Poems of the Past and the Present

by Thomas Hardy

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POEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

BY THOMAS HARDY

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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.

Sunday Night, 27th January 1901.

WAR POEMS

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.

“God knows that for myself I’ve scanty care; Past scrimmages 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, 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, 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 [253]— 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 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

And, towering to seaward in legions, They paused at a spot Overbending the Race— That engulphing, ghast, 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!

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 ires 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.

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.

POEMS OF PILGRIMAGE

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.

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 Cæsar'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 Cæsar'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)

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, 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, 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 Cæsar’s power Approached its bloody end: yea, saw’st that Noon When darkness filled the earth till the ninth hour.

THE BRIDGE OF LODI [290] (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 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

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 emprize 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, wonning 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.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

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 aërie 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 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, 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; 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

"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 deficience, 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 pleasantry!

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 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 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, 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

Brother 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 unknows 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 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.

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 he 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; 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 Noë'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: 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 wombèd 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 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 irisèd 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

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!

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 resemblest 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, "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 kindliest 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 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, 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 momently 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!”

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!— 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 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-yearsmen 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 distrest, 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, alway In some soul hold a loved continuance Of shape and voice and glance.

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

III

’Tis not that we have unforetold 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! 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

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 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 ghastliness, 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.

"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— 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 predesigned: 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.

V

"I may not go!" she at length upspake, "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!

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, 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 sward, 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 ‘theäs 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, 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— 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 Froomside 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.

“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

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, 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 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.

II

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

When the clouds’ swoln 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: ruers 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 eves 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.

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— 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 overgat 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-blanched 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 ashlared 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 craftsmaster 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.

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 substanced!” said my soul: “I heard me bidden to this deed, And straight obeyed the call. Illume 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 Griefs, 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 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 MEDIÆVAL LEGEND [457]

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.

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, 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

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 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

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.

IMITATIONS, ETC.

SAPPHIC FRAGMENT

“Thou shalt be—Nothing.”—Omar Khayyám.

“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

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.

RETROSPECT

"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: 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 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.”

ἈΓΝΩΣΤΩι ΘΕΩι.

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

[253] The “Race” is the turbulent sea-area off the Bill of Portland, where contrary tides meet.

[290] Pronounce “Loddy.”

[457] 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 mediæval, called Cross-and-Hand or Christ-in-Hand. Among other stories of its origin a local tradition preserves the one here given.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT ***

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