

The Poetry Collection of Thomas Hardy - Volume 4

Thomas Hardy

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[image not archived]

Hardy with his beloved bicycle, c. 1890

WAITING BOTH

A star looks down at me,
 And says: "Here I and you
 Stand, each in our degree:
 What do you mean to do, —
 Mean to do?"

I say: "For all I know,
 Wait, and let Time go by,
 Till my change come." — "Just so,"
 The star says: "So mean I: —
 So mean I."

A BIRD-SCENE AT A RURAL DWELLING

When the inmate stirs, the birds retire discreetly
From the window-ledge, whereon they whistled sweetly
And on the step of the door,
In the misty morning hoar;
But now the dweller is up they flee
To the crooked neighbouring codlin-tree;
And when he comes fully forth they seek the garden,
And call from the lofty costard, as pleading pardon
For shouting so near before
In their joy at being alive: —
Meanwhile the hammering clock within goes five.

I know a domicile of brown and green,
Where for a hundred summers there have been
Just such enactments, just such daybreaks seen.

ANY LITTLE OLD SONG

Any little old song
Will do for me,
Tell it of joys gone long,
Or joys to be,
Or friendly faces best
Loved to see.

Newest themes I want not
On subtle strings,
And for thrillings pant not
That new song brings:
I only need the homeliest
Of heartstirrings.

IN A FORMER RESORT AFTER MANY YEARS

Do I know these, slack-shaped and wan,
Whose substance, one time fresh and furrowless,
Is now a rag drawn over a skeleton,
As in El Greco's canvases? —
Whose cheeks have slipped down, lips become indrawn,
And statures shrunk to dwarfishness?

Do they know me, whose former mind
Was like an open plain where no foot falls,
But now is as a gallery portrait-lined,
And scored with necrologic scrawls,
Where feeble voices rise, once full-defined,
From underground in curious calls?

A CATHEDRAL FAÇADE AT MIDNIGHT

Along the sculptures of the western wall
I watched the moonlight creeping:
It moved as if it hardly moved at all
Inch by inch thinly peeping

Round on the pious figures of freestone, brought
And poised there when the Universe was wrought
To serve its centre, Earth, in mankind's thought.

The lunar look skimmed scanty toe, breast, arm,
Then edged on slowly, slightly,
To shoulder, hand, face; till each austere form
Was blanched its whole length brightly
Of prophet, king, queen, cardinal in state,
That dead men's tools had striven to simulate;
And the stiff images stood irradiate.

A frail moan from the martyred saints there set
Mid others of the erection
Against the breeze, seemed sighings of regret
At the ancient faith's rejection
Under the sure, unhasting, steady stress
Of Reason's movement, making meaningless
The coded creeds of old-time godliness.

THE TURNIP-HOER

Of tides that toss the souls of men
Some are foreseen, and weathered warefully;
More burst at flood, none witting why or when,
And are called Destiny.

— Years past there was a turnip-hoer,
Who loved his wife and child, and worked amain
In the turnip-time from dawn till day out-wore
And night bedimmed the plain.

The thronging plants of blueish green
Would fall in lanes before his skilful blade,
Which, as by sleight, would deftly slip between
Those spared and those low-laid.

‘Twas afternoon: he hoed his best,
Unlifting head or eye, when, through the fence,
He heard a gallop dropping from the crest
Of the hill above him, whence,

Descending at a crashing pace,
An open carriage came, horsed by a pair:
A lady sat therein, with lilywhite face
And wildly windblown hair.

The man sprang over, and horse and horse
Faced in the highway as the pair ondrew;
Like Terminus stood he there, and barred their course,
And almost ere he knew

The lady was limp within his arms,
And, half-unconscious, clutched his hair and beard;
And so he held her, till from neighbouring farms
Came hinds, and soon appeared

Footman and coachman on the way: —
The steeds were guided back, now breath-bespent,
And the hoer was rewarded with good pay: —
So passed the accident.

“She was the Duchess of Southernshire,
They tell me,” said the second hoe, next day:
“She’s come a-visiting not far from here;
This week will end her stay.”

The hoer’s wife that evening set
Her hand to a crusted stew in the three-legged pot,
And he sat looking on in silence; yet
The cooking saw he not,

But a woman, with her arms around him,
Glove-handed, clasping his neck and clutching his blouse,
And ere he went to bed that night he found him
Outside a manor-house.

A page there smoking answered him:
“Her Grace’s room is where you see that light;
By now she’s up there slipping off her trim:
The Dook’s is on the right.”

She was, indeed, just saying through the door,
“That dauntless fellow saved me from collapse:
I’d not much with me, or ‘d have given him more:
‘Twas not enough, perhaps!”

Up till she left, before he slept,
He walked, though tired, to where her window shined,
And mused till it went dark; but close he kept
All that was in his mind.

“What is it, Ike?” inquired his wife;
“You are not so nice now as you used to be.
What have I done? You seem quite tired of life!”
“Nothing at all,” said he.

In the next shire this lady of rank,
So ‘twas made known, would open a bazaar:
He took his money from the savings-bank
To go there, for ‘twas far.

And reached her stall, and sighted, clad
In her ripe beauty and the goodliest guise,
His Vision of late. He straight spent all he had,
But not once caught her eyes.

Next week he heard, with heart of clay,
That London held her for three months or so:
Fearing to tell his wife he went for a day,
Pawning his watch to go;

And scanned the Square of her abode,
And timed her moves, as well as he could guess,
That he might glimpse her; till afoot by road
He came home penniless. . . .

— The Duke in Wessex once again,
Glanced at the Wessex paper, where he read
Of a man, late taken to drink, killed by a train
At a crossing, so it said.

“Why — he who saved your life, I think?”
— ”O no,” said she. “It cannot be the same:
He was sweet-breath’d, without a taint of drink;
Yet it is like his name.”

THE CARRIER

There's a seat, I see, still empty?"
Cried the hailer from the road;
"No, there is not!" said the carrier,
Quickening his horse and load.
" — They say you are in the grave, Jane;
But still you ride with me!"
And he looked towards the vacant space
He had kept beside his knee.

And the passengers murmured: "'Tis where his wife
In journeys to and fro
Used always to sit; but nobody does
Since those long years ago."

Rumble-mumble went the van
Past Sidwell Church and wall,
Till Exon Towers were out of scan,
And night lay over all.

LOVER TO MISTRESS

(SONG)

Beckon to me to come
With handkerchief or hand,
Or finger mere or thumb;
Let forecasts be but rough,
Parents more bleak than bland,
'Twill be enough,
Maid mine,
'Twill be enough!

Two fields, a wood, a tree,
Nothing now more malign
Lies between you and me;
But were they bysm, or bluff,
Or snarling sea, one sign
Would be enough,
Maid mine,
Would be enough!

From an old copy.

THE MONUMENT-MAKER

I chiselled her monument
To my mind's content,
Took it to the church by night,
When her planet was at its height,
And set it where I had figured the place in the daytime.
Having niched it there
I stepped back, cheered, and thought its outlines fair,
And its marbles rare.

Then laughed she over my shoulder as in our Maytime:
"It spells not me!" she said:
"Tells nothing about my beauty, wit, or gay time
With all those, quick and dead,
Of high or lowlihead,
That hovered near,
Including you, who carve there your devotion;
But you felt none, my dear!"

And then she vanished. Checkless sprang my emotion
And forced a tear
At seeing I'd not been truly known by her,
And never prized! — that my memorial here,
To consecrate her sepulchre,
Was scorned, almost,
By her sweet ghost:
Yet I hoped not quite, in her very innermost!

1916

CIRCUS-RIDER TO RINGMASTER

When I am riding round the ring no longer,
Tell a tale of me;
Say, no steed-borne woman's nerve was stronger
Than used mine to be.
Let your whole soul say it; do:
O it will be true!

Should I soon no more be mistress found in
Feats I've made my own,

Trace the tan-laid track you'd whip me round in
On the cantering roan:
There may cross your eyes again
My lithe look as then.

Show how I, when clay becomes my cover,
Took the high-hoop leap
Into your arms, who coaxed and grew my lover, —
Ah, to make me weep
Since those claspings cared for so
Ever so long ago!

Though not now as when you freshly knew me,
But a fading form,
Shape the kiss you'd briskly blow up to me
While our love was warm,
And my cheek unstained by tears,
As in these last years!

LAST WEEK IN OCTOBER

The trees are undressing, and fling in many places —
On the gray road, the roof, the window-sill —
Their radiant robes and ribbons and yellow laces;
A leaf each second so is flung at will,
Here, there, another and another, still and still.

A spider's web has caught one while downcoming,
That stays there dangling when the rest pass on;
Like a suspended criminal hangs he, mumming
In golden garb, while one yet green, high yon,
Trembles, as fearing such a fate for himself anon.

COME NOT; YET COME!

(SONG)

In my sage moments I can say,
Come not near,
But far in foreign regions stay,
So that here
A mind may grow again serene and clear.

But the thought withers. Why should I
Have fear to earn me
Fame from your nearness, though thereby
Old fires new burn me,
And lastly, maybe, tear and overturn me!

So I say, Come: deign again shine
Upon this place,
Even if unslackened smart be mine
From that sweet face,
And I faint to a phantom past all trace.

THE LATER AUTUMN

Gone are the lovers, under the bush
Stretched at their ease;
Gone the bees,
Tangling themselves in your hair as they rush
On the line of your track,
Leg-laden, back
With a dip to their hive
In a prepossessed dive.

Toadsmeat is mangy, frosted, and sere;
Apples in grass
Crunch as we pass,
And rot ere the men who make cyder appear.
Couch-fires abound
On fallows around,
And shades far extend
Like lives soon to end.

Spinning leaves join the remains shrunk and brown
Of last year's display
That lie wasting away,
On whose corpses they earlier as scorners gazed down
From their aery green height:
Now in the same plight
They huddle; while yon
A robin looks on.

LET ME BELIEVE

(SONG)

Let me believe it, dearest,
Let it be
As just a dream — the merest —
Haunting me,
That a frank full-souled sweetness
Warmed your smile
And voice, to indiscreetness
Once, awhile!
And I will fondly ponder
Till I lie
Earthed up with others yonder
Past a sigh,
That you may name at stray times
With regret
One whom through green and gray times
You forget!

AT A FASHIONABLE DINNER

We sat with the banqueting-party
By the table-end —
Unmarked, — no diners out
Were we: scarce a friend
Of our own mind's trend
Was there, though the welcome was hearty.
Then we noticed a shade extend
By a distant screen,
And I said: "What to you does it seem to mean,
Lavine?"
" — It is like my own body lying
Beyond the door
Where the servants glide in and about
The carpeted floor;
And it means my death hour! — "

“ — What a fancy! Who feels like dying
While these smart sallies pour,
With laughter between!
To me it is more like satin sheen,
Lavine.”

“ — That means your new bride, when you win her:
Yes, so it must be!
It’s her satin dress, no doubt —
That shine you see —
My own corpse to me!”
And a gloom came over the dinner,
Where almost strangers were we,
As the spirit of the scene
Forsook her — the fairest of the whole thirteen —
Lavine!

GREEN SLATES

(PENPETHY
)

It happened once, before the duller
Loomings of life defined them,
I searched for slates of greenish colour
A quarry where men mined them;
And saw, the while I peered around there,
In the quarry standing
A form against the slate background there,
Of fairness eye-commanding.
And now, though fifty years have flown me,
With all their dreams and duties,
And strange-pipped dice my hand has thrown me,
And dust are all her beauties,
Green slates — seen high on roofs, or lower
In waggon, truck, or lorry —
Cry out: “Our home was where you saw her
Standing in the quarry!”

AN EAST-END CURATE

A small blind street off East Commercial Road;
Window, door; window, door;
Every house like the one before,
Is where the curate, Mr. Dowle, has found a pinched abode.
Spectacled, pale, moustache straw-coloured, and with a long thin face,
Day or dark his lodgings' narrow doorstep does he pace.

A bleached pianoforte, with its drawn silk plaitings faded,
Stands in his room, its keys much yellowed, cyphering, and abraded,
"Novello's Anthems" lie at hand, and also a few glees,
And "Laws of Heaven for Earth" in a frame upon the wall one sees.

He goes through his neighbours' houses as his own, and none regards,
And opens their back-doors off-hand, to look for them in their yards:
A man is threatening his wife on the other side of the wall,
But the curate lets it pass as knowing the history of it all.

Freely within his hearing the children skip and laugh and say:
"There's Mister Dow-well! There's Mister Dow-well!" in their play;
And the long, pallid, devoted face notes not,
But stoops along abstractedly, for good, or in vain, God wot!

AT RUSHY-POND

On the frigid face of the heath-hemmed pond
There shaped the half-grown moon:
Winged whiffs from the north with a husky croon
Blew over and beyond.

And the wind flapped the moon in its float on the pool,
And stretched it to oval form;
Then corkscrewed it like a wriggling worm;
Then wanned it weariful.

And I cared not for conning the sky above
Where hung the substant thing,
For my thought was earthward sojourning
On the scene I had vision of.

Since there it was once, in a secret year,
I had called a woman to me
From across this water, ardently —
And practised to keep her near;

Till the last weak love-words had been said,
And ended was her time,
And blurred the bloomage of her prime,
And white the earlier red.

And the troubled orb in the pond's sad shine
Was her very wraith, as scanned
When she withdrew thence, mirrored, and
Her days dropped out of mine.

FOUR IN THE MORNING

At four this day of June I rise:
The dawn-light strengthens steadily;
Earth is a cerule mystery,
As if not far from Paradise
At four o'clock,

Or else near the Great Nebula,
Or where the Pleiads blink and smile:
(For though we see with eyes of guile
The grisly grin of things by day,
At four o'clock

They show their best.) . . . In this vale's space
I am up the first, I think. Yet, no,
A whistling? and the to-and-fro
Wheezed whettings of a scythe apace
At four o'clock? . . .

— Though pleasure spurred, I rose with irk:
Here is one at compulsion's whip
Taking his life's stern stewardship
With blithe uncare, and hard at work
At four o'clock!

Bockhampton.

ON THE ESPLANADE

MIDSUMMER: 10 P.M.

The broad bald moon edged up where the sea was wide,
Mild, mellow-faced;
Beneath, a tumbling twinkle of shines, like dyed,
A trackway traced
To the shore, as of petals fallen from a rose to waste,
In its overblow,
And fluttering afloat on inward heaves of the tide: —
All this, so plain; yet the rest I did not know.

The horizon gets lost in a mist new-wrought by the night:
The lamps of the Bay
That reach from behind me round to the left and right
On the sea-wall way
For a constant mile of curve, make a long display
As a pearl-strung row,
Under which in the waves they bore their gimlets of light: —
All this was plain; but there was a thing not so.

Inside a window, open, with undrawn blind,
There plays and sings
A lady unseen a melody undefined:
And where the moon flings
Its shimmer a vessel crosses, whereon to the strings
Plucked sweetly and low
Of a harp, they dance. Yea, such did I mark. That, behind,
My Fate's masked face crept near me I did not know!

IN ST. PAUL'S A WHILE AGO

Summer and winter close commune
On this July afternoon
As I enter chilly Paul's,
With its chasmal classic walls.
— Drifts of gray illumination
From the lofty fenestration
Slant them down in bristling spines that spread
Fan-like upon the vast dust-moted shade.

Moveless here, no whit allied
To the daemonian din outside,
Statues stand, cadaverous, wan,
Round the loiterers looking on
Under the yawning dome and nave,
Pondering whatnot, giddy or grave.
Here a verger moves a chair,
Or a red rope fixes there: —
A brimming Hebe, rapt in her adorning,
Brushes an Artemisia craped in mourning;
Beatrice Benedick piques, coquetting;
All unknowing or forgetting
That strange Jew, Damascus-bound,
Whose name, thereafter travelling round
To this precinct of the world,
Spread here like a flag unfurled:
Anon inspiring architectural sages
To frame this pile, writ his throughout the ages:
Whence also the encircling mart
Assumed his name, of him no part,
And to his vision-seeing mind
Charmless, blank in every kind;
And whose displays, even had they called his eye,
No gold or silver had been his to buy;
Whose haunters, had they seen him stand
On his own steps here, lift his hand
In stress of eager, stammering speech,
And his meaning chanced to reach,
Would have proclaimed him as they passed
An epilept enthusiast.

COMING UP OXFORD STREET: EVENING

The sun from the west glares back,
And the sun from the watered track,
And the sun from the sheets of glass,
And the sun from each window-brass;
Sun-mirrorings, too, brighten
From show-cases beneath
The laughing eyes and teeth
Of ladies who rouge and whiten.
And the same warm god explores
Panels and chinks of doors;
Problems with chymists' bottles
Profound as Aristotle's
He solves, and with good cause,
Having been ere man was.

Also he dazzles the pupils of one who walks west,
A city-clerk, with eyesight not of the best,
Who sees no escape to the very verge of his days
From the rut of Oxford Street into open ways;
And he goes along with head and eyes flagging forlorn,
Empty of interest in things, and wondering why he was born,
As seen July 4, 1872.

A LAST JOURNEY

"Father, you seem to have been sleeping fair?"
The child uncovered the dimity-curtained window-square
And looked out at the dawn,
And back at the dying man nigh gone,
And propped up in his chair,
Whose breathing a robin's "chink" took up in antiphon.

The open fireplace spread
Like a vast weary yawn above his head,
Its thin blue blower waved against his whitening crown,
For he could not lie down:
He raised him on his arms so emaciated: —

“Yes; I’ve slept long, my child. But as for rest,
Well, that I cannot say.
The whole night have I footed field and turnpike way —
A regular pilgrimage — as at my best
And very briskest day!

“‘Twas first to Weatherb’ry, to see them there,
And thence to King’s-Stag, where
I joined in a jolly trip to Weydon-Priors Fair:
I shot for nuts, bought gingerbreads, cream-cheese;
And, not content with these,
I went to London: heard the watchmen cry the hours.

“I soon was off again, and found me in the bowers
Of father’s apple-trees,
And he shook the apples down: they fell in showers,
Whereon he turned, smiled strange at me, as ill at ease;
And then you pulled the curtain; and, ah me,
I found me back where I wished not to be!”

‘Twas told the child next day: “Your father’s dead.”
And, struck, she questioned, “O,
That journey, then, did father really go? —
Buy nuts, and cakes, and travel at night till dawn was red,
And tire himself with journeying, as he said,
To see those old friends that he cared for so?”

SINGING LOVERS

I rowed: the dimpled tide was at the turn,
And mirth and moonlight spread upon the bay:
There were two singing lovers in the stern;
But mine had gone away, —
Whither, I shunned to say!

The houses stood confronting us afar,
A livid line against the evening glare;
The small lamps livened; then out-stole a star;
But my Love was not there, —
Vanished. I sorrowed where!

His arm was round her, both full facing me
With no reserve. Theirs was not love to hide;
He held one tiller-rope, the other she;
I pulled — the merest glide, —
Looked on at them, and sighed.

The moon's glassed glory heaved as we lay swinging
Upon the undulations. Shoreward, slow,
The splash of pebbles joined the lovers' singing,
But she of a bygone vow
Joined in the song not now!
Weymouth.

THE MONTH'S CALENDAR

Tear off the calendar
Of this month past,
And all its weeks, that are
Flown, to be cast
To oblivion fast!

Darken that day
On which we met,
With its words of gay
Half-felt regret
That you'll forget!

The second day, too;
The noon I nursed
Well — thoughts; yes, through
To the thirty-first;
That was the worst.

For then it was
You let me see
There was good cause
Why you could not be
Aught ever to me!

A SPELLBOUND PALACE

(HAMPTON COURT)

On this kindly yellow day of mild low-travelling winter sun
The stirless depths of the yews
Are vague with misty blues:
Across the spacious pathways stretching spires of shadow run,
And the wind-gnawed walls of ancient brick are fired vermilion

Two or three early sanguine finches tune
Some tentative strains, to be enlarged by May or June:
From a thrush or blackbird
Comes now and then a word,
While an enfeebled fountain somewhere within is heard.

Our footsteps wait awhile,
Then draw beneath the pile,
When an inner court outspreads
As 'twere History's own asile,
Where the now-visions fountain its attenuate crystal sheds
In passive lapse that seems to ignore the yon world's clamorous clutch,
And lays an insistent numbness on the place, like a cold hand's touch.

And there swaggers the Shade of a straddling King, plumed, sworded, with sensual
face,
And lo, too, that of his Minister, at a bold self-centred pace:
Sheer in the sun they pass; and thereupon all is still,
Save the mindless fountain tinkling on with thin enfeebled will.

WHEN DEAD

TO — — —

It will be much better when
I am under the bough;
I shall be more myself, Dear, then,
Than I am now.

No sign of querulousness
To wear you out
Shall I show there: strivings and stress
Be quite without.

This fleeting life-brief blight
Will have gone past
When I resume my old and right
Place in the Vast.

And when you come to me
To show you true,
Doubt not I shall infallibly
Be waiting you.

SINE PROLE

(MEDIAEVAL LATIN SEQUENCE-METRE)

Forth from ages thick in mystery,
Through the morn and noon of history,
To the moment where I stand
Has my line wound: I the last one —
Outcome of each spectral past one
Of that file, so many-manned!

Nothing in its time-trail marred it:
As one long life I regard it
Throughout all the years till now,
When it fain — the close seen coming —
After annals past all plumbing —
Makes to Being its parting bow.

Unlike Jahveh's ancient nation,
Little in their line's cessation
Moderns see for surge of sighs:
They have been schooled by lengthier vision,
View Life's lottery with misprision,
And its dice that fling no prize!

TEN YEARS SINCE

'Tis ten years since
I saw her on the stairs,
Heard her in house-affairs,
And listened to her cares;
And the trees are ten feet taller,
And the sunny spaces smaller
Whose bloomage would enthrall her;
And the piano wires are rustier,
The smell of bindings mustier,
And lofts and lumber dustier
Than when, with casual look
And ear, light note I took
Of what shut like a book
Those ten years since!

Nov. 1922.

EVERY ARTEMISIA

“Your eye-light wanes with an ail of care,
Frets freeze gray your face and hair.”

“I was the woman who met him,
Then cool and keen,
Whiling away
Time, with its restless scene on scene
Every day.”

“Your features fashion as in a dream
Of things that were, or used to seem.”

“I was the woman who won him:
Steadfast and fond
Was he, while I
Tepidly took what he gave, nor conned
Wherefore or why.”

“Your house looks blistered by a curse,
As if a wraith ruled there, or worse.”

“I was the woman who slighted him:
Far from my town
Into the night
He went. . . . My hair, then auburn-brown,
Pangs have wanned white.”

“Your ways reflect a monstrous gloom;
Your voice speaks from within a tomb.”

“I was the woman who buried him:
My misery
God laughed to scorn:
The people said: “Twere well if she
Had not been born!””

“You plod to pile a monument
So madly that your breath is spent.”

“I am the woman who god him:
I build, to ease
My scalding fires,
A temple topping the Deities’
Fanes of my sires.”

THE BEST SHE COULD

Nine leaves a minute
Swim down shakily;
Each one fain would spin it
Straight to earth; but, see,
How the sharp airs win it
Slantwise away! — Hear it say,
“Now we have finished our summer show
Of what we knew the way to do:
Alas, not much! But, as things go,
As fair as any. And night-time calls,
And the curtain falls!”

Sunlight goes on shining
As if no frost were here,
Blackbirds seem designing
Where to build next year;
Yet is warmth declining:
And still the day seems to say,
“Saw you how Dame Summer drest?
Of all God taught her she bethought her!
Alas, not much! And yet the best
She could, within the too short time
Granted her prime.”

Nov. 8, 1923.

THE GRAVEYARD OF DEAD CREEDS

I lit upon the graveyard of dead creeds
In wistful wanderings through old wastes of thought,
Where bristled fennish fungi, fruiting nought,
Amid the sepulchres begirt with weeds,

Which stone by stone recorded sanct, deceased
Catholicons that had, in centuries flown,
Physicked created man through his long groan,
Ere they went under, all their potence ceased.

When in a breath-while, lo, their spectres rose
Like wakened winds that autumn summons up: —
“Out of us cometh an heir, that shall disclose
New promise!” cried they. “And the caustic cup

“We ignorantly upheld to men, be filled
With draughts more pure than those we ever distilled,
That shall make tolerable to sentient seers
The melancholy marching of the years.”

THERE SEEMED A STRANGENESS

A PHANTASY

There seemed a strangeness in the air,
Vermilion light on the land's lean face;
I heard a Voice from I knew not where: —
“The Great Adjustment is taking place!

“I set thick darkness over you,
And fogged you all your years therein;
At last I uncloud your view,
Which I am weary of holding in.

“Men have not heard, men have not seen
Since the beginning of the world
What earth and heaven mean;
But now their curtains shall be furled,

“And they shall see what is, ere long,
Not through a glass, but face to face;
And Right shall disestablish Wrong:
The Great Adjustment is taking place.”

A NIGHT OF QUESTIONINGS

On the eve of All-Souls' Day
I heard the dead men say
Who lie by the tottering tower,
To the dark and doubling wind
At the midnight's turning hour,
When other speech had thinned:
"What of the world now?"
The wind whiffed back: "Men still
Who are born, do good, do ill
Here, just as in your time:
Till their years the locust hath eaten,
Leaving them bare, downbeaten;
Somewhiles in springtide rime,
Somewhiles in summer glow,
Somewhiles in winter snow: —
No more I know."

The same eve I caught cry
To the selfsame wind, those dry
As dust beneath the aisles
Of old cathedral piles,
Walled up in vaulted biers
Through many Christian years:
"What of the world now?"

Sighed back the circuiteer:
"Men since your time, shrined here
By deserved ordinance,
Their own craft, or by chance,
Which follows men from birth
Even until under earth,
But little difference show
When ranged in sculptured row,
Different as dyes although: —
No more I know."

On the selfsame eve, too, said
Those swayed in the sunk sea-bed
To the selfsame wind as it played
With the tide in the starless shade
From Comorin to Horn,
And round by Wrath forlorn:
“What of the world now?”
And the wind for a second ceased,
Then whirred: “Men west and east,
As each sun soars and dips,
Go down to the sea in ships
As you went — hither and thither;
See the wonders of the deep,
As you did, ere they sleep;
But few at home care whither
They wander to and fro;
Themselves care little also! —
No more I know.”

Said, too, on the selfsame eve
The troubled skulls that heave
And fust in the flats of France,
To the wind wayfaring over
Listlessly as in trance
From the Ardennes to Dover,
“What of the world now?”
And the farer moaned: “As when
You mauled these fields, do men
Set them with dark-drawn breaths
To knave their neighbours’ deaths
In periodic spasms!
Yea, fooled by foul phantasms,
In a strange cyclic throe
Backward to type they go: —
No more I know.”

That night, too, men whose crimes
Had cut them off betimes,
Who lay within the pales
Of town and county jails
With the rope-groove on them yet,
Said to the same wind's fret,
"What of the world now?"
And the blast in its brooding tone
Returned: "Men have not shown,
Since you were stretched that morning,
A white cap your adorning,
More lovely deeds or true
Through thus neck-knotting you;
Or that they purer grow,
Or ever will, I trow! —
No more I know."

XENOPHANES, THE MONIST OF COLOPHON

Ann: aet: suae XCII. — A: C: CCCCLXXX.

"Are You groping Your way?
Do You do it unknowing? —
Or mark Your wind blowing?
Night tell You from day,
O Mover? Come, say!"
Cried Xenophanes.

"I mean, querying so,
Do You do it aware,
Or by rote, like a player,
Or in ignorance, nor care
Whether doing or no?"
Pressed Xenophanes

"Thus strive I to plumb
Your depths, O Great Dumb! —
Not a god, but the All
(As I read); yet a thrall
To a blind ritual,"
Sighed Xenophanes.

“If I only could bring
You to own it, close Thing,
I would write it again
With a still stronger pen
To my once neighbour-men!”
Said Xenophanes.

— Quoth the listening Years:
“You ask It in vain;
You waste sighs and tears
On these callings inane,
Which It grasps not nor hears,
O Xenophanes!

“When you penned what you thought
You were cast out, and sought
A retreat over sea
From aroused enmity:
So it always will be,
Yea, Xenophanes!

“In the lone of the nights
At Elea unseen,
Where the swinging wave smites
Of the restless Tyrrhene,
You may muse thus, serene,
Safe, Xenophanes.

“But write it not back
To your dear Colophon;
Brows still will be black
At your words, ‘All is One,’
From disputers thereon,
Know, Xenophanes.

“Three thousand years hence,
Men who hazard a clue
To this riddle immense,
And still treat it as new,
Will be scowled at, like you,
O Xenophanes!

“‘Some day I may tell,
When I’ve broken My spell,’
It snores in Its sleep
If you listen long, deep
At Its closely-sealed cell,
Wronged Xenophanes!

“Yea, on, near the end,
Its doings may mend;
Aye, when you’re forgotten,
And old cults are rotten,
And bulky codes shotten,
Xenophanes!”

1921

LIFE AND DEATH AT SUNRISE

(NEAR DOGBURY GATE, 1867)

The hills uncap their tops
Of woodland, pasture, copse,
And look on the layers of mist
At their foot that still persist:
They are like awakened sleepers on one elbow lifted,
Who gaze around to learn if things during night have shifted.

A waggon creaks up from the fog
With a laboured leisurely jog;
Then a horseman from off the hill-tip
Comes clapping down into the dip;
While woodlarks, finches, sparrows, try to entune at one time,
And cocks and hens and cows and bulls take up the chime.

With a shouldered basket and flagon
A man meets the one with the waggon,
And both the men halt of long use.
“Well,” the waggoner says, “what’s the news?”
“ — ’Tis a boy this time. You’ve just met the doctor trotting back.
She’s doing very well. And we think we shall call him ‘Jack.’

“And what have you got covered there?”
He nods to the waggon and mare.
“Oh, a coffin for old John Thinn:
We are just going to put him in.”
“ — So he’s gone at last. He always had a good constitution.”
“ — He was ninety-odd. He could call up the French Revolution.”

NIGHT-TIME IN MID-FALL

It is a storm-strid night, winds footing swift
Through the blind profound;
I know the happenings from their sound;
Leaves totter down still green, and spin and drift;
The tree-trunks rock to their roots, which wrench and lift
The loam where they run onward underground.

The streams are muddy and swollen; eels migrate
To a new abode;
Even cross, 'tis said, the turnpike-road;
(Men's feet have felt their crawl, home-coming late):
The westward fronts of towers are saturate,
Church-timbers crack, and witches ride abroad.

A SHEEP FAIR

The day arrives of the autumn fair,
And torrents fall,
Though sheep in throngs are gathered there,
Ten thousand all,
Sodden, with hurdles round them reared:
And, lot by lot, the pens are cleared,
And the auctioneer wrings out his beard,
And wipes his book, bedrenched and smeared,
And rakes the rain from his face with the edge of his hand,
As torrents fall.

The wool of the ewes is like a sponge
With the daylong rain:
Jammed tight, to turn, or lie, or lunge,
They strive in vain.
Their horns are soft as finger-nails,
Their shepherds reek against the rails,
The tied dogs soak with tucked-in tails,
The buyers' hat-brims fill like pails,
Which spill small cascades when they shift their stand
In the daylong rain.

POSTSCRIPT

Time has trailed lengthily since met
At Pummery Fair
Those panting thousands in their wet
And woolly wear:
And every flock long since has bled,
And all the dripping buyers have sped,
And the hoarse auctioneer is dead,
Who "Going — going!" so often said,
As he consigned to doom each meek, mewed band
At Pummery Fair.

SNOW IN THE SUBURBS

Every branch big with it,
Bent every twig with it;
Every fork like a white web-foot;
Every street and pavement mute:
Some flakes have lost their way, and grope back upward, when
Meeting those meandering down they turn and descend again.
The palings are glued together like a wall,
And there is no waft of wind with the fleecy fall.

A sparrow enters the tree,
Whereon immediately
A snow-lump thrice his own slight size
Descends on him and showers his head and eyes.

And overturns him,
And near inurns him,
And lights on a nether twig, when its brush
Starts off a volley of other lodging lumps with a rush.

The steps are a blanched slope,
Up which, with feeble hope,
A black cat comes, wide-eyed and thin;
And we take him in.

A LIGHT SNOW-FALL AFTER FROST

On the flat road a man at last appears:
How much his whitening hairs
Owe to the settling snow's mute anchorage,
And how much to a life's rough pilgrimage,
One cannot certify.

The frost is on the wane,
And cobwebs hanging close outside the pane
Pose as festoons of thick white worsted there,
Of their pale presence no eye being aware
Till the rime made them plain.

A second man comes by;
His ruddy beard brings fire to the pallid scene:
His coat is faded green;
Hence seems it that his mien
Wears something of the dye
Of the berried holm-trees that he passes nigh.

The snow-feathers so gently swoop that though
But half an hour ago
The road was brown, and now is starkly white,
A watcher would have failed defining quite
When it transformed it so.
Near Surbiton.

WINTER NIGHT IN WOODLAND

(OLD TIME)

The bark of a fox rings, sonorous and long: —
Three barks, and then silentness; “wong, wong, wong!”
In quality horn-like, yet melancholy,
As from teachings of years; for an old one is he.
The hand of all men is against him, he knows; and yet, why?
That he knows not, — will never know, down to his death-halloo cry.

With clap-nets and lanterns off start the bird-baiters,
In trim to make raids on the roosts in the copse,
Where they beat the boughs artfully, while their awaiters
Grow heavy at home over divers warm drops.
The poachers, with swingels, and matches of brimstone, outcreep
To steal upon pheasants and drowse them a-perch and asleep.

Out there, on the verge, where a path wavers through,
Dark figures, filed singly, thrud quickly the view,
Yet heavily laden: land-carriers are they
In the hire of the smugglers from some nearest bay.
Each bears his two "tubs," slung across, one in front, one behind,
To a further snug hiding, which none but themselves are to find.

And then, when the night has turned twelve the air brings
From dim distance, a rhythm of voices and strings:
'Tis the quire, just afoot on their long yearly rounds,
To rouse by worn carols each house in their bounds;
Robert Penny, the Dewys, Mail, Voss, and the rest; till anon
Tired and thirsty, but cheerful, they home to their beds in the dawn.

ICE ON THE HIGHWAY

Seven buxom women abreast, and arm in arm,
Trudge down the hill, tip-toed,
And breathing warm;
They must perforce trudge thus, to keep upright
On the glassy ice-bound road,

And they must get to market whether or no,
Provisions running low
With the nearing Saturday night,
While the lumbering van wherein they mostly ride
Can nowise go:
Yet loud their laughter as they stagger and slide!
Yell'ham Hill.

MUSIC IN A SNOWY STREET

The weather is sharp,
But the girls are unmoved:
One wakes from a harp,
The next from a viol,
A strain that I loved
When life was no trial.

The triplettime beat
Bounds forth on the snow,
But the spry springing feet
Of a century ago,
And the arms that enlaced
As the couples embraced,
Are silent old bones
Under graying gravestones.

The snow-feathers sail
Across the harp-strings,
Whose throbbing threads wail
Like love-satiate things.
Each lyre's grimy mien,
With its rout-raising tune,
Against the new white
Of the flake-laden noon,
Is incongruous to sight,
Hinting years they have seen
Of revel at night
Ere these damsels became
Possessed of their frame.

O bygone whirls, heys,
Crotchets, quavers, the same
That were danced in the days
Of grim Bonaparte's fame,
Or even by the toes
Of the fair Antoinette, —
Yea, old notes like those
Here are living on yet! —
But of their fame and fashion
How little these know
Who strum without passion
For pence, in the snow!

THE FROZEN GREENHOUSE

(ST. JULIOT)

“There was a frost
Last night!” she said,
“And the stove was forgot
When we went to bed,
And the greenhouse plants
Are frozen dead!”

By the breakfast blaze
Blank-faced spoke she,
Her scared young look
Seeming to be
The very symbol
Of tragedy.

The frost is fiercer
Than then to-day,
As I pass the place
Of her once dismay,
But the greenhouse stands
Warm, tight, and gay,

While she who grieved
At the sad lot
Of her pretty plants —
Cold, iced, forgot —
Herself is colder,
And knows it not.

TWO LIPS

I kissed them in fancy as I came
Away in the morning glow:
I kissed them through the glass of her picture-frame:
She did not know.

I kissed them in love, in troth, in laughter,
When she knew all; long so!
That I should kiss them in a shroud thereafter
She did not know.

NO BUYERS

A STREET SCENE

A load of brushes and baskets and cradles and chairs
Labours along the street in the rain:
With it a man, a woman, a pony with whiteybrown hairs. —
The man foots in front of the horse with a shambling sway
At a slower tread than a funeral train,
While to a dirge-like tune he chants his wares,
Swinging a Turk's-head brush (in a drum-major's way
When the bandsmen march and play).

A yard from the back of the man is the whiteybrown pony's nose:
He mirrors his master in every item of pace and pose:
He stops when the man stops, without being told,
And seems to be eased by a pause; too plainly he's old,
Indeed, not strength enough shows
To steer the disjointed waggon straight,
Which wriggles left and right in a rambling line,
Deflected thus by its own warp and weight,
And pushing the pony with it in each incline.

The woman walks on the pavement verge,
Parallel to the man:
She wears an apron white and wide in span,
And carries a like Turk's-head, but more in nursing-wise:

Now and then she joins in his dirge,
But as if her thoughts were on distant things.
The rain clams her apron till it clings. —
So, step by step, they move with their merchandize,
And nobody buys.

ONE WHO MARRIED ABOVE HIM

“‘Tis you, I think? Back from your week's work, Steve?”
“It is I. Back from work this Christmas Eve.”
“But you seem off again? — in this night-rime?”
“I am off again, and thoroughly off this time.”
“What does that mean?”
“More than may first be seen. . . .”

Half an hour ago I footed homeward here,
No wife found I, nor child, nor maid, indoors or near.
She has, as always, gone with them to her mother's at the farm,
Where they fare better far than here, and, maybe, meet less harm.
She's left no fire, no light, has cooked me nothing to eat,
Though she had fuel, and money to get some Christmas meat.
Christmas with them is grand, she knows, and brings good victual,
Other than how it is here, where it's but lean and little.
But though not much, and rough,
If managed neat there's enough.
She and hers are too highmade for me;
But she's whimmed her once too often, she'll see!
Farmer Bollen's daughter should never have married a man that's poor;
And I can stand it no longer; I'm leaving; you'll see me no more, be sure."
"But nonsense: you'll be back again ere bedtime, and lighting a fire,
And sizzling your supper, and vexing not that her views of supper are higher."
"Never for me."
"Well, we shall see."

The sceptical neighbour and Stephen then followed their fore-designed ways,
And their steps dimmed into white silence upon the slippery glaze;
And the trees went on with their spitting amid the icicled haze.

The evening whiled, and the wife with the babies came home,
But he was not there, nor all Christmas Day did he come.
Christmastide went, and likewise went the New Year,
But no husband's footfall revived,
And month after month lapsed, graytime to green and to sere,
And other new years arrived,
And the children grew up: one husbanded and one wived. —
She wept and repented,
But Stephen never relented.
And there stands the house, and the sycamore-tree and all.
With its roots forming steps for the passers who care to call,
And there are the mullioned windows, and Ham-Hill door,
Through which Steve's wife was brought out, but which Steve re-entered no more.

THE NEW TOY

She cannot leave it alone,
The new toy;
She pats it, smooths it, rights it, to show it's her own,
As the other train-passengers muse on its temper and tone
Till she draws from it cries of annoy: —
She feigns to appear as if thinking it nothing so rare
Or worthy of pride, to achieve
This wonder a child, though with reason the rest of them there
May so be inclined to believe.

QUEEN CAROLINE TO HER GUESTS

Dear friends, stay!
Lamplit wafts of wit keep sorrow
In the purlieus of to-morrow:
Dear friends, stay!
Haste not away!
Even now may Time be weaving
Tricks of ravage, wrack, bereaving:
Haste not away!
Through the pane,
Lurking along the street, there may be
Heartwings, keeping hid till day be,
Through the pane.
Check their reign:
Since while here we are the masters,
And can barricade dim disasters:
Check their reign!
Give no ear
To those ghosts withoutside mumming,
Mouthing, threatening, "We are coming!"
Give no ear!
Sheltered here
Care we not that next day bring us
Pains, perversions! No racks wring us
Sheltered here.

Homeward gone,
Sleep will slay this merrymaking;
No resuming it at waking,
Homeward gone.

After dawn
Something sad may be befalling;
Mood like ours there's no recalling
After dawn!

Morrow-day
Present joy that moments strengthen
May be past our power to lengthen,
Morrow-day!

Dear friends, stay!
Lamplit wafts of wit keep sorrow
In the limbo of to-morrow:
Dear friends, stay!

PLENA TIMORIS

The lovers looked over the parapet-stone:
The moon in its southing directly blent
Its silver with their environment.
Her ear-rings twinkled; her teeth, too, shone
As, his arm around her, they laughed and leant.

A man came up to them; then one more.
"There's a woman in the canal below,"
They said; climbed over; slid down; let go,
And a splashing was heard, till an arm upbore,
And a dripping body began to show.

"Drowned herself for love of a man,
Who at one time used to meet her here,
Until he grew tired. But she'd wait him near,
And hope, till hopeless despair began.
So much for love in this mortal sphere!"

The girl's heart shuddered; it seemed as to freeze her
That here, at their tryst for so many a day,
Another woman's tragedy lay.
Dim dreads of the future grew slowly to seize her,
And her arm dropt from his as they wandered away.

THE WEARY WALKER

A plain in front of me,
And there's the road
Upon it. Wide country,
And, too, the road!

Past the first ridge another,
And still the road
Creeps on. Perhaps no other
Ridge for the road?

Ah! Past that ridge a third,
Which still the road
Has to climb furtherward —
The thin white road!

Sky seems to end its track;
But no. The road
Trails down the hill at the back.
Ever the road!

LAST LOVE-WORD

(SONG)

This is the last; the very, very last!
Anon, and all is dead and dumb,
Only a pale shroud over the past,
That cannot be
Of value small or vast,
Love, then to me!

I can say no more: I have even said too much.
I did not mean that this should come:
I did not know 'twould swell to such —
Nor, perhaps, you —
When that first look and touch,
Love, doomed us two!

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NOBODY COMES

Tree-leaves labour up and down,
And through them the fainting light
Succumbs to the crawl of night.
Outside in the road the telegraph wire
To the town from the darkening land
Intones to travellers like a spectral lyre
Swept by a spectral hand.

A car comes up, with lamps full-glare,
That flash upon a tree:
It has nothing to do with me,
And whangs along in a world of its own,
Leaving a blacker air;
And mute by the gate I stand again alone,
And nobody pulls up there.

October 9, 1924.

IN THE STREET

(SONG)

Only acquaintances
Seem do we,
Each of whom, meeting, says
Civilly
“Good morning.” — Yes: thus we appear to be!
But far, near, left and right,
Here or there,
By day or dingiest night,
Everywhere
I see you: one incomparably fair!
So do we wend our ways,
Beautiful girl,
Along our parallel days;
While unfurl
Our futures, and what there may whelm and whirl.

THE LAST LEAF

“The leaves throng thick above: —
Well, I’ll come back, dear Love,
When they all are down!”

She watched that August tree,
(None now scorned summer as she),
Till it broidered it brown.

And then October came blowing,
And the leaves showed signs they were going,
And she saw up through them.

O how she counted them then!
— November left her but ten,
And started to strew them.

“Ah, when they all are gone,
And the skeleton-time comes on,
Whom shall I see!”

— When the fifteenth spread its sky
That month, her upturned eye
Could count but three.

And at the close of the week
A flush flapped over her cheek:
The last one fell.

But — he did not come. And, at length,
Her hope of him lost all strength,
And it was as a knell. . . .

When he did come again,
Years later, a husband then,
Heavy somewhat,

With a smile she reminded him:
And he cried: “Ah, that vow of our whim! —
Which I forgot,

“As one does! — And was that the tree?
So it was! — Dear me, dear me:
Yes: I forgot.”

AT WYNYARD'S GAP

She

(on horseback)

The hounds pass here?

He

(on horseback)

They did an hour ago,

Just in full cry, and went down-wind, I saw,

Towards Pen Wood, where they may kill, and draw

A second time, and bear towards the Yeo.

She

How vexing! And I've crept along unthinking.

He

Ah! — lost in dreams. Fancy to fancy linking!

She

(more softly)

Not that, quite. . . . Now, to settle what I'll do.

He

Go home again. But have you seen the view

From the top there? Not? It's really worth your while. —

You must dismount, because there is a stile. They dismount, hitch their horses, and climb a few-score yards from the road.

There you see half South Wessex, — combe, and glen,
And down, to Lewsdon Hill and Pilsdon Pen.

She

Yes. It is fine. And I, though living out there

By Crewkerne, never knew it. (She turns her head)

Well, I declare,

Look at the horses! — How shall I catch my mare? The horses have got loose and scampered off.

Now that's your fault, through leading me up here!

You must have known 'twould happen —

He
No, my dear!

She
I'm not your dear.

He
(blandly)
But you can't help being so,
If it comes to that. The fairest girl I've seen
Is of course dear — by her own fault, I mean.

She
(quickly)
What house is that we see just down below?

He
Oh — that's the inn called "Wynyard's Gap." — I'll go
While you wait here, and catch those brutes. Don't stir.

He goes. She waits.
She
What a handsome man. Not local, I'll aver.

He comes back.
He
I met a farmer's labourer some way on;
He says he'll bring them to us here anon,
If possible before the day is dim.
Come down to the inn: there we can wait for him.

They descend slowly in that direction.
She
What a lonely inn. Why is there such a one?

He
For us to wait at. Thus 'tis things are done.

She
Thus things are done? Well — what things do you mean?

He
Romantic things. Meetings unknown, unseen.

She

But ours is accident, and needn't have been,
And isn't what I'd plan with a stranger, quite,
Particularly at this time — nearly night.

He

Nor I. But still, the tavern's loneliness
Is favourable for lovers in distress,
When they've eloped, for instance, and are in fear
Of being pursued. No one would find them here. He goes to speak to the labourer

approaching; and returns.

He says the horses long have passed the combe,
And cannot be overtaken. They'll go home.

She
And what's to be done? And it's beginning to rain.
'Tis always so. One trouble brings a train!

He
It seems to me that here we'd better stay
And rest us till some vehicle comes this way:
In fact, we might put up here till the morning:
The floods are high, and night-farers have warning.

She
Put up? Do you think so!

He
I incline to such,
My dear (do you mind?)

She
Yes. — Well (more softly)
, I don't much,
If I seem like it. But I ought to tell you
One thing. I'm married. Being so, it's well you —

He
Oh, so am I. (A silence, he regarding her)
I note a charming thing —
You stand so stock-still that your ear-ring shakes
At each pulsation which the vein there makes.

She

Does it? Perhaps because it's flustering
To be caught thus! (In a murmur)
Why did we chance to meet here!

He

God knows! Perhaps to taste a bitter-sweet here. —
Still, let us enter. Shelter we must get:
The night is darkening and is growing wet.
So, anyhow, you can treat me as a lover
Just for this once. To-morrow 'twill be over!

They reach the inn. The door is locked, and they discern a board marked "To Let."
While they stand stultified a van is seen drawing near, with passengers.

She

Ah, here's an end of it! The Crewkerne carrier.

He

So cynic circumstance erects its barrier!

She

(mischievously)

To your love-making, which would have grown stronger,
No doubt, if we had stayed on here much longer?

The carrier comes up. Her companion reluctantly hails him.

He

Yes. . . . And in which you might have shown some ruth,
Had but the inn been open! — Well, forsooth,
I'm sorry it's not. Are you? Now, dear, the truth!

She

(with gentle evasiveness)

I am — almost. But best 'tis thus to be.
For — dear one — there I've said it! — you can see
That both at one inn (though roomed separately,
Of course) — so lone, too — might have been unfit,
Perfect as 'tis for lovers, I admit.

He
(after a sigh)
Carrier! A lift for my wife, please.

She
(in quick undertones)
Wife? But nay —

He
(continuing)
Her horse has thrown her and has gone astray:
See she gets safe to Crewkerne. I've to stay.

Carrier
I will, sir! I'm for Crookhorn straight away.

He
(to her, aloud)
Right now, dear. I shall soon be home. Adieu!

(Kisses her.)
She
(whispering confusedly)
You shouldn't! Pretending you are my husband, too!
I now must act the part of wife to you!

He
(whispering)
Yes, since I've kissed you, dear. You see it's done
To silence tongues as we're found here alone
At night, by gossipers, and seem as shown
Staying together!

She
(whispering)
Then must I, too, kiss?

He
Yes: a mere matter of form, you know,
To check all scandal. People will talk so!

She
I'd no idea it would reach to this! (Kisses him.)

What makes it worse is, I'm ashamed to say,
I've a young baby waiting me at home!

He

Ah — there you beat me! — But, my dearest, play
The wife to the end, and don't give me away,
Despite the baby, since we've got so far,
And what we've acted feel we almost are!

She

(sighing)

Yes. 'Tis so! And my conscience has gone dumb! (Aloud)

'Bye, dear, awhile! I'll sit up till you come. (In a whisper)

Which means Good-bye for ever, truly heard!
Upon to-night be silent!

He

Never a word,
Till Pilsdon Pen by Marshwood wind is stirred!

He hands her up. Exeunt omnes.

AT SHAG'S HEATH

1(TRADITIONAL)

I grieve and grieve for what I have done,
And nothing now is left to me
But straight to drown; yea, I have slain
The rarest soul the world shall see!
— My husband said: "Now thou art wed
Thou must beware! And should a man
Cajole, mind, he means ill to thee,
Depend on't: fool him if ye can!"
But 'twas King Monmouth, he!

As truth I took what was not true:
Till darked my door just such a one.
He asked me but the way to go,
Though looking all so down and done.

And as he stood he said, unsued,
 "The prettiest wife I've eyed to-day!"
 And then he kissed me tenderly
 Before he footed fast away
 Did dear King Monmouth, he!
 Builded was he so beautiful! —
 Why did I pout a pettish word
 For what he'd done? — Then whisking off —
 For his pursuers' feet were heard —
 "Dear one, keep faith!" he turns and saith.
 And next he vanished in the copse
 Before I knew what such might be,
 And how great fears and how great hopes
 Had rare King Monmouth — he!
 Up rode the soldiers. "Where's this man? —
 He is the rebel Duke," say they.
 "And calls himself King Monmouth, sure!"
 Then I believed my husband; aye,
 Though he'd spoke lies in jealous-wise!
 — To Shag's nigh copse beyond the road
 I moved my finger mercilessly;
 And there lay hidden where I showed:
 My dear King Monmouth, he!
 The soldiers brought him by my door,
 His elbows bound behind him, fast;
 Passing, he me-ward cast his eyes —
 What eyes of beauty did he cast!
 Grieved was his glance at me askance:
 "I wished all weal might thee attend,
 But this is what th'st done to me,
 O heartless woman, held my friend!"
 Said sweet King Monmouth, he!
 O then I saw he was no hind,
 But a great lord of loftihood,
 Come here to claim his rule and rights,
 Who'd wished me, as he'd said, but good. —
 With tug and jolt, then, out to Holt,
 To Justice Ettricke, he was led,
 And thence to London speedily,
 Where under yester's headsman bled
 The rare King Monmouth, he!

Last night, the while my husband slept,
He rose up at the window there,
All blood and blear, and hacked about,
With heavy eyes, and rumpled hair;
And said: "My Love, 'twas cruel of
A Fair like thee to use me so!
But now it's nought: from foes I'm free!
Sooner or later all must go,"
Said dear King Monmouth, he!
"Yes, lovely cruel one!" he said
In through the mullioned pane, shroud-pale,
"I love you still, would kiss you now,
But blood would stain your nighty-rail!"
— That's all. And so to drown I go:
O wear no weeds, my friends, for me . . .
When comes the waterman, he'll say,
"Who's done her thuswise?" — 'Twill be, yea,
Sweet, slain King Monmouth — he!

A SECOND ATTEMPT

Thirty years after
I began again
An old-time passion:
And it seemed as fresh as when
The first day ventured on:
When mutely I would waft her
In Love's past fashion
Dreams much dwelt upon,
Dreams I wished she knew.
I went the course through,
From Love's fresh-found sensation —
Remembered still so well —
To worn words charged anew,
That left no more to tell:
Thence to hot hopes and fears,
And thence to consummation,
And thence to sober years,
Markless, and mellow-hued.

Firm the whole fabric stood,
Or seemed to stand, and sound
As it had stood before.
But nothing backward climbs,
And when I looked around
As at the former times,
There was Life — pale and hoar;
And slow it said to me,
“Twice-over cannot be!”

FREED THE FRET OF THINKING

Freed the fret of thinking,
Light of lot were we,
Song with service linking
Like to bird or bee:
Chancing bale unblinking,
Freed the fret of thinking
On mortality!

Had not thought-endowment
Beings ever known,
What Life once or now meant
None had wanted shown —
Measuring but the moment —
Had not thought-endowment
Caught Creation's groan!

Loosed from wrings of reason,
We might blow like flowers,
Sense of Time-wrought treason
Would not then be ours
In and out of season;
Loosed from wrings of reason
We should laud the Powers!

THE ABSOLUTE EXPLAINS

I

“O no,” said It: her lifedoings
Time’s touch hath not destroyed:
They lie their length, with the throbbing things
Akin them, down the Void,
Live, unalloyed.

II

“Know, Time is toothless, seen all through;
The Present, that men but see,
Is phasmal: since in a sane purview
All things are shaped to be
Eternally.

III

“Your ‘Now’ is just a gleam, a glide
Across your gazing sense:
With me, ‘Past,’ ‘Future,’ ever abide:
They come not, go not, whence
They are never hence.

IV

“As one upon a dark highway,
Plodding by lantern-light,
Finds but the reach of its frail ray
Uncovered to his sight,
Though mid the night

V

“The road lies all its length the same,
Forwardly as at rear,
So, outside what you ‘Present’ name,
Future and Past stand sheer,
Cognate and clear.”

VI

— Thus It: who straightway opened then
The vista called the Past,
Wherein were seen, as fair as when
They seemed they could not last,
Small things and vast.

VII

There were those songs, a score times sung,
With all their tripping tunes,
There were the laughs once that rung,
There those unmatched full moons,
Those idle noons!

VIII

There fadeless, fixed, were dust-dead flowers
Remaining still in blow;
Elsewhere, wild love-makings in bowers;
Hard by, that irised bow
Of years ago.

IX

There were my ever memorable
Glad days of pilgrimage,
Coiled like a precious parchment fell,
Illumined page by page,
Unhurt by age.

X

“ — Here you see spread those mortal ails
So powerless to restrain
Your young life's eager hot assails,
With hazards then not plain
Till past their pain.

XI

“Here you see her who, by these laws
You learn of, still shines on,
As pleasing-pure as erst she was,
Though you think she lies yon,
Graved, glow all gone.

XII

“Here are those others you used to prize. —
But why go further we?
The Future? — Well, I would advise
You let the future be,
Unshown by me!

XIII

“‘Twould harrow you to see undraped
The scenes in ripe array
That wait your globe — all worked and shaped;
And I’ll not, as I say,
Bare them to-day.

XIV

“In fine, Time is a mock, — yea, such! —
As he might well confess:
Yet hath he been believed in much,
Though lately, under stress
Of science, less.

XV

“And hence, of her you asked about
At your first speaking: she
Hath, I assure you, not passed out
Of continuity,
But is in me.

XVI

“So thus doth Being’s length transcend
Time’s ancient regal claim
To see all lengths begin and end.
‘The Fourth Dimension’ fame
Bruits as its name.”
New Year’s Eve, 1922.

SO, TIME

(THE SAME THOUGHT RESUMED)

So, Time,
Royal, sublime;
Heretofore held to be
Master and enemy,
Thief of my Love's adornings,
Despoiling her to scorings: —
The sound philosopher
Now sets him to aver
You are nought
But a thought
Without reality.

Young, old,
Passioned, cold,
All the loved-lost thus
Are beings continuous,
In dateless dure abiding,
Over the present striding
With placid permanence
That knows not transience:
Firm in the Vast,
First, last;
Afar, yet close to us.

AN INQUIRY

A PHANTASY

Circumdederunt me dolores mortis. — Ps. xviii.

I said to It: "We grasp not what you meant,
(Dwelling down here, so narrowly pinched and pent)
By crowning Death the King of the Firmament:
— The query I admit to be
One of unwonted size,
But it is put you sorrowingly,
And not in idle-wise."

“Sooth, since you ask me gravely,” It replied,
“Though too incisive questions I have decried,
This shows some thought, and may be justified.
I’ll gauge its value as I go
Across the Universe,
And bear me back in a moment or so
And say, for better or worse.”

Many years later, when It came again,
“That matter an instant back which brought you pain,”
It said, “and you besought me to explain:
Well, my forethoughtless modes to you
May seem a shameful thing,
But — I’d no meaning, that I knew,
In crowning Death as King!”

THE FAITHFUL SWALLOW

When summer shone
Its sweetest on
An August day,
“Here evermore,”
I said, “I’ll stay;
Not go away
To another shore
As fickle they!”

December came:
‘Twas not the same!
I did not know
Fidelity
Would serve me so.
Frost, hunger, snow;
And now, ah me,
Too late to go!

IN SHERBORNE ABBEY

(17**)

The moon has passed to the panes of the south-aisle wall,
And brought the mullioned shades and shines to fall
On the cheeks of a woman and man in a pew there, pressed
Together as they pant, and recline for rest.

Forms round them loom, recumbent like their own,
Yet differing; for they are chiselled in frigid stone;
In doublets are some; some mailed, as whilom ahorse they leapt:
And stately husbands and wives, side by side as they anciently slept.

“We are not like those,” she murmurs. “For ever here set!”
“True, Love,” he replies. “We two are not marble yet.”
“And, worse,” said she; “not husband and wife!”
“But we soon shall be” (from him) “if we’ve life!”
A silence. A trotting of horses is heard without.
The lovers scarce breathe till its echo has quite died out.

“It was they! They have passed, anyhow!”
“Our horse, silyly hid by the conduit,
They’ve missed, or they’d rushed to impound it!”
“And they’ll not discover us now.”
“Will not, until ‘tis too late,
And we can outface them straight!”

“Why did you make me ride in your front?” says she.
“To outwit the law. That was my strategy.

As I was borne off on the pillion behind you,
Th’abductor was you, Dearest, let me remind you;
And seizure of me by an heiress is no felony,
Whatever to do it with me as the seizer may be.”

Another silence sinks. And a cloud comes over the moon:
The print of the panes upon them enfeebles, as fallen in a swoon,
Until they are left in darkness unbroke and profound,
As likewise are left their chill and chiselled neighbours around.

A Family tradition.

THE PAIR HE SAW PASS

O sad man, now a long dead man,
To whom it was so real,
I picture, as ‘twere yesterday,
How you would tell the tale!

Just wived were you, you sad dead man,
And "settling down," you'd say,
And had rigged the house you had reared for yourself
And the mate now yours alway.

You had eyed and tried each door and lock,
And cupboard, and bell, and glass,
When you glanced across to the road without,
And saw a carriage pass.

It bowled along from the old town-gate;
Two forms its freight, and those
Were a just-joined pair, as you discerned
By the favours and the bows.

And one of the pair you saw was a Fair
Whom you had wooed awhile,
And the other you saw, with a creeping awe,
Was yourself, in bridegroom style.

"And there we rode as man and wife
In the broad blaze of the sun,"
Would you aver; yea, you with her
You had left for another one.

"The morning," you said, my friend long dead,
"Was ordinary and fine;
And yet there gleamed, it somehow seemed,
At moments, a strange shine."

You hailed a boy from your garden-plot,
And sent him along the way
To the parish church; whence word was brought
No marriage had been that day.

You mused, you said; till you heard anon
That at that hour she died
Whom once, instead of your living wife,
You had meant to make your bride. . . .

You, dead man, dwelt in your new-built house
With no great spirit or will,
And after your soon decease your spouse
Re-mated: she lives there still.

Which should be blamed, if either can,
The teller does not know
For your mismatch, O weird-wed man,
Or what you thought was so.

From an old draft.

THE MOCK WIFE

It's a dark drama, this; and yet I know the house, and date;
That is to say, the where and when John Channing met his fate.
The house was one in High Street, seen of burghers still alive,
The year was some two centuries bygone; seventeen-hundred and five
And dying was Channing the grocer. All the clocks had struck eleven,
And the watchers saw that ere the dawn his soul would be in Heaven;
When he said on a sudden: "I should like to kiss her before I go, —
For one last time!" They looked at each other and murmured, "Even so."

She'd just been haled to prison, his wife; yea, charged with shaping his death:
By poison, 'twas told; and now he was nearing the moment of his last breath:
He, witless that his young housemate was suspect of such a crime,
Lay thinking that his pangs were but a malady of the time.

Outside the room they pondered gloomily, wondering what to do,
As still he craved her kiss — the dying man who nothing knew:
"Guilty she may not be," they said; "so why should we torture him
In these his last few minutes of life? Yet how indulge his whim?"

And as he begged there piteously for what could not be done,
And the murder-charge had flown about the town to every one,
The friends around him in their trouble thought of a hasty plan,
And straightway set about it. Let denounce them all who can.

"O will you do a kindly deed — it may be a soul to save;
At least, great misery to a man with one foot in the grave?"
Thus they to the buxom woman not unlike his prisoned wife;
"The difference he's past seeing; it will soothe his sinking life."

Well, the friendly neighbour did it; and he kissed her; held her fast;
Kissed her again and yet again. "I — knew she'd — come at last! —
Where have you been? — Ah, kept away! — I'm sorry — overtried —
God bless you!" And he loosed her, fell back tiredly, and died.

His wife stood six months after on the scaffold before the crowd,
Ten thousand of them gathered there; fixed, silent, and hard-browed.
To see her strangled and burnt to dust, as was the verdict then
On women truly judged, or false, of doing to death their men.

Some of them said as they watched her burn: "I am glad he never knew,
Since a few hold her as innocent — think such she could not do!
Glad, too, that (as they tell) he thought she kissed him ere he died."
And they seemed to make no question that the cheat was justified.

THE FIGHT ON DURNOVER MOOR

(183*)

We'd loved, we two, some while,
And that had come which comes when men too much beguile;
And without more ado
My lady said: "O shame! Get home, and hide!" But he was true.

Yes: he was true to me,
And helped me some miles homealong; and vowing to come
Before the weeks were three,
And do in church a deed should strike all scandal dumb.

And when we had traipsed to Grey's great Bridge, and pitched my box
On its cope, to breathe us there,
He cried: "What wrangle's that in yonder moor? Those knocks,
Gad, seem not to be fair!

"And a woman on her knees! . . . I'll go. . . . There's surely something wrong!"
I said: "You are tired and spent
With carrying my heavy things so far and long!"
But he would go, and went.

And there I stood, steadying my box, and screened from none,
Upon the crown of the bridge,
Ashamed o' my shape, as lower and lower slipped the sun
Down behind Pummery Ridge. . . .

"O you may long wait so!
Your young man's done — aye, dead!" they by and by ran and cried.
"You shouldn't have let him go
And join that whorage, but have kept him at your side!

"It was another wench,
Biggening as you, that he championed: yes, he came on straight
With a warmth no words could quench
For her helpless face, as soon as ever he eyed her state,

"And fought her fancy-lad, who had used her far from well,
So soon to make her moan,
Aye, closed with him in fight, till at a blow yours fell,
His skull against a stone.

"She'd followed him there, this man who'd won her, and overwon,
So, when he set to twit her
Yours couldn't abide him — him all other fighters shun,
For he's a practised hitter.

“Your man moved not, and the constables came for the other; so he,
He’ll never make her his wife
Any more than yours will you; for they say that at least ‘twill be
Across the water for life.”

“O what has she brought about!”
I groaned; “this woman met here in my selfsame plight;
She’s put another yielding heart’s poor candle out
By dogging her man to-night!

“He might never have done her his due
Of amends! But mine had bidden the banns for marrying me!
Why did we rest on this bridge; why rush to a quarrel did he
With which he had nothing to do!”

But vain were bursts of blame:
We twain stood like and like, though strangers till that hour,
Foredoomed to tread our paths beneath like gaze and glower,
Bear a like blushful name.

Almost the selfsame day
It fell that her time and mine came on, — a lad and a lass:
The father o’ mine was where the worms waggle under the grass,
Of hers, at Botany Bay.

LAST LOOK ROUND ST. MARTIN'S FAIR

The sun is like an open furnace door,
Whose round revealed retort confines the roar
Of fires beyond terrene;
The moon presents the lustre-lacking face
Of a brass dial gone green,
Whose hours no eye can trace.
The unsold heathcroppers are driven home
To the shades of the Great Forest whence they come
By men with long cord-waistcoats in brown monochrome.
The stars break out, and flicker in the breeze,
It seems, that twitches the trees. —
From its hot idol soon
The fickle unresting earth has turned to a fresh patrol —
The cold, now brighter, moon.
The woman in red, at the nut-stall with the gun,
Lights up, and still goes on:
She's redder in the flare-lamp than the sun
Showed it ere it was gone.
Her hands are black with loading all the day,
And yet she treats her labour as 'twere play,
Tosses her ear-rings, and talks ribaldry
To the young men around as natural gaiety,
And not a weary work she'd readily stay,
And never again nut-shooting see,
Though crying, "Fire away!"

THE CARICATURE

Of the Lady Lu there were stories told,
For she was a woman of comely mould,
In heart-experience old.
Too many a man for her whimsical sake
Had borne with patience chill and ache,
And nightly lain awake!
This epicure in pangs, in her tooth
For more of the sweet, with a calm unruth
Cast eyes on a painter-youth.

Her junior he; and the bait of bliss
Which she knew to throw — not he to miss —
She threw, till he dreamed her his.

To her arts not blind, he yet sued long,
As a songster jailed by a deed of wrong
Will shower the doer with song;

Till tried by tones now smart, now suave,
He would flee in ire, to return a slave
Who willingly forgave.

When no! One day he left her door,
“I’ll ease mine agony!” he swore,
“And bear this thing no more!

“I’ll practise a plan!” Thereon he took
Her portrait from his sketching-book,
And, though his pencil shook,

He moulded on the real its mock;
Of beauteous brow, lip, eye, and lock
Composed a laughingstock.

Amazed at this satire of his long lure,
Whenever he scanned it he’d scarce endure
His laughter. ‘Twas his cure.

And, even when he woke in the night,
And chanced to think of the comic sight,
He laughed till exhausted quite.

“Why do you laugh?” she said one day
As he gazed at her in a curious way.
“Oh — for nothing,” said he. “Mere play.”

— A gulf of years then severed the twain;
Till he heard — a painter of high attain —
She was dying on her domain.

“And,” dryly added the friend who told,
“You may know or not that, in semblance cold,
She loved once, loved whole-souled;

“And that you were the man? Did you break your vow?
Well, well; she is good as gone by now . . .
But you hit her, all allow!”

Ah, the blow past bearing that he received!
In his bachelor quiet he grieved and grieved;
How cruel; how self-deceived!

Did she ever know? . . . Men pitied his state
As the curse of his own contrivance ate
Like canker into his fate.

For ever that thing of his evil craft
Uprose on his grief — his mocking draught —
Till, racked, he insanely laughed.

Thence onward folk would muse in doubt
What gloomed him so as he walked about,
But few, or none, found out.

A LEADER OF FASHION

Never has she known
The way a robin will skip and come,
With an eye half bold, half timorsome,
To the table's edge for a breakfast crumb:

Nor has she seen
A streak of roseate gently drawn
Across the east, that means the dawn,
When, up and out, she foots it on:

Nor has she heard
The rustle of the sparrow's tread
To roost in roof-holes near her head
When dusk bids her, too, seek her bed:

Nor has she watched
Amid a stormy eve's turmoil
The pipkin slowly come to boil,
In readiness for one at toil:

Nor has she hearkened
Through the long night-time, lone and numb,
For sounds of sent-for help to come
Ere the swift-sinking life succumb:

Nor has she ever
Held the loved-lost one on her arm,
Attired with care his straightened form,
As if he were alive and warm:

Yea, never has she
Known, seen, heard, felt, such things as these,
Haps of so many in their degrees
Throughout their count of calvaries!

MIDNIGHT ON BEECHEN, 187*

On Beechen Cliff self-commune I
This night of mid-June, mute and dry;
When darkness never rises higher
Than Bath's dim concave, towers, and spire,
Last eveglow loitering in the sky
 To feel the dawn, close lurking by,
The while the lamps as glow-worms lie
In a glade, myself their lonely eye
On Beechen Cliff:

 The city sleeps below. I sigh,
For there dwells one, all testify,
To match the maddest dream's desire:
What swain with her would not aspire
To walk the world, yea, sit but nigh
On Beechen Cliff!

THE AËROLITE

I thought a germ of Consciousness
Escaped on an aërolite
Aions ago
From some far globe, where no distress
Had means to mar supreme delight;
 But only things abode that made
The power to feel a gift uncloyed
Of gladsome glow,
And life unendingly displayed
Emotions loved, desired, enjoyed.

 And that this stray, exotic germ
Fell wanderingly upon our sphere,
After its wingings,
Quickened, and showed to us the worm
That gnaws vitalities native here,
 And operated to unblind
Earth's old-established ignorance
Of stains and stingings,
Which grin no griefs while not opined,
But cruelly tax intelligence.

“How shall we,” then the seers said,
“Oust this awareness, this disease
Called sense, here sown,
Though good, no doubt, where it was bred,
And wherein all things work to please?”

Others cried: “Nay, we rather would,
Since this untoward gift is sent
For ends unknown,
Limit its registerings to good,
And hide from it all anguishment.”

I left them pondering. This was how
(Or so I dreamed) was waked on earth
The mortal moan
Begot of sentience. Maybe now
Normal unawareness waits rebirth.

THE PROSPECT

The twigs of the birch imprint the December sky
Like branching veins upon a thin old hand;
I think of summer-time, yes, of last July,
When she was beneath them, greeting a gathered band
Of the urban and bland.

Iced airs wheeze through the skeletoned hedge from the north,
With steady snores, and a numbing that threatens snow,
And skaters pass; and merry boys go forth
To look for slides. But well, well do I know
Whither I would go!

December 1912.

GENITRIX LAESA

(MEASURE OF A SARUM SEQUENCE)

Nature, through these generations
You have nursed us with a patience
Cruelly crossed by malversations,
Marring mother-ministry
To your multitudes, so blended
By your processes, long-tended,
And the painstaking expended
On their chording tunefully.

But this stuff of slowest moulding,
In your fancy ever enfolding
Life that rhythmic chime is holding:
(Yes; so deem it you, Ladye —
This “concordia discors”!) — truly,
Rather, as if some imp unruly
Twitched your artist-arm when newly
Shaping forth your scenery!

Aye. Yet seem you not to know it.
Hence your world-work needs must show it
Good in dream, in deed below it:
(Lady, yes: so sight it we!)
Thus, then, go on fondly thinking:
Why should man your purblind blinking
Crave to cure, when all is sinking
To dissolubility?

THE FADING ROSE

I saw a rose, in bloom, but sad,
Shedding the petals that still it had,
And I heard it say: “O where is she
Who used to come and muse on me?”

“The pruner says she comes no more
Because she loves another flower,
The weeder says she’s tired of me
Because I droop so suddenly.

“Because of a sweetheart she comes not,
Declares the man with the watering-pot;
‘She does not come,’ says he with the rake,
‘Because all women are fickle in make.’

“He with the spade and humorous leer
Says: ‘Know, I delve elsewhere than here,
Mid text-writ stones and grassy heaps,
Round which a curious silence creeps.
““She must get to you underground
If any way at all be found,
For, clad in her beauty, marble’s kin,
‘Tis there I have laid her and trod her in.””

WHEN OATS WERE REAPED

That day when oats were reaped, and wheat was ripe, and barley ripening,
The road-dust hot, and the bleaching grasses dry,
I walked along and said,
While looking just ahead to where some silent people lie:
“I wounded one who’s there, and now know well I wounded her:
But, ah, she does not know that she wounded me!”
And not an air stirred,
Nor a bill of any bird; and no response accorded she.
August 1913.

LOUIE

I am forgetting Louie the buoyant;
Why not raise her phantom, too,
Here in daylight
With the elect one’s?
She will never thrust the foremost figure out of view!
Mid this heat, in gauzy muslin
See I Louie’s life-lit brow
Here in daylight
By the elect one’s. —
Long two strangers they and far apart; such neighbours now!
July 1913.

SHE OPENED THE DOOR

She opened the door of the West to me,
With its loud sea-lashings,
And cliff-side clashings
Of waters rife with revelry.

She opened the door of Romance to me,
The door from a cell
I had known too well,
Too long, till then, and was fain to flee.

She opened the door of a Love to me,
That passed the wry
World-welters by
As far as the arching blue the lea.

She opens the door of the Past to me,
Its magic lights,
Its heavenly heights,
When forward little is to see!

WHAT'S THERE TO TELL?

(SONG)

What's there to tell of the world
More than is told?
— Into its vortex hurled,
Out of it rolled,
Can we yet more of the world
Find to be told?
Lalla-la, lu!

If some could last alive
Much might be told;
Yes, gladness might survive;
But they go cold —
Each and each late alive —
All their tale told.
Lalla-la, lu!

There's little more of the world,
Then, to be told;
Had ever life unfurled
Joys manifold,
There had been more of the world
Left to be told.
Lalla-la, lalla-la, lalla-la, lu!
190*.

THE HARBOUR BRIDGE

From here, the quay, one looks above to mark
The bridge across the harbour, hanging dark
Against the day's-end sky, fair-green in glow
Over and under the middle archway's bow:
It draws its skeleton where the sun has set,
Yea, clear from cutwater to parapet;
On which mild glow, too, lines of rope and spar
Trace themselves black as char.

Down here in shade we hear the painters shift
Against the bollards with a drowsy lift,
As moved by the incoming stealthy tide.
High up across the bridge the burghers glide
As cut black-paper portraits hastening on
In conversation none knows what upon:
Their sharp-edged lips move quickly word by word
To speech that is not heard.

There trails the dreamful girl, who leans and stops,
There presses the practical woman to the shops,

There is a sailor, meeting his wife with a start,
And we, drawn nearer, judge they are keeping apart.
Both pause. She says: "I've looked for you. I thought
We'd make it up." Then no words can be caught.
At last: "Won't you come home?" She moves still nigher:
"Tis comfortable, with a fire."

“No,” he says gloomily. “And, anyhow,
I can’t give up the other woman now:
You should have talked like that in former days,
When I was last home.” They go different ways.
And the west dims, and yellow lamplights shine:
And soon above, like lamps more opaline,
White stars ghost forth, that care not for men’s wives,
Or any other lives.
Weymouth.

VAGRANT’S SONG

(WITH AN OLD WESSEX REFRAIN)

I

When a dark-eyed dawn
Crawls forth, cloud-drawn,
And starlings doubt the night-time’s close;
And “three months yet,”
They seem to fret,
“Before we cease us slaves of snows,
And sun returns
To loose the burns,
And this wild woe called Winter goes!” —
O a hollow tree
Is as good for me
As a house where the back-brand glows!
Che-hane, mother; che-hane, mother,
As a house where the back-brand glows!

II

When autumn brings
A whirr of wings
Among the evergreens around,
And sundry thrills
About their quills
Awe rooks, and misgivings abound,
And the joyless pines
In leaning lines
Protect from gales the lower ground,
O a hollow tree
Is as good for me
As a house of a thousand pound!
Che-hane, mother; che-hane, mother,
As a house of a thousand pound!
“Back-brand” — the log which used to be laid at the back of a wood fire.

FARMER DUNMAN’S FUNERAL

“Bury me on a Sunday,”
He said; “so as to see
Poor folk there. ‘Tis their one day
To spare for following me.”
With forethought of that Sunday,
He wrote, while he was well,
On ten rum-bottles one day,
“Drink for my funeral.”
They buried him on a Sunday,
That folk should not be balked
His wish, as ‘twas their one day:
And forty couple walked.
They said: “To have it Sunday
Was always his concern;
His meaning being that one day
He’d do us a good turn.
“We must, had it been Monday,
Have got it over soon,
But now we gain, being Sunday,
A jolly afternoon.”

THE SEXTON AT LONGPUDDLE

He passes down the churchyard track
On his way to toll the bell;
And stops, and looks at the graves around,
And notes each finished and greening mound
Complacently,
As their shaper he,
And one who can do it well,
And, with a prosperous sense of his doing,
Thinks he'll not lack
Plenty such work in the long ensuing
Futurity.
For people will always die,
And he will always be nigh
To shape their cell.

THE HARVEST-SUPPER

(Circa 1850)

Nell and the other maids danced their best
With the Scotch-Greys in the barn;
These had been asked to the harvest-feast;
Red shapes amid the corn.

Nell and the other maids sat in a row
Within the benched barn-nook;
Nell led the songs of long ago
She'd learnt from never a book.

She sang of the false Sir John of old,
The lover who witched to win,
And the parrot, and cage of glittering gold;
And the other maids joined in.

Then whispered to her a gallant Grey,
"Dear, sing that ballet again!
For a bonnier mouth in a bonnier way
Has sung not anywhen!"

As she loosed her lips anew there sighed
To Nell through the dark barn-door
The voice of her Love from the night outside,
Who was buried the month before:

“O Nell, can you sing ballets there,
And I out here in the clay,
Of lovers false of yore, nor care
What you vowed to me one day!

“O can you dance with soldiers bold,
Who kiss when dancing’s done,
Your little waist within their hold,
As ancient troth were none!”

She cried: “My heart is pierced with a wound!
There’s something outside the wall
That calls me forth to a greening mound:
I can sing no more at all!

“My old Love rises from the worms,
Just as he used to be,
And I must let gay gallants’ arms
No more encircle me!”

They bore her home from the merry-making;
Bad dreams disturbed her bed:
“Nevermore will I dance and sing,”
Mourned Nell; “and never wed!”

AT A PAUSE IN A COUNTRY DANCE

(MIDDLE OF LAST CENTURY)

They stood at the foot of the figure,
And panted: they’d danced it down through —
That “Dashing White Serjeant” they loved so: —
A window, uncurtained, was nigh them
That end of the room. Thence in view

Outside it a valley updrew,
Where the frozen moon lit frozen snow:
At the furthest reach of the valley
A light from a window shone low.

“They are inside that window,” said she,

As she looked. “They sit up there for me;
And baby is sleeping there, too.”
He glanced. “Yes,” he said. “Never mind,
Let’s foot our way up again; do!
And dance down the line as before.

What's the world to us, meeting once more!"
" — Not much, when your husband full trusts you,
And thinks the child his that I bore!"
He was silent. The fiddlers six-eighted
With even more passionate vigour.

The pair swept again up the figure,
The child's cuckoo-father and she,
And the next couples threaded below,
And the twain wove their way to the top
Of "The Dashing White Serjeant" they loved so,
Restarting: right, left, to and fro.

— From the homestead, seen yon, the small glow
Still adventured forth over the white,
Where the child slept, unknowing who sired it,
In the cradle of wicker tucked tight,
And its grandparents, nodding, admired it
In elbow-chairs through the slow night.

ON THE PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN ABOUT TO BE HANGED

Comely and capable one of our race,
Posing there in your gown of grace,
Plain, yet becoming;
Could subtlest breast
Ever have guessed
What was behind that innocent face,
Drumming, drumming!

Would that your Causer, ere knoll your knell
For this riot of passion, might deign to tell
Why, since It made you
Sound in the germ,
It sent a worm
To madden Its handiwork, when It might well
Not have assayed you,

Not have implanted, to your deep rue,
The Clytaemnestra spirit in you,
And with purblind vision
Sowed a tare
In a field so fair,
And a thing of symmetry, seemly to view,
Brought to derision!
January 6, 1923.

THE CHURCH AND THE WEDDING

“I’ll restore this old church for our marriage:
I’ve ordered the plans:
Style of wedding your choice — foot or carriage —
By licence, or banns.”

He restored it, as though built newly:
The bishop was won
To preach, who pronounced it truly
A thing well done.

But the wedding waits; long, long has waited;
And guesswork is dumb
Why those who were there to have mated
Do not come.

And when the nights moan like the wailings
Of souls sore-tried,
The folk say who pass the church-palings
They hear inside

Strange sounds as of anger and sadness
That cut the heart’s core,
And shaken words bitter to madness;
And then no more.

THE SHIVER

Five lone clangs from the house-clock nigh,
And I woke with a sigh:
Stars wore west like a slow tide flowing,
And my lover had told yesternight of his going, —
That at this gray hour he’d be hasting by,

Starting betimes on a journey afar: —
So, casement ajar,
I eyed in the upland pasture his figure,
A dim dumb speck, growing darker and bigger,
Then smalling to nought where the nut-trees are.

He could not bend his track to my window, he'd said,
Being hurried ahead:
But I wished he had tried to! — and then felt a shiver,
Corpse-cold, as he sank toward the town by the river;
And back I went sadly and slowly to bed.

What meant my shiver while seeing him pass
As a dot on the grass
I surmised not then. But later I knew it
When came again he; and my words outdrew it,
As said he: "It's hard for your bearing, alas!

"But I've seen, I have clasped, where the smart ships plough,
One of far brighter brow.
A sea-goddess. Shiver not. One far rarer
In gifts than I find thee; yea, warmer and fairer: —
I seek her again; and I love you not now."

NOT ONLY I

Not only I
Am doomed awhile to lie
In this close bin with earthen sides;
But the things I thought, and the songs I sang,
And the hopes I had, and the passioned pang
For people I knew
Who passed before me,
Whose memory barely abides;
And the visions I drew
That daily upbore me!

And the joyous springs and summers,
And the jaunts with blithe newcomers,
And my plans and appearances; drives and rides
That fanned my face to a lively red;
And the grays and blues
Of the far-off views,
That nobody else discerned outspread;
And little achievements for blame or praise;
Things left undone; things left unsaid;
In brief, my days!
Compressed here in six feet by two,
In secrecy
To lie with me
Till the Call shall be,
Are all these things I knew,
Which cannot be handed on;
Strange happenings quite unrecorded,
Lost to the world and disregarded,
That only thinks: "Here moulders till Doom's-dawn
A woman's skeleton."

SHE SAW HIM, SHE SAID

"Why, I saw you with the sexton, outside the church-door,
So I did not hurry me home,
Thinking you'd not be come,
Having something to him to say. —
Yes: 'twas you, Dear, though you seemed sad, heart-sore;
How fast you've got therefrom!"

"I've not been out. I've watched the moon through the birch,
And heard the bell toll. Yes,
Like a passing soul in distress!"
"— But no bell's tolled to-day?" . . .
His face looked strange, like the face of him seen by the church,
And she sank to musefulness.

ONCE AT SWANAGE

The spray sprang up across the cusps of the moon,
And all its light loomed green
As a witch-flame's weirdsome sheen
At the minute of an incantation scene;
And it greened our gaze — that night at demilune.

Roaring high and roaring low was the sea
Behind the headland shores:
It symbolled the slamming of doors,
Or a regiment hurrying over hollow floors. . . .
And there we two stood, hands clasped; I and she!

THE FLOWER'S TRAGEDY

In the bedchamber window, near the glass,
Stood the little flower in the little vase,
Unnoticed quite
For a whole fortnight,
And withered for lack of watering
To a skeleton mere — a mummied thing.

But it was not much, mid a world of teen,
That a flower should waste in a nook unseen!

One needed no thought to ascertain
How it happened; that when she went in the rain
To return here not,
She was mindless what
She had left here to perish. — Ah, well: for an hour
I wished I had not found the flower!

Yet it was not much. And she never had known
Of the flower's fate; nor it of her own.

AT THE AQUATIC SPORTS

With their backs to the sea two fiddlers stand
Facing the concourse on the strand,
And a third man who sings.
The sports proceed; there are crab-catchings;
The people laugh as levity spreads;
Yet these three do not turn their heads
To see whence the merriment springs.

They cease their music, but even then
They stand as before, do those three men,
Though pausing, nought to do:
They never face to the seaward view
To enjoy the contests, add their cheer,
So wholly is their being here
A business they pursue.

A WATCHER'S REGRET

J. E.'S STORY

I slept across the front of the clock,
Close to the long case-door;
The hours were brought by their brazen knock
To my ear as the slow nights wore.

Thus did I, she being sick to death,
That each hour as it belled
Should wake me to rise, and learn by her breath
Whether her strength still held.

Yet though throughout life's midnights all
I would have watched till spent
For her dear sake, I missed the call
Of the hour in which she went.

HORSES ABOARD

Horses in horsecloths stand in a row
On board the huge ship that at last lets go:
Whither are they sailing? They do not know,
Nor what for, nor how. —
They are horses of war,
And are going to where there is fighting afar;
But they gaze through their eye-holes unwitting they are,
And that in some wilderness, gaunt and ghast,
Their bones will bleach ere a year has passed,
And the item be as "war-waste" classed. —
And when the band booms, and the folk say "Good-bye!"
And the shore slides astern, they appear wrenched awry
From the scheme Nature planned for them, — wondering why.

THE HISTORY OF AN HOUR

Vain is the wish to try rhyming it, writing it!
Pen cannot weld into words what it was;
Time will be squandered in toil at inditing it;
Clear is the cause!

Yea, 'twas too satiate with soul, too ethereal;
June-morning scents of a rose-bush in flower
Catch in a clap-net of hempen material;
So catch that hour!

THE MISSED TRAIN

How I was caught
Hieing home, after days of allure,
And forced to an inn — small, obscure —
At the junction, gloom-fraught.

How civil my face
To get them to chamber me there —
A roof I had scorned, scarce aware
That it stood at the place.

And how all the night
I had dreams of the unwitting cause
Of my lodgment. How lonely I was;
How consoled by her sprite!

Thus onetime to me . . .
Dim wastes of dead years bar away
Then from now. But such happenings to-day
Fall to lovers, may be!

Years, years as shoaled seas,
Truly, stretch now between! Less and less
Shrink the visions then vast in me. — Yes,
Then in me: Now in these.

UNDER HIGH-STOY HILL

Four climbed High-Stoy from Ivelwards,
Where hedge meets hedge, and cart-ruts wind,
Chattering like birds,
And knowing not what lay behind.

We laughed beneath the moonlight blink,
Said supper would be to our mind,
And did not think
Of Time, and what might lie behind. . . .

The moon still meets that tree-tipped height,
The road — as then — still trails inclined;
But since that night
We have well learnt what lay behind!

For all of the four then climbing here
But one are ghosts, and he brow-lined;
With him they fare,
Yet speak not of what lies behind.

AT THE MILL

O Miller Knox, whom we knew well,
And the mill, and the floury floors,
And the corn, — and those two women,
And infants — yours!

The sun was shining when you rode
To market on that day:
The sun was set when home-along
You ambled in the gray,
And gathered what had taken place
While you were away.

O Miller Knox, 'twas grief to see
Your good wife hanging there
By her own rash and passionate hand,
In a throe of despair;

And those two children, one by her,
And one by the waiting-maid,
Borne the same hour, and you afar,
And she past aid.

And though sometimes you walk of nights,
Sleepless, to Yalbury Brow,
And glance the graveyard way, and grunt,
“'Twas not much, anyhow:
She shouldn't ha' minded!” nought it helps
To say that now.

And the water dribbles down your wheel,
Your mead blooms green and gold,
And birds 'twit in your apple-boughs
Just as of old.

ALIKE AND UNLIKE

(GREAT-ORME'S HEAD)

We watched the selfsame scene on that long drive,
Saw the magnificent purples, as one eye,
Of those near mountains; saw the storm arrive;
Laid up the sight in memory, you and I,
As if for joint recallings by and by.

But our eye-records, like in hue and line,
Had superimposed on them, that very day,
Gravings on your side deep, but slight on mine! —
Tending to sever us thenceforth alway;
Mine commonplace; yours tragic, gruesome, gray.

THE THING UNPLANNED

The white winter sun struck its stroke on the bridge,
The meadow-rills rippled and gleamed
As I left the thatched post-office, just by the ridge,
And dropped in my pocket her long tender letter,
With: "This must be snapped! it is more than it seemed;
And now is the opportune time!"

But against what I willed worked the surging sublime
Of the thing that I did — the thing better!

THE SHEEP-BOY

A yawning, sunned concave
Of purple, spread as an ocean wave
Entroughed on a morning of swell and sway
After a night when wind-fiends have been heard to rave:
Thus was the Heath called "Draäts," on an August day.

Suddenly there intunes a hum:
This side, that side, it seems to come.
From the purple in myriads rise the bees
With consternation mid their rapt employ.
So headstrongly each speeds him past, and flees,
As to strike the face of the shepherd-boy.
Awhile he waits, and wonders what they mean;
Till none is left upon the shagged demesne.
To learn what ails, the sheep-boy looks around;
Behind him, out of the sea in swirls
Flexuous and solid, clammy vapour-curls
Are rolling over Pokeswell Hills to the inland ground,
Into the heath they sail,
And travel up the vale
Like the moving pillar of cloud raised by the Israelite: —
In a trice the lonely sheep-boy seen so late ago,
Draäts'-Hollow in gorgeous blow,
And Kite-Hill's regal glow,
Are viewless — folded into those creeping scrolls of white.
On Rainbarrows.

RETTY'S PHASES

I

Retty used to shake her head,
Look with wicked eye;
Say, "I'd tease you, simple Ned,
If I cared to try!"
Then she'd hot-up scarlet red,
Stilly step away,
Much afraid that what she'd said
Sounded bold to say.

II

Retty used to think she loved
(Just a little) me.
Not untruly, as it proved
Afterwards to be.

For, when weakness forced her rest
If we walked a mile,
She would whisper she was blest
By my clasp awhile.

III

Retty used at last to say
When she neared the Vale,
“Mind that you, Dear, on that day
Ring my wedding peal!”
And we all, with pulsing pride,
Vigorous sounding gave
Those six bells, the while outside
John filled in her grave.

IV

Retty used to draw me down
To the turfy heaps,
Where, with yeoman, squire, and clown
Noticeless she sleeps.
Now her silent slumber-place
Seldom do I know,
For when last I saw her face
Was so long ago!

From an old draft of 1868.

In many villages it was customary after the funeral of an unmarried young woman to ring a peal as for her wedding while the grave was being filled in, as if Death were not to be allowed to balk her of bridal honours. Young unmarried men were always her bearers.

A POOR MAN AND A LADY

We knew it was not a valid thing,
And only sanct in the sight of God
(To use your phrase), as with fervent nod
You swore your assent when I placed the ring

On your pale slim hand. Our whispering
Was soft as the fan of a turtledove
That round our heads might have seemed to wing;
So solemn were we; so sincere our love.

We could do no better; and thus it stood
Through a time of timorous secret bliss,
Till we were divided, and never a kiss
Of mine could touch you, or likelihood
Illumed our sky that we might, or should
Be each to each in the world's wide eye
What we were unviewed; and our vows make good
In the presence of parents and standers by.

I was a striver with deeds to do,
And little enough to do them with,
And a comely woman of noble kith,
With a courtly match to make, were you;
And we both were young; and though sterling-true
You had proved to our pledge under previous strains,
Our "union," as we called it, grew
Less grave to your eyes in your town campaigns.

Well: the woeful neared, you needn't be told:
The current news-sheets clarioned soon
That you would be wived on a summer noon
By a man of illustrious line and old:
Nor better nor worse than the manifold
Of marriages made, had there not been
Our faith-swearing when fervent-souled,
Which, to me, seemed a breachless bar between.

We met in a Mayfair church, alone:
(The request was mine, which you yielded to.)
"But we were not married at all!" urged you:
"Why, of course we were!" I said. Your tone,
I noted, was world-wise. You went on:
"Twas sweet while it lasted. But you well know
That law is law. He'll be, anon,
My husband really. You, Dear, weren't so."

“I wished — but to learn if — ” faltered I,
And stopped. “But I’ll sting you not. Farewell!”
And we parted. — Do you recall the bell
That tolled by chance as we said good-bye? . . .
I saw you no more. The track of a high,
Sweet, liberal lady you’ve doubtless trod.
— All’s past! No heart was burst thereby,
And no one knew, unless it was God.

The foregoing was intended to preserve an episode in the story of “The Poor Man and the Lady,” written in 1868, and, like these lines, in the first person; but never printed, and ultimately destroyed.

AN EXPOSTULATION

Why want to go afar
Where pitfalls are,
When all we swains adore
Your featness more and more
As heroine of our artless masquings here,
And count few Wessex’ daughters half so dear?

Why paint your appealing face,
When its born grace
Is such no skill can match
With powder, puff, or patch,
Whose every touch defames your bloomfulness,
And with each stain increases our distress?

Yea, is it not enough
That (rare or rough
Your lines here) all uphold you,
And as with wings enfold you,
But you must needs desert the kine-cropt vale
Wherein your foredames gaily filled the pail?

TO A SEA-CLIFF

(DURLSTON HEAD)

Lend me an ear
While I read you here
A page from your history,
Old cliff — not known
To your solid stone,
Yet yours inseparably.
Near to your crown
There once sat down
A silent listless pair;
And the sunset ended,
And dark descended,
And still the twain sat there.
Past your jutting head
Then a line-ship sped,
Lit brightly as a city;
And she sobbed: "There goes
A man who knows
I am his, beyond God's pity!"
He slid apart
Who had thought her heart
His own, and not aboard
A bark, sea-bound. . . .
That night they found
Between them lay a sword.

THE ECHO-ELF ANSWERS

How much shall I love her?
For life, or not long?
"Not long."
Alas! When forget her?
In years, or by June?
"By June."
And whom woo I after?
No one, or a throng?
"A throng."
Of these shall I wed one
Long hence, or quite soon?
"Quite soon."

And which will my bride be?
The right or the wrong?
“The wrong.”
And my remedy — what kind?
Wealth-wove, or earth-hewn?
“Earth-hewn.”

CYNIC’S EPITAPH

A race with the sun as he downed
I ran at evetide,
Intent who should first gain the ground
And there hide.
He beat me by some minutes then,
But I triumphed anon,
For when he’d to rise up again
I stayed on.

A BEAUTY’S SOLILOQUY DURING HER HONEYMOON

Too late, too late! I did not know my fairness
Would catch the world’s keen eyes so!
How the men look at me! My radiant rareness
I deemed not they would prize so!
That I was a peach for any man’s possession
Why did not some one say
Before I leased myself in an hour’s obsession
To this dull mate for aye!
His days are mine. I am one who cannot steal her
Ahead of his plodding pace:
As he is, so am I. One doomed to feel her
A wasted form and face!
I was so blind! It did sometimes just strike me
All girls were not as I,
But, dwelling much alone, how few were like me
I could not well descry;

Till, at this Grand Hotel, all looks bend on me
In homage as I pass
To take my seat at breakfast, dinner, — con me
As poorly spoused, alas!

I was too young. I dwelt too much on duty:
If I had guessed my powers
Where might have sailed this cargo of choice beauty
In its unanchored hours!

Well, husband, poor plain man; I've lost life's battle! —
Come — let them look at me.

O damn, don't show in your looks that I'm your chattel
Quite so emphatically!

In a London Hotel, 1892.

DONAGHADEE

(SONG)

I've never gone to Donaghadee,
That vague far townlet by the sea;
In Donaghadee I shall never be:
Then why do I sing of Donaghadee,
That I know not in a faint degree? . . .

— Well, once a woman wrote to me
With a tender pen from Donaghadee.

“Susan,” I've sung, “Pride of Kildare,”
Because I'd heard of a Susan there,
The “Irish Washerwoman's” capers
I've shared for hours to midnight tapers,

And “Kitty O'Linch” has made me spin
Till dust rose high, and day broke in:
That other “Kitty, of Coleraine,”
Too, set me aching in heart and brain:
While “Kathleen Mavourneen,” of course, would ring
When that girl learnt to make me sing.

Then there was “Irish Molly O”
I tuned as “the fairest one I know,”
And “Nancy Dawson,” if I remember,
Rhymed sweet in moonlight one September.

But the damsel who once wrote so free
And tender-toned from Donaghadee,
Is a woman who has no name for me —
Moving sylph-like, mysteriously,
(For doubtless, of that sort is she)
In the pathways of her destiny;
But that is where I never shall be; —
And yet I sing of Donaghadee!

HE INADVERTENTLY CURES HIS LOVE-PAINS

(SONG)

I said: "O let me sing the praise
Of her who sweetly racks my days, —
Her I adore;
Her lips, her eyes, her moods, her ways!"
In miseries of pulse and pang
I strung my harp, and straightway sang
As none before: —
To wondrous words my quavers rang!
Thus I let heartaches lilt my verse,
Which suaged and soothed, and made disperse
The smarts I bore
To stagnance like a sepulchre's.
But, eased, the days that thrilled ere then
Lost value; and I ask, O when,
And how, restore
Those old sweet agonies again!

THE PEACE PEAL

(AFTER FOUR YEARS OF SILENCE)

Said a wistful daw in Saint Peter's tower,
High above Casterbridge slates and tiles,
"Why do the walls of my Gothic bower
Shiver, and shrill out sounds for miles?
This gray old rubble
Has scorned such din
Since I knew trouble
And joy herein.
How still did abide them
These bells now swung,
While our nest beside them
Securely clung! . . .
It means some snare
For our feet or wings;
But I'll be ware
Of such baleful things!"
And forth he flew from his louvred niche
To take up life in a damp dark ditch.
— So mortal motives are misread,
And false designs attributed,
In upper spheres of straws and sticks,
Or lower, of pens and politics.
At the end of the War.

LADY VI

There goes the Lady Vi. How well,
How well I know the spectacle
The earth presents
And its events
To her sweet sight
Each day and night!

“Life is a wheeling show, with me
As its pivot of interest constantly.
Below in the hollows of towns is sin,
Like a blue brimstone mist therein,
Which makes men lively who plunge amid it,
But wrongfully, and wives forbid it.
London is a place for prancing
Along the Row and, later, dancing
Till dawn, with tightening arm-embowments
As hours warm up to tender moments.

“Travel is piquant, and most thrilling
If, further, joined to big-game killing:
At home, too, hunting, hounds full cry,
When Reynard nears his time to die,
‘Tis glee to mark his figure flag,
And how his brush begins to drag,
Till, his earth reached by many a wend,
He finds it stopped, and meets his end.

“Religion is good for all who are meek;
It stays in the Bible through the week,
And floats about the house on Sundays,
But does not linger on till Mondays.
The ten Commandments in one’s prime
Are matter for another time,
While griefs and graves and things allied
In well-bred talk one keeps outside.”

A POPULAR PERSONAGE AT HOME

“I live here: ‘Wessex’ is my name:
I am a dog known rather well:
I guard the house; but how that came
To be my whim I cannot tell.

“With a leap and a heart elate I go
At the end of an hour’s expectancy
To take a walk of a mile or so
With the folk I let live here with me.

“Along the path, amid the grass
I sniff, and find out rarest smells
For rolling over as I pass
The open fields towards the dells.

“No doubt I shall always cross this sill,
And turn the corner, and stand steady,
Gazing back for my mistress till
She reaches where I have run already,

“And that this meadow with its brook,
And bulrush, even as it appears
As I plunge by with hasty look,
Will stay the same a thousand years.”

Thus “Wessex.” But a dubious ray
At times informs his steadfast eye,
Just for a trice, as though to say,
“Yet, will this pass, and pass shall I?”

1924

INSCRIPTIONS FOR A PEAL OF EIGHT BELLS

AFTER A RESTORATION

I

Thomas Tremble new-made me
Eighteen hundred and fifty-three:
Why he did I fail to see.

II

I was well-toned by William Brine,
Seventeen hundred and twenty-nine;
Now, re-cast, I weakly whine!

III

Fifteen hundred used to be
My date, but since they melted me
‘Tis only eighteen fifty-three.

IV

Henry Hopkins got me made,
And I summon folk as bade;
Not to much purpose, I’m afraid!

V

I likewise; for I bang and bid
In commoner metal than I did,
Some of me being stolen and hid.

VI

I, too, since in a mould they flung me,
Drained my silver, and rehung me,
So that in tin-like tones I tongue me.

VII

In nineteen hundred, so 'tis said,
They cut my canon off my head,
And made me look scalped, scraped, and dead.

VIII

I'm the peal's tenor still, but rue it!
Once it took two to swing me through it:
Now I'm rehung, one dolt can do it.

A REFUSAL

Said the grave Dean of Westminster:
Mine is the best minster
Seen in Great Britain,
As many have written:
So therefore I cannot
Rule here if I ban not
Such liberty-taking
As movements for making

Its grayness environ
The memory of Byron,
Which some are demanding
Who think them of standing,
But in my own viewing
Require some subduing
For tendering suggestions
On Abbey-wall questions
That must interfere here
With my proper sphere here,
And bring to disaster
This fane and its master,
Whose dict is but Christian
Though nicknamed Philistian.

A lax Christian charity —
No mental clarity
Ruling its movements
For fabric improvements —
Demands admonition
And strict supervision
When bent on enshrining
Rapscallions, and signing
Their names on God's stonework,
As if like His own work
Were their lucubrations:
And passed is my patience
That such a creed-scorner
(Not mentioning horner)
Should claim Poet's Corner.

'Tis urged that some sinners
Are here for worms' dinners
Already in person;
That he could not worsen
The walls by a name mere
With men of such fame here.
Yet nay; they but leaven
The others in heaven
In just true proportion,
While more mean distortion.

'Twill next be expected
That I get erected
To Shelley a tablet
In some niche or gablet.
Then — what makes my skin burn,
Yea, forehead to chin burn —
That I ensconce Swinburne!
August 1924.

EPITAPH ON A PESSIMIST

I'm Smith of Stoke, aged sixty-odd,
I've lived without a dame
From youth-time on; and would to God
My dad had done the same.
From the French and Greek.

THE PROTEAN MAIDEN

(SONG)

This single girl is two girls:
How strange such things should be!
One noon eclipsed by few girls,
The next no beauty she.

And daily cries the lover,
In voice and feature vext:
"My last impression of her
Is never to be the next!

"She's plain: I will forget her!
She's turned to fair. Ah no,
Forget? — not I! I'll pet her
With kisses swift and slow."

A WATERING-PLACE LADY INVENTORIED

A sweetness of temper unsurpassed and unforgettable,
A mole on the cheek whose absence would have been regrettable,
A ripple of pleasant converse full of modulation,
A bearing of inconveniences without vexation,
Till a cynic would find her amiability provoking,
Tempting him to indulge in mean and wicked joking.

Flawlessly oval of face, especially cheek and chin,
With a glance of a quality that beckoned for a glance akin,
A habit of swift assent to any intelligence broken,
Before the fact to be conveyed was fully spoken
And she could know to what her colloquist would win her, —
This from a too alive impulsion to sympathy in her, —
All with a sense of the ridiculous, keen yet charitable;
In brief, a rich, profuse attractiveness unnarratable.

I should have added her hints that her husband prized her but slenderly,
And that (with a sigh) 'twas a pity she'd no one to treat her tenderly.

THE SEA FIGHT

31 May: 1916

IN MEMORIAM CAPTAIN PROWSE

Down went the grand "Queen Mary,"
"Queen Mary's" captain, and her crew;
The brunt of battle bare he,
And he died;
And he died, as heroes do.

More really now we view him,
More really lives he, moves with men,
Than while on earth we knew him
As our fellow,
As our fellow-denizen.

Maybe amid the changes
Of ocean's caverned dim profound,
Gaily his spirit ranges
With his comrades,
With his comrades all around.

1916

PARADOX

(M. H.)

Though out of sight now, and as 'twere not the least to us;
Comes she in sorrows, as one bringing peace to us?
Lost to each meadow, each hill-top, each tree around,
Yet the whole truth may her largened sight see around?
Always away from us
She may not stray from us!
Can she, then, know how men's fatings befall?
Yea indeed, may know well; even know thereof all.

THE ROVER COME HOME

He's journeyed through America
From Canso Cape to Horn,
And from East Indian Comorin
To Behring's Strait forlorn;
He's felled trees in the backwoods,
In swamps has gasped for breath;
In Tropic heats, in Polar ice,
Has often prayed for death.

He has fought and bled in civil wars
Of no concern to him,
Has shot his fellows — beasts and men —
At risk of life and limb.
He has suffered fluxes, fevers.
Agues, and ills allied,
And now he's home. You look at him
As he talks by your fireside.

And what is written in his glance
Stressed by such foreign wear,
After such alien circumstance
What does his face declare?
His mother's; she who saw him not
After his starting year,
Who never left her native spot,
And lies in the churchyard near.

KNOWN HAD I

(SONG)

Known had I what I knew not
When we met eye to eye,
That thenceforth I should view not
Again beneath the sky
So truefooted a farer
As you who faced me then,
My path had been a rarer
Than it figures among men!

I would have trod beside you
To guard your feet all day,
And borne at night to guide you
A lantern on your way:
Would not have left you lonely
With wringing doubt, to cow
Old hope, if I could only
Have known what I know now.

THE PAT OF BUTTER

Once, at the Agricultural Show,
We tasted — all so yellow —
Those butter-pats, cool and mellow!
Each taste I still remember, though
It was so long ago.

This spoke of the grass of Netherhay,
And this of Kingcomb Hill,
And this of Coker Rill:
Which was the prime I could not say
Of all those tried that day,

Till she, the fair and wicked-eyed,
Held out a pat to me:
Then felt I all Yeo-Lea
Was by her sample sheer outvied;
And, "This is the best," I cried.

BAGS OF MEAT

“Here’s a fine bag of meat,”
Says the master-auctioneer,
As the timid, quivering steer,
Starting a couple of feet
At the prod of a drover’s stick,
And trotting lightly and quick,
A ticket stuck on his rump,
Enters with a bewildered jump.

“Where he’s lived lately, friends,
I’d live till lifetime ends:
They’ve a whole life everyday
Down there in the Vale, have they!
He’d be worth the money to kill
And give away Christmas for good-will.”

“Now here’s a heifer — worth more
Than bid, were she bone-poor;
Yet she’s round as a barrel of beer”;
“She’s a plum,” said the second auctioneer.

“Now this young bull — for thirty pound?
Worth that to manure your ground!”
“Or to stand,” chimed the second one,
“And have his picter done!”

The beast was rapped on the horns and snout
To make him turn about.

“Well,” cried a buyer, “another crown —
Since I’ve dragged here from Taunton Town!”

“That calf, she sucked three cows,
Which is not matched for bouse
In the nurseries of high life
By the first-born of a nobleman’s wife!”
The stick falls, meaning, “A true tale’s told,”
On the buttock of the creature sold,
And the buyer leans over and snips
His mark on one of the animal’s hips.

Each beast, when driven in,
Looks round at the ring of bidders there
With a much-amazed reproachful stare,
As at unnatural kin,
For bringing him to a sinister scene
So strange, unhomelike, hungry, mean;
His fate the while suspended between
A butcher, to kill out of hand,
And a farmer, to keep on the land;
One can fancy a tear runs down his face
When the butcher wins, and he's driven from the place.

THE SUNDIAL ON A WET DAY

I drip, drip here
In Atlantic rain,
Falling like handfuls
Of winnowed grain,
Which, tear-like, down
My gnomon drain,
And dim my numerals
With their stain, —
Till I feel useless,
And wrought in vain!
And then I think
In my despair
That, though unseen,
He is still up there,
And may gaze out
Anywhen, anywhere;
Not to help clockmen
Quiz and compare,
But in kindness to let me
My trade declare.
St. Juliot.

HER HAUNTING-GROUND

Can it be so? It must be so,
That visions have not ceased to be
In this the chiefest sanctuary
Of her whose form we used to know.
— Nay, but her dust is far away,
And “where her dust is, shapes her shade,
If spirit clings to flesh,” they say:
Yet here her life-parts most were played!

Her voice explored this atmosphere,
Her foot impressed this turf around,
Her shadow swept this slope and mound,
Her fingers fondled blossoms here;
And so, I ask, why, why should she
Haunt elsewhere, by a slighted tomb,
When here she flourished sorrow-free,
And, save for others, knew no gloom?

A PARTING-SCENE

The two pale women cried,
But the man seemed to suffer more,
Which he strove hard to hide.
They stayed in the waiting-room, behind the door,
Till startled by the entering engine-roar,
As if they could not bear to have unfurled
Their misery to the eyes of all the world.

A soldier and his young wife
Were the couple; his mother the third,
Who had seen the seams of life.
He was sailing for the East I later heard.
— They kissed long, but they did not speak a word;
Then, strained, he went. To the elder the wife in tears
“Too long; too long!” burst out. (‘Twas for five years.)

SHORTENING DAYS AT THE HOMESTEAD

The first fire since the summer is lit, and is smoking into the room:
The sun-rays thread it through, like woof-lines in a loom.
Sparrows spurt from the hedge, whom misgivings appal
That winter did not leave last year for ever, after all.
Like shock-headed urchins, spiny-haired,
Stand pollard willows, their twigs just bared.

Who is this coming with pondering pace,
Black and ruddy, with white embossed,
His eyes being black, and ruddy his face
And the marge of his hair like morning frost?
It's the cider-maker,
And appletree-shaker,
And behind him on wheels, in readiness,
His mill, and tubs, and vat, and press.

DAYS TO RECOLLECT

Do you recall
That day in Fall
When we walked towards Saint Alban's Head,
On thistledown that summer had shed,
Or must I remind you?
Winged thistle-seeds which hitherto
Had lain as none were there, or few,
But rose at the brush of your petticoat-seam
(As ghosts might rise of the recent dead),
And sailed on the breeze in a nebulous stream
Like a comet's tail behind you:
You don't recall
That day in Fall?

Then do you remember
That sad November
When you left me never to see me more,
And looked quite other than theretofore,
As if it could not be you?
And lay by the window whence you had gazed
So many times when blamed or praised,
Morning or noon, through years and years,
Accepting the gifts that Fortune bore,
Sharing, enduring, joys, hopes, fears!
Well: I never more did see you. —
Say you remember
That sad November!

TO C. F. H.

ON HER CHRISTENING-DAY

Fair Caroline, I wonder what
You think of earth as a dwelling-spot,
And if you'd rather have come, or not?

To-day has laid on you a name
That, though unasked for, you will claim
Lifelong, for love or praise or blame.

May chance and change impose on you
No heavier burthen than this new
Care-chosen one your future through!

Dear stranger here, the prayer is mine
That your experience may combine
Good things with glad. . . . Yes, Caroline!

THE HIGH-SCHOOL LAWN

Gray prinked with rose,
White tipped with blue,
Shoes with gay hose,
Sleeves of chrome hue;

Fluffed frills of white,
Dark bordered light;
Such shimmerings through
Trees of emerald green are eyed
This afternoon, from the road outside.

They whirl around:
Many laughters run
With a cascade's sound;
Then a mere one.

A bell: they flee:
Silence then: —
So it will be
Some day again
With them, — with me.

THE FORBIDDEN BANNS

A BALLAD OF THE EIGHTEEN-THIRTIES

I

“O what's the gain, my worthy Sir,
In stopping the banns to-day!
Your son declares he'll marry her
If a thousand folk say Nay.”

“I'll do't; I'll do't; whether or no!
And, if I drop down dead,
To church this morning I will go,
And say they shall not wed!”

That day the parson clear outspoke
The maid's name and the man's:
His father, mid the assembled folk,
Said, “I forbid the banns!”

Then, white in face, lips pale and cold,
He turned him to sit down,
When he fell forward; and behold,
They found his life had flown.

II

'Twas night-time, towards the middle part,
When low her husband said,
"I would from the bottom of my heart
That father was not dead!"

She turned from one to the other side,
And a sad woman was she
As he went on: "He'd not have died
Had it not been for me!"

She brought him soon an idiot child,
And then she brought another:
His face waned wan, his manner wild
With hatred of their mother.

"Hearken to me, my son. No: no:
There's madness in her blood!"
Those were his father's words; and lo,
Now, now he understood.

What noise is that? One noise, and two
Resound from a near gun.
Two corpses found: and neighbours knew
By whom the deed was done.

THE PAPHIAN BALL

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS EXPERIENCE OF THE MELLSTOCK QUIRE

We went our Christmas rounds once more,
With quire and viols as therefore.

Our path was near by Rushy-Pond,
Where Egdon-Heath outstretched beyond.

There stood a figure against the moon,
Tall, spare, and humming a weirdsome tune.

"You tire of Christian carols," he said:
"Come and lute at a ball instead.

"'Tis to your gain, for it ensures
That many guineas will be yours.

"A slight condition hangs on't, true,
But you will scarce say nay thereto:

"That you go blindfold; that anon
The place may not be gossiped on."

They stood and argued with each other:
 "Why sing from one house to another
 "These ancient hymns in the freezing night,
 And all for nought? 'Tis foolish, quite!"
 " — 'Tis serving God, and shunning evil:
 Might not elsedoing serve the devil?"
 "But grand pay!" . . . They were lured by his call,
 Agreeing to go blindfold all.
 They walked, he guiding, some new track,
 Doubting to find the pathway back.
 In a strange hall they found them when
 They were unblinded all again.
 Gilded alcoves, great chandeliers,
 Voluptuous paintings ranged in tiers,
 In brief, a mansion large and rare,
 With rows of dancers waiting there.
 They tuned and played; the couples danced;
 Half-naked women tripped, advanced,
 With handsome partners footing fast,
 Who swore strange oaths, and whirled them past.
 And thus and thus the slow hours wore them:
 While shone their guineas heaped before them.
 Drowsy at length, in lieu of the dance
 "While Shepherds watched . . ." they bowed by chance;
 And in a moment, at a blink,
 There flashed a change; ere they could think
 The ball-room vanished and all its crew:
 Only the well-known heath they view —
 The spot of their crossing overnight,
 When wheedled by the stranger's sleight.
 There, east, the Christmas dawn hung red,
 And dark Rainbarrow with its dead
 Bulged like a supine negress' breast
 Against Clyffe-Clump's faint far-off crest.
 Yea; the rare mansion, gorgeous, bright,
 The ladies, gallants, gone were quite.
 The heaped-up guineas, too, were gone
 With the gold table they were on.
 "Why did not grasp we what was owed!"
 Cried some, as homeward, shamed, they strode.
 Now comes the marvel and the warning:
 When they had dragged to church next morning,

With downcast heads and scarce a word,
They were astound at what they heard.

Praises from all came forth in showers
For how they'd cheered the midnight hours.

"We've heard you many times," friends said,
"But like that never have you played!

"Rejoice, ye tenants of the earth,
And celebrate your Saviour's birth

"Never so thrilled the darkness through,
Or more inspired us so to do!" . . .

— The man who used to tell this tale
Was the tenor-viol, Michael Mail;

Yes; Mail the tenor, now but earth! —
I give it for what it may be worth.

ON MARTOCK MOOR

I

My deep-dyed husband trusts me,
He feels his mastery sure,
Although I leave his evening hearth
To walk upon the moor.

II

— I had what wealth I needed,
And of gay gowns a score,
And yet I left my husband's house
To muse upon the moor.

III

O how I loved a dear one
Who, save in soul, was poor!
O how I loved the man who met
Me nightly on the moor.

IV

I'd feather-beds and couches,
And carpets for the floor,
Yet brighter to me was, at eves,
The bareness of the moor.

V

There was a dogging figure,
There was a hiss of "Whore!"
There was a frounce at Weir-water
One night upon the moor. . . .

VI

Yet do I haunt there, knowing
By rote each rill's low pour,
But only a fitful phantom now
Meets me upon the moor.

1899

THAT MOMENT

The tragedy of that moment
Was deeper than the sea,
When I came in that moment
And heard you speak to me!

What I could not help seeing
Covered life as a blot;
Yes, that which I was seeing,
And knew that you were not

PREMONITIONS

“The bell went heavy to-day
At afternoon service, they say,
And a screech-owl cried in the boughs,
And a raven flew over the house,
And Betty’s old clock with one hand,
That’s worn out, as I understand,
And never goes now, never will,
Struck twelve when the night was dead still,
Just as when my last loss came to me. . . .
Ah! I wonder who next it will be!”

THIS SUMMER AND LAST

Unhappy summer you,
Who do not see
What your yester-summer saw!
Never, never will you be
Its match to me,
Never, never draw
Smiles your forerunner drew,
Know what it knew!
Divine things done and said
Illumined it,
Whose rays crept into corn-brown curls,
Whose breezes heard a humorous wit
Of fancy flit. —
Still the alert brook purls,
Though feet that there would tread
Elsewhere have sped.
So, bran-new summer, you
Will never see
All that yester-summer saw!
Never, never will you be
In memory
Its rival, never draw
Smiles your forerunner drew,
Know what it knew!
1913?

NOTHING MATTERS MUCH

(B. F. L.)

“Nothing matters much,” he said
Of something just befallen unduly:
He, then active, but now dead,
Truly, truly!

He knew the letter of the law
As voiced by those of wig and gown,
Whose slightest syllogistic flaw
He hammered down.

And often would he shape in word
That nothing needed much lamenting;
And she who sat there smiled and heard,
Sadly assenting.

Facing the North Sea now he lies,
Toward the red altar of the East,
The Flamborough roar his psalmodies,
The wind his priest.

And while I think of his bleak bed,
Of Time that builds, of Time that shatters,
Lost to all thought is he, who said
“Nothing much matters.”

IN THE EVENING

IN MEMORIAM FREDERICI TREVES, 1853–1923 (Dorchester Cemetery, Jan. 2,
1924)

In the evening, when the world knew he was dead,
He lay amid the dust and hoar
Of ages; and to a spirit attending said:
“This chalky bed? —
I surely seem to have been here before?”

“O yes. You have been here. You knew the place,
Substanced as you, long ere your call;
And if you cared to do so you might trace
In this gray space
Your being, and the being of men all.”

Thereto said he: "Then why was I called away?
I knew no trouble or discontent:
Why did I not prolong my ancient stay
Herein for aye?"
The spirit shook its head. "None knows: you went.
"And though, perhaps, Time did not sign to you
The need to go, dream-vision sees
How Aesculapius' phantom hither flew,
With Galen's, too,
And his of Cos — plague-proof Hippocrates,
"And beckoned you forth, whose skill had read as theirs,
Maybe, had Science chanced to spell
In their day, modern modes to stem despairs
That mankind bears! . . .
Enough. You have returned. And all is well."

THE SIX BOARDS

Six boards belong to me:
I do not know where they may be;
If growing green, or lying dry
In a cockloft nigh.
Some morning I shall claim them,
And who may then possess will aim them
To bring to me those boards I need
With thoughtful speed.
But though they hurry so
To yield me mine, I shall not know
How well my want they'll have supplied
When notified.
Those boards and I — how much
In common we, of feel and touch
Shall share thence on, — earth's far core-quakings,
Hill-shocks, tide-shakings —
Yea, hid where none will note,
The once live tree and man, remote
From mundane hurt as if on Venus, Mars,
Or furthest stars.

BEFORE MY FRIEND ARRIVED

I sat on the eve-lit weir,
Which gurgled in sobs and sighs;
I looked across the meadows near
To the towered church on the rise.
Overmuch cause had my look!
I pulled out pencil and book,
And drew a white chalk mound,
Outthrown on the sepulchred ground.

Why did I pencil that chalk?
It was fetched from the waiting grave,
And would return there soon,
Of one who had stilled his walk
And sought oblivion's cave.
He was to come on the morrow noon
And take a good rest in the bed so hewn.

He came, and there he is now, although
This was a wondrous while ago.
And the sun still dons a ruddy dye;
The weir still gurgles nigh;
The tower is dark on the sky.

COMPASSION

AN ODE

In Celebration of the Centenary of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty
to Animals

I

Backward among the dusky years
A lonesome lamp is seen arise,
Lit by a few fain pioneers
Before incredulous eyes. —
We read the legend that it lights:
“Wherefore beholds this land of historied rights
Mild creatures, despot-doomed, bewildered, plead
Their often hunger, thirst, pangs, prisonment,
In deep dumb gaze more eloquent
Than tongues of widest heed?”

II

What was faint-written, read in a breath
In that year — ten times ten away —
A larger louder conscience saith
More sturdily to-day. —
But still those innocents are thralls
To throbbless hearts, near, far, that hear no calls
Of honour towards their too-dependent frail,
And from Columbia Cape to Ind we see
How helplessness breeds tyranny
In power above assail.

III

Cries still are heard in secret nooks,
Till hushed with gag or slit or thud;
And hideous dens whereon none looks
Are sprayed with needless blood.
But here, in battlings, patient, slow,
Much has been won — more, maybe, than we know —
And on we labour hopeful. “Ailino!”
A mighty voice calls: “But may the good prevail!”
And “Blessed are the merciful!”
Calls a yet mightier one.
January 22, 1924.

WHY SHE MOVED HOUSE

(THE DOG MUSES)

Why she moved house, without a word,
I cannot understand;
She'd mirrors, flowers, she'd book and bird,
And callers in a band.

And where she is she gets no sun,
No flowers, no book, no glass;
Of callers I am the only one.
And I but pause and pass.

TRAGEDIAN TO TRAGEDIENNE

Shall I leave you behind me
When I play
In earnest what we've played in mock to-day?
Why, yes; most surely shall I
Leave you behind
In yet full orbit, when my years upwind.
I may creep off in the night-time,
And none know
Till comes the morning, bringing news 'tis so.
Will you then turn for a moment
White or red,
Recall those spells of ours; things done, things said?
Aye, those adventurous doings
And those days
Of stress, when I'd the blame and you the praise?
Still you will meet adventure —
None knows what —
Still you will go on changing: I shall not.
Still take a call at the mummings
Daily or nightly,
Yielding to custom, calmly, gloomily, brightly.
Last, you will flag, and finish
Your masquings too:
Yes: end them: I not there to succour you.

THE LADY OF FOREBODINGS

“What do you so regret, my lady,
Sitting beside me here?
Are there not days as clear
As this to come — ev'n shaped less shady?”
“O no,” said she. “Come what delight
To you, by voice or pen,
To me will fall such day, such night,
Not, not again!”

The lamps above and round were fair,
The tables were alee,
As if 'twould ever be
That we should smile and sit on there.
But yet she said, as though she must,
"Yes: it will soon be gone,
And all its dearness leave but dust
To muse upon."

THE BIRD-CATCHER'S BOY

"Father, I fear your trade:
Surely it's wrong!
Little birds limed and made
Captive life-long.

"Larks bruise and bleed in jail,
Trying to rise;
Every caged nightingale
Soon pines and dies."

"Don't be a dolt, my boy!
Birds must be caught;
My lot is such employ,
Yours to be taught.

"Soft shallow stuff as that
Out from your head!
Just learn your lessons pat,
Then off to bed."

Lightless, without a word
Bedwise he fares;
Groping his way is heard
Seek the dark stairs

Through the long passage, where
Hang the caged choirs:
Harp-like his fingers there
Sweep on the wires.

Next day, at dye of dawn,
Freddy was missed:
Whither the boy had gone
Nobody wist.

That week, the next one, whiled:
No news of him:
Weeks up to months were piled:
Hope dwindled dim.

Yet not a single night
Locked they the door,
Waiting, heart-sick, to sight
Freddy once more.

Hopping there long anon
Still the birds hung:
Like those in Babylon
Captive, they sung.

One wintry Christmastide
Both lay awake;
All cheer within them dried,
Each hour an ache.

Then some one seemed to flit
Soft in below;
“Freddy’s come!” Up they sit,
Faces aglow.

Thereat a groping touch
Dragged on the wires
Lightly and softly — much
As they were lyres;

“Just as it used to be
When he came in,
Feeling in darkness the
Stairway to win!”

Waiting a trice or two
Yet, in the gloom,
Both parents pressed into
Freddy’s old room.

There on the empty bed
White the moon shone,
As ever since they’d said,
“Freddy is gone!”

That night at Durdle-Door
Foundered a hoy,
And the tide washed ashore
One sailor boy.

November 21, 1912.

Durdle-Door, a rock on the south coast.

A HURRIED MEETING

It is August moonlight in the tall plantation,
Whose elms, by aged squirrels' footsteps worn,
Outscreen the noon, and eve, and morn.
On the facing slope a faint irradiation

From a mansion's marble front is borne,
Mute in its woodland wreathing.
Up here the night-jar whirrs forlorn,
And the trees seem to withhold their softest breathing.

To the moonshade slips a woman in muslin vesture:
Her naked neck the gossamer-web besmears,
And she sweeps it away with a hasty gesture
Again it touches her forehead, her neck, her ears,
Her fingers, the backs of her hands.
She sweeps it away again
Impatiently, and then
She takes no notice; and listens, and sighs, and stands.

The night-hawk stops. A man shows in the obscure:
They meet, and passively kiss,
And he says: "Well, I've come quickly. About this —
Is it really so? You are sure?"
"I am sure. In February it will be.
That such a thing should come to me!
We should have known. We should have left off meeting.
Love is a terrible thing: a sweet allure
That ends in heart-outeating!"

"But what shall we do, my Love, and how?"
"You need not call me by that name now."
Then he more coldly: "What is your suggestion?"
"I've told my mother, and she sees a way,
Since of our marriage there can be no question.
We are crossing South — near about New Year's Day
The event will happen there.
It is the only thing that we can dare
To keep them unaware!"

"Well, you can marry me."
She shook her head. "No: that can never be.
"Twill be brought home as hers. She's forty-one,
When many a woman's bearing is not done,
And well might have a son. —
We should have left off specious self-deceiving:

I feared that such might come,
And knowledge struck me numb.
Love is a terrible thing: witching when first begun,
To end in grieving, grieving!"

And with one kiss again the couple parted:
Inferior clearly he; she haughty-hearted.
He watched her down the slope to return to her place.
The marble mansion of her ancient race,
And saw her brush the gossamers from her face
As she emerged from shade to the moonlight ray.
And when she had gone away
The night-jar seemed to imp, and say,
"You should have taken warning:
Love is a terrible thing: sweet for a space,
And then all mourning, mourning!"

DISCOURAGEMENT

To see the Mother, naturing Nature, stand
All racked and wrung by her unfaithful lord,
Her hopes dismayed by his defiling hand,
Her passioned plans for bloom and beauty marred.

Where she would mint a perfect mould, an ill;
Where she would don divinest hues, a stain,
Over her purposed genial hour a chill,
Upon her charm of flawless flesh a blain:

Her loves dependent on a feature's trim,
A whole life's circumstance on hap of birth,
A soul's direction on a body's whim,
Eternal Heaven upon a day of Earth,
Is frost to flower of heroism and worth,
And fosterer of visions ghast and grim.

Westbourne Park Villas, 1863-7.

(From old MS.)

A LEAVING

Knowing what it bore
I watched the rain-smitten back of the car —
(Brown-curtained, such as the old ones were) —
When it started forth for a journey afar
Into the sullen November air,
And passed the glistening laurels and round the bend.

I have seen many gayer vehicles turn that bend
In autumn, winter, and summer air,
Bearing for journeys near or afar
Many who now are not, but were,
But I don't forget that rain-smitten car,
Knowing what it bore!

SONG TO AN OLD BURDEN

The feet have left the wormholed flooring,
That danced to the ancient air,
The fiddler, all-ignoring,
Sleeps by the gray-grassed 'cello player:
Shall I then foot around around around,
As once I footed there!

The voice is heard in the room no longer
That trilled, none sweetlier,
To gentle stops or stronger,
Where now the dust-draped cobwebs stir:
Shall I then sing again again again,
As once I sang with her!

The eyes that beamed out rapid brightness
Have longtime found their close,
The cheeks have wanned to whiteness
That used to sort with summer rose:
Shall I then joy anew anew anew,
As once I joyed in those!

O what's to me this tedious Maying,
What's to me this June?
O why should viols be playing
To catch and reel and rigadoon?
Shall I sing, dance around around around,
When phantoms call the tune!

WHY DO I?

Why do I go on doing these things?
Why not cease?
Is it that you are yet in this world of welterings
And unease,
And that, while so, mechanic repetitions please?
When shall I leave off doing these things? —
When I hear
You have dropped your dusty cloak and taken you wondrous wings
To another sphere,
Where no pain is: Then shall I hush this dinning gear.

WINTER WORDS IN VARIOUS MOODS AND METRES

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- HENLEY REGATTA
- AN EVENING IN GALILEE
- THE BROTHER
- WE FIELD-WOMEN
- A PRACTICAL WOMAN
- SQUIRE HOOPER
- A GENTLEMAN'S SECOND-HAND SUIT
- WE SAY WE SHALL NOT MEET
- SEEING THE MOON RISE
- SONG TO AURORE
- HE NEVER EXPECTED MUCH
- STANDING BY THE MANTELPIECE
- BOYS THEN AND NOW
- THAT KISS IN THE DARK
- A NECESSITARIAN'S EPITAPH
- BURNING THE HOLLY
- SUSPENSE
- THE SECOND VISIT
- OUR OLD FRIEND DUALISM
- FAITHFUL WILSON
- GALLANT'S SONG

- A PHILOSOPHICAL FANTASY
- A QUESTION OF MARRIAGE
- THE LETTER'S TRIUMPH
- A FORGOTTEN MINIATURE
- WHISPERED AT THE CHURCH-OPENING
- IN WEATHERBURY STOCKS
- A PLACID MAN'S EPITAPH
- THE NEW BOOTS
- THE MUSING MAIDEN
- LORNA THE SECOND
- A DAUGHTER RETURNS
- THE THIRD KISSING-GATE
- DRINKING SONG
- THE TARRYING BRIDEGROOM
- THE DESTINED PAIR
- A MUSICAL INCIDENT
- JUNE LEAVES AND AUTUMN
- NO BELL-RINGING
- I LOOKED BACK
- THE AGED NEWSPAPER SOLILOQUIZES
- THE SINGLE WITNESS
- HOW SHE WENT TO IRELAND
- DEAD WESSEX THE DOG TO THE HOUSEHOLD
- THE WOMAN WHO WENT EAST
- NOT KNOWN

- THE BOY'S DREAM
- THE GAP IN THE WHITE
- FAMILY PORTRAITS
- THE CATCHING BALLET OF THE WEDDING CLOTHES
- A WINSOME WOMAN
- THE BALLAD OF LOVE'S SKELETON
- A PRIVATE MAN ON PUBLIC MEN
- CHRISTMAS IN THE ELGIN ROOM
- WE ARE GETTING TO THE END
- HE RESOLVES TO SAY NO MORE

THE NEW DAWN'S BUSINESS

What are you doing outside my walls,
 O Dawn of another day?
 I have not called you over the edge
 Of the heathy ledge,
 So why do you come this way,
 With your furtive footstep without sound here,
 And your face so deedily gray?

“I show a light for killing the man
 Who lives not far from you,
 And for bringing to birth the lady's child,
 Nigh domiciled,
 And for earthing a corpse or two,
 And for several other such odd jobs round here
 That Time to-day must do.

“But you he leaves alone (although,
 As you have often said,
 You are always ready to pay the debt
 You don't forget
 You owe for board and bed):
 The truth is, when men willing are found here
 He takes those loth instead.”

PROUD SONGSTERS

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales
In bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
As if all Time were theirs.

These are brand-new birds of twelve-months' growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales,
Nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

THOUGHTS AT MIDNIGHT

Mankind, you dismay me
When shadows waylay me! —
Not by your splendours
Do you affray me,
Not as pretenders
To demonic keenness,
Not by your meanness,
Nor your ill-teachings,
Nor your false preachings,
Nor your banalities
And immoralities,
Nor by your daring
Nor sinister bearing;
But by your madneses
Capping cool badneses,
Acting like puppets
Under Time's buffets;
In superstitions
And ambitions
Moved by no wisdom,
Far-sight, or system,
Led by sheer senselessness
And presciencelessness
Into unreason
And hideous self-treason. . . .
God, look he on you,
Have mercy upon you!
Part written 25th May 1906.

I AM THE ONE

I am the one whom ringdoves see
Through chinks in boughs
When they do not rouse
In sudden dread,
But stay on cooing, as if they said:
“Oh; it's only he.”

I am the passer when up-eared hares,
Stirred as they eat
The new-sprung wheat,
Their munch resume
As if they thought: "He is one for whom
Nobody cares."

Wet-eyed mourners glance at me
As in train they pass
Along the grass
To a hollowed spot,
And think: "No matter; he quizzes not
Our misery."

I hear above: "We stars must lend
No fierce regard
To his gaze, so hard
Bent on us thus, —
Must scathe him not. He is one with us
Beginning and end."

THE PROPHETESS

1

"Now shall I sing
That pretty thing
'The Mocking-Bird'?" — And sing it straight did she.
I had no cause
To think it was
A Mocking-bird in truth that sang to me.

2

Not even the glance
She threw askance
Foretold to me, nor did the tune or rhyme,
That the words bore
A meaning more
Than that they were a ditty of the time.

3

But after years
Of hopes and fears,
And all they bring, and all they take away,
I found I had heard
The Mocking-bird
In person singing there to me that day.

A WISH FOR UNCONSCIOUSNESS

If I could but abide
As a tablet on a wall,
Or a hillock daisy-pied,
Or a picture in a hall,
And as nothing else at all,
I should feel no doleful achings,
I should hear no judgment-call,
Have no evil dreams or wakings,
No uncouth or grisly care;
In a word, no cross to bear.

THE BAD EXAMPLE

Fie, Aphrodite, shamming you are no mother,
And your maternal markings trying to smother,
As you were maiden, now you love another! . . .
If one like you need such pretence to noose him,
Indulgence in too early fires beware you,
All girls yet virgin, and have constant care you
Become not staled by use as she has, ere you
Meet your most-loved; lest, tumbled, you should lose him
Partly from Meleager.

TO LOUISA IN THE LANE

Meet me again as at that time
In the hollow of the lane;
I will not pass as in my prime
I passed at each day's wane.
— Ah, I remember!
To do it you will have to see
Anew this sorry scene wherein you have ceased to be!
But I will welcome your aspen form
As you gaze wondering round
And say with spectral frail alarm,
“Why am I still here found?”
— Ah, I remember!
It is through him with blitheful brow
Who did not love me then, but loves and draws me now!”
And I shall answer: “Sweet of eyes,
Carry me with you, Dear,
To where you donned this spirit-guise;
It's better there than here!”
— Till I remember
Such is a deed you cannot do:
Wait must I, till with flung-off flesh I follow you.

LOVE WATCHES A WINDOW

“Here in the window beaming across
Is he — the lineaments like him so! —
The saint whose name I do not know,
With the holy robe and the cheek aglow.
Here will I kneel as if worshipping God
When all the time I am worshipping you,
Whose Love I was —
You that with me will nevermore tread anew
The paradise-paths we trod!”

She came to that prominent pew each day,
And sat there. Zealously she came
And watched her Love — looking just the same
From the rubied eastern tracery-frame —
The man who had quite forsaken her
And followed another, it was thought. —
Be't as it may,
Thinner, more thin, was the lady's figure wrought
By some ache, year on year.

Well, now she's dead, and dead is he
From whom her heart once drew delight,
Whose face glowed daily, lover-bright,
High in the glass before her sight.
And still the face is seen as clear
In the rubied eastern window-gleam
As formerly;
But not seen now is a passionate woman's dream
Glowing beside it there.

THE LOVE-LETTERS

(IN MEMORIAM H. R.)

I met him quite by accident
In a bye-path that he'd frequent.
And, as he neared, the sunset glow
Warmed up the smile of pleasantry
Upon his too thin face, while he
Held a square packet up to me,
Of what, I did not know.

“Well,” said he then; “they are my old letters.
Perhaps she — rather felt them fetters. . . .
You see, I am in a slow decline,
And she's broken off with me. Quite right
To send them back, and true foresight;
I'd got too fond of her! To-night
I burn them — stuff of mine!”

He laughed in the sun — an ache in his laughter —
And went. I heard of his death soon after.

AN UNKINDLY MAY

A shepherd stands by a gate in a white smock-frock:
He holds the gate ajar, intently counting his flock.

The sour spring wind is blurting boisterous-wise,
And bears on it dirty clouds across the skies;
Plantation timbers creak like rusty cranes,
And pigeons and rooks, dishevelled by late rains,
Are like gaunt vultures, sodden and unkempt,
And song-birds do not end what they attempt:
The buds have tried to open, but quite failing
Have pinched themselves together in their quailing.
The sun frowns whitely in eye-trying flaps
Through passing cloud-holes, mimicking audible taps.
“Nature, you’re not commendable to-day!”
I think. “Better to-morrow!” she seems to say.

That shepherd still stands in that white smock-frock,
Unnoting all things save the counting his flock.

UNKEPT GOOD FRIDAYS

There are many more Good Fridays
Than this, if we but knew
The names, and could relate them,
Of men whom rulers slew
For their goodwill, and date them
As runs the twelvemonth through.

These nameless Christs’ Good Fridays,
Whose virtues wrought their end,
Bore days of bonds and burning,
With no man to their friend,
Of mockeries, and spurning;
Yet they are all unpenned.

When they had their Good Fridays
Of bloody sweat and strain
Oblivion hides. We quote not
Their dying words of pain,
Their sepulchres we note not,
Unwitting where they have lain.

No annual Good Fridays
Gained they from cross and cord,
From being sawn asunder,
Disfigured and abhorred,
Smitten and trampled under:
Such dates no hands have scored.

Let be. Let lack Good Fridays
These Christs of unwrit names;
The world was not even worthy
To taunt their hopes and aims,
As little of earth, earthy,
As his mankind proclaims.

Good Friday, 1927.

THE MOUND

For a moment pause: —
Just here it was;
And through the thin thorn hedge, by the rays of the moon,
I can see the tree in the field, and beside it the mound —
Now sheeted with snow — whereon we sat that June
When it was green and round,
And she crazed my mind by what she coolly told —
The history of her undoing,
(As I saw it), but she called “comradeship,”
That bred in her no rueing:
And saying she’d not be bound
For life to one man, young, ripe-yearred, or old,
Left me — an innocent simpleton to her viewing;

For, though my accmpt of years outscored her own,
Hers had more hotly flown. . . .
We never met again by this green mound,
To press as once so often lip on lip,
And palter, and pause: —
Yes; here it was!

LIDDELL AND SCOTT

ON THE COMPLETION OF THEIR LEXICON

(Written after the death of Liddell in 1898. Scott had died some ten years earlier.)

“Well, though it seems
Beyond our dreams,”
Said Liddell to Scott,
“We’ve really got
To the very end,
All inked and penned
Blotless and fair
Without turning a hair,
This sultry summer day, A.D.
Eighteen hundred and forty-three.

“I’ve often, I own,
Belched many a moan
At undertaking it,
And dreamt forsaking it.
— Yes, on to Pi,
When the end loomed nigh,
And friends said: ‘You’ve as good as done,’
I almost wished we’d not begun.
Even now, if people only knew
My sinkings, as we slowly drew
Along through Kappa, Lambda, Mu,
They’d be concerned at my misgiving,
And how I mused on a College living
Right down to Sigma,
But feared a stigma
If I succumbed, and left old Donnegan
For weary freshmen’s eyes to con again:
And how I often, often wondered
What could have led me to have blundered
So far away from sound theology
To dialects and etymology;
Words, accents not to be breathed by men
Of any country ever again!”

“My heart most failed,
 Indeed, quite quailed,”
 Said Scott to Liddell,
 “Long ere the middle! . . .
 ‘Twas one wet dawn
 When, slippers on,
 And a cold in the head anew,
 Gazing at Delta
 I turned and felt a
 Wish for bed anew,
 And to let supersedings
 Of Passow’s readings
 In dialects go.
 ‘That German has read
 More than we!’ I said;
 Yea, several times did I feel so! . . .

“O that first morning, smiling bland,
 With sheets of foolscap, quills in hand,
 To write ±±±Ä;Â and ±±³·Â,
 Followed by fifteen hundred pages,
 What nerve was ours
 So to back our powers,
 Assured that we should reach ÉÉ´·Â
 While there was breath left in our bodies!”

Liddell replied: “Well, that’s past now;
 The job’s done, thank God, anyhow.”

“And yet it’s not,”
 Considered Scott,
 “For we’ve to get
 Subscribers yet
 We must remember;
 Yes; by September.”

“O Lord; dismiss that. We’ll succeed.
 Dinner is my immediate need.
 I feel as hollow as a fiddle,
 Working so many hours,” said Liddell.

CHRISTMASTIDE

The rain-shafts splintered on me
As despondently I strode;
The twilight gloomed upon me
And bleared the blank high-road.
Each bush gave forth, when blown on
By gusts in shower and shower,
A sigh, as it were sown on
In handfuls by a sower.

A cheerful voice called, nigh me,
“A merry Christmas, friend!” —
There rose a figure by me,
Walking with townward trend,
A sodden tramp’s, who, breaking
Into thin song, bore straight
Ahead, direction taking
Toward the Casuals’ gate.

RELUCTANT CONFESSION

“What did you do? Cannot you let me know?”
“Don’t ask! . . . ‘Twas midnight, and I’d lost at cards.”
“Ah. Was it crime — or seemed it to be so?”
“No — not till afterwards.”
“But what, then, did you do?”

“Well — that was the beginning — months ago;
You see, I had lost, and could not pay but — so.
And there flashed from him strange and strong regards
That you only see when scruples smash to shards;
And thus it happened — O it rained and blew! —
But I can’t tell. ‘Twas all so lurid in hue!
And what was worst came after, when I knew
What first crossed not my mind,
And he has never divined!” . . .
“But he must have, if he proposed it you?”
“I mean, that — I got rid of what resulted
In a way a woman told me I consulted:
‘Tis that he does not know;
Great God, it harrows me so!
I did not mean to. Every night —
In hell-dark dreams
I see an appealing figure in white —
That somehow seems
A newborn child in the clothes I set to make,
But left off, for my own depraved name’s sake!”

EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE

“I had a holiday once,” said the woman —
Her name I did not know —
“And I thought that where I’d like to go,
Of all the places for being jolly,
And getting rid of melancholy,
Would be to a good big fair:
And I went. And it rained in torrents, drenching
Every horse, and sheep, and yeoman,
And my shoulders, face and hair;
And I found that I was the single woman
In the field — and looked quite odd there!
Everything was spirit-quenching:
I crept and stood in the lew of a wall
To think, and could not tell at all
What on earth made me plod there!”

ARISTODEMUS THE MESSENIAN

(DRAMATIC HENDECASYLLABICS)

Scene: Before the Stronghold of Ithome, Messenia, 735 B.C.

His daughter's lover discovered, in the disguise of a soothsayer; to whom enters Aristodemus.

Aristodemus

(apostrophically)

Straightway let it be done!

Lover

Let what be done, chief?

Aristodemus

Who art thou that art speaking? Some sage prophet? —
She, my daughter's to perish on the altar!

Lover

Thou called hero! — a myth thy vaunted power,
If it fail to redeem thy best beloved.

Aristodemus

Power is nought to the matter. What the Sibyl
Bids, must be!

Lover

But I doubt such bidding thereto.

Aristodemus

Nay. White lippings above the Delphic tripod
Mangle never their message! And they lip such.
Thriving, conquering shall Messene be forthwith —
Future worthy my gift of this intact one.
Yea, and who of the Aépytids' renowned house
Weigh can greater with Zeus than she my offspring?
Shall these Spartiats sway to save me reavement?
What is fatherhood when they march in hearing?
Hark! E'en now they are here!

(Marching soldiers heard afar.)

Lover

(after a silence)
And mean you to warn her?

Aristodemus
Not till evening shades can cover pallor.

[Exit.
Lover stands motionless. Enter the daughter of Aristodemus.

Daughter
Ah! Thou comest to me, Love, not as earlier! Lover, as it were waking, approaches, unhoods his face, and embraces her.

Why not speak to me?

Lover
Sweetest, thou'rt a doomed one!

Daughter
How?

Lover
Thy sacrifice by thy father waits thee —
Thee, as offering for the State's salvation.

Daughter
Not the slaying of me?

Lover
Fail I to stay him — (She droops in his arms)

Whereto bursts in a flame a means upon me!

Daughter
How? My father is mighty. Thou'rt so powerless.

Lover
Thus and now it adumbrates. Haste I to him,
Vowing love for thee!

Daughter
Which he'll value wryly —
Less than nought, as I know.

Lover

Till comes my sequel;
This, to wit. Thou art got with child by me. Ay,
List: the Sibylline utterance asks a virgin;
So th'rt saved!

Daughter

But a maid's the thing I am, Love!
Gods! With child I am not, but veriest virgin —
Who knows surer than thou?

Lover

I'll make him think so,
Though no man upon earth more knows its falseness,
Such will I.

Daughter

But alas, thou canst not make him:
Me he knows to the core. He'll not believe thee.

Lover

Then thou canst. He'll accept thy vouching, sure, Sweet,
And another intact one, equal serving,
Straightway find for the knife.

Daughter

My Love, I must not!

Lover

Not? And yet there is pending for thee, otherwise,
Dark destruction, and all thy burning being
Dungeoned in an eternal nescientness! She shudders, but weepingly shows unwillingness.

Stay. I'll make the asseverance first. Thou'lt clinch it?

Daughter

(with white cheeks, after a pause)
Be it so! . . .

The Messenian army is heard going out to meet the Spartans. Lover hoods himself as
Aristodemus enters from the stronghold.

Aristodemus

(looking strangely at his daughter)

Stay you yet at the gate? The old man also?
Hath indeed he disclosed the sore pronouncement?

Daughter

(falteringly)

Sore pronouncement? And what is, sire, its substance?

Messenger enters.

Messenger

King Euphaes is just found slain in combat:
Thereby King is the Chief, Aristodemus,
E'en ere falters the strife — still hard against us!

Aristodemus

Ha! And is it in balance yet! — The deed, then! Daughter looks at her lover, who
throws off his disguise; and they go up to Aristodemus together.

Who's this man? And to what tends all this feigning?

Daughter

He — my lover — who thinks to be my husband —
O my father, thy pardon! Know a secret!

Aristodemus

Lover? Secret? And what? But such is nought now:
Husband he nor another can be to thee,
Let him think as he may! And though I meant not
Death to broach till the eve, let doom be dealt now.
Hark, the Spartan assays! It straight behoves me,
Cost it what to my soul, to give deliverance
To my country the instant. Thou, my daughter,
Foremost maiden of all the maidens round us —

Daughter

O but save me, I pray, sire! And to that end
There has now to be spoke a thing immediate,
And I fain would be speaker. But I cannot!
What he now will reveal, receive as vouched for!

(She rushes into the castle.)

Aristodemus

(to lover)

What means this in her? Reads she what's impending?

Lover

King, its meaning is much! That she's with child. Yea,
By me! Hence there is called for immolation
One who's what she is not — a sure-sealed virgin —
If you'd haste to deliver stressed Ithome,
Bulking yet overhead as though unweakened!

Aristodemus sinks on to a projection of the rock, and covers his eyes.

Aristodemus

(brokenly)

Better had she been made the purposed victim
Than that this should have so befallen to save her!
Foul disaster of fatherhood and home-pride! . . .
Let this citadel fall; the Spartan army
Trample over its dust, and enter in here!
She is worse than a martyr for the State-weal,
I than one of the slain. And king to-morrow!

(He pauses)

Tis not true!

He makes as if to fall upon her lover with his sword. Lover defends himself with his dagger. Aristodemus turns to rush into the castle after his daughter.

I misdoubt it! They speak falsely!

[Exit Aristodemus. Lover walks up and down in strained suspense. Interval. A groan is heard. Lover is about to rush out, but re-enter Aristodemus sword in hand, now bloody.

Aristodemus

I have proved me her honour, shown the falsehood
Ye twain both have declared me!

Lover

That canst not do!

Aristodemus

I say I have outshewn it; proved her even
Until death very virgin pure and spotless!

Enter Attendants.

Attendants

(severally)

Horror, horror indeed! He's ripped her up — yea,
With his sword! He hath split her beauteous body
To prove her maid!

Aristodemus

(to lover)

Now diest thou for thy lying, like as she died!

He turns his sword on lover, but falls from exhaustion. Lover seizes Aristodemus' sword, and is about to run him through with it; but he checks his hand, and turn the sword upon himself.

(Lover dies.)

EVENING SHADOWS

The shadows of my chimneys stretch afar
Across the plot, and on to the privet bower,
And even the shadows of their smokings show,
And nothing says just now that where they are
They will in future stretch at this same hour,
Though in my earthen cyst I shall not know.

And at this time the neighbouring Pagan mound,
Whose myths the Gospel news now supersede,
Upon the greensward also throws its shade,
And nothing says such shade will spread around
Even as to-day when men will no more heed
The Gospel news than when the mound was made.

THE THREE TALL MEN

The First Tapping

“What's that tapping at night: tack, tack,
In some house in the street at the back?”

“O, 'tis a man who, when he has leisure,
Is making himself a coffin to measure.
He's so very tall that no carpenter
Will make it long enough, he's in fear.
His father's was shockingly short for his limb —
And it made a deep impression on him.”

The Second Tapping

“That tapping has begun again,
Which ceased a year back, or near then?”

“Yes, ‘tis the man you heard before
Making his coffin. The first scarce done
His brother died — his only one —
And, being of his own height, or more,
He used it for him; for he was afraid
He’d not get a long enough one quick made.
He’s making a second now, to fit
Himself when there shall be need for it.
Carpenters work so by rule of thumb
That they make mistakes when orders come.”

The Third Tapping

“It’s strange, but years back, when I was here,
I used to notice a tapping near;
A man was making his coffin at night,
And he made a second, if I am right?
I have heard again the self-same tapping —
Yes, late last night — or was I napping?”

“O no. It’s the same man. He made one
Which his brother had; and a second was done —
For himself, as he thought. But lately his son,
As tall as he, died; aye, and as trim,
And his sorrowful father bestowed it on him.
And now the man is making a third,
To be used for himself when he is interred.”

“Many years later was brought to me
News that the man had died at sea.”

THE LODGING-HOUSE FUCHSIAS

Mrs. Masters’s fuchsias hung
Higher and broader, and brightly swung,
Bell-like, more and more
Over the narrow garden-path,
Giving the passer a sprinkle-bath
In the morning.

She put up with their pushful ways,
And made us tenderly lift their sprays,
Going to her door:
But when her funeral had to pass
They cut back all the flowery mass
In the morning.

THE WHALER'S WIFE

I never pass that inn "The Ring of Bells"
Without recalling what its signpost tells
To recollection:
A tale such as all houses yield, maybe,
That ever have known of fealties, phantasy,
Hate, or affection.

He has come from a whaling cruise to settle down
As publican in his small native town,
Where his wife dwells.
It is a Sunday morning; she has gone
To church with others. Service still being on,
He seeks "The Bells."

"Yes: she's quite thriving; very much so, they say.
I don't believe in tales; 'tis not my way!
I hold them stuff.
But — as you press me — certainly we know
He visits her once at least each week or so,
Fair weather or rough.

"And, after all, he's quite a gentleman,
And lonely wives must friend them where they can.
She'll tell you all,
No doubt, when prayers are done and she comes home.
I'm glad to hear your early taste to roam
Begins to pall."

"I'll stroll out and await her," then said he.
Anon the congregation passed, and she
Passed with the rest,
Unconscious of the great surprise at hand
And bounding on, and smiling — fair and bland —
In her Sunday best.

Straight she was told. She fainted at the news,
But rallied, and was able to refuse
Help to her home.

There she sat waiting all day — with a look —
A look of joy, it seemed, if none mistook . . .
But he did not come.

Time flew: her husband kept him absent still,
And by slow slips the woman pined, until,
Grown thin, she died —
Of grief at loss of him, some would aver,
But how could that be? They anyway buried her
By her mother's side.

And by the grave stood, at the funeral,
A tall man, elderly and grave withal;
Gossip grew grim:
He was the same one who had been seen before;
He paid, in cash, all owing; and no more
Was heard of him.

At the pulling down of her house, decayed and old,
Many years after, was the true tale told
By an ancient swain.

The tall man was the father of the wife.
He had beguiled her mother in maiden life,
And to cover her stain,

Induced to wive her one in his service bred,
Who brought her daughter up as his till wed.
— This the girl knew,
But hid it close, to save her mother's name,
Even from her seaman spouse, and ruined her fame
With him, though true.

THROWING A TREE

NEW FOREST

The two executioners stalk along over the knolls,
Bearing two axes with heavy heads shining and wide,
And a long limp two-handled saw toothed for cutting great boles,
And so they approach the proud tree that bears the death-mark on its side.

Jackets doffed they swing axes and chop away just above ground,
And the chips fly about and lie white on the moss and fallen leaves;
Till a broad deep gash in the bark is hewn all the way round,
And one of them tries to hook upward a rope, which at last he achieves.

The saw then begins, till the top of the tall giant shivers:
The shivers are seen to grow greater each cut than before:
They edge out the saw, tug the rope; but the tree only quivers,
And kneeling and sawing again, they step back to try pulling once more.

Then, lastly, the living mast sways, further sways: with a shout
Job and Ike rush aside. Reached the end of its long staying powers
The tree crashes downward: it shakes all its neighbours throughout,
And two hundred years' steady growth has been ended in less than two hours.

THE WAR-WIFE OF CATKNOLL

“What crowd is this in Catknoll Street,
Now I am just come home?
What crowd is this in my old street,
That flings me such a glance?
A stretcher — and corpse? A sobering sight
To greet me, when my heart is light
With thoughts of coming cheer to-night
Now I am back from France.”

“O ‘tis a woman, soldier-man,
Who seem to be new come:
O ‘tis a woman, soldier-man,
Found in the river here,
Whither she went and threw her in,
And now they are carrying her within:
She’s drowned herself for a sly sin
Against her husband dear.

“‘A said to me, who knew her well,
‘O why was I so weak!’
‘A said to me, who knew her well,
And have done all her life,
With a downcast face she said to me,
‘O why did I keep company
Wi’ them that practised gallantry,
When vowed a faithful wife!’

“‘O God, I’m driven mad!’ she said,
‘To hear he’s coming back;
I’m fairly driven mad!’ she said:
‘He’s been two years ago,
And now he’ll find me in this state,
And not forgive me. Had but fate
Kept back his coming three months late,
Nothing of it he’d known!’

“We did not think she meant so much,
And said: ‘He may forgive.’
O never we thought she meant so much
As to go doing this.

And now she must be crowned ! — so fair! —
Who drew men’s eyes so everywhere! —
And love-letters beyond compare
For coaxing to a kiss.

“She kept her true a year or more
Against the young men all;
Yes, kept her true a year or more,
And they were most to blame.
There was Will Peach who plays the flute,
And Waywell with the dandy suit,
And Nobb, and Knight. . . . But she’s been mute
As to the father’s name.”

Old English for “there must be a coroner’s inquest over her.”

CONCERNING HIS OLD HOME

Mood I

I wish to see it never —
That dismal place
With cracks in its floor —
I would forget it ever!

Mood II

To see it once, that sad
And memoried place —
Yes, just once more —
I should be faintly glad!

Mood III

To see it often again —
That friendly place
With its green low door —
I'm willing anywhen!

Mood IV

I'll haunt it night and day —
That loveable place,
With its flowers' rich store
That drives regret away!

HER SECOND HUSBAND HEARS HER STORY

"Still, Dear, it is incredible to me
That here, alone,
You should have sewed him up until he died,
And in this very bed. I do not see
How you could do it, seeing what might betide."

"Well, he came home one midnight, liquored deep —
Worse than I'd known —
And lay down heavily, and soundly slept:
Then, desperate driven, I thought of it, to keep
Him from me when he woke. Being an adept

"With needle and thimble, as he snored, click-click
An hour I'd sewn,
Till, had he roused, he couldn't have moved from bed,
So tightly laced in sheet and quilt and tick
He lay. And in the morning he was dead.

"Ere people came I drew the stitches out,
And thus 'twas shown
To be a stroke." — "It's a strange tale!" said he.
"And this same bed?" — "Yes, here it came about."
"Well, it sounds strange — told here and now to me.

"Did you intend his death by your tight lacing?"
"O, that I cannot own.
I could not think of else that would avail
When he should wake up, and attempt embracing." —
"Well, it's a cool queer tale!"

YULETIDE IN A YOUNGER WORLD

We believed in highdays then,
And could glimpse at night
On Christmas Eve
Imminent oncomings of radiant revel —
Doings of delight: —
Now we have no such sight.

We had eyes for phantoms then,
And at bridge or stile
On Christmas Eve
Clear beheld those countless ones who had crossed it
Cross again in file: —
Such has ceased longwhile!

We liked divination then,
And, as they homeward wound
On Christmas Eve,
We could read men's dreams within them spinning
Even as wheels spin round: —
Now we are blinker-bound.

We heard still small voices then,
And, in the dim serene
Of Christmas Eve,
Caught the fartime tones of fire-filled prophets
Long on earth unseen. . . .
— Can such ever have been?

AFTER THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

You died, and made but little of it! —
Why then should I, when called to doff it,
Drop, and renounce this worm-holed raiment,
Shrink edgewise off from its grey claimant?
Rather say, when I am Time-outrun,
As you did: Take me, and have done,
Inexorable, insatiate one!

THE SON'S PORTRAIT

I walked the streets of a market town,
And came to a lumber-shop,
Which I had known ere I met the frown
Of fate and fortune,
And habit led me to stop.

In burrowing mid this chattel and that,
High, low, or edgewise thrown,
I lit upon something lying flat —
A fly-flecked portrait,
Framed. 'Twas my dead son's own.

"That photo? . . . A lady — I know not whence —
Sold it me, Ma'am, one day,
With more. You can have it for eighteenpence:
The picture's nothing;
It's but for the frame you pay."

He had given it her in their heyday shine,
When she wedded him, long her wooer:
And then he was sent to the front-trench-line,
And fell there fighting;
And she took a new bridegroom to her.

I bought the gift she had held so light,
And buried it — as 'twere he. —
Well, well! Such things are trifling, quite,
But when one's lonely
How cruel they can be!

LYING AWAKE

You, Morningtide Star, now are steady-eyed, over the east,
I know it as if I saw you;
You, Beeches, engrave on the sky your thin twigs, even the least;
Had I paper and pencil I'd draw you.

You, Meadow, are white with your counterpane cover of dew,
I see it as if I were there;
You, Churchyard, are lightening faint from the shade of the yew,
The names creeping out everywhere.

THE LADY IN THE FURS

“I’m a lofty lovely woman,”
Says the lady in the furs,
In the glance she throws around her
On the poorer dames and sirs:
“This robe, that cost three figures,
Yes, is mine,” her nod avers.

“True, my money did not buy it,
But my husband’s, from the trade;
And they, they only got it
From things feeble and afraid
By murdering them in ambush
With a cunning engine’s aid.

“True, my hands, too, did not shape it
To the pretty cut you see,
But the hands of midnight workers
Who are strangers quite to me:
It was fitted, too, by dressers
Ranged around me toilsomely.

“But I am a lovely lady,
Though sneerers say I shine
By robbing Nature’s children
Of apparel not mine,
And that I am but a broom-stick,
Like a scarecrow’s wooden spine.”

CHILDHOOD AMONG THE FERNS

I sat one sprinkling day upon the lea,
Where tall-stemmed ferns spread out luxuriantly,
And nothing but those tall ferns sheltered me.

The rain gained strength, and damped each lopping frond,
Ran down their stalks beside me and beyond,
And shaped slow-creeping rivulets as I coned,

With pride, my spray-roofed house. And though anon
Some drops pierced its green rafters, I sat on,
Making pretence I was not rained upon.

The sun then burst, and brought forth a sweet breath
From the limp ferns as they dried underneath:
I said: “I could live on here thus till death”;

And queried in the green rays as I sate:
“Why should I have to grow to man’s estate,
And this afar-noised World perambulate?”

A COUNTENANCE

Her laugh was not in the middle of her face quite,
As a gay laugh springs,
It was plain she was anxious about some things
I could not trace quite.
Her curls were like fir-cones — piled up, brown —
Or rather like tight-tied sheaves:
It seemed they could never be taken down. . . .

And her lips were too full, some might say:
I did not think so. Anyway,
The shadow her lower one would cast
Was green in hue whenever she passed
Bright sun on midsummer leaves.
Alas, I knew not much of her,
And lost all sight and touch of her!

If otherwise, should I have minded
The shy laugh not in the middle of her mouth quite,
And would my kisses have died of drouth quite
As love became unblinded?

1884

A POET’S THOUGHT

It sprang up out of him in the dark,
And took on the lightness of a lark:
It went from his chamber along the city strand,
Lingered awhile, then leapt all over the land.

It came back maimed and mangled. And the poet
When he beheld his offspring did not know it:
Yea, verily, since its birth Time’s tongue had tossed to him
Such travesties that his old thought was lost to him.

SILENCES

There is the silence of a copse or croft
When the wind sinks dumb,
And of a belfry-loft
When the tenor after tolling stops its hum.

And there's the silence of a lonely pond
Where a man was drowned,
Nor nigh nor yond
A newt, frog, toad, to make the merest sound.

But the rapt silence of an empty house
Where oneself was born,
Dwelt, held carouse
With friends, is of all silences most forlorn!

Past are remembered songs and music-strains
Once audible there:
Roof, rafters, panes
Look absent-thoughted, tranced, or locked in prayer.

It seems no power on earth can waken it
Or rouse its rooms,
Or its past permit
The present to stir a torpor like a tomb's.

I WATCHED A BLACKBIRD

I watched a blackbird on a budding sycamore
One Easter Day, when sap was stirring twigs to the core;
I saw his tongue, and crocus-coloured bill
Parting and closing as he turned his trill;
Then he flew down, seized on a stem of hay,
And upped to where his building scheme was under way,
As if so sure a nest were never shaped on spray.

A NIGHTMARE, AND THE NEXT THING

On this decline of Christmas Day
The empty street is fogged and blurred:
The house-fronts all seem backwise turned
As if the outer world were spurned:
Voices and songs within are heard,
Whence red rays gleam when fires are stirred,
Upon this nightmare Christmas Day.

The lamps, just lit, begin to outloom
Like dandelion-globes in the gloom;
The stonework, shop-signs, doors, look bald;
Curious crude details seem installed,
And show themselves in their degrees
As they were personalities
Never discerned when the street was bustling
With vehicles, and farmers hustling.
Three clammy casuals wend their way
To the Union House. I hear one say:
“Jimmy, this is a treat! Hay-hay!”

Six laughing mouths, six rows of teeth,
Six radiant pairs of eyes, beneath
Six yellow hats, looking out at the back
Of a waggonette on its slowed-down track
Up the steep street to some gay dance,
Suddenly interrupt my glance.

They do not see a gray nightmare
Astride the day, or anywhere.

TO A TREE IN LONDON

(CLEMENT'S INN)

Here you stay
Night and day,
Never, never going away!

Do you ache
When we take
Holiday for our health's sake?

Wish for feet
When the heat
Scalds you in the brick-built street,

That you might
Climb the height
Where your ancestry saw light,
Find a brook
In some nook
There to purge your swarthy look?
No. You read
Trees to need
Smoke like earth whereon to feed. . . .
Have no sense
That far hence
Air is sweet in a blue immense,
Thus, black, blind,
You have opined
Nothing of your brightest kind;
Never seen
Miles of green,
Smelt the landscape's sweet serene.
192*.

THE FELLED ELM AND SHE

When you put on that inmost ring
She, like you, was a little thing:
When your circles reached their fourth,
Scarce she knew life's south from north:
When your year-zones counted twenty
She had fond admirers plenty:
When you'd grown your twenty-second
She and I were lovers reckoned:
When you numbered twenty-three
She went everywhere with me:
When you, at your fortieth line,
Showed decay, she seemed to pine:
When you were quite hollow within
She was felled — mere bone and skin:
You too, lacking strength to grow
Further trunk-rings, were laid low,
Matching her; both unaware
That your lives formed such a pair.

HE DID NOT KNOW ME

(WOMAN'S SORROW SONG)

He said: "I do not know you;
You are not she who came
And made my heart grow tame?"
I laughed: "The same!"

Still said he: "I don't know you."
"But I am your Love!" laughed I:
"Yours — faithful ever — till I die,
And pulseless lie!"

Yet he said: "I don't know you."
Freakful, I went away,
And met pale Time, with "Pray,
What means his Nay?"

Said Time: "He does not know you
In your mask of Comedy."
"But," said I, "that I have chosen to be:
Tragedy he."

"True; hence he did not know you."
"But him I could recognize?"
"Yea. Tragedy is true guise,
Comedy lies."

SO VARIOUS

You may have met a man — quite young —
A brisk-eyed youth, and highly strung:
One whose desires
And inner fires
Moved him as wires.

And you may have met one stiff and old,
If not in years; of manner cold;
Who seemed as stone,
And never had known
Of mirth or moan.

And there may have crossed your path a lover,
In whose clear depths you could discover
A staunch, robust,
And tender trust,
Through storm and gust.

And you may have also known one fickle,
Whose fancies changed as the silver sickle
Of yonder moon,
Which shapes so soon
To demilune!

You entertained a person once
Whom you internally deemed a dunce: —
As he sat in view
Just facing you
You saw him through.

You came to know a learned seer
Of whom you read the surface mere:
Your soul quite sank;
Brain of such rank
Dubbed yours a blank.

Anon you quizzed a man of sadness,
Who never could have known true gladness:
Just for a whim
You pitied him
In his sore trim.

You journeyed with a man so glad
You never could conceive him sad:
He proved to be
Indubitably
Good company.

You lit on an unadventurous slow man,
Who, said you, need be feared by no man;
That his slack deeds
And sloth must needs
Produce but weeds.

A man of enterprise, shrewd and swift,
Who never suffered affairs to drift,
You eyed for a time
Just in his prime,
And judged he might climb.

You smoked beside one who forgot
All that you said, or grasped it not.
Quite a poor thing,
Not worth a sting
By satirizing!

Next year you nearly lost for ever
Goodwill from one who forgot slights never;
And, with unease,
Felt you must seize
Occasion to please . . .

Now. . . . All these specimens of man,
So various in their pith and plan,
Curious to say
Were one man. Yea,
I was all they.

A SELF-GLAMOURER

My little happiness,
How much I have made of it! —
As if I had been not less
Than a queen, to be straight obeyed of it.
“Life, be fairer far,”
I said, “Than you are.”

So I counted my springtime-day’s
Dream of futurity
Enringed with golden rays
To be quite a summer surety;
And my trustful daring undoubt
Brought it about!

Events all human-wrought
Had look of divinity,
And what I foreframed in thought
Grew substanced, by force of affinity:
Visions to verities came,
Seen as the same.

My years in trusting spent
Make to shape towardly,
And fate and accident
Behave not perversely or frowardly.
Shall, then, Life’s winter snow
To me be so?

THE DEAD BASTARD

Many and many a time I thought,
“Would my child were in its grave!”
Such the trouble and shame it brought.

Now ‘tis there. And now I’d brave
Opinion’s worst, in word or act,
To have that child alive; yes, slave
To dress and flaunt it to attract;
Show it the gossips brazenly,
And let as nothing be the fact
That never its father married me.

THE CLASPED SKELETONS

SURMISED DATE 1800 B.C.

(In an Ancient British barrow near the writer’s house)

O why did we uncover to view
So closely clasped a pair?
Your chalky bedclothes over you,
This long time here!

Ere Paris lay with Helena —
The poets’ dearest dear —
Ere David bedded Bathsheba
You two were bedded here.

Aye, even before the beauteous Jael
Bade Sisera doff his gear
And lie in her tent; then drove the nail,
You two lay here.

Wicked Aholah, in her youth,
Colled loves from far and near
Until they slew her without ruth;
But you had long colled here.

Aspasia lay with Pericles,
And Philip’s son found cheer
At eves in lying on Thais’ knees
While you lay here.

Cleopatra with Antony,
Resigned to dalliance sheer,
Lay, fatuous he, insatiate she,
Long after you’d lain here.

Pilate by Procula his wife
Lay tossing at her tear
Of pleading for an innocent life;
You tossed not here.

Ages before Monk Abélard
Gained tender Héloïse' ear,
And loved and lay with her till scarred,
Had you lain loving here.

So long, beyond chronology,
Lovers in death as 'twere,
So long in placid dignity
Have you lain here!

Yet what is length of time? But dream!
Once breathed this atmosphere
Those fossils near you, met the gleam
Of day as you did here;

But so far earlier theirs beside
Your life-span and career,
That they might style of yestertide
Your coming here!

IN THE MARQUEE

It was near last century's ending,
And, though not much to rate
In a world of getting and spending,
To her it was great.

The scene was a London suburb
On a night of summer weather,
And the villas had back gardens
Running together.

Her neighbours behind were dancing
Under a marquee;
Two violoncellos played there,
And violins three.

She had not been invited,
Although her lover was;
She lay beside her husband,
Perplexed at the cause.

Sweet after sweet quadrille rang:
Absence made her weep;
The tears dried on her eyelids
As she fell asleep.

She dreamt she was whirling with him
In this dance upon the green
To which she was not invited
Though her lover had been.

All night she danced as he clasped her —
That is, in the happy dream
The music kept her dreaming
Till the first daybeam.

“O damn those noisy fiddles!”
Her husband said as he turned:
“Close to a neighbour’s bedroom:
I’d like them burned!”

At intervals thus all night-long
Her husband swore. But she
Slept on, and danced in the loved arms,
Under the marquee.

Next day she found that her lover,
Though asked, had gone elsewhere,
And that she had possessed him in absence
More than if there.

AFTER THE BURIAL

The family had buried him,
Their bread-bringer, their best:
They had returned to the house, whose hush a dim
Vague vacancy expressed.

There sat his sons, mute, rigid-faced,
His daughters, strained, red-eyed,
His wife, whose wan, worn features, vigil-traced,
Bent over him when he died.

At once a peal bursts from the bells
Of a large tall tower hard by:
Along the street the jocund clangour swells,
And upward to the sky.

Probably it was a wedding-peal,
Or possibly for a birth,
Or townsman knighted for political zeal,
This resonant mark of mirth.

The mourners, heavy-browed, sat on
Motionless. Well they heard,
They could not help it; nevertheless thereon
Spoke not a single word,

Nor window did they close, to numb
The bells' insistent calls
Of joy; but suffered the harassing din to come
And penetrate their souls.

THE MONGREL

In Havenpool Harbour the ebb was strong,
And a man with a dog drew near and hung,
And taxpaying day was coming along,
So the mongrel had to be drowned.
The man threw a stick from the paved wharf-side
Into the midst of the ebbing tide,
And the dog jumped after with ardent pride
To bring the stick aground.

But no: the steady suck of the flood
To seaward needed, to be withstood,
More than the strength of mongrelhood
To fight its treacherous trend.
So, swimming for life with desperate will,
The struggler with all his natant skill
Kept buoyant in front of his master still
There standing to wait the end.

The loving eyes of the dog inclined
To the man he held as a god enshrined,
With no suspicion in his mind
That this had all been meant.
Till the effort not to drift from shore
Of his little legs grew slower and slower,
And, the tide still outing with brookless power,
Outward the dog, too, went.

Just ere his sinking what does one see
Break on the face of that devotee?
A wakening to the treachery
He had loved with love so blind?
The faith that had shone in that mongrel's eye
That his owner would save him by and by
Turned to much like a curse as he sank to die,
And a loathing of mankind.

CONCERNING AGNES

I am stopped from hoping what I have hoped before —
Yes, many a time! —
To dance with that fair woman yet once more
As in the prime
Of August, when the wide-faced moon looked through
The boughs at the faery lamps of the Larmer Avenue.
I could not, though I should wish, have over again
That old romance,
And sit apart in the shade as we sat then
After the dance
The while I held her hand, and, to the booms
Of contrabassos, feet still pulsed from the distant rooms.
I could not. And you do not ask me why.
Hence you infer
That what may chance to the fairest under the sky
Has chanced to her.
Yes. She lies white, straight, features marble-keen,
Unapproachable, mute, in a nook I have never seen.
There she may rest like some vague goddess, shaped
As out of snow;
Say Aphrodite sleeping; or bedraped
Like Kalupso;
Or Amphitrite stretched on the Mid-sea swell,
Or one of the Nine grown stiff from thought. I cannot tell!

HENLEY REGATTA

She looks from the window: still it pours down direly,
And the avenue drips. She cannot go, she fears;
And the Regatta will be spoilt entirely;
And she sheds half-crazed tears.

Regatta Day and rain come on together
Again, years after. Gutters trickle loud;
But Nancy cares not. She knows nought of weather,
Or of the Henley crowd:

She's a Regatta quite her own. Inanely
She laughs in the asylum as she floats
Within a water-tub, which she calls "Henley,"
Her little paper boats.

AN EVENING IN GALILEE

She looks far west towards Carmel, shading her eyes with her hand,
And she then looks east to the Jordan, and the smooth Tiberias' strand.
"Is my son mad?" she asks; and never an answer has she,
Save from herself, aghast at the possibility.

"He professes as his firm faiths things far too grotesque to be true,
And his vesture is odd — too careless for one of his fair young hue! . . .

"He lays down doctrines as if he were old — aye, fifty at least:
In the Temple he terrified me, opposing the very High-Priest!
Why did he say to me, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?'
O it cuts to the heart that a child of mine thus spoke to me!
And he said, too, 'Who is my mother?' — when he knows so very well.
He might have said, 'Who is my father?' — and I'd found it hard to tell!
That no one knows but Joseph and — one other, nor ever will;
One who'll not see me again. . . . How it chanced! — I dreaming no ill! . . .

"Would he'd not mix with the lowest folk — like those fishermen —
The while so capable, culling new knowledge, beyond our ken! . . .
That woman of no good character, ever following him,
Adores him if I mistake not: his wish of her is but a whim
Of his madness, it may be, outmarking his lack of coherency;
After his 'Keep the Commandments!' to smile upon such as she!
It is just what all those do who are wandering in their wit.
I don't know — dare not say — what harm may grow from it.

O a mad son is a terrible thing; it even may lead
To arrest, and death! . . . And how he can preach, expound, and read!
“Here comes my husband. Shall I unveil him this tragedy-brink?
No. He has nightmares enough. I’ll pray, and think, and think.” . . .
She remembers she’s never put on any pot for his evening meal,
And pondering a plea looks vaguely to south of her — towards Jezreel.

THE BROTHER

O know you what I have done
To avenge our sister? She,
I thought, was wantoned with
By a man of levity:
 And I lay in wait all day,
All day did I wait for him,
And dogged him to Bollard Head
When twilight dwindled dim,
 And hurled him over the edge
And heard him fall below:
O would I were lying with him,
For the truth I did not know!
 “O where’s my husband?” she asked,
As evening wore away:
“Best you had one, forsooth,
But never had you!” I say.
 “Yes, but I have!” says she,
“My Love made it up with me,
And we churched it yesterday
And mean to live happily.”
 And now I go in haste
To the Head, before she’s aware,
To join him in death for the wrong
I’ve done them both out there!

WE FIELD-WOMEN

How it rained
When we worked at Flintcomb-Ash,
And could not stand upon the hill
Trimming swedes for the slicing-mill.
The wet washed through us — splash, splash, splash:
How it rained!

How it snowed
When we crossed from Flintcomb-Ash
To the Great Barn for drawing reed,
Since we could nowise chop a swede. —
Flakes in each doorway and casement-sash:
How it snowed!

How it shone
When we went from Flintcomb-Ash
To start at dairywork once more
In the laughing meads, with cows three-score,
And pails, and songs, and love — too rash:
How it shone!

A PRACTICAL WOMAN

“O who’ll get me a healthy child: —
I should prefer a son —
Seven have I had in thirteen years,
Sickly every one!

“Three mope about as feeble shapes;
Weak; white; they’ll be no good.
One came deformed; an idiot next;
And two are crass as wood.

“I purpose one not only sound
In flesh, but bright in mind:
And duly for producing him
A means I’ve now to find.”

She went away. She disappeared,
Years, years. Then back she came:
In her hand was a blooming boy
Mentally and in frame.

“I found a father at last who’d suit
The purpose in my head,
And used him till he’d done his job,”
Was all thereon she said.

SQUIRE HOOPER

Hooper was ninety. One September dawn
He sent a messenger
For his physician, who asked thereupon
What ailed the sufferer
Which he might circumvent, and promptly bid begone.
“Doctor, I summoned you,” the squire replied —
“Pooh-pooh me though you may —
To ask what’s happened to me — burst inside,
It seems — not much, I’d say —
But awkward with a house-full here for a shoot to-day.”
And he described the symptoms. With bent head
The listener looked grave.
“H’m. . . . You’re a dead man in six hours,” he said. —
“I speak out, since you are brave —
And best ‘tis you should know, that last things may be sped.”
“Right,” said the squire. “And now comes — what to do?
One thing: on no account
Must I now spoil the sport I’ve asked them to —
My guests are paramount —
They must scour scrub and stubble; and big bags bring as due.”
He downed to breakfast, and bespoke his guests: —
“I find I have to go
An unexpected journey, and it rests
With you, my friends, to show
The shoot can go off gaily, whether I’m there or no.”
Thus blandly spoke he; and to the fields they went,
And Hooper up the stair.
They had a glorious day; and stiff and spent
Returned as dusk drew near. —
“Gentlemen,” said the doctor, “he’s not back as meant,

To his deep regret!" — So they took leave, each guest
Observing: "I dare say
Business detains him in the town: 'tis best
We should no longer stay
Just now. We'll come again anon"; and they went their way.

Meeting two men in the obscurity
Shouldering a box a thin
Cloth-covering wrapt, one sportsman cried: "Damn me,
I thought them carrying in,
At first, a coffin; till I knew it could not be."

A GENTLEMAN'S SECOND-HAND SUIT

Here it is hanging in the sun
By the pawn-shop door,
A dress-suit — all its revels done
Of heretofore.
Long drilled to the waltzers' swing and sway,
As its tokens show:
What it has seen, what it could say
If it did but know!

The sleeve bears still a print of powder
Rubbed from her arms
When she warmed up as the notes swelled louder
And livened her charms —
Or rather theirs, for beauties many
Leant there, no doubt,
Leaving these tell-tale traces when he
Spun them about.

Its cut seems rather in bygone style
On looking close,
So it mayn't have bent it for some while
To the dancing pose:
Anyhow, often within its clasp
Fair partners hung,
Assenting to the wearer's grasp
With soft sweet tongue.

Where is, alas, the gentleman
Who wore this suit?
And where are his ladies? Tell none can:
Gossip is mute.
Some of them may forget him quite
Who smudged his sleeve,
Some think of a wild and whirling night
With him, and grieve.

WE SAY WE SHALL NOT MEET

We say we shall not meet
Again beneath this sky,
And turn with leaden feet,
Murmuring "Good-bye!"
But laugh at how we rued
Our former time's adieu
When those who went for good
Are met anew.
We talk in lightest vein
On trifles talked before,
And part to meet again,
But meet no more.

SEEING THE MOON RISE

We used to go to Froom-hill Barrow
To see the round moon rise
Into the heath-rimmed skies,
Trudging thither by plough and harrow
Up the pathway, steep and narrow,
Singing a song.
Now we do not go there. Why?
Zest burns not so high!

Latterly we've only conned her
With a passing glance
From window or door by chance,
Hoping to go again, high yonder,
As we used, and gaze, and ponder,
Singing a song.
Thitherward we do not go:
Feet once quick are slow!
August 1927

SONG TO AURORE

We'll not begin again to love,
It only leads to pain;
The fire we now are master of
Has seared us not in vain.
Any new step of yours I'm fain
To hear of from afar,
And even in such may find a gain
While lodged not where you are.

No: that must not be done anew
Which has been done before;
I scarce could bear to seek, or view,
Or clasp you any more!
Life is a labour, death is sore,
And lonely living wrings;
But go your courses, Sweet Aurore,
Kisses are caresome things!

HE NEVER EXPECTED MUCH

[or] A CONSIDERATION
[A reflection] ON MY EIGHTY-SIXTH BIRTHDAY

Well, World, you have kept faith with me,
Kept faith with me;
Upon the whole you have proved to be
Much as you said you were.
Since as a child I used to lie
Upon the leaze and watch the sky,
Never, I own, expected I
That life would all be fair.

‘Twas then you said, and since have said,
Times since have said,
In that mysterious voice you shed
From clouds and hills around:
“Many have loved me desperately,
Many with smooth serenity,
While some have shown contempt of me
Till they dropped underground.

“I do not promise overmuch,
Child; overmuch;
Just neutral-tinted haps and such,”
You said to minds like mine.
Wise warning for your credit’s sake!
Which I for one failed not to take,
And hence could stem such strain and ache
As each year might assign.

STANDING BY THE MANTELPIECE

(H. M. M., 1873)

This candle-wax is shaping to a shroud
To-night. (They call it that, as you may know) —
By touching it the claimant is avowed,
And hence I press it with my finger — so.

To-night. To me twice night, that should have been
The radiance of the midmost tick of noon,
And close around me wintertime is seen
That might have shone the veriest day of June!

But since all’s lost, and nothing really lies
Above but shade, and shadier shade below,
Let me make clear, before one of us dies,
My mind to yours, just now embittered so.

Since you agreed, unurged and full-advised,
And let warmth grow without discouragement,
Why do you bear you now as if surprised,
When what has come was clearly consequent?

Since you have spoken, and finality
Closes around, and my last movements loom,
I say no more: the rest must wait till we
Are face to face again, yonside the tomb.

And let the candle-wax thus mould a shape
Whose meaning now, if hid before, you know,
And how by touch one present claims its drape,
And that it's I who press my finger — so.

BOYS THEN AND NOW

“More than one cuckoo?”
And the little boy
Seemed to lose something
Of his spring joy.

When he'd grown up
He told his son
He'd used to think
There was only one,
Who came each year
With the trees' new trim
On purpose to please
England and him:

And his son — old already
In life and its ways —
Said yawning: “How foolish
Boys were in those days!”

THAT KISS IN THE DARK

Recall it you? —
Say you do! —
When you went out into the night,
In an impatience that would not wait,
From that lone house in the woodland spot,
And when I, thinking you had gone
For ever and ever from my sight,
Came after, printing a kiss upon
Black air
In my despair,
And my two lips lit on your cheek
As you leant silent against a gate,
Making my woman's face flush hot
At what I had done in the dark, unaware
You lingered for me but would not speak:
Yes, kissed you, thinking you were not there!
Recall it you? —
Say you do!

A NECESSITARIAN'S EPITAPH

A world I did not wish to enter
Took me and poised me on my centre,
Made me grimace, and foot, and prance,
As cats on hot bricks have to dance
Strange jigs to keep them from the floor,
Till they sink down and feel no more.

BURNING THE HOLLY

O you are sad on Twelfth Night,
I notice: sad on Twelfth Night;
You are as sad on Twelfth Night
As any that I know.

“Yes: I am sad on that night,
Doubtless I'm sad on that night:
Yes; I am sad on that night,
For we all loved her so!”

Why are you sad on Twelfth Night,
Especially on Twelfth Night?
Why are you sad on Twelfth Night
When wit and laughter flow?

— "She'd been a famous dancer,
Much lured of men; a dancer.
She'd been a famous dancer,
Facile in heel and toe. . . .

"And we were burning the holly
On Twelfth Night; the holly,
As people do: the holly,
Ivy, and mistletoe.

"And while it popped and crackled,
(She being our lodger), crackled;
And while it popped and crackled,
Her face caught by the glow,

"In he walked and said to her,
In a slow voice he said to her;
Yes, walking in he said to her,
'We sail before cock-crow.'

"Why did you not come on to me,
As promised? Yes, come on to me?
Why did you not come on to me,
Since you had sworn to go?"

"His eyes were deep and flashing,
As flashed the holm-flames: flashing;
His eyes were deep, and flashing
In their quick, keen upthrow.

"As if she had been ready,
Had furtively been ready;
As if she had been ready
For his insistence — lo! —

"She clasped his arm and went with him
As his entirely: went with him.
She clasped his arm and went with him
Into the sprinkling snow.

"We saw the prickly leaves waste
To ashes: saw the leaves waste;
The burnt-up prickly leaves waste. . . .
The pair had gone also.

— "On Twelfth Night, two years after —
Yes, Twelfth Night, two years after;
On Twelfth Night, two years after,
We sat — our spirits low —

"Musing, when back the door swung
Without a knock. The door swung;
Thought flew to her. The door swung,
And in she came, pale, slow;

"Against her breast a child clasped;
Close to her breast a child clasped;
She stood there with the child clasped,
Swaying it to and fro.

"Her look alone the tale told;
Quite wordless was the tale told;
Her careworn eyes the tale told
As larger they seemed to grow. . . .

"One day next spring she disappeared,
The second time she disappeared.
And that time, when she'd disappeared
Came back no more. Ah, no!

"But we still burn the holly
On Twelfth Night; burn the holly
As people do: the holly,
Ivy, and mistletoe."

SUSPENSE

A clamminess hangs over all like a clout,
The fields are a water-colour washed out,
The sky at its rim leaves a chink of light,
Like the lid of a pot that will not close tight.

She is away by the groaning sea,
Strained at the heart, and waiting for me:
Between us our foe from a hid retreat
Is watching, to wither us if we meet. . . .

But it matters little, however we fare —
Whether we meet, or I get not there;
The sky will look the same thereupon,
And the wind and the sea go groaning on.

THE SECOND VISIT

Clack, clack, clack, went the mill-wheel as I came,
And she was on the bridge with the thin hand-rail,
And the miller at the door, and the ducks at mill-tail;
I come again years after, and all there seems the same.

And so indeed it is: the apple-tree'd old house,
And the deep mill-pond, and the wet wheel clacking,
And a woman on the bridge, and white ducks quacking,
And the miller at the door, powdered pale from boots to brows.

But it's not the same miller whom long ago I knew,
Nor are they the same apples, nor the same drops that dash
Over the wet wheel, nor the ducks below that splash,
Nor the woman who to fond complaints replied, "You know I do!"

OUR OLD FRIEND DUALISM

All hail to him, the Protean! A tough old chap is he:
Spinoza and the Monists cannot make him cease to be.
We pound him with our "Truth, Sir, please!" and quite appear to still him:
He laughs; holds Bergson up, and James; and swears we cannot kill him.
We argue them pragmatic cheats. "Aye," says he. "They're deceiving:
But I must live; for flamens plead I am all that's worth believing!"

1920

FAITHFUL WILSON

"I say she's handsome, by all laws
Of beauty, if wife ever was!"
Wilson insists thus, though each day
The years fret Fanny towards decay.
"She was once beauteous as a jewel,"
Hint friends; "but Time, of course, is cruel."
Still Wilson does not quite feel how,
Once fair, she can be different now.

Partly from Strato of Sardis.

GALLANT'S SONG

When the maiden leaves off teasing,
Then the man may leave off pleasing:
Yea, 'tis sign,
Wet or fine,
She will love him without ceasing
With a love there's no appeasing.
Is it so?
Ha-ha. Ho!
Nov. 1868.
From an old notebook.

A PHILOSOPHICAL FANTASY

“Milton . . . made God argue.” — Walter Bagehot.

“Well, if thou wilt, then, ask me;
To answer will not task me:
I've a response, I doubt not.
And quite agree to flout not
Thy question, if of reason,
Albeit not quite in season:
A universe to marshal,
What god can give but partial
Eye to frail Earth — life-shotten
Ere long, extinct, forgotten! —
But seeing indications
That thou read'st my limitations,
And since my lack of forethought
Aggrieves thy more and more thought,
I'll hearken to thy pleading:
Some lore may lie in heeding
Thy irregular proceeding.”

“‘Tis this unfulfilled intention,
O Causer, I would mention: —
Will you, in condescension
This evening, ere we’ve parted,
Say why you felt fainthearted,
And let your aim be thwarted,
Its glory be diminished,
Its concept stand unfinished? —
Such I ask you, Sir or Madam,
(I know no more than Adam,
Even vaguely, what your sex is, —
Though feminine I had thought you
Till seers as ‘Sire’ besought you; —
And this my ignorance vexes
Some people not a little,
And, though not me one tittle,
It makes me sometimes choose me
Call you ‘It,’ if you’ll excuse me?”)

“Call me ‘It’ with a good conscience,
 And be sure it is all nonsense
 That I mind a fault of manner
 In a pigmy towards his planner!
 Be I, be not I, sexless,
 I am in nature vexless.
 — How vain must clay-carved man be
 To deem such folly can be
 As that freaks of my own framing
 Can set my visage flaming —
 Start me volleying interjections
 Against my own confections,
 As the Jews and others limned me,
 And in fear and trembling hymned me!
 Call me ‘but dream-projected,’
 I shall not be affected;
 Call me ‘blind force persisting,’
 I shall remain unlisting;
 (A few have done it lately,
 And, maybe, err not greatly.)
 — Another such a vanity
 In witless weak humanity
 Is thinking that of those all
 Through space at my disposal,
 Man’s shape must needs resemble
 Mine, that makes zodiacs tremble!
 “Continuing where we started: —
 As for my aims being thwarted,
 Wherefore I feel fainthearted,
 Aimless am I, revealing
 No heart-scope for faint feeling.
 — But thy mistake I’ll pardon,
 And, as Adam’s mentioned to me,
 (Though in timeless truth there never
 Was a man like him whatever)
 I’ll meet thee in thy garden,
 As I did not him, beshrew me!
 In the sun of so-called daytime —
 Say, just about the Maytime
 Of my next, or next, Creation?
 (I love procrastination,

To use the words in thy sense,
Which have no hold on my sense)
Or at any future stray-time. —
One of thy representatives
In some later incarnation
I mean, of course, well knowing
Thy present conformation
But a unit of my tentatives,
Whereof such heaps lie blowing
As dust, where thou art going;
Yea, passed to where suns glow not,
Begrrieved of those that go not
(Though what grief is, I know not.)
“Perhaps I may inform thee,
In case I should alarm thee,
That no dramatic stories
Like ancient ones whose core is
A mass of superstition
And monkish imposition
Will mark my explanation
Of the world’s sore situation
(As thou tell’st), with woes that shatter;
Though from former aions to latter
To me ‘tis malleable matter
For treatment scientific
More than sensitive and specific —
Stuff without moral features,
Which I’ve no sense of ever,
Or of ethical endeavour,
Or of justice to Earth’s creatures,
Or how Right from Wrong to sever:
Let these be as men learn such;
For me, I don’t discern such,
And — real enough I daresay —
I know them but by hearsay
As something Time hath rendered
Out of substance I engendered,
Time, too, being a condition
Beyond my recognition.
— I would add that, while unknowing
Of this justice earthward owing,

Nor explanation offering
Of what is meant by suffering,
Thereof I'm not a spurner,
Or averse to be a learner.

“To return from wordy wandering
To the question we are pondering;
Though, viewing the world in my mode,
I fail to see it in thy mode
As ‘unfulfilled intention,’
Which is past my comprehension
Being unconscious in my doings
So largely, (whence thy rueings); —
Aye, to human tribes nor kindness
Nor love I've given, but mindlessness,
Which state, though far from ending,
May nevertheless be mending.

“However, I'll advise him —
Him thy scion, who will walk here
When Death hath dumb'd thy talk here —
In phrase that may surprise him,
What thing it was befel me,
(A thing that my confessing
Lack of forethought helps thy guessing),
And acted to compel me
By that purposeless propension
Which is mine, and not intention,
Along lines of least resistance,
Or, in brief, unsensed persistence,
That saddens thy existence
To think my so-called scheming
Not that of my first dreaming.”

1920 and 1926.

A QUESTION OF MARRIAGE

“I yield you my whole heart, Countess,” said he;
“Come, Dear, and be queen of my studio.”
“No, sculptor. You're merely my friend,” said she:
“We dine our artists; but marry them — no.”

“Be it thus,” he replied. And his love, so strong,
He subdued as a stoic should. Anon
He wived some damsel who’d loved him long,
Of lineage noteless; and chiselled on.

And a score years passed. As a master-mind
The world made much of his marching fame,
And his wife’s little charms, with his own entwined,
Won day after day increased acclaim.

The countess-widow had closed with a mate
In rank and wealth of her own degree,
And they moved among the obscurely great
Of an order that had no novelty.

And oldening — neither with blame nor praise —
Their stately lives begot no stir,
And she saw that when death should efface her days
All men would abandon thought of her;

And said to herself full gloomily:
“Far better for me had it been to shine
The wench of a genius such as he
Than rust as the wife of a spouse like mine!”

THE LETTER’S TRIUMPH

(A FANCY)

Yes: I perceive it’s to your Love
You are bent on sending me. That this is so
Your words and phrases prove!

And now I am folded, and start to go,
Where you, my writer, have no leave to come:
My entry none will know!

And I shall catch her eye, and dumb
She’ll keep, should my unnoised arrival be
Hoped for, or troublesome.

My face she’ll notice readily:
And, whether she care to meet you, or care not,
She will perforce meet me;

Take me to closet or garden-plot
And, blushing or pouting, bend her eyes quite near,
Moved much, or never a jot.

And while you wait in hope and fear,
Far from her cheeks and lips, snug I shall stay
In close communion there,
And hear her heart-beats, things she may say,
As near her naked fingers, sleeve, or glove
I lie — ha-ha! — all day.

A FORGOTTEN MINIATURE

There you are in the dark,
Deep in a box
Nobody ever unlocks,
Or even turns to mark;
— Out of mind stark.
Yet there you have not been worsed
Like your sitter
By Time, the Fair's hard-hitter;
Your beauties, undispersed,
Glow as at first.
Shut in your case for years,
Never an eye
Of the many passing nigh,
Fixed on their own affairs,
Thinks what it nears!
— While you have lain in gloom,
A form forgot,
Your reign remembered not,
Much life has come to bloom
Within this room.
Yea, in Time's cyclic sweep
Unrest has ranged:
Women and men have changed:
Some you knew slumber deep;
Some wait for sleep.

WHISPERED AT THE CHURCH-OPENING

In the bran-new pulpit the bishop stands,
And gives out his text, as his gaze expands
To the people, the aisles, the roof's new frame,
And the arches, and ashlar with coloured bands.

“Why — he's the man,” says one, “who came
To preach in my boyhood — a fashion then —
In a series of sermons to working-men
On week-day evenings, a novelty
Which brought better folk to hear and see.
They preached each one each week, by request:
Some were eloquent speakers, among the best
Of the lot being this, as all confessed.”

“I remember now. And reflection brings
Back one in especial, sincerest of all;
Whose words, though unpicked, gave the essence of things; —
And where is he now, whom I well recall?”

“Oh, he'd no touches of tactic skill:
His mind ran on charity and good will:
He's but as he was, a vicar still.”

IN WEATHERBURY STOCKS

-1850

“I sit here in these stocks,
And Saint-Mary's moans eleven;
The sky is dark and cold:
I would I were in heaven!

“What footsteps do I hear?
Ah, you do not forget,
My Sophy! O, my dear,
We may be happy yet!

“But — . Mother, is't your voice?
You who have come to me? —
It did not cross my thought:
I was thinking it was she.”

“She! Foolish simple son!
She says: ‘I've finished quite
With him or any one
Put in the stocks to-night.’

“She’s gone to Blooms-End dance,
And will not come back yet:
Her new man sees his chance,
And is teaching her to forget.

“Jim, think no other woman
To such a fellow is true
But the mother you have grieved so,
Or cares for one like you!”

A PLACID MAN’S EPITAPH

As for my life, I’ve led it
With fair content and credit:
It said: “Take this.” I took it.
Said: “Leave.” And I forsook it.
If I had done without it
None would have cared about it,
Or said: “One has refused it
Who might have meetly used it.”

1925

THE NEW BOOTS

“They are his new boots,” she pursued;
“They have not been worn at all:
They stay there hung on the wall,
And are getting as stiff as wood.
He bought them for the wet weather,
And they are of waterproof leather.”

“Why does her husband,” said I,
“Never wear those boots bought new?”
To a neighbour of hers I knew;
Who answered: “Ah, those boots. Aye,
He bought them to wear whenever
It rained. But there they hang ever.

“‘Yes,’ he laughed, as he hung them up,
‘I’ve got them at last — a pair
I can walk in anywhere
Through rain and slush and slop.
For many a year I’ve been haunted
By thoughts of how much they were wanted.’

“And she’s not touched them or tried
To remove them. . . . Anyhow,
As you see them hanging now
They have hung ever since he died
The day after gaily declaring:
‘Ha-ha! Now for wet wayfaring.
They’re just the chaps for my wearing!’”

THE MUSING MAIDEN

“Why so often, silent one,
Do you steal away alone?”
Starting, half she turned her head,
And guiltily she said: —

“When the vane points to his far town
I go upon the hog-backed down,
And think the breeze that stroked his lip
Over my own may slip.

“When he walks at close of day
I ramble on the white highway,
And think it reaches to his feet:
A meditation sweet!

“When coasters hence to London sail
I watch their puffed wings waning pale;
His window opens near the quay;
Their coming he can see.

“I go to meet the moon at night;
To mark the moon was our delight;
Up there our eyesights touch at will
If such he practise still.”

W.P.V. October 1866 (recopied).

LORNA THE SECOND

Lorna! Yes, you are sweet,
But you are not your mother,
Lorna the First, frank, feat,
Never such another! —
Love of her could smother
Griefs by day or night;
Nor could any other,
Lorna, dear and bright,
Ever so well adorn a
Mansion, coach, or cot,
Or so make men scorn a
Rival in their sight;
Even you could not!
Hence I have to mourn a
Loss ere you were born; a Lorna!

A DAUGHTER RETURNS

I like not that dainty-cut raiment, those earrings of pearl,
I like not the light in that eye;
I like not the note of that voice. Never so was the girl
Who a year ago bade me good-bye!

Hadst but come bare and moneyless, worn in the vamp, weather-gray,
But innocent still as before,
How warmly I'd lodged thee! But sport thy new gains far away;
I pray thee now — come here no more!

And yet I'll not try to blot out every memory of thee;
I'll think of thee — yes, now and then:
One who's watched thee since Time called thee out o' thy mother and me
Must think of thee; aye, I know when! . . .

When the cold sneer of dawn follows night-shadows black as a hearse,
And the rain filters down the fruit tree,
And the tempest mouths into the flue-top a word like a curse,
Then, then I shall think, think of thee!

December 17, 1901.

THE THIRD KISSING-GATE

She foots it forward down the town,
Then leaves the lamps behind,
And trots along the eastern road
Where elms stand double-lined.

She clacks the first dim kissing-gate
Beneath the storm-strained trees,
And passes to the second mead
That fringes Mellstock Leaze.

She swings the second kissing-gate
Next the gray garden-wall,
And sees the third mead stretching down
Towards the waterfall.

And now the third-placed kissing-gate
Her silent shadow nears,
And touches with; when suddenly
Her person disappears.

What chanced by that third kissing-gate
When the hushed mead grew dun?
Lo — two dark figures clasped and closed
As if they were but one.

DRINKING SONG

Once on a time when thought began
Lived Thales: he
Was said to see
Vast truths that mortals seldom can;
It seems without
A moment's doubt
That everything was made for man.

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: feel no distress
That thoughts so great should now be less!

Earth mid the sky stood firm and flat,
He held, till came
A sage by name
Copernicus, and righted that.
We trod, he told,
A globe that rolled
Around a sun it warmed it at.

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: feel no distress;
'Tis only one great thought the less!
But still we held, as Time flew by
And wit increased,
Ours was, at least,
The only world whose rank was high:
Till rumours flew
From folk who knew
Of globes galore about the sky.

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: fell no distress;
'Tis only one great thought the less!
And that this earth, our one estate,
Was no prime ball,
The best of all,
But common, mean; indeed, tenth-rate:
And men, so proud,
A feeble crowd,
Unworthy any special fate.

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: feel no distress;
'Tis only one great thought the less!
Then rose one Hume, who could not see,
If earth were such,
Required were much
To prove no miracles could be:
"Better believe
The eyes deceive
Than that God's clockwork jolts," said he.

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: feel no distress;
'Tis only one great thought the less!

Next this strange message Darwin brings,
(Though saying his say
In a quiet way);
We all are one with creeping things;
And apes and men
Blood-brethren,
And likewise reptile forms with stings.

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: feel no distress;
'Tis only one great thought the less!
And when this philosoph had done
Came Doctor Cheyne:
Speaking plain he
Proved no virgin bore a son.
"Such tale, indeed,
Helps not our creed,"
He said. "A tale long known to none."

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: feel no distress;
'Tis only one great thought the less!
And now comes Einstein with a notion —
Not yet quite clear
To many here —
That's there's no time, no space, no motion,
Nor rathe nor late,
Nor square nor straight,
But just a sort of bending-ocean.

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: feel no distress;
'Tis only one great thought the less!
So here we are, in piteous case:
Like butterflies
Of many dyes
Upon an Alpine glacier's face:
To fly and cower
In some warm bower
Our chief concern in such a place.

Chorus.

Fill full your cups: feel no distress
At all our great thoughts shrinking less:
We'll do a good deed nevertheless!

THE TARRYING BRIDEGROOM

Wildly bound the bells this morning
For the glad solemnity;
People are adorning
Chancel and canopy;
But amid the peal a warning
Under-echo calls to me.

Where the lane divides the pasture
Long I watch each bend and stone,
Why not now as last year,
When he sought me — lone?
Come, O come, and see, and cast here
Light and love on one your own!

How it used to draw him to me,
When I piped a pretty tune;
Yes, when first he knew me
In my pink shalloon:
Little I guessed 'twould so undo me
Lacking him this summer noon!

THE DESTINED PAIR

Two beings were drifting
Each one to the other:
No moment's veil-lifting
Or hint from another
Led either to weet
That the tracks of their feet
Were arcs that would meet.

One moved in a city,
And one in a village,
Where many a ditty
He tongued when at tillage
On dreams of a dim
Figure fancy would limn
That was viewless to him.

Would Fate have been kinder
To keep night between them? —
Had he failed to find her
And time never seen them
Unite; so that, caught
In no burning love-thought,
She had faded unsought?

A MUSICAL INCIDENT

When I see the room it hurts me
As with a pricking blade,
Those women being the memoried reason why my cheer deserts me. —
‘Twas thus. One of them played
To please her friend, not knowing
That friend was speedily growing,
Behind the player’s chair,
Somnolent, unaware
Of any music there.

I saw it, and it distressed me,
For I had begun to think
I loved the drowsy listener, when this arose to test me
And tug me from love’s brink.
“Beautiful!” said she, waking
As the music ceased. “Heart-aching!”
Though never a note she’d heard
To judge of as averred —
Save that of the very last word.

All would have faded in me,
But that the sleeper brought
News a week thence that her friend was dead. It stirred within me
Sense of injustice wrought
That dead player’s poor intent —
So heartily, kindly meant —
As blandly added the sigher:
“How glad I am I was nigh her,
To hear her last tune!” — ”Liar!”
I lipped. — This gave love pause,
And killed it, such as it was.

JUNE LEAVES AND AUTUMN

I

Lush summer lit the trees to green;
But in the ditch hard by
Lay dying boughs some hand unseen
Had lopped when first with festal mien
They matched their mates on high.
It seemed a melancholy fate
That leaves but brought to birth so late
Should rust there, red and numb,
In quickened fall, while all their race
Still joyed aloft in pride of place
With store of days to come.

II

At autumn-end I fared that way,
And traced those boughs fore-hewn
Whose leaves, awaiting their decay
In slowly browning shades, still lay
Where they had lain in June
And now, no less embrowned and curst
Than if they had fallen with the first,
Nor known a morning more,
Lay there alongside, dun and sere,
Those that at my last wandering here
Had length of days in store.

November 19, 1898.

NO BELL-RINGING

A BALLAD OF DURNOVER

The little boy legged on through the dark,
To hear the New-Year's ringing:
The three-mile road was empty, stark,
No sound or echo bringing.

When he got to the tall church tower
Standing upon the hill,
Although it was hard on the midnight hour
The place was, as elsewhere, still;

Except that the flag-staff rope, betossed
By blasts from the nor'-east,
Like a dead man's bones on a gibbet-post
Tugged as to be released.

"Why is there no ringing to-night?"
Said the boy to a moveless one
On a tombstone where the moon struck white;
But he got answer none.

"No ringing in of New Year's Day."
He mused as he dragged back home;
And wondered till his head was gray
Why the bells that night were dumb.

And often thought of the snowy shape
That sat on the moonlit stone,
Nor spoke nor moved, and in mien and drape
Seemed like a sprite thereon.

And then he met one left of the band
That had treble-bobbed when young,
And said: "I never could understand
Why, that night, no bells rung."

"True. There'd not happened such a thing
For half a century; aye,
And never I've told why they did not ring
From that time till to-day. . . .

"Through the week in bliss at The Hit or Miss
We had drunk — not a penny left;
What then we did — well, now 'tis hid, —
But better we'd stooped to theft!

"Yet, since none other remains who can,
And few more years are mine,
I may tell you," said the cramped old man.
"We — swilled the Sacrament-wine.

"Then each set-to with the strength of two,
Every man to his bell;
But something was wrong we found ere long
Though what, we could not tell.

"We pulled till the sweat-drops fell around,
As we'd never pulled before,
An hour by the clock, but not one sound
Came down through the bell-loft floor.

“On the morrow all folk of the same thing spoke,
They had stood at the midnight time
On their doorsteps near with a listening ear,
But there reached them never a chime.

“We then could read the dye of our deed,
And we knew we were accurst;
But we broke to none the thing we had done,
And since then never durst.”

An old tavern now demolished. The full legend over the door ran, “Hit or Miss:
Luck’s All!”

I LOOKED BACK

I looked back as I left the house,
And, past the chimneys and neighbour tree,
The moon upsidled through the boughs: —
I thought: “I shall a last time see
This picture; when will that time be?”

I paused amid the laugh-loud feast,
And selfward said: “I am sitting where,
Some night, when ancient songs have ceased,
‘Now is the last time I shall share
Such cheer,’” will be the thought I bear.

An eye-sweep back at a look-out corner
Upon a hill, as forenigh wore,
Stirred me to think: “Ought I to warn her
That, though I come here times three-score,
One day ‘twill be I come no more?”

Anon I reasoned there had been,
Ere quite forsaken was each spot,
Bygones whereon I’d lastly seen
That house, that feast, that maid forgot;
But when? — Ah, I remembered not!

THE AGED NEWSPAPER SOLILOQUIZES

Yes; yes; I am old. In me appears
The history of a hundred years;
Empires', kings', captives', births and deaths,
Strange faiths, and fleeting shibboleths.
— Tragedy, comedy, throngs my page
Beyond all mummied on any stage:
Cold hearts beat hot, hot hearts beat cold,
And I beat on. Yes; yes; I am old.

CHRISTMAS: 1 "Peace upon earth!" was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison-gas.

1924

THE SINGLE WITNESS

"Did no one else, then, see them, man,
Lying among the whin?
Did no one else, behold them at all
Commit this shameless sin,
But you, in the hollow of the down
No traveller's eye takes in?"

"Nobody else, my noble lord,
Saw them together there —
Your young son's tutor and she. I made
A short cut from the fair,
And lit on them. I've said no word
About it anywhere."

"Good. . . . Now, you see my father's sword,
Hanging up in your view;
No hand has swung it since he came
Home after Waterloo.
I'll show it you. . . . There is the sword:
And this is what I'll do."

He ran the other through the breast,
Ere he could plead or cry.
“It is a dire necessity,
But — since no one was nigh
Save you and they, my historied name
Must not be smirched thereby.”

HOW SHE WENT TO IRELAND

Dora’s gone to Ireland
Through the sleet and snow:
Promptly she has gone there
In a ship, although
Why she’s gone to Ireland
Dora does not know.

That was where, yea, Ireland,
Dora wished to be:
When she felt, in lone times,
Shoots of misery,
Often there, in Ireland,
Dora wished to be.

Hence she’s gone to Ireland,
Since she meant to go,
Through the drift and darkness
Onward labouring, though
That she’s gone to Ireland
Dora does not know.

DEAD WESSEX THE DOG TO THE HOUSEHOLD

Do you think of me at all,
Wistful ones?
Do you think of me at all
As if nigh?
Do you think of me at all
At the creep of evenfall,
Or when the sky-birds call
As they fly?

Do you look for me at times,
Wistful ones?
Do you look for me at times
Strained and still?
Do you look for me at times,
When the hour for walking chimes,
On that grassy path that climbs
Up the hill?

You may hear a jump or trot,
Wistful ones,
You may hear a jump or trot —
Mine, as 'twere —
You may hear a jump or trot
On the stair or path or plot;
But I shall cause it not,
Be not there.

Should you call as when I knew you,
Wistful ones,
Should you call as when I knew you,
Shared your home;

Should you call as when I knew you,
I shall not turn to view you,
I shall not listen to you,
Shall not come.

THE WOMAN WHO WENT EAST

“Where is that woman of the west,
Good Sir, once friends with me,
In rays of her own rareness drest,
And fired by sunset from the sea?
Yes, she — once friends with me.”

“ — She went to sojourn in the east,
O stranger Dame, one day;
Her own west land she reckoned least
Of all lands, with its weird old way,
So left it, Dame, one day:

“Doubtless they prized her marvellous mould
At its right worth elsewhere,
Yea, Dame, and kept her shrined in gold,
So speaking, as one past compare;
Aye, prized her worth elsewhere!”

— ”Must, must I then a story tell,
Old native, here to you,
Of peradventures that befel
Her eastward — shape it as ‘twere new,
Old native, here to you?

“O unforgotten day long back,
When, wilful, east she sped
From you with her new Love. Alack,
Her lips would still be ripe and red
Had she not eastward sped!

“For know, old lover, dull of eyes,
That woman, I am she:
This skeleton that Time so tries
Your rose of rareness used to be;
Yes, sweetheart, I am she.”

NOT KNOWN

They know the wilings of the world,
The latest flippancy;
They know each jest at hazard hurled,
But know not me.

They know a phasm they name as me,
In whom I should not find
A single self-held quality
Of body or mind.

THE BOY’S DREAM

Provincial town-boy he, — frail, lame,
His face a waning lily-white,
A court the home of his wry, wrenched frame,
Where noontide shed no warmth or light.

Over his temples — flat and wan,
Where bluest veins were patterned keen,
The skin appeared so thinly drawn
The skull beneath was almost seen.

Always a wishful, absent look
Expressed it in his face and eye;
At the strong shape this longing took
One guessed what wish must underlie.

But no. That wish was not for strength,
For other boys' agility,
To race with ease the field's far length,
Now hopped across so painfully.

He minded not his lameness much,
To shine at feats he did not long,
Nor to be best at goal and touch,
Nor at assaults to stand up strong.

But sometimes he would let be known
What the wish was: — to have, next spring,
A real green linnet — his very own —
Like that one he had late heard sing.

And as he breathed the cherished dream
To those whose secrecy was sworn,
His face was beautified by the theme,
And wore the radiance of the morn.

THE GAP IN THE WHITE

(178*)

Something had cracked in her mouth as she slept,
Having danced with the Prince long, and sipped his gold tass;
And she woke in alarm, and quick, breathlessly, leapt
Out of bed to the glass.

And there, in the blue dawn, her mouth now displayed
To her woe, in the white
Level line of her teeth, a black gap she had made
In a dream's nervous bite.

“O how can I meet him to-morrow!” she said.
“I'd won him — yes, yes! Now, alas, he is lost!”
(That age knew no remedy.) Duly her dread
Proved the truth, to her cost.

And if you could go and examine her grave
You'd find the gap there,
But not understand, now that science can save,
Her unbounded despair.

FAMILY PORTRAITS

Three picture-drawn people stepped out of their frames —
The blast, how it blew!
And the white-shrouded candles flapped smoke-headed flames;
— Three picture-drawn people came down from their frames,
And dumbly in lippings they told me their names,
Full well though I knew.

The first was a maiden of mild wistful tone,
Gone silent for years,
The next a dark woman in former time known;
But the first one, the maiden of mild wistful tone,
So wondering, unpractised, so vague and alone,
Nigh moved me to tears.

The third was a sad man — a man of much gloom;
And before me they passed
In the shade of the night, at the back of the room,
The dark and fair woman, the man of much gloom,
Three persons, in far-off years forceful, but whom
Death now fettered fast.

They set about acting some drama, obscure,
The women and he,
With puppet-like movements of mute strange allure;
Yea, set about acting some drama, obscure,
Till I saw 'twas their own lifetime's tragic amour,
Whose course begot me;

Yea — a mystery, ancestral, long hid from my reach
In the perished years past,
That had mounted to dark doings each against each
In those ancestors' days, and long hid from my reach;
Which their restless enghostings, it seemed, were to teach
Me in full, at this last.

But fear fell upon me like frost, of some hurt
If they entered anew
On the orbits they smartly had swept when expert
In the law-lacking passions of life, — of some hurt
To their souls — and thus mine — which I fain would avert
So, in sweat cold as dew,

“Why wake up all this?” I cried out. “Now, so late!
Let old ghosts be laid!”
And they stiffened, drew back to their frames and numb state,
Gibbering: “Thus are your own ways to shape, know too late!”
Then I grieved that I’d not had the courage to wait
And see the play played.

I have grieved ever since: to have balked future pain,
My blood’s tendance foreknown,
Had been triumph. Nights long stretched awake I have lain
Perplexed in endeavours to balk future pain
By uncovering the drift of their drama. In vain,
Though therein lay my own.

THE CATCHING BALLET OF THE WEDDING CLOTHES

(Temp. Guliel IV.)

“A gentleman’s coming
To court me, they say;
The ringers are told,
And the band is to play.
O why should he do it
Now poor Jack’s away?
I surely shall rue it:
Come, white witch, and say!”

“The gentleman’s coming
To marry you, dear;
They tell at the turnpikes
That he has been here!
He rode here in secret,
To gain eye of you: —
Throw over the sailor,
Is what I should do!”

"I will not throw over
 Poor Jack: no, indeed,
 For a new unknown lover
 Who loves at such speed,
 And writes to the ringers,
 And orders the band,
 As if I could only
 Obey his command!
 "La! now here is something
 Close packed in a box,
 And strapped up and corded,
 And held with two locks!"
 "Dear, that's from him, surely,
 As we may suppose?
 Ay, through the chink shining
 I spy wedding clothes!"
 "Yes — here's a drawn bonnet,
 And tortoiseshell combs,
 And a silk gown, silk stockings,
 And scents of rare blooms;
 And shoes, too, of satin,
 Quite past all my pride:
 O, how will it end, witch;
 I can't be his bride!"
 "Don't waste you in weeping:
 Not worth it is man!
 Beshrew me, my deary,
 I've shaped a new plan.
 Wear the clothes of the rich one,
 Since he will not see,
 But marry the poor one
 You love faithfully."
 "Here's a last packet. . . . Never!
 It knocks me to bits —
 The ring! 'Just to try on,
 To see if it fits."
 O I cannot!" . . . But Jack said,
 Quite cool, when he came,
 "Well, it will save money,
 And be just the same."

The marriage took place,
Yes; as vowed, she was true
To her dear sailor Jack
Ere the gentleman knew;
But she wore the rich clothing,
Much joyed at such guise,
Yet fearing and trembling
With tears in her eyes.

And at midnight, between her
And him she had wed,
The gentleman's figure
Arose up and said:
"My too-cruel darling,
In spite of your oaths,
You have married the man
Of the ring and the clothes!"

Thence on, would confront her,
When sleep had grown slack,
His face on the pillow
Between her and Jack;
And he nightly kept whispering:
"You surely must see,
Though your tongue-tip took him, Love,
Your body took me."

Till she sighed: "Yes, my word,
It must be confessed o' me,
Jack has; but this man
Can claim all the rest o' me!
And off to go with him
Bewitched am I now:
I'd fain not be two men's,
And won't, anyhow!"

So she pleaded and pleaded
From daybreak till dark,
Converting the parish
(Save parson and clerk).

She then wrote to Jack thus:
"I'm torn with mind-strife:
She who wears a man's bride-clothes
Must be the man's wife!"

And still she kept plaining,
Till Jack he wrote: "Aye!"
And the villagers gathered,
And on a fixed day,
They went out alertly
And stood in a row,
Quite blithe with excitement
To see John's wife go.

Some were facing her dwelling,
And some on the bridge,
And some at the corner,
And some by the ridge.
With a nod and a word
The coach stopped at her door,
And she upped like a bird,
And they saw her no more.

'Twas told that, years after,
When autumn winds wave,
A wealthy old lady
Stood long at Jack's grave,
And while her coach waited: —
She mused there; and then
She stepped in, and never
Came thither again.

1919

A WINSOME WOMAN

SONG

There's no winsome woman so winsome as she;
Some are flower-like in mouth,
Some have fire in the eyes,
Some feed a soul's drouth
Trilling words music-wise;
But where are these gifts all in one found to be
Save in her known to me?

What her thoughts are I read not, but this much I know,
That she, too, will pass
From the sun and the air
To her cave under grass;
And the world will declare,
“No such woman as his passionate utterances show
Walked this planet, we trow!”

THE BALLAD OF LOVE’S SKELETON

(179*)

“Come, let’s to Culliford Hill and Wood,
And watch the squirrels climb,
And look in sunny places there
For shepherds’ thyme.”

— “Can I have heart for Culliford Wood,
And hill and bank and tree,
Who know and ponder over all
Things done by me!”

— “Then, Dear, don hat, and come along:
We’ll strut the Royal strand;
King George has just arrived, his Court,
His guards, and band.”

— “You are a Baron of the King’s Court
From Hanover lately come,
And can forget in song and dance
What chills me numb.

“Well be the royal scenes for you,
And band beyond compare,
But how is she who hates her crime
To frolic there?”

“O why did you so urge and say
‘Twould soil your noble name! —
I should have prized a little child,
And faced the shame.

“I see the child — that should have been,
But was not, born alive;
With such a deed in a woman’s life
A year seems five.

“I asked not for the wifely rank,
Nor maiden honour saved;
To call a nestling thing my own
Was all I craved.

“For what’s the hurt of shame to one
Of no more note than me?
Can littlest life beneath the sun
More littled be?”

— ”Nay, never grieve. The day is bright,
Just as it was ere then:
In the Assembly Rooms to-night
Let’s joy again!

“The new Quick-Step is the sweetest dance
For lively toes and heels;
And when we tire of that we’ll prance
Bewitching reels.

“Dear, never grieve! As once we whirled
So let us whirl to-night,
Forgetting all things save ourselves
Till dawning light.

“The King and Queen, Princesses three,
Have promised to meet there
The mayor and townsfolk. I’ve my card
And One to spare.

“The Court will dance at the upper end;
Only a cord between
Them and the burgher-throng below;
A brilliant scene!”

— ”I’ll go. You’ve still my heart in thrall:
Save you, all’s dark to me.
And God knows what, when love is all,
The end will be!”

A PRIVATE MAN ON PUBLIC MEN

When my contemporaries were driving
Their coach through Life with strain and striving,
And raking riches into heaps,
And ably pleading in the Courts
With smart rejoinders and retorts,
Or where the Senate nightly keeps
Its vigils, till their fames were fanned
By rumour's tongue throughout the land,
I lived in quiet, screened, unknown,
Pondering upon some stick or stone,
Or news of some rare book or bird
Latterly bought, or seen, or heard,
Not wishing ever to set eyes on
The surging crowd beyond the horizon,
Tasting years of moderate gladness
Mellowed by sundry days of sadness,
Shut from the noise of the world without,
Hearing but dimly its rush and rout,
Unenvying those amid its roar,
Little endowed, not wanting more.

CHRISTMAS IN THE ELGIN ROOM

BRITISH MUSEUM: EARLY LAST CENTURY

“What is the noise that shakes the night,
And seems to soar to the Pole-star height?”
— ”Christmas bells,
The watchman tells
Who walks this hall that blears us captives with its blight.”
“And what, then, mean such clangs, so clear?”
“ — ’Tis said to have been a day of cheer,
And source of grace
To the human race
Long ere their woven sails winged us to exile here.
“We are those whom Christmas overthrew
Some centuries after Pheidias knew
How to shape us
And bedrape us
And to set us in Athena's temple for men's view.

“O it is sad now we are sold —
We gods! for Borean people’s gold,
And brought to the gloom
Of this gaunt room
Which sunlight shuns, and sweet Aurore but enters cold.
“For all these bells, would I were still
Radiant as on Athenai’s Hill.”
— ”And I, and I!”
The others sigh,
“Before this Christ was known, and we had men’s good will.”
Thereat old Helios could but nod,
Throbbled, too, the Ilissus River-god,
And the torsos there
Of deities fair,
Whose limbs were shards beneath some Acropolitan clod:
Demeter too, Poseidon hoar,
Persephone, and many more
Of Zeus’ high breed, —
All loth to heed
What the bells sang that night which shook them to the core.
1905 and 1926.

WE ARE GETTING TO THE END

We are getting to the end of visioning
The impossible within this universe,
Such as that better whiles may follow worse,
And that our race may mend by reasoning.
We know that even as larks in cages sing
Unthoughtful of deliverance from the curse
That holds them lifelong in a latticed hearse,
We ply spasmodically our pleasuring.
And that when nations set them to lay waste
Their neighbours’ heritage by foot and horse,
And hack their pleasant plains in festering seams,
They may again, — not warely, or from taste,
But tickled mad by some demonic force. —
Yes. We are getting to the end of dreams!

HE RESOLVES TO SAY NO MORE

O my soul, keep the rest unknown!
It is too like a sound of moan
When the charnel-eyed
Pale Horse has nighed:
Yea, none shall gather what I hide!
 Why load men's minds with more to bear
That bear already ails to spare?
From now alway
Till my last day
What I discern I will not say.
 Let Time roll backward if it will;
(Magians who drive the midnight quill
With brain aglow
Can see it so,)
What I have learnt no man shall know.
 And if my vision range beyond
The blinkered sight of souls in bond,
— By truth made free —
I'll let all be,
And show to no man what I see.

The Ted K Archive

Thomas Hardy
The Poetry Collection of Thomas Hardy - Volume 4

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