind keen from north-east: sky a  
dull grey.

(TRIOLET)

Rook.--Throughout the field I find no grain;  
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!  
Starling.--Aye: patient pecking now is vain  
Throughout the field, I find . . .  
Rook.--No grain!  
Pigeon.--Nor will be, comrade, till it rain,  
Or genial thawings loose the lorn land  
Throughout the field.  
Rook.--I find no grain:  
The cruel frost encrusts the cornland!

THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM

Poems of the Past and the Present

Why should this flower delay so long  
To show its tremulous plumes?  
Now is the time of plaintive robin-song,  
When flowers are in their tombs.

Through the slow summer, when the sun  
Called to each frond and whorl  
That all he could for flowers was being done,  
Why did it not uncurl?

It must have felt that fervid call  
Although it took no heed,  
Waking but now, when leaves like corpses fall,  
And saps all retrocede.

Too late its beauty, lonely thing,  
The season's shine is spent,  
Nothing remains for it but shivering  
In tempests turbulent.

Had it a reason for delay,  
Dreaming in witlessness  
That for a bloom so delicately gay  
Winter would stay its stress?

- I talk as if the thing were born  
With sense to work its mind;  
Yet it is but one mask of many worn  
By the Great Face behind.

THE DARKLING THRUSH

I leant upon a coppice gate  
When Frost was spectre-gray,  
And Winter's dregs made desolate  
The weakening eye of day.  
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky  
Like strings from broken lyres,  
And all mankind that haunted nigh  
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be  
The Century's corpse outleant,  
His crypt the cloudy canopy,  
The wind his death-lament.  
The ancient pulse of germ and birth  
Was shrunken hard and dry,  
And every spirit upon earth  
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice outburst among  
The bleak twigs overhead  
In a full-hearted evensong  
Of joy illimited;  
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,  
In blast-beruffled plume,  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carollings  
Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
Afar or nigh around,  
That I could think there trembled through

Poems of the Past and the Present

His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.

December 1900.

THE COMET AT YALBURY OR YELL'HAM

I

It bends far over Yell'ham Plain,  
And we, from Yell'ham Height,  
Stand and regard its fiery train,  
So soon to swim from sight.

II

It will return long years hence, when  
As now its strange swift shine  
Will fall on Yell'ham; but not then  
On that sweet form of thine.

MAD JUDY

When the hamlet hailed a birth  
Judy used to cry:  
When she heard our christening mirth  
She would kneel and sigh.  
She was crazed, we knew, and we  
Humoured her infirmity.

When the daughters and the sons  
Gathered them to wed,  
And we like-intending ones  
Danced till dawn was red,  
She would rock and mutter, "More  
Comers to this stony shore!"

When old Headsman Death laid hands  
On a babe or twain,  
She would feast, and by her brands  
Sing her songs again.  
What she liked we let her do,  
Judy was insane, we knew.

A WASTED ILLNESS

Through vaults of pain,  
Enribbed and wrought with groins of ghastriness,  
I passed, and garish spectres moved my brain  
To dire distress.

And hammerings,  
And quakes, and shoots, and stifling hotness, blent  
With webby waxing things and waning things  
As on I went.

Poems of the Past and the Present

"Where lies the end  
To this foul way?" I asked with weakening breath.  
Thereon ahead I saw a door extend -  
The door to death.

It loomed more clear:  
"At last!" I cried. "The all-delivering door!"  
And then, I knew not how, it grew less near  
Than theretofore.

And back slid I  
Along the galleries by which I came,  
And tediously the day returned, and sky,  
And life--the same.

And all was well:  
Old circumstance resumed its former show,  
And on my head the dews of comfort fell  
As ere my woe.

I roam anew,  
Scarce conscious of my late distress . . . And yet  
Those backward steps through pain I cannot view  
Without regret.

For that dire train  
Of waxing shapes and waning, passed before,  
And those grim aisles, must be traversed again  
To reach that door.

A MAN  
(IN MEMORY OF H. OF M.)

I

In Casterbridge there stood a noble pile,  
Wrought with pilaster, bay, and balustrade  
In tactful times when shrewd Eliza swayed. -  
On burgher, squire, and clown  
It smiled the long street down for near a mile

II

But evil days beset that domicile;  
The stately beauties of its roof and wall  
Passed into sordid hands. Condemned to fall  
Were cornice, quoin, and cove,  
And all that art had wove in antique style.

III

Among the hired dismantlers entered there  
One till the moment of his task untold.  
When charged therewith he gazed, and answered bold:  
"Be needy I or no,  
I will not help lay low a house so fair!

IV

"Hunger is hard. But since the terms be such -  
No wage, or labour stained with the disgrace  
Of wrecking what our age cannot replace  
To save its tasteless soul -

Poems of the Past and the Present

I'll do without your dole. Life is not much!

V

Dismissed with sneers he backed his tools and went,  
And wandered workless; for it seemed unwise  
To close with one who dared to criticize  
    And carp on points of taste:  
To work where they were placed rude men were meant.

VI

Years whiled. He aged, sank, sickened, and was not:  
And it was said, "A man intractable  
And curst is gone." None sighed to hear his knell,  
    None sought his churchyard-place;  
His name, his rugged face, were soon forgot.

VII

The stones of that fair hall lie far and wide,  
And but a few recall its ancient mould;  
Yet when I pass the spot I long to hold  
    As truth what fancy saith:  
"His protest lives where deathless things abide!"

THE DAME OF ATHELHALL

I

"Soul! Shall I see thy face," she said,  
    "In one brief hour?  
And away with thee from a loveless bed  
To a far-off sun, to a vine-wrapt bower,  
And be thine own unseparated,  
    And challenge the world's white glower?"

II

She quickened her feet, and met him where  
    They had pre-designed:  
And they clasped, and mounted, and cleft the air  
Upon whirling wheels; till the will to bind  
Her life with his made the moments there  
    Efface the years behind.

III

Miles slid, and the sight of the port upgrew  
    As they sped on;  
When slipping its bond the bracelet flew  
From her fondled arm. Replaced anon,  
Its cameo of the abjured one drew  
    Her musings thereupon.

IV

The gaud with his image once had been  
    A gift from him:  
And so it was that its carving keen  
Refurbished memories wearing dim,  
Which set in her soul a throe of teen,  
    And a tear on her lashes' brim.

Poems of the Past and the Present

V

"I may not go!" she at length upspoke,  
"Thoughts call me back -  
I would still lose all for your dear, dear sake;  
My heart is thine, friend! But my track  
I home to Athelhall must take  
To hinder household wrack!"

VI

He appealed. But they parted, weak and wan:  
And he left the shore;  
His ship diminished, was low, was gone;  
And she heard in the waves as the daytide wore,  
And read in the leer of the sun that shone,  
That they parted for evermore.

VII

She homed as she came, at the dip of eve  
On Athel Coomb  
Regaining the Hall she had sworn to leave . . .  
The house was soundless as a tomb,  
And she entered her chamber, there to grieve  
Lone, kneeling, in the gloom.

VIII

From the lawn without rose her husband's voice  
To one his friend:  
"Another her Love, another my choice,  
Her going is good. Our conditions mend;  
In a change of mates we shall both rejoice;  
I hoped that it thus might end!"

IX

"A quick divorce; she will make him hers,  
And I wed mine.  
So Time rights all things in long, long years -  
Or rather she, by her bold design!  
I admire a woman no balk deters:  
She has blessed my life, in fine.

X

"I shall build new rooms for my new true bride,  
Let the bygone be:  
By now, no doubt, she has crossed the tide  
With the man to her mind. Far happier she  
In some warm vineland by his side  
Than ever she was with me."

THE SEASONS OF HER YEAR

I

Winter is white on turf and tree,  
And birds are fled;  
But summer songsters pipe to me,  
And petals spread,  
For what I dreamt of secretly  
His lips have said!

Poems of the Past and the Present

II

O 'tis a fine May morn, they say,  
And blooms have blown;  
But wild and wintry is my day,  
My birds make moan;  
For he who vowed leaves me to pay  
Alone--alone!

THE MILKMAID

Under a daisied bank  
There stands a rich red ruminating cow,  
And hard against her flank  
A cotton-hooded milkmaid bends her brow.

The flowery river-ooze  
Upheaves and falls; the milk purrs in the pail;  
Few pilgrims but would choose  
The peace of such a life in such a vale.

The maid breathes words--to vent,  
It seems, her sense of Nature's scenery,  
Of whose life, sentiment,  
And essence, very part itself is she.

She bends a glance of pain,  
And, at a moment, lets escape a tear;  
Is it that passing train,  
Whose alien whirr offends her country ear? -

Nay! Phyllis does not dwell  
On visual and familiar things like these;  
What moves her is the spell  
Of inner themes and inner poetries:

Could but by Sunday morn  
Her gay new gown come, meads might dry to dun,  
Trains shriek till ears were torn,  
If Fred would not prefer that Other One.

THE LEVELLED CHURCHYARD

"O passenger, pray list and catch  
Our sighs and piteous groans,  
Half stifled in this jumbled patch  
Of wrenched memorial stones!

"We late-lamented, resting here,  
Are mixed to human jam,  
And each to each exclaims in fear,  
'I know not which I am!'

"The wicked people have annexed  
The verses on the good;  
A roaring drunkard sports the text  
Teetotal Tommy should!

"Where we are huddled none can trace,

Poems of the Past and the Present

And if our names remain,  
They pave some path or p-ing place  
Where we have never lain!

"There's not a modest maiden elf  
But dreads the final Trumpet,  
Lest half of her should rise herself,  
And half some local strumpet!

"From restorations of Thy fane,  
From smoothings of Thy sword,  
From zealous Churchmen's pick and plane  
Deliver us O Lord! Amen!"

1882.

THE RUINED MAID

"O 'Melia, my dear, this does everything crown!  
Who could have supposed I should meet you in Town?  
And whence such fair garments, such prosperi-ty?" -  
"O didn't you know I'd been ruined?" said she.

- "You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,  
Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;  
And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!" -  
"Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined," said she.

- "At home in the barton you said 'thee' and 'thou,'  
And 'thik oon,' and 'theas oon,' and 't'other'; but now  
Your talking quite fits 'ee for high compa-ny!" -  
"Some polish is gained with one's ruin," said she.

- "Your hands were like paws then, your face blue and bleak,  
But now I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek,  
And your little gloves fit as on any la-dy!" -  
"We never do work when we're ruined," said she.

- "You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,  
And you'd sigh, and you'd sock; but at present you seem  
To know not of megrims or melancho-ly!" -  
"True. There's an advantage in ruin," said she.

- "I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,  
And a delicate face, and could strut about Town!" -  
"My dear--a raw country girl, such as you be,  
Isn't equal to that. You ain't ruined," said she.

WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS, 1866,

THE RESPECTABLE BURGHER ON "THE HIGHER CRITICISM"

Since Reverend Doctors now declare  
That clerks and people must prepare  
To doubt if Adam ever were;  
To hold the flood a local scare;  
To argue, though the stolid stare,  
That everything had happened ere  
The prophets to its happening sware;  
That David was no giant-slayer,



Poems of the Past and the Present

Nor one to call a God-obeyer  
In certain details we could spare,  
But rather was a debonair  
Shrewd bandit, skilled as banjo-player:  
That Solomon sang the fleshly Fair,  
And gave the Church no thought whate'er;  
That Esther with her royal wear,  
And Mordecai, the son of Jair,  
And Joshua's triumphs, Job's despair,  
And Balaam's ass's bitter blare;  
Nebuchadnezzar's furnace-flare,  
And Daniel and the den affair,  
And other stories rich and rare,  
Were writ to make old doctrine wear  
Something of a romantic air:  
That the Nain widow's only heir,  
And Lazarus with cadaverous glare  
(As done in oils by Piombo's care)  
Did not return from Sheol's lair:  
That Jael set a fiendish snare,  
That Pontius Pilate acted square,  
That never a sword cut Malchus' ear  
And (but for shame I must forbear)  
That -- -- did not reappear! . . .  
- Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,  
All churchgoing will I forswear,  
And sit on Sundays in my chair,  
And read that moderate man Voltaire.

ARCHITECTURAL MASKS

I

There is a house with ivied walls,  
And mullioned windows worn and old,  
And the long dwellers in those halls  
Have souls that know but sordid calls,  
And daily dote on gold.

II

In blazing brick and plated show  
Not far away a "villa" gleams,  
And here a family few may know,  
With book and pencil, viol and bow,  
Lead inner lives of dreams.

III

The philosophic passers say,  
"See that old mansion mossed and fair,  
Poetic souls therein are they:  
And O that gaudy box! Away,  
You vulgar people there."

THE TENANT-FOR-LIFE

The sun said, watching my watering-pot  
"Some morn you'll pass away;  
These flowers and plants I parch up hot -

Poems of the Past and the Present  
Who'll water them that day?

"Those banks and beds whose shape your eye  
Has planned in line so true,  
New hands will change, unreasoning why  
Such shape seemed best to you.

"Within your house will strangers sit,  
And wonder how first it came;  
They'll talk of their schemes for improving it,  
And will not mention your name.

"They'll care not how, or when, or at what  
You sighed, laughed, suffered here,  
Though you feel more in an hour of the spot  
Than they will feel in a year

"As I look on at you here, now,  
Shall I look on at these;  
But as to our old times, avow  
No knowledge--hold my peace! . . .

"O friend, it matters not, I say;  
Bethink ye, I have shined  
On nobler ones than you, and they  
Are dead men out of mind!"

#### THE KING'S EXPERIMENT

It was a wet wan hour in spring,  
And Nature met King Doom beside a lane,  
Wherein Hodge trudged, all blithely ballading  
The Mother's smiling reign.

"Why warbles he that skies are fair  
And coombs alight," she cried, "and fallows gay,  
When I have placed no sunshine in the air  
Or glow on earth to-day?"

"'Tis in the comedy of things  
That such should be," returned the one of Doom;  
"Charge now the scene with brightest blazonings,  
And he shall call them gloom."

She gave the word: the sun outbroke,  
All Froonside shone, the hedgebirds raised a song;  
And later Hodge, upon the midday stroke,  
Returned the lane along,

Low murmuring: "O this bitter scene,  
And thrice accurst horizon hung with gloom!  
How deadly like this sky, these fields, these treen,  
To trappings of the tomb!"

The Beldame then: "The fool and blind!  
Such mad perverseness who may apprehend?" -  
"Nay; there's no madness in it; thou shalt find  
Thy law there," said her friend.

"When Hodge went forth 'twas to his Love,  
To make her, ere this eve, his wedded prize,  
And Earth, despite the heaviness above,  
Was bright as Paradise.

Poems of the Past and the Present

"But I sent on my messenger,  
With cunning arrows poisonous and keen,  
To take forthwith her laughing life from her,  
And dull her little een,

"And white her cheek, and still her breath,  
Ere her too buoyant Hodge had reached her side;  
So, when he came, he clasped her but in death,  
And never as his bride.

"And there's the humour, as I said;  
Thy dreary dawn he saw as gleaming gold,  
And in thy glistening green and radiant red  
Funereal gloom and cold."

THE TREE  
AN OLD MAN'S STORY

I

Its roots are bristling in the air  
Like some mad Earth-god's spiny hair;  
The loud south-wester's swell and yell  
Smote it at midnight, and it fell.  
Thus ends the tree  
Where some one sat with me.

II

Its boughs, which none but darers trod,  
A child may step on from the sod,  
And twigs that earliest met the dawn  
Are lit the last upon the lawn.  
Cart off the tree  
Beneath whose trunk sat we!

III

Yes, there we sat: she cooed content,  
And bats ringed round, and daylight went;  
The gnarl, our seat, is wrenched and sunk,  
Prone that queer pocket in the trunk  
Where lay the key  
To her pale mystery.

IV

"Years back, within this pocket-hole  
I found, my Love, a hurried scrawl  
Meant not for me," at length said I;  
"I glanced thereat, and let it lie:  
The words were three -  
'Beloved, I agree.'

V

"Who placed it here; to what request  
It gave assent, I never guessed.  
Some prayer of some hot heart, no doubt,  
To some coy maiden hereabout,  
Just as, maybe,  
With you, Sweet Heart, and me."

VI

Poems of the Past and the Present

She waited, till with quickened breath  
She spoke, as one who banisheth  
Reserves that lovecraft heeds so well,  
To ease some mighty wish to tell:  
" 'Twas I," said she,  
"who wrote thus clinchingly.

VII

"My lover's wife--aye, wife!--knew nought  
Of what we felt, and bore, and thought . . .  
He'd said: 'I wed with thee or die:  
She stands between, 'tis true. But why?  
Do thou agree,  
And--she shalt cease to be.'

VIII

"How I held back, how love supreme  
Involved me madly in his scheme  
Why should I say? . . . I wrote assent  
(You found it hid) to his intent . . .  
She--DIED . . . But he  
Came not to wed with me.

IX

"O shrink not, Love!--Had these eyes seen  
But once thine own, such had not been!  
But we were strangers . . . Thus the plot  
Cleared passion's path.--why came he not  
To wed with me? . . .  
He wived the gibbet-tree."

X

- Under that oak of heretofore  
Sat Sweetheart mine with me no more:  
By many a Fiord, and Strom, and Fleuve  
Have I since wandered . . . Soon, for love,  
Distraught went she -  
'Twas said for love of me.

HER LATE HUSBAND  
(KING'S-HINTOCK, 182-.)

"No--not where I shall make my own;  
But dig his grave just by  
The woman's with the initialed stone -  
As near as he can lie -  
After whose death he seemed to ail,  
Though none considered why.

"And when I also claim a nook,  
And your feet tread me in,  
Bestow me, under my old name,  
Among my kith and kin,  
That strangers gazing may not dream  
I did a husband win."

"Widow, your wish shall be obeyed;  
Though, thought I, certainly  
You'd lay him where your folk are laid,

Poems of the Past and the Present

And your grave, too, will be,  
As custom hath it; you to right,  
And on the left hand he."

"Aye, sexton; such the Hintock rule,  
And none has said it nay;  
But now it haps a native here  
Eschews that ancient way . . .  
And it may be, some Christmas night,  
When angels walk, they'll say:

"'O strange interment! Civilized lands  
Afford few types thereof;  
Here is a man who takes his rest  
Beside his very Love,  
Beside the one who was his wife  
In our sight up above!'"

THE SELF-UNSEEING

Here is the ancient floor,  
Footworn and hollowed and thin,  
Here was the former door  
Where the dead feet walked in.

She sat here in her chair,  
Smiling into the fire;  
He who played stood there,  
Bowing it higher and higher.

Childlike, I danced in a dream;  
Blessings emblazoned that day  
Everything glowed with a gleam;  
Yet we were looking away!

DE PROFUNDIS

I

"Percussus sum sicut foenum, et aruit cor meum."  
- Ps. ci

Wintertime nighs;  
But my bereavement-pain  
It cannot bring again:  
Twice no one dies.

Flower-petals flee;  
But, since it once hath been,  
No more that severing scene  
Can harrow me.

Birds faint in dread:  
I shall not lose old strength  
In the lone frost's black length:  
Strength long since fled!

Leaves freeze to dun;  
But friends can not turn cold  
This season as of old

Poems of the Past and the Present

For him with none.

Tempests may scath;  
But love can not make smart  
Again this year his heart  
Who no heart hath.

Black is night's cope;  
But death will not appal  
One who, past doubtings all,  
Waits in unhope.

DE PROFUNDIS

II

"Considerabam ad dexteram, et videbam; et non erat qui cognosceret me  
. . . Non est qui requirat animam meam."--Ps. cxli.

When the clouds' swollen bosoms echo back the shouts of the many and  
strong  
That things are all as they best may be, save a few to be right ere  
long,  
And my eyes have not the vision in them to discern what to these is  
so clear,  
The blot seems straightway in me alone; one better he were not here.

The stout upstanders say, All's well with us: rulers have nought to  
rue!  
And what the potent say so oft, can it fail to be somewhat true?  
Breezily go they, breezily come; their dust smokes around their  
career,  
Till I think I am one horn out of due time, who has no calling here.

Their dawns bring lusty joys, it seems; their eyes exultance sweet;  
Our times are blessed times, they cry: Life shapes it as is most  
meet,  
And nothing is much the matter; there are many smiles to a tear;  
Then what is the matter is I, I say. Why should such an one be here?  
. . .

Let him to whose ears the low-voiced Best seems stilled by the clash  
of the First,  
Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look  
at the worst,  
Who feels that delight is a delicate growth cramped by crookedness,  
custom, and fear,  
Get him up and be gone as one shaped awry; he disturbs the order  
here.

1895-96.

DE PROFUNDIS

III

"Heu mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est! Habitavi cum  
habitantibus Cedar; multum incola fuit aninia mea."--Ps. cxix.

There have been times when I well might have passed and the ending  
have come -

Poems of the Past and the Present

Points in my path when the dark might have stolen on me, artless,  
unrueing -  
Ere I had learnt that the world was a welter of futile doing:  
Such had been times when I well might have passed, and the ending  
have come!

Say, on the noon when the half-sunny hours told that April was nigh,  
And I upgathered and cast forth the snow from the crocus-border,  
Fashioned and furbished the soil into a summer-seeming order,  
Glowing in gladsome faith that I quickened the year thereby.

Or on that loneliest of eves when afar and benighted we stood,  
She who upheld me and I, in the midmost of Egdon together,  
Confident I in her watching and ward through the blackening heather,  
Deeming her matchless in might and with measureless scope endued.

Or on that winter-wild night when, reclined by the chimney-nook  
quoin,  
Slowly a drowse overgath me, the smallest and feeblest of folk there,  
Weak from my baptism of pain; when at times and anon I awoke there -  
Heard of a world wheeling on, with no listing or longing to join.

Even then! while unweeting that vision could vex or that knowledge  
could numb,  
That sweets to the mouth in the belly are bitter, and tart, and  
untoward,  
Then, on some dim-coloured scene should my briefly raised curtain  
have lowered,  
Then might the voice that is law have said "Cease!" and the ending  
have come.

1896.

THE CHURCH-BUILDER

I

The church flings forth a battled shade  
Over the moon-blanchéd sward;  
The church; my gift; whereto I paid  
My all in hand and hoard:  
Lavished my gains  
With stintless pains  
To glorify the Lord.

II

I squared the broad foundations in  
Of ashlaréd masonry;  
I moulded mullions thick and thin,  
Hewed fillet and ogee;  
I circleted  
Each sculptured head  
With nimb and canopy.

III

I called in many a craftsman  
To fix emblazoned glass,  
To figure Cross and Sepulchre  
On dossal, boss, and brass.  
My gold all spent,  
My jewels went  
To gem the cups of Mass.

Poems of the Past and the Present

IV

I borrowed deep to carve the screen  
And raise the ivoried Rood;  
I parted with my small demesne  
To make my owings good.  
Heir-looms unpriced  
I sacrificed,  
Until debt-free I stood.

V

So closed the task. "Deathless the Creed  
Here substacked!" said my soul:  
"I heard me bidden to this deed,  
And straight obeyed the call.  
Illumine this fane,  
That not in vain  
I build it, Lord of all!"

VI

But, as it chanced me, then and there  
Did dire misfortunes burst;  
My home went waste for lack of care,  
My sons rebelled and curst;  
Till I confessed  
That aims the best  
Were looking like the worst.

VII

Enkindled by my votive work  
No burning faith I find;  
The deeper thinkers sneer and smirk,  
And give my toil no mind;  
From nod and wink  
I read they think  
That I am fool and blind.

VIII

My gift to God seems futile, quite;  
The world moves as erstwhile;  
And powerful wrong on feeble right  
Tramples in olden style.  
My faith burns down,  
I see no crown;  
But Cares, and Grievs, and Guile.

IX

So now, the remedy? Yea, this:  
I gently swing the door  
Here, of my fane--no soul to wis -  
And cross the patterned floor  
To the rood-screen  
That stands between  
The nave and inner chore.

X

The rich red windows dim the moon,  
But little light need I;  
I mount the prie-dieu, lately hewn  
From woods of rarest dye;  
Then from below



Poems of the Past and the Present

My garment, so,  
I draw this cord, and tie

XI

One end thereof around the beam  
Midway 'twixt Cross and truss:  
I noose the nethermost extreme,  
And in ten seconds thus  
I journey hence -  
To that land whence  
No rumour reaches us.

XII

Well: Here at morn they'll light on one  
Dangling in mockery  
Of what he spent his substance on  
Blindly and uselessly! . . .  
"He might," they'll say,  
"Have built, some way.  
A cheaper gallows-tree!"

THE LOST PYX  
A MEDIAEVAL LEGEND {3}

Some say the spot is banned; that the pillar Cross-and-Hand  
Attests to a deed of hell;  
But of else than of bale is the mystic tale  
That ancient Vale-folk tell.

Ere Cernel's Abbey ceased hereabout there dwelt a priest,  
(In later life sub-prior  
Of the brotherhood there, whose bones are now bare  
In the field that was Cernel choir).

One night in his cell at the foot of yon dell  
The priest heard a frequent cry:  
"Go, father, in haste to the cot on the waste,  
And shrive a man waiting to die."

Said the priest in a shout to the caller without,  
"The night howls, the tree-trunks bow;  
One may barely by day track so rugged a way,  
And can I then do so now?"

No further word from the dark was heard,  
And the priest moved never a limb;  
And he slept and dreamed; till a Visage seemed  
To frown from Heaven at him.

In a sweat he arose; and the storm shrieked shrill,  
And smote as in savage joy;  
While High-Stoy trees twanged to Bubb-Down Hill,  
And Bubb-Down to High-Stoy.

There seemed not a holy thing in hail,  
Nor shape of light or love,  
From the Abbey north of Blackmore Vale  
To the Abbey south thereof.

Yet he plodded thence through the dark immense,  
And with many a stumbling stride  
Through copse and briar climbed nigh and nigher  
To the cot and the sick man's side.

Poems of the Past and the Present

When he would have unslung the Vessels uphung  
To his arm in the steep ascent,  
He made loud moan: the Pyx was gone  
Of the Blessed Sacrament.

Then in dolorous dread he beat his head:  
"No earthly prize or pelf  
Is the thing I've lost in tempest tossed,  
But the Body of Christ Himself!"

He thought of the Visage his dream revealed,  
And turned towards whence he came,  
Hands groping the ground along foot-track and field,  
And head in a heat of shame.

Till here on the hill, betwixt vill and vill,  
He noted a clear straight ray  
Stretching down from the sky to a spot hard by,  
Which shone with the light of day.

And gathered around the illumined ground  
Were common beasts and rare,  
All kneeling at gaze, and in pause profound  
Attent on an object there.

'Twas the Pyx, unharmed 'mid the circling rows  
Of Blackmore's hairy throng,  
Whereof were oxen, sheep, and does,  
And hares from the brakes among;

And badgers grey, and conies keen,  
And squirrels of the tree,  
And many a member seldom seen  
Of Nature's family.

The ireful winds that scoured and swept  
Through coppice, clump, and dell,  
Within that holy circle slept  
Calm as in hermit's cell.

Then the priest bent likewise to the sod  
And thanked the Lord of Love,  
And Blessed Mary, Mother of God,  
And all the saints above.

And turning straight with his priceless freight,  
He reached the dying one,  
Whose passing sprite had been stayed for the rite  
Without which bliss hath none.

And when by grace the priest won place,  
And served the Abbey well,  
He reared this stone to mark where shone  
That midnight miracle.

TESS'S LAMENT

I

I would that folk forgot me quite,  
Forgot me quite!  
I would that I could shrink from sight,  
And no more see the sun.  
Would it were time to say farewell,

Poems of the Past and the Present

To claim my nook, to need my knell,  
Time for them all to stand and tell  
Of my day's work as done.

II

Ah! dairy where I lived so long,  
I lived so long;  
Where I would rise up stanch and strong,  
And lie down hopefully.  
'Twas there within the chimney-seat  
He watched me to the clock's slow beat -  
Loved me, and learnt to call me sweet,  
And whispered words to me.

III

And now he's gone; and now he's gone; . . .  
And now he's gone!  
The flowers we potted p'rhaps are thrown  
To rot upon the farm.  
And where we had our supper-fire  
May now grow nettle, dock, and briar,  
And all the place be mould and mire  
So cozy once and warm.

IV

And it was I who did it all,  
who did it all;  
'Twas I who made the blow to fall  
On him who thought no guile.  
Well, it is finished--past, and he  
Has left me to my misery,  
And I must take my Cross on me  
For wronging him awhile.

V

How gay we looked that day we wed,  
That day we wed!  
"May joy be with ye!" all o'm said  
A standing by the durn.  
I wonder what they say o's now,  
And if they know my lot; and how  
She feels who milks my favourite cow,  
And takes my place at churn!

VI

It wears me out to think of it,  
To think of it;  
I cannot bear my fate as writ,  
I'd have my life unbe;  
Would turn my memory to a blot,  
Make every relic of me rot,  
My doings be as they were not,  
And what they've brought to me!

THE SUPPLANTER  
A TALE

I

Poems of the Past and the Present

He bends his travel-tarnished feet  
To where she wastes in clay:  
From day-dawn until eve he fares  
Along the wintry way;  
From day-dawn until eve repairs  
Unto her mound to pray.

II

"Are these the gravestone shapes that meet  
My forward-straining view?  
Or forms that cross a window-blind  
In circle, knot, and queue:  
Gay forms, that cross and whirl and wind  
To music throbbing through?" -

III

"The Keeper of the Field of Tombs  
Dwells by its gateway-pier;  
He celebrates with feast and dance  
His daughter's twentieth year:  
He celebrates with wine of France  
The birthday of his dear." -

IV

"The gates are shut when evening glooms:  
Lay down your wreath, sad wight;  
To-morrow is a time more fit  
For placing flowers aright:  
The morning is the time for it;  
Come, wake with us to-night!" -

V

He grounds his wreath, and enters in,  
And sits, and shares their cheer. -  
"I fain would foot with you, young man,  
Before all others here;  
I fain would foot it for a span  
With such a cavalier!"

VI

She coaxes, clasps, nor fails to win  
His first-unwilling hand:  
The merry music strikes its staves,  
The dancers quickly band;  
And with the damsel of the graves  
He duly takes his stand.

VII

"You dance divinely, stranger swain,  
Such grace I've never known.  
O longer stay! Breathe not adieu  
And leave me here alone!  
O longer stay: to her be true  
Whose heart is all your own!" -

VIII

"I mark a phantom through the pane,  
That beckons in despair,  
Its mouth all drawn with heavy moan -  
Her to whom once I sware!" -  
"Nay; 'tis the lately carven stone

Poems of the Past and the Present  
Of some strange girl laid there!" -

IX

"I see white flowers upon the floor  
Betrodden to a clot;  
My wreath were they?"--"Nay; love me much,  
Swear you'll forget me not!  
'Twas but a wreath! Full many such  
Are brought here and forgot."

\* \* \*

X

The watches of the night grow hoar,  
He rises ere the sun;  
"Now could I kill thee here!" he says,  
"For winning me from one  
Who ever in her living days  
Was pure as cloistered nun!"

XI

She cowers, and he takes his track  
Afar for many a mile,  
For evermore to be apart  
From her who could beguile  
His senses by her burning heart,  
And win his love awhile.

XII

A year: and he is travelling back  
To her who wastes in clay;  
From day-dawn until eve he fares  
Along the wintry way,  
From day-dawn until eve repairs  
Unto her mound to pray.

XIII

And there he sets him to fulfil  
His frustrate first intent:  
And lay upon her bed, at last,  
The offering earlier meant:  
When, on his stooping figure, ghast  
And haggard eyes are bent.

XIV

"O surely for a little while  
You can be kind to me!  
For do you love her, do you hate,  
She knows not--cares not she:  
Only the living feel the weight  
Of loveless misery!

XV

"I own my sin; I've paid its cost,  
Being outcast, shamed, and bare:  
I give you daily my whole heart,  
Your babe my tender care,  
I pour you prayers; and aye to part  
Is more than I can bear!"

XVI

Poems of the Past and the Present

He turns--unpitying, passion-tossed;  
"I know you not!" he cries,  
"Nor know your child. I knew this maid,  
But she's in Paradise!"  
And swiftly in the winter shade  
He breaks from her and flies.

SAPPHIC FRAGMENT

"Thou shalt be--Nothing."--OMAR KHAYYAM.  
"Tombless, with no remembrance."--W. SHAKESPEARE.

Dead shalt thou lie; and nought  
Be told of thee or thought,  
For thou hast plucked not of the Muses' tree:  
And even in Hades' halls  
Amidst thy fellow-thralls  
No friendly shade thy shade shall company!

CATULLUS: XXXI  
(After passing Sirmione, April 1887.)

Sirmio, thou dearest dear of strands  
That Neptune strokes in lake and sea,  
With what high joy from stranger lands  
Doth thy old friend set foot on thee!  
Yea, barely seems it true to me  
That no Bithynia holds me now,  
But calmly and assuringly  
Around me stretchest homely Thou.

Is there a scene more sweet than when  
Our clinging cares are undercast,  
And, worn by alien moils and men,  
The long untrodden sill repassed,  
We press the pined for couch at last,  
And find a full repayment there?  
Then hail, sweet Sirmio; thou that wast,  
And art, mine own unrivalled Fair!

AFTER SCHILLER

Knight, a true sister-love  
This heart retains;  
Ask me no other love,  
That way lie pains!

Calm must I view thee come,  
Calm see thee go;  
Tale-telling tears of thine  
I must not know!

SONG FROM HEINE

Poems of the Past and the Present

I scanned her picture dreaming,  
Till each dear line and hue  
Was imaged, to my seeming,  
As if it lived anew.

Her lips began to borrow  
Their former wondrous smile;  
Her fair eyes, faint with sorrow,  
Grew sparkling as erstwhile.

Such tears as often ran not  
Ran then, my love, for thee;  
And O, believe I cannot  
That thou are lost to me!

FROM VICTOR HUGO

Child, were I king, I'd yield my royal rule,  
My chariot, sceptre, vassal-service due,  
My crown, my porphyry-basined waters cool,  
My fleets, whereto the sea is but a pool,  
For a glance from you!

Love, were I God, the earth and its heaving airs,  
Angels, the demons abject under me,  
Vast chaos with its teeming womby lairs,  
Time, space, all would I give--aye, upper spheres,  
For a kiss from thee!

CARDINAL BEMBO'S EPITAPH ON RAPHAEL

Here's one in whom Nature feared--faint at such vying -  
Eclipse while he lived, and decease at his dying.

"I HAVE LIVED WITH SHADES"

I

I have lived with shades so long,  
And talked to them so oft,  
Since forth from cot and croft  
I went mankind among,  
That sometimes they  
In their dim style  
Will pause awhile  
To hear my say;

II

And take me by the hand,  
And lead me through their rooms  
In the To-be, where Dooms  
Half-wove and shapeless stand:

Poems of the Past and the Present

And show from there  
The dwindled dust  
And rot and rust  
Of things that were.

III

"Now turn," spake they to me  
One day: "Look whence we came,  
And signify his name  
Who gazes thence at thee." -  
--"Nor name nor race  
Know I, or can,"  
I said, "Of man  
So commonplace.

IV

"He moves me not at all;  
I note no ray or jot  
Of rareness in his lot,  
Or star exceptional.  
Into the dim  
Dead throngs around  
He'll sink, nor sound  
Be left of him."

V

"Yet," said they, "his frail speech,  
Hath accents pitched like thine -  
Thy mould and his define  
A likeness each to each -  
But go! Deep pain  
Alas, would be  
His name to thee,  
And told in vain!"

Feb. 2, 1899.

MEMORY AND I

"O memory, where is now my youth,  
Who used to say that life was truth?"

"I saw him in a crumbled cot  
Beneath a tottering tree;  
That he as phantom lingers there  
Is only known to me."

"O Memory, where is now my joy,  
Who lived with me in sweet employ?"

"I saw him in gaunt gardens lone,  
Where laughter used to be;  
That he as phantom wanders there  
Is known to none but me."

"O Memory, where is now my hope,  
Who charged with deeds my skill and scope?"

"I saw her in a tomb of tomes,  
Where dreams are wont to be;  
That she as spectre haunteth there



Poems of the Past and the Present  
Is only known to me."

"O Memory, where is now my faith,  
One time a champion, now a wraith?"

"I saw her in a ravaged aisle,  
Bowed down on bended knee;  
That her poor ghost outflickers there  
Is known to none but me."

"O Memory, where is now my love,  
That rayed me as a god above?"

"I saw him by an ageing shape  
Where beauty used to be;  
That his fond phantom lingers there  
Is only known to me."

[GREEK TITLE]

Long have I framed weak phantasies of Thee,  
O Willer masked and dumb!  
Who makest Life become, -  
As though by labouring all-unknowingly,  
Like one whom reveries numb.

How much of consciousness informs Thy will  
Thy biddings, as if blind,  
Of death-inducing kind,  
Nought shows to us ephemeral ones who fill  
But moments in Thy mind.

Perhaps Thy ancient rote-restricted ways  
Thy ripening rule transcends;  
That listless effort tends  
To grow percipient with advance of days,  
And with percipience mends.

For, in unwonted purlieus, far and nigh,  
At whiles or short or long,  
May be discerned a wrong  
Dying as of self-slaughter; whereat I  
Would raise my voice in song.

Footnotes:

{1} The "Race" is the turbulent sea-area off the Bill of Portland,  
where contrary tides meet.

{2} Pronounce "Loddy."

{3} On a lonely table-land above the Vale of Blackmore, between  
High-Stoy and Bubb-Down hills, and commanding in clear weather views  
that extend from the English to the Bristol Channel, stands a pillar,  
apparently mediaeval, called Cross-and-Hand or Christ-in-Hand. Among  
other stories of its origin a local tradition preserves the one here  
given.

Poems of the Past and the Present