

Fernando Pizarro

THE POETICAL WORKS
OF
THOMAS HARDY

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

COLLECTED POEMS

LYRICAL, NARRATORY, AND REFLECTIVE



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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Thomas Hardy.

COLLECTED POEMS
OF
THOMAS HARDY

WITH A PORTRAIT

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1912

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1919

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WESSEX POEMS
AND OTHER VERSES

PREFACE

OF the miscellaneous collection of verse that follows, only four pieces have been published, though many were written long ago, and others partly written. In some few cases the verses were turned into prose and printed as such, it having been unanticipated at that time that they might see the light.

Whenever an ancient and legitimate word of the district, for which there was no equivalent in received English, suggested itself as the most natural, nearest, and often only expression of a thought, it has been made use of, on what seemed good grounds.

The pieces are in a large degree dramatic or personative in conception; and this even where they are not obviously so.

The dates attached to some of the poems do not apply to the rough sketches given in illustration,¹ which have been recently made, and, as may be surmised, are inserted for personal and local reasons rather than for their intrinsic qualities.

T. H.

¹ The early editions were illustrated by the writer.

September 1898.

THE TEMPORARY THE ALL

CHANGE and chancefulness in my flowering youthtime,
Set me sun by sun near to one unchosen ;
Wrought us fellowlike, and despite divergence
Fused us in friendship.

"Cherish him can I while the true one forthcome—
Come the rich fulfiller of my prevision ;
Life is roomy yet, and the odds unbounded."
So self-communed I.

Thwart my wistful way did a damsel saunter,
Fair, albeit unformed to be all-eclipsing ;
"Maiden meet," held I, "till arise my forefelt
Wonder of women."

Long a visioned hermitage deep desiring,
Tenements uncouth I was fain to house in ;
"Let such lodging be for a breath-while," thought I,
"Soon a more seemly.

"Then, high handiwork will I make my life-deed,
Truth and Light outshow ; but the ripe time pending,
Intermissive aim at the thing sufficeth."
Thus I . . . But lo, me !

Mistress, friend, place, aims to be bettered straightway,
Bettered not has Fate or my hand's achievement ;
Sole the showings those of my onward earthtrack—
Never transcended !

AMABEL

I MARKED her ruined hues,
 Her custom-straitened views,
 And asked, "Can there indwell
 My Amabel?"

I looked upon her gown,
 Once rose, now earthen brown;
 The change was like the knell
 Of Amabel.

Her step's mechanic ways
 Had lost the life of May's;
 Her laugh, once sweet in swell,
 Spoilt Amabel.

I mused: "Who sings the strain
 I sang ere warmth did wane?
 Who thinks its numbers spell
 His Amabel?"—

Knowing that, though Love cease,
 Love's race shows no decrease;
 All find in dorp or dell
 An Amabel.

—I felt that I could creep
 To some housetop, and weep
 That Time the tyrant fell
 Ruled Amabel!

I said (the while I sighed
 That love like ours had died),
 "Fond things I'll no more tell
 To Amabel,

"But leave her to her fate,
 And fling across the gate,
 'Till the Last Trump, farewell,
 O Amabel!"

HAP

IF but some vengeful god would call to me
 From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
 Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
 That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
 Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
 Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
 Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
 And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
 —Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
 And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
 These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
 Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

1866.

"IN VISION I ROAMED"

TO —

IN vision I roamed the flashing Firmament,
 So fierce in blazon that the Night waxed wan,
 As though with awe at orbs of such ostent;
 And as I thought my spirit ranged on and on

In footless traverse through ghastr heights of sky,
 To the last chambers of the monstrous Dome,
 Where stars the brightest here are lost to the eye:
 Then, any spot on our own Earth seemed Home!

And the sick grief that you were far away
 Grew pleasant thankfulness that you were near,
 Who might have been, set on some foreign Sphere,
 Less than a Want to me, as day by day
 I lived unaware, uncaring all that lay
 Locked in that Universe taciturn and drear.

1866.

WESSEX POEMS

AT A BRIDAL

NATURE'S INDIFFERENCE

WHEN you paced forth, to await maternity,
 A dream of other offspring held my mind,
 Compounded of us twain as Love designed ;
 Rare forms, that corporate now will never be !

Should I, too, wed as slave to Mode's decree,
 And each thus found apart, of false desire,
 A stolid line, whom no high aims will fire
 As had fired ours could ever have mingled we ;

And, grieved that lives so matched should miscompose,
 Each mourn the double waste ; and question dare
 To the Great Dame whence incarnation flows,
 Why those high-purposed children never were :
 What will she answer ? That she does not care
 If the race all such sovereign types unknowns.

1866.

POSTPONEMENT

SNOW-BOUND in woodland, a mournful word,
 Dropt now and then from the bill of a bird,
 Reached me on wind-wafts ; and thus I heard,
 Wearily waiting :—

“ I planned her a nest in a leafless tree,
 But the passers eyed and twitted me,
 And said : ‘ How reckless a bird is he,
 Cheerily mating ! ’

“ Fear-filled, I stayed me till summer-tide,
 In lewth of leaves to throne her bride ;
 But alas ! her love for me waned and died,
 Wearily waiting.

“ Ah, had I been like some I see,
 Born to an evergreen nesting-tree,
 None had eyed and twitted me,
 Cheerily mating ! ”

1866.

A CONFESSION TO A FRIEND IN TROUBLE

YOUR troubles shrink not, though I feel them less
 Here, far away, than when I tarried near ;
 I even smile old smiles—with listlessness—
 Yet smiles they are, not ghastly mockeries mere.

A thought too strange to house within my brain
 Haunting its outer precincts I discern :
 —*That I will not show zeal again to learn
 Your griefs, and, sharing them, renew my pain.* . . .

It goes, like murky bird or buccaneer
 That shapes its lawless figure on the main,
 And each new impulse tends to make outflie
 The unseemly instinct that had lodgment here ;
 Yet, comrade old, can bitterer knowledge be
 Than that, though banned, such instinct was in me !

1866.

NEUTRAL TONES

WE stood by a pond that winter day,
 And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
 And a few leaves lay on the starving sod ;
 —They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
 Over tedious riddles solved years ago ;
 And some words played between us to and fro
 On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
 Alive enough to have strength to die ;
 And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
 Like an ominous bird a-wing. . . .

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
 And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
 Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
 And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

1867.

SHE

AT HIS FUNERAL

THEY bear him to his resting-place—
 In slow procession sweeping by ;
 I follow at a stranger's space ;
 His kindred they, his sweetheart I.
 Unchanged my gown of garish dye,
 Though sable-sad is their attire ;
 But they stand round with griefless eye,
 Whilst my regret consumes like fire !

187.

HER INITIALS

UPON a poet's page I wrote
 Of old two letters of her name ;
 Part seemed she of the effulgent thought
 Whence that high singer's rapture came.
 —When now I turn the leaf the same
 Immortal light illumines the lay,
 But from the letters of her name
 The radiance has waned away !

1869.

HER DILEMMA

(IN ——— CHURCH)

THE two were silent in a sunless church,
 Whose mildewed walls, uneven paving-stones,
 And wasted carvings passed antique research ;
 And nothing broke the clock's dull monotonous.
 Leaning against a wormy poppy-head,
 So wan and worn that he could scarcely stand,
 —For he was soon to die,—he softly said,
 "Tell me you love me!"—holding long her hand.

She would have given a world to breathe "yes" truly,
 So much his life seemed hanging on her mind,
 And hence she lied, her heart persuaded throughly
 'Twas worth her soul to be a moment kind.

But the sad need thereof, his nearing death,
 So mocked humanity that she shamed to prize
 A world conditioned thus, or care for breath
 Where Nature such dilemmas could devise.

1866.

REVULSION

THOUGH I waste watches framing words to fetter
 Some unknown spirit to mine in clasp and kiss,
 Out of the night there looms a sense 'twere better
 To fail obtaining whom one fails to miss.

For winning love we win the risk of losing,
 And losing love is as one's life were riven;
 It cuts like contumely and keen ill-using
 To cede what was superfluously given.

Let me then never feel the fateful thrilling
 That devastates the love-worn wooer's frame,
 The hot ado of fevered hopes, the chilling
 That agonizes disappointed aim!
 So may I live no junctive law fulfilling,
 And my heart's table bear no woman's name.

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

I

WHEN you shall see me in the toils of Time,
 My lauded beauties carried off from me,
 My eyes no longer stars as in their prime,
 My name forgot of Maiden Fair and Free;

When, in your being, heart concedes to mind,
 And judgment, though you scarce its process know,
 Recalls the excellencies I once enshrined,
 And you are irked that they have withered so:

Remembering mine the loss is, not the blame,
 That Sportsman Time but rears his brood to kill,
 Knowing me in my soul the very same—
 One who would die to spare you touch of ill!—
 Will you not grant to old affection's claim
 The hand of friendship down Life's sunless hill?

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

II

PERHAPS, long hence, when I have passed away,
 Some other's feature, accent, thought like mine,
 Will carry you back to what I used to say,
 And bring some memory of your love's decline.

Then you may pause awhile and think, "Poor jade!"
 And yield a sigh to me—as ample due,
 Not as the tittle of a debt unpaid
 To one who could resign her all to you—

And thus reflecting, you will never see
 That your thin thought, in two small words conveyed,
 Was no such fleeting phantom-thought to me,
 But the Whole Life wherein my part was played;
 And you amid its fitful masquerade
 A Thought—as I in your life seem to be!

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

III

I WILL be faithful to thee; aye, I will!
 And Death shall choose me with a wondering eye
 That he did not discern and domicile
 One his by right ever since that last Good-bye!

I have no care for friends, or kin, or prime
 Of manhood who deal gently with me here;
 Amid the happy people of my time
 Who work their love's fulfilment, I appear

Numb as a vane that cankers on its point,
 True to the wind that kissed ere canker came :
 Despised by souls of Now, who would disjoint
 The mind from memory, making Life all aim,

My old dexterities in witchery gone,
 And nothing left for Love to look upon.

1866.

SHE, TO HIM

IV

THIS love puts all humanity from me ;
 I can but maledict her, pray her dead,
 For giving love and getting love of thee—
 Feeding a heart that else mine own had fed !

How much I love I know not, life not known,
 Save as one unit I would add love by ;
 But this I know, my being is but thine own—
 Fused from its separateness by ecstasy.

And thus I grasp thy amplitudes, of her
 Ungrasped, though helped by nigh-regarding eyes ;
 Canst thou then hate me as an envier
 Who see unrecked what I so dearly prize ?
 Believe me, Lost One, Love is lovelier
 The more it shapes its moan in selfish-wise.

1866.

DITTY

(E. L. G.)

BENEATH a knap where flown
 Nestlings play,
 Within walls of weathered stone,
 Far away
 From the files of formal houses,
 By the bough the firstling browses,
 Lives a Sweet : no merchants meet,
 No man barbers, no man sells
 Where she dwells.

WESSEX POEMS

Upon that fabric fair
 "Here is she!"
 Seems written everywhere
 Unto me.
 But to friends and nodding neighbours,
 Fellow-wights in lot and labours,
 Who descry the times as I,
 No such lucid legend tells
 Where she dwells.

Should I lapse to what I was
 Ere we met;
 (Such will not be, but because
 Some forget
 Let me feign it)—none would notice
 That where she I know by rote is
 Spread a strange and withering change,
 Like a drying of the wells
 Where she dwells.

To feel I might have kissed—
 Loved as true—
 Otherwhere, nor Mine have missed
 My life through,
 Had I never wandered near her,
 Is a smart severe—severer
 In the thought that she is nought,
 Even as I, beyond the dells
 Where she dwells.

And Devotion droops her glance
 To recall
 What bond-servants of Chance
 We are all.
 I but found her in that, going
 On my errant path unknowing,
 I did not out-skirt the spot
 That no spot on earth excels,
 —Where she dwells!

THE SERGEANT'S SONG

(1803)

WHEN Lawyers strive to heal a breach,
 And Parsons practise what they preach ;
 Then Boney he'll come pouncing down,
 And march his men on London town !
 Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lorum,
 Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lay !

When Justices hold equal scales,
 And Rogues are only found in jails ;
 Then Boney he'll come pouncing down,
 And march his men on London town !
 Rollicum-rorum, &c.

When Rich Men find their wealth a curse,
 And fill therewith the Poor Man's purse ;
 Then Boney he'll come pouncing down,
 And march his men on London town !
 Rollicum-rorum, &c.

When Husbands with their Wives agree,
 And Maids won't wed from modesty ;
 Then Boney he'll come pouncing down,
 And march his men on London town !
 Rollicum-rorum, tol-tol-lorum,
 Rollicum-rorum, tol-lol-lay !

1878.

Published in "The Trumpet-Major" 1880.

VALENCIENNES

(1793)

BY CORP'L TULLIDGE, in "*The Trumpet Major*"

IN MEMORY OF S. C. (PENSIONER). DIED 184-

WE trenched, we trumpeted and drummed,
 And from our mortars tons of iron hummed
 Ath'art the ditch, the month we bombed
 The Town o' Valenciën.

WESSEX POEMS

'Twas in the June o' Ninety-dree
 (The Duke o' Yark our then Commander beën)
 The German Legion, Guards, and we
 Laid siege to Valencieën.

This was the first time in the war
 That French and English spilled each other's gore ;
 —Few dreamt how far would roll the roar
 Begun at Valencieën !

'Twas said that we'd no business there
 A-topperèn the French for disagreeën ;
 However, that's not my affair—
 We were at Valencieën.

Such snocks and slats, since war began
 Never knew raw recruit or veteràn :
 Stone-deaf therence went many a man
 Who served at Valencieën.

Into the streets, ath'art the sky,
 A hundred thousand balls and bombs were fleën ;
 And harmless townsfolk fell to die
 Each hour at Valencieën !

And, sweatèn wi' the bombardiers,
 A shell was slent to shards anighst my ears :
 —'Twas nigh the end of hopes and fears
 For me at Valencieën !

They bore my wounded frame to camp,
 And shut my gapèn skull, and washed en cleän,
 And jined en wi' a zilver clamp
 Thik night at Valencieën.

"We've fetched en back to quick from dead ;
 But never more on earth while rose is red
 Will drum rouse Corpel !" Doctor said
 O' me at Valencieën.

Twer true. No voice o' friend or foe
 Can reach me now, or any livèn beën ;
 And little have I power to know
 Since then at Valencieën !

I never hear the zummer hums
 O' bees ; and don' know when the cuckoo comes ;
 But night and day I hear the bombs
 We threw at Valencieën. . . .

As for the Duke o' Yark in war,
 There may be volk whose judgment o' en is meän ;
 But this I say—he was not far
 From great at Valencieën.

O' wild wet nights, when all seems sad,
 My wovnds come back, as though new wovnds I'd had ;
 But yet—at times I'm sort o' glad
 I fout at Valencieën.

Well : Heaven wì its jasper halls
 Is now the on'y Town I care to be in. . . .
 Good Lord, if Nick should bomb the walls
 As we did Valencieën !

1878-1897.

SAN SEBASTIAN

(August 1813)

WITH THOUGHTS OF SERGEANT M—— (PENSIONER), WHO DIED 185-

“WHY, Sergeant, stray on the Ivel Way,
 As though at home there were spectres rife ?
 From first to last 'twas a proud career !
 And your sunny years with a gracious wife
 Have brought you a daughter dear.

“I watched her to-day ; a more comely maid,
 As she danced in her muslin bowed with blue,
 Round a Hintock maypole never gayed.”
 —“Aye, aye ; I watched her this day, too,
 As it happens,” the Sergeant said.

“My daughter is now,” he again began,
 “Of just such an age as one I knew
 When we of the Line, the Forlorn-hope van,
 On an August morning—a chosen few—
 Stormed San Sebastian.

"She's a score less three ; so about was *she*—
The maiden I wronged in Peninsular days. . . .
You may prate of your prowess in lusty times,
But as years gnaw inward you blink your bays,
And see too well your crimes !

"We'd stormed it at night, by the flapping light
Of burning towers, and the mortar's boom :
We'd topped the breach ; but had failed to stay,
For our files were misled by the baffling gloom ;
And we said we'd storm by day.

"So, out of the trenches, with features set,
On that hot, still morning, in measured pace,
Our column climbed ; climbed higher yet,
Past the fauss'bray, scarp, up the curtain-face,
And along the parapet.

"From the battered hornwork the cannoneers
Hove crashing balls of iron fire ;
On the shaking gap mount the volunteers
In files, and as they mount expire
Amid curses, groans, and cheers.

"Five hours did we storm, five hours re-form,
As Death cooled those hot blood pricked on ;
Till our cause was helped by a woe within :
They were blown from the summit we'd leapt upon,
And madly we entered in.

"On end for plunder, 'mid rain and thunder
That burst with the lull of our cannonade,
We vamped the streets in the stifling air—
Our hunger unsoothed, our thirst unstayed—
And ransacked the buildings there.

"From the shady vaults of their walls of white
We rolled rich puncheons of Spanish grape,
Till at length, with the fire of the wine alight,
I saw at a doorway a fair fresh shape—
A woman, a sylph, or sprite.

"Afeard she fled, and with heated head
I pursued to the chamber she called her own ;
—When might is right no qualms deter,
And having her helpless and alone
I wreaked my will on her.

"She raised her beseeching eyes to me,
And I heard the words of prayer she sent
In her own soft language. . . . Fatefully
I copied those eyes for my punishment
In begetting the girl you see !

"So, to-day I stand with a God-set brand
Like Cain's, when he wandered from kindred's ken. . . .
I served through the war that made Europe free ;
I wived me in peace-year. But, hid from men,
I bear that mark on me.

"Maybe we shape our offspring's guise
From fancy, or we know not what,
And that no deep impression dies,—
For the mother of my child is not
The mother of her eyes.

"And I nightly stray on the Ivel Way
As though at home there were spectres rife ;
I delight me not in my proud career ;
And 'tis coals of fire that a gracious wife
Should have brought me a daughter dear !"

THE STRANGER'S SONG

(*As sung by MR. CHARLES CHARRINGTON in the play of*
"The Three Wayfarers")

O MY trade it is the rarest one,
Simple shepherds all—
My trade is a sight to see ;
For my customers I tie, and take 'em up on high,
And waft 'em to a far countree !

My tools are but common ones,
 Simple shepherds all—
 My tools are no sight to see :
A little hempen string, and a post whereon to swing,
 Are implements enough for me !
To-morrow is my working day,
 Simple shepherds all—
 To-morrow is a working day for me :
For the farmer's sheep is slain, and the lad who did it ta'en,
 And on his soul may God ha' mer-cy !

Printed in "The Three Strangers," 1883.

THE BURGHERS

(17—)

THE sun had wheeled from Grey's to Dammer's Crest,
And still I mused on that Thing imminent :
At length I sought the High-street to the West.

The level flare raked pane and pediment
And my wrecked face, and shaped my nearing friend
Like one of those the Furnace held unshent.

"I've news concerning her," he said. "Attend.
They fly to-night at the late moon's first gleam :
Watch with thy steel : two righteous thrusts will end

Her shameless visions and his passion'd dream.
I'll watch with thee, to testify thy wrong—
To aid, maybe.—Law consecrates the scheme."

I started, and we paced the flags along
Till I replied : "Since it has come to this
I'll do it ! But alone. I can be strong."

Three hours past Curfew, when the Froom's mild hiss
Reigned sole, undulled by whirr of merchandize,
From Pummery-Tout to where the Gibbet is,

I crossed my pleasaunce hard by Glyd'path Rise,
And stood beneath the wall. Eleven strokes went,
And to the door they came, contrariwise,

And met in clasp so close I had but bent
My lifted blade on either to have let
Their two souls loose upon the firmament.

But something held my arm. "A moment yet
As pray-time ere you wantons die!" I said;
And then they saw me. Swift her gaze was set

With eye and cry of love illimited
Upon her Heart-king. Never upon me
Had she thrown look of love so thoroughsped! . . .

At once she flung her faint form shieldingly
On his, against the vengeance of my vows;
The which o'erruling, her shape shielded he.

Blanked by such love, I stood as in a drowse,
And the slow moon edged from the upland nigh,
My sad thoughts moving thuswise: "I may house

And I may husband her, yet what am I
But licensed tyrant to this bonded pair?
Says Charity, Do as ye would be done by." . . .

Hurling my iron to the bushes there,
I bade them stay. And, as if brain and breast
Were passive, they walked with me to the stair.

Inside the house none watched; and on we prest
Before a mirror, in whose gleam I read
Her beauty, his,—and mine own mien unblest;

Till at her room I turned. "Madam," I said,
"Have you the wherewithal for this? Pray speak.
Love fills no cupboard. You'll need daily bread."

"We've nothing, sire," she lipped; "and nothing seek.
'Twere base in me to rob my lord unware;
Our hands will earn a pittance week by week."

And next I saw she had piled her raiment rare
Within the garde-robés, and her household purse,
Her jewels, her least lace of personal wear;

And stood in homespun. Now grown wholly hers,
I handed her the gold, her jewels all,
And him the choicest of her robes diverse.

"Ill take you to the doorway in the wall,
And then adieu," I told them. "Friends, withdraw."
They did so; and she went—beyond recall.

And as I paused beneath the arch I saw
Their moonlit figures—slow, as in surprise—
Descend the slope, and vanish on the haw.

"'Fool,' some will say," I thought.—"But who is wise,
Save God alone, to weigh my reasons why?"
—"Hast thou struck home?" came with the boughs' night-sighs.

It was my friend. "I have struck well. They fly,
But carry wounds that none can cicatrize."
—"Mortal?" said he. "Remorseful—worse," said I.

LEIPZIG

(1813)

SCENE.—*The Master-tradesmen's Parlour at the Old Ship Inn,
Casterbridge. Evening.*

"OLD Norbert with the flat blue cap—
A German said to be—
Why let your pipe die on your lap,
Your eyes blink absently?"

—"Ah! . . . Well, I had thought till my cheek was wet
Of my mother—her voice and mien
When she used to sing and pirouette,
And tap the tambourine

"To the march that yon street-fiddler plies:
She told me 'twas the same
She'd heard from the trumpets, when the Allies
Burst on her home like flame.

"My father was one of the German Hussars,
My mother of Leipzig ; but he,
Being quartered here, fetched her at close of the wars,
And a Wessex lad reared me.

"And as I grew up, again and again
She'd tell, after trilling that air,
Of her youth, and the battles on Leipzig plain
And of all that was suffered there ! . . .

"—'Twas a time of alarms. Three Chiefs-at-arms
Combined them to crush One,
And by numbers' might, for in equal fight
He stood the matched of none.

"Carl Schwarzenberg was of the plot,
And Blücher, prompt and prow,
And Jean the Crown-Prince Bernadotte :
Buonaparte was the foe.

"City and plain had felt his reign
From the North to the Middle Sea,
And he'd now sat down in the noble town
Of the King of Saxony.

"October's deep dew its wet gossamer threw
Upon Leipzig's lawns, leaf-strewn,
Where lately each fair avenue
Wrought shade for summer noon.

"To westward two dull rivers crept
Through miles of marsh and slough,
Wherever a streak of whiteness swept—
The Bridge of Lindenau.

"Hard by, in the City, the One, care-tossed,
Sat pondering his shrunken power ;
And without the walls the hemming host
Waxed denser every hour.

"He had speech that night on the morrow's designs
With his chiefs by the bivouac fire,
While the belt of flames from the enemy's lines
Flared nigher him yet and nigher.

"Three sky-lights then from the girdling trine
Told, 'Ready!' As they rose
Their flashes seemed his Judgment-Sign
For bleeding Europe's woes.

"'Twas seen how the French watch-fires that night
Glowed still and steadily ;
And the Three rejoiced, for they read in the sight
That the One disdained to flee. . . .

"—Five hundred guns began the affray
On next day morn at nine ;
Such mad and mangling cannon-play
Had never torn human line.

"Around the town three battles beat,
Contracting like a gin ;
As nearer marched the million feet
Of columns closing in.

"The first battle nighed on the low Southern side ;
The second by the Western way ;
The nearing of the third on the North was heard ;
—The French held all at bay.

"Against the first band did the Emperor stand ;
Against the second stood Ney ;
Marmont against the third gave the order-word :
—Thus raged it throughout the day.

"Fifty thousand sturdy souls on those trampled plains and knolls,
Who met the dawn hopefully,
And were lotted their shares in a quarrel not theirs,
Dropt then in their agony.

"'O,' the old folks said, 'ye Preachers stern !
O so-called Christian time !
When will men's swords to ploughshares turn ?
When come the promised prime ?' . . .

"—The clash of horse and man which that day began,
Closed not as evening wore ;
And the morrow's armies, rear and van,
Still mustered more and more.

"From the City towers the Confederate Powers
Were eyed in glittering lines,
And up from the vast a murmuring passed
As from a wood of pines.

"'Tis well to cover a feeble skill
By numbers' might!' scoffed He ;
'But give me a third of their strength, I'd fill
Half Hell with their soldiery !'

"All that day raged the war they waged,
And again dumb night held reign,
Save that ever upspread from the dank deathbed
A miles-wide pant of pain.

"Hard had striven brave Ney, the true Bertrand,
Victor, and Augereau,
Bold Poniatowski, and Lauriston,
To stay their overthrow ;

"But, as in the dream of one sick to death
There comes a narrowing room
That pens him, body and limbs and breath,
To wait a hideous doom,

"So to Napoleon, in the hush
That held the town and towers
Through these dire nights, a creeping crush
Seemed borne in with the hours.

"One road to the rearward, and but one,
Did fitful Chance allow ;
'Twas where the Pleiss' and Elster run—
The Bridge of Lindenau.

"The nineteenth dawned. Down street and Platz
The wasted French sank back,
Stretching long lines across the Flats
And on the bridgeway track :

"When there surged on the sky an earthen wave,
And stones, and men, as though
Some rebel churchyard crew uprave
Their sepulchres from below.

"To Heaven is blown Bridge Lindenau ;
 Wrecked regiments reel therefrom ;
 And rank and file in masses plough
 The sullen Elster-Strom.

"A gulf was Lindenau ; and dead
 Were fifties, hundreds, tens ;
 And every current rippled red
 With Marshal's blood and men's.

"The smart Macdonald swam therein,
 And barely won the verge ;
 Bold Poniatowski plunged him in
 Never to re-emerge.

"Then stayed the strife. The remnants wound
 Their Rhineward way pell-mell ;
 And thus did Leipzig City sound
 An Empire's passing bell ;

"While in cavalcade, with band and blade,
 Came Marshals, Princes, Kings ;
 And the town was theirs. . . . Ay, as simple maid,
 My mother saw these things !

"And whenever those notes in the street begin,
 I recall her, and that far scene,
 And her acting of how the Allies marched in,
 And her tap of the tambourine !"

THE PEASANT'S CONFESSION

"Si le maréchal Grouchy avait été rejoint par l'officier que Napoléon lui avait expédié la veille à dix heures du soir, toute question eût disparu. Mais cet officier n'était point parvenu à sa destination, ainsi que le maréchal n'a cessé de l'affirmer toute sa vie, et il faut l'en croire, car autrement il n'aurait eu aucune raison pour hésiter. Cet officier avait-il été pris ? avait-il passé à l'ennemi ? C'est ce qu'on a toujours ignoré."—THIERS, *Histoire de l'Empire*.
 "Waterloo."

GOOD Father ! . . . It was eve in middle June,
 And war was waged anew
 By great Napoleon, who for years had strewn
 Men's bones all Europe through.

Three nights ere this, with columned corps he'd cross'd
The Sambre at Charleroi,
To move on Brussels, where the English host
Dallied in Parc and Bois.

The yestertide we'd heard the gloomy gun
Growl through the long-sunned day
From Quatre-Bras and Ligny ; till the dun
Twilight suppressed the fray ;

Albeit therein—as lated tongues bespoke—
Brunswick's high heart was drained,
And Prussia's Line and Landwehr, though unbroke,
Stood cornered and constrained.

And at next noon-time Grouchy slowly passed
With thirty thousand men :
We hoped thenceforth no army, small or vast,
Would trouble us again.

My hut lay deeply in a vale recessed,
And never a soul seemed nigh
When, reassured at length, we went to rest—
My children, wife, and I.

But what was this that broke our humble ease ?
What noise, above the rain,
Above the dripping of the poplar trees
That smote along the pane ?

—A call of mastery, bidding me arise,
Compelled me to the door,
At which a horseman stood in martial guise—
Splashed—sweating from every pore.

Had I seen Grouchy ! Yes ? What track took he ?
Could I lead thither on ?—
Fulfilment would ensure much gold for me,
Perhaps more gifts anon.

“I bear the Emperor's mandate,” then he said,
“Charging the Marshal straight
To strike between the double host ahead
Ere they co-operate,

“Engaging Blücher till the Emperor put
 Lord Wellington to flight,
 And next the Prussians. This to set afoot
 Is my emprise to-night.”

I joined him in the mist ; but, pausing, sought
 To estimate his say.
 Grouchy had made for Wavre ; and yet, on thought,
 I did not lead that way.

I mused : “ If Grouchy thus and thus be told,
 The clash comes sheer hereon ;
 My farm is stript. While, as for gifts of gold,
 Money the French have none.

“Grouchy unwarned, moreo'er, the English win,
 And mine is left to me—
 They buy, not borrow.”—Hence did I begin
 To lead him treacherously.

And as we edged Joidoigne with cautious view
 Dawn pierced the humid air ;
 And still I easted with him, though I knew
 Never marched Grouchy there.

Near Ottignies we passed, across the Dyle
 (Lim'lette left far aside),
 And thence direct toward Pervez and Noville
 Through green grain, till he cried :

“ I doubt thy conduct, man ! no track is here—
 I doubt thy gagèd word ! ”
 Thereat he scowled on me, and prancing near,
 He pricked me with his sword.

“ Nay, Captain, hold ! We skirt, not trace the course
 Of Grouchy,” said I then :

“ As we go, yonder went he, with his force
 Of thirty thousand men.”

—At length noon nighed ; when west, from Saint-John's-Mound,
 A hoarse artillery boomed,
 And from Saint-Lambert's upland, chapel-crowned,
 The Prussian squadrons loomed.

Then leaping to the wet wild path we had kept,
 "My mission fails!" he cried;
 "Too late for Grouchy now to intercept,
 For, peasant, you have lied!"

He turned to pistol me. I sprang, and drew
 The sabre from his flank,
 And 'twixt his nape and shoulder, ere he knew,
 I struck, and dead he sank.

I hid him deep in nodding rye and oat—
 His shroud green stalks and loam;
 His requiem the corn-blade's husky note—
 And then I hastened home. . . .

—Two armies writhe in coils of red and blue,
 And brass and iron clang
 From Goumont, past the front of Waterloo,
 To Pap'lotte and Smohain.

The Guard Imperial wavered on the height;
 The Emperor's face grew glum;
 "I sent," he said, "to Grouchy yesternight,
 And yet he does not come!"

'Twas then, Good Father, that the French espied,
 Streaking the summer land,
 The men of Blücher. But the Emperor cried,
 "Grouchy is now at hand!"

And meanwhile Vand'leur, Vivian, Maitland, Kempt,
 Met d'Erlon, Friant, Ney;
 But Grouchy—mis-sent, blamed, yet blame-exempt—
 Grouchy was far away.

By even, slain or struck, Michel the strong,
 Bold Travers, Dnop, Delord,
 Smart Guyot, Reil-le, l'Heriter, Friant,
 Scattered that champaign o'er.

Fallen likewise wronged Duhesme, and skilled Lobau
 Did that red sunset see;
 Colbert, Legros, Blancard! . . . And of the foe
 Picton and Ponsonby;

WESSEX POEMS

With Gordon, Canning, Blackman, Ompteda,
 L'Estrange, Delancey, Packe,
 Grose, D'Oyly, Stables, Morice, Howard, Hay,
 Von Schwerin, Watzdorf, Boek,
 Smith, Phelps, Fuller, Lind, and Battersby,
 And hosts of ranksmen round. . . .
 Memorials linger yet to speak to thee
 Of those that bit the ground !
 The Guards' last column yielded ; dykes of dead
 Lay between vale and ridge,
 As, thinned yet closing, faint yet fierce, they sped
 In packs to Genappe Bridge.
 Safe was my stock ; my capple cow unslain ;
 Intact each cock and hen ;
 But Grouchy far at Wavre all day had lain,
 And thirty thousand men.
 O Saints, had I but lost my earing corn
 And saved the cause once prized !
 O Saints, why such false witness had I borne
 When late I'd sympathized ! . . .
 So now, being old, my children eye askance
 My slowly dwindling store,
 And crave my mite ; till, worn with tarrance,
 I care for life no more.
 To Almighty God henceforth I stand confessed,
 And Virgin-Saint Marie ;
 O Michael, John, and Holy Ones in rest,
 Entreat the Lord for me !

THE ALARM

(TRADITIONAL)

IN MEMORY OF ONE OF THE WRITER'S FAMILY WHO WAS A
 VOLUNTEER DURING THE WAR WITH NAPOLEON

In a ferny byway
 Near the great South-Wessex Highway,
 A homestead raised its breakfast-smoke aloft ;
 The dew-damps still lay steamless, for the sun had made no skyway,
 And twilight cloaked the croft.

It was almost past conceiving
 Here, where woodbines hung inweaving,
 That quite closely hostile armaments might steer,
 Save from seeing in the porchway a fair woman mutely grieving,
 And a harnessed Volunteer.

In haste he'd flown there
 To his comely wife alone there,
 While marching south hard by, to still her fears,
 For she soon would be a mother, and few messengers were known
 there
 In these campaigning years.

'Twas time to be Good-bying,
 Since the assembly-hour was nighing
 In royal George's town at six that morn;
 And betwixt its wharves and this retreat were ten good miles of
 hieing
 Ere ring of bugle-horn.

"I've laid in food, Dear,
 And broached the spiced and brewed, Dear;
 And if our July hope should antedate,
 Let the char-wench mount and gallop by the halterpath and
 wood, Dear,
 And fetch assistance straight.

"As for Buonaparte, forget him;
 He's not like to land! But let him,
 Those strike with aim who strike for wives and sons!
 And the war-boats built to float him; 'twere but wanted to upset
 him
 A slat from Nelson's guns!

"But, to assure thee,
 And of creeping fears to cure thee,
 If he *should* be rumoured anchoring in the Road,
 Drive with the nurse to Kingsbere; and let nothing thence allure
 thee
 Till we have him safe-bestowed.

"Now, to turn to marching matters:—
 I've my knapsack, firelock, spatters,

Crossbelts, priming-horn, stock, bay'net, blackball, clay,
 Pouch, magazine, and flint-box that at every quick-step clatters ;—
 My heart, Dear ; that must stay !”

—With breathings broken
 Farewell was kissed unspoken,
 And they parted there as morning stroked the panes ;
 And the Volunteer went on, and turned, and twirled his glove for
 token,
 And took the coastward lanes.

When above He'th Hills he found him,
 He saw, on gazing round him,
 The Barrow-Beacon burning—burning low,
 As if, perhaps, enkindled ever since he'd homeward bound him ;
 And it meant : Expect the Foe !

Leaving the byway,
 He entered on the highway,
 Where were cars and chariots, faring fast inland ;
 “He's anchored, Soldier !” shouted some : “God save thee,
 marching thy way,
 Th'lt front him on the strand !”

He slowed ; he stopped ; he paltered
 Awhile with self, and faltered,
 “Why courting misadventure shoreward roam ?
 To Molly, surely ! Seek the woods with her till times have
 altered ;
 Charity favours home.

“Else, my denying
 He'd come, she'll read as lying—
 Think the Barrow-Beacon must have met my eyes—
 That my words were not unwareness, but deceit of her, while
 vying
 In deeds that jeopardize.

“At home is stocked provision,
 And to-night, without suspicion,
 We might bear it with us to a covert near ;
 Such sin, to save a childing wife, would earn it Christ's remission,
 Though none forgive it here !”

While he stood thinking,
 A little bird, perched drinking
 Among the crowfoot tufts the river bore,
 Was tangled in their stringy arms and fluttered, almost sinking
 Near him, upon the moor.

He stepped in, reached, and seized it,
 And, preening, had released it
 But that a thought of Holy Writ occurred,
 And Signs Divine ere battle, till it seemed him Heaven had
 pleased it
 As guide to send the bird.

“O Lord, direct me! . . .
 Doth Duty now expect me
 To march a-coast, or guard my weak ones near?
 Give this bird a flight according, that I thence learn to elect me
 The southward or the rear.”

He loosed his clasp; when, rising,
 The bird—as if surmising—
 Bore due to southward, crossing by the Froom,
 And Durnover Great Field and Fort, the soldier clear advising—
 Prompted he deemed by Whom.

Then on he panted
 By grim Mai-Don, and slanted
 Up the steep Ridge-way, hearkening between whiles;
 Till nearing coast and harbour he beheld the shore-line planted
 With Foot and Horse for miles.

Mistrusting not the omen,
 He gained the beach, where Yeomen
 Militia, Fencibles and Pikemen bold,
 With Regulars in thousands, were enmassed to meet the Foemen,
 Whose fleet had not yet shoaled.

Captain and Colonel,
 Sere Generals, Ensigns vernal,
 Were there; of neighbour-natives, Michel, Smith,
 Meggs, Bingham, Gambier, Cunningham, to face the said
 nocturnal
 Swoop on their land and kith.

But Buonaparte still tarried :
 His project had miscarried ;
 At the last hour, equipped for victory,
 The fleet had paused ; his subtle combinations had been parried
 By British strategy.

Homeward returning
 Anon, no beacons burning,
 No alarms, the Volunteer, in modest bliss,
 Te Deum sang with wife and friends : " We praise Thee, Lord,
 discerning
 That Thou hast helped in this ! "

HER DEATH AND AFTER

THE summons was urgent : and forth I went—
 By the way of the Western Wall, so drear
 On that winter night, and sought a gate,
 Where one, by Fate,
 Lay dying that I held dear.

And there, as I paused by her tenement,
 And the trees shed on me their rime and hoar,
 I thought of the man who had left her lone—
 Him who made her his own
 When I loved her, long before.

The rooms within had the piteous shine
 That home-things wear when there's aught amiss ;
 From the stairway floated the rise and fall
 Of an infant's call,
 Whose birth had brought her to this.

Her life was the price she would pay for that wine—
 For a child by the man she did not love.
 " But let that rest for ever," I said,
 And bent my tread
 To the bedchamber above.

She took my hand in her thin white own,
 And smiled her thanks—though nigh too weak—
 And made them a sign to leave us there,
 Then faltered, ere
 She could bring herself to speak.

“Just to see you—before I go—he’ll condone
 Such a natural thing now my time’s not much—
 When Death is so near it hustles hence
 All passioned sense
 Between woman and man as such !

“My husband is absent. As heretofore
 The City detains him. But, in truth,
 He has not been kind. . . . I will speak no blame,
 But—the child is lame ;
 O, I pray she may reach his ruth !

“Forgive past days—I can say no more—
 Maybe had we wed you would now repine ! . . .
 But I treated you ill. I was punished. Farewell !
 —Truth shall I tell ?
 Would the child were yours and mine !

“As a wife I was true. But, such my unease
 That, could I insert a deed back in Time,
 I’d make her yours, to secure your care ;
 And the scandal bear,
 And the penalty for the crime !”

—When I had left, and the swinging trees
 Rang above me, as lauding her candid say,
 Another was I. Her words were enough :
 Came smooth, came rough,
 I felt I could live my day.

Next night she died ; and her obsequies
 In the Field of Tombs where the earthworks frowned
 Had her husband’s heed. His tendance spent,
 I often went
 And pondered by her mound.

All that year and the next year whiled,
 And I still went thitherward in the gloam ;
 But the Town forgot her and her nook,
 And her husband took
 Another Love to his home.

WESSEX POEMS

And the rumour flew that the lame lone child
 Whom she wished for its safety child of mine,
 Was treated ill when offspring came
 Of the new-made dame,
 And marked a more vigorous line.

A smarter grief within me wrought
 Than even at loss of her so dear
 That the being whose soul my soul suffused
 Had a child ill-used,
 While I dared not interfere !

One eve as I stood at my spot of thought
 In the white-stoned Garth, brooding thus her wrong,
 Her husband neared ; and to shun his view
 By her hallowed mew
 I went from the tombs among

To the Cirque of the Gladiators which faced—
 That haggard mark of Imperial Rome,
 Whose Pagan echoes mock the chime
 Of our Christian time—
 And I drew to its bank, and clomb.

The sun's gold touch was scarce displaced
 From the vast Arena where men once bled,
 When her husband followed ; bowed ; half-passed
 With lip upcast ;
 Then halting sullenly said :

‘ It is noised that you visit my first wife's tomb.
 Now, I gave her an honoured name to bear
 While living, when dead. So I've claim to ask
 By what right you task
 My patience by vigiling there ?

“ There's decency even in death, I assume ;
 Preserve it, sir, and keep away ;
 For the mother of my first-born you
 Show mind undue !
 —Sir, I've nothing more to say.”

A desperate stroke discerned I then—
 God pardon—or pardon not—the lie ;
 She had sighed that she wished (lest the child should pine
 Of slights) 'twere mine,
 So I said : “ But the father I.

“ That you thought it yours is the way of men ;
 But I won her troth long ere your day :
 You learnt how, in dying, she summoned me ?
 'Twas in fealty.
 —Sir, I've nothing more to say,

“ Save that, if you'll hand me my little maid,
 I'll take her, and rear her, and spare you toil.
 Think it more than a friendly act none can ;
 I'm a lonely man,
 While you've a large pot to boil.

“ If not, and you'll put it to ball or blade—
 To-night, to-morrow night, anywhen—
 I'll meet you here. . . . But think of it,
 And in season fit
 Let me hear from you again.”

—Well, I went away, hoping ; but nought I heard
 Of my stroke for the child, till there greeted me
 A little voice that one day came
 To my window-frame
 And babbled innocently :

“ My father who's not my own, sends word
 I'm to stay here, sir, where I belong ! ”
 Next a writing came : “ Since the child was the fruit
 Of your lawless suit,
 Pray take her, to right a wrong.”

And I did. And I gave the child my love,
 And the child loved me, and estranged us none.
 But compuncions loomed ; for I'd harmed the dead
 By what I said
 For the good of the living one.

—Yet though, God wot, I am sinner enough,
 And unworthy the woman who drew me so,
 Perhaps this wrong for her darling's good
 She forgives, or would,
 If only she could know!

THE DANCE AT THE PHŒNIX

To Jenny came a gentle youth
 From inland leazes lone,
 His love was fresh as apple-blooth
 By Parrett, Yeo, or Tone.
 And duly he entreated her
 To be his tender minister,
 And take him for her own.

Now Jenny's life had hardly been
 A life of modesty ;
 And few in Casterbridge had seen
 More loves of sorts than she
 From scarcely sixteen years above ;
 Among them sundry troopers of
 The King's-Own Cavalry.

But each with charger, sword, and gun,
 Had bluffed the Biscay wave ;
 And Jenny prized her rural one
 For all the love he gave.
 She vowed to be, if they were wed,
 His honest wife in heart and head
 From bride-ale hour to grave.

Wedded they were. Her husband's trust
 In Jenny knew no bound,
 And Jenny kept her pure and just,
 Till even malice found
 No sin or sign of ill to be
 In one who walked so decently
 The duteous helpmate's round.

Two sons were born, and bloomed to men,
And roamed, and were as not :
Alone was Jenny left again
As ere her mind had sought
A solace in domestic joys,
And ere the vanished pair of boys
Were sent to sun her cot.

She numbered near on sixty years,
And passed as elderly,
When, on a day, with flushing fears,
She learnt from shouts of glee,
And shine of swords, and thump of drum,
Her early loves from war had come,
The King's-Own Cavalry.

She turned aside, and bowed her head
Anigh Saint Peter's door ;
" Alas for chastened thoughts ! " she said ;
" I'm faded now, and hoar,
And yet those notes—they thrill me through,
And those gay forms move me anew
As they moved me of yore ! " . . .

'Twas Christmas, and the Phœnix Inn
Was lit with tapers tall,
For thirty of the trooper men
Had vowed to give a ball
As " Theirs " had done ('twas handed down)
When lying in the selfsame town
Ere Buonaparté's fall.

That night the throbbing " Soldier's Joy,"
The measured tread and sway
" Of " Fancy-Lad " and " Maiden Coy,"
Reached Jenny as she lay
Beside her spouse ; till springtide blood
Seemed scouring through her like a flood
That whisked the years away.

She rose, arrayed, and decked her head
Where the bleached hairs grew thin ;
Upon her cap two bows of red
She fixed with hasty pin ;

Unheard descending to the street
 She trod the flags with tune-led feet,
 And stood before the Inn.

Save for the dancers', not a sound
 Disturbed the icy air ;
 No watchman on his midnight round
 Or traveller was there ;
 But over All-Saints', high and bright,
 Pulsed to the music Sirius white,
 The Wain by Bullstake Square.

She knocked, but found her further stride
 Checked by a sergeant tall :
 "Gay Granny, whence come you?" he cried ;
 "This is a private ball."
 —"No one has more right here than me !
 Ere you were born, man," answered she,
 "I knew the regiment all !"

"Take not the lady's visit ill !"
 The steward said ; "for see,
 We lack sufficient partners still,
 So, prithee, let her be !"
 They seized and whirled her mid the maze,
 And Jenny felt as in the days
 Of her immodesty.

Hour chased each hour, and night advanced ;
 She sped as shod with wings ;
 Each time and every time she danced—
 Reels, jigs, poussettes, and flings :
 They cheered her as she soared and swooped,
 (She had learnt ere art in dancing drooped
 From hops to slothful swings).

The favourite Quick-step "Speed the Plough"—
 (Cross hands, cast off, and wheel)—
 "The Triumph," "Sylph," "The Row-dow-dow,"
 Famed "Major Malley's Reel,"
 "The Duke of York's," "The Fairy Dance,"
 "The Bridge of Lodi" (brought from France),
 She beat out, toe and heel.

The "Fall of Paris" clanged its close,
And Peter's chime went four,
When Jenny, bosom-beating, rose
To seek her silent door.
They tiptoed in escorting her,
Lest stroke of heel or clink of spur
Should break her goodman's snore.

The fire that lately burnt fell slack
When lone at last was she ;
Her nine-and-fifty years came back ;
She sank upon her knee
Beside the durn, and like a dart
A something arrowed through her heart
In shoots of agony.

Their footsteps died as she leant there,
Lit by the morning star
Hanging above the moorland, where
The aged elm-rows are ;
As overnight, from Pummery Ridge
To Maembury Ring and Standfast Bridge
No life stirred, near or far.

Though inner mischief worked amain,
She reached her husband's side ;
Where, toil-weary, as he had lain
Beneath the patchwork pied
When forthward yestereve she crept,
And as unwitting, still he slept
Who did in her confide.

A tear sprang as she turned and viewed
His features free from guile ;
She kissed him long, as when, just wooed,
She chose his domicile.
She felt she would give more than life
To be the single-hearted wife
That she had been erstwhile. . . .

Time wore to six. Her husband rose
And struck the steel and stone ;
He glanced at Jenny, whose repose
Seemed deeper than his own.

With dumb dismay, on closer sight,
 He gathered sense that in the night,
 Or morn, her soul had flown.

When told that some too mighty strain
 For one so many-year'd
 Had burst her bosom's master-vein,
 His doubts remained unstirred.
 His Jenny had not left his side
 Betwixt the eve and morning-tide :
 —The King's said not a word.

Well! times are not as times were then,
 Nor fair ones half so free ;
 And truly they were martial men,
 The King's-Own Cavalry.
 And when they went from Casterbridge
 And vanished over Mellstock Ridge,
 'Twas saddest morn to see.

THE CASTERBRIDGE CAPTAINS

(KHYBER PASS, 1842)

A TRADITION OF J. B. L.—, T. G. B.—, AND J. L.—

THREE captains went to Indian wars,
 And only one returned :
 Their mate of yore, he singly wore
 The laurels all had earned.

At home he sought the ancient aisle
 Wherein, untrumped of fame,
 The three had sat in pupilage,
 And each had carved his name.

The names, rough-hewn, of equal size,
 Stood on the panel still ;
 Unequal since.—“'Twas theirs to aim,
 Mine was it to fulfil !”

—“Who saves his life shall lose it, friends!”
 Outspake the preacher then,
 Unweeting he his listener, who
 Looked at the names again.

That he had come and they had been stayed
 Was but the chance of war :
 Another chance, and they had been here,
 And he had lain afar.

Yet saw he something in the lives
 Of those who had ceased to live
 That sphered them with a majesty
 Which living failed to give.

Transcendent triumph in return
 No longer lit his brain ;
 Transcendence rayed the distant urn
 Where slept the fallen twain.

A SIGN-SEEKER

I MARK the months in liveries dank and dry,
 The noontides many-shaped and hued ;
 I see the nightfall shades subtrude,
 And hear the monotonous hours clang negligently by.

I view the evening bonfires of the sun
 On hills where morning rains have hissed ;
 The eyeless countenance of the mist
 Pallidly rising when the summer droughts are done.

I have seen the lightning-blade, the leaping star,
 The cauldrons of the sea in storm,
 Have felt the earthquake's lifting arm,
 And trodden where abysmal fires and snow-cones are.

I learn to prophesy the hid eclipse,
 The coming of eccentric orbs ;
 To mete the dust the sky absorbs,
 To weigh the sun, and fix the hour each planet dips.

I witness fellow earth-men surge and strive ;
 Assemblies meet, and throb, and part ;
 Death's sudden finger, sorrow's smart ;
 —All the vast various moils that mean a world alive.

But that I fain would wot of shuns my sense—
 Those sights of which old prophets tell,
 Those signs the general word so well
 As vouchsafed their unheed, denied my long suspense.

In graveyard green, where his pale dust lies pent
 To glimpse a phantom parent, friend,
 Wearing his smile, and "Not the end!"
 Outbreathing softly : that were blest enlightenment ;

Or, if a dead Love's lips, whom dreams reveal
 When midnight imps of King Decay
 Delve sly to solve me back to clay,
 Should leave some print to prove her spirit-kisses real ;

Or, when Earth's Frail lie bleeding of her Strong,
 If some Recorder, as in Writ,
 Near to the weary scene should flit
 And drop one plume as pledge that Heaven inscrolls the wrong.

—There are who, rapt to heights of trancelike trust,
 These tokens claim to feel and see,
 Read radiant hints of times to be—
 Of heart to heart returning after dust to dust.

Such scope is granted not to lives like mine . . .
 I have lain in dead men's beds, have walked
 The tombs of those with whom I had talked,
 Called many a gone and goodly one to shape a sign,

And panted for response. But none replies ;
 No warnings loom, nor whisperings
 To open out my limitings,
 And Nescience mutely muses : When a man falls he lies.

MY CICELY

(17—)

"ALIVE?"—And I leapt in my wonder,
Was faint of my joyance,
And grasses and grove shone in garments
Of glory to me.

"She lives, in a plenteous well-being,
To-day as aforehand ;
The dead bore the name—though a rare one—
The name that bore she."

She lived . . . I, afar in the city
Of frenzy-led factions,
Had squandered green years and maturer
In bowing the knee

To Baals illusive and specious,
Till chance had there voiced me
That one I loved vainly in nonage
Had ceased her to be.

The passion the planets had scowled on,
And change had let dwindle,
Her death-rumour smartly relifted
To full apogee.

I mounted a steed in the dawning
With acheful remembrance,
And made for the ancient West Highway
To far Exonb'ry.

Passing heaths, and the House of Long Sieging,
I neared the thin steeple
That tops the fair fane of Poore's olden
Episcopal see ;

And, changing anew my blown bearer,
I traversed the downland
Whereon the bleak hill-graves of Chieftains
Bulge barren of tree ;

And still sadly onward I followed
 That Highway the Icen,
 Which trails its pale riband down Wessex
 By lynchet and lea.

Along through the Stour-bordered Forum,
 Where Legions had wayfared,
 And where the slow river-face glasses
 Its green canopy,

And by Weatherbury Castle, and thencefrom
 Through Casterbridge held I
 Still on, to entomb her my mindsight
 Saw stretched pallidly.

No highwayman's trot blew the night-wind
 To me so life-weary,
 But only the creak of a gibbet
 Or waggoner's jee.

Triple-ramparted Maidon gloomed grayly
 Above me from southward,
 And north the hill-fortress of Eggar,
 And square Pummerie.

The Nine-Pillared Cromlech, the Bride-streams,
 The Axe, and the Otter
 I passed, to the gate of the city
 Where Exe scents the sea ;

Till, spent, in the graveacre pausing,
 I learnt 'twas not *my* Love
 To whom Mother Church had just murmured
 A last lullaby.

—“Then, where dwells the Canon's kinswoman,
 My friend of aforetime?”
 I asked, to disguise my heart-heavings
 And new ecstasy.

“She wedded.”—“Ah!”—“Wedded beneath her—
 She keeps the stage-hostel
 Ten miles hence, beside the great Highway—
 The famed Lions-Three.

“ Her spouse was her lackey—no option
’Twixt wedlock and worse things ;
A lapse over-sad for a lady
Of her pedigree ! ”

I shuddered, said nothing, and wandered
To shades of green laurel :
More ghastly than death were these tidings
Of life’s irony !

For, on my ride down I had halted
Awhile at the Lions,
And her—her whose name had once opened
My heart as a key—

I had looked on, unknowing, and witnessed
Her jests with the tapsters,
Her liquor-fired face, her thick accents
In naming her fee.

“ O God, why this seeming derision ! ”
I cried in my anguish :
“ O once Loved, O fair Unforgotten—
That Thing—meant it thee !

“ Inurned and at peace, lost but sainted,
Were grief I could compass ;
Depraved—’tis for Christ’s poor dependent
A cruel decree ! ”

I backed on the Highway ; but passed not
The hostel. Within there
Too mocking to Love’s re-expression
Was Time’s repartee !

Uptracking where Legions had wayfared
By cromlechs unstoried,
And lynchets, and sepultured Chieftains,
In self-colloquy,

A feeling stirred in me and strengthened
That *she* was not my Love,
But she of the garth, who lay rapt in
Her long reverie.

And thence till to-day I persuade me
 That this was the true one ;
 That Death stole intact her young dearness
 And innocency.

Frail-witted, illuded they call me ;
 I may be. Far better
 To dream than to own the debasement
 Of sweet Cicely.

Moreover I rate it unseemly
 To hold that kind Heaven
 Could work such device—to her ruin
 And my misery.

So, lest I disturb my choice vision,
 I shun the West Highway,
 Even now, when the knaps ring with rhythms
 From blackbird and bee ;

And feel that with slumber half-conscious
 She rests in the church-hay,
 Her spirit unsoiled as in youth-time
 When lovers were we.

HER IMMORTALITY

UPON a noon I pilgrimed through
 A pasture, mile by mile,
 Unto the place where last I saw
 My dead Love's living smile.

And sorrowing I lay me down
 Upon the heated sod :
 It seemed as if my body pressed
 The very ground she trod.

I lay, and thought ; and in a trance
 She came and stood thereby—
 The same, even to the marvellous ray
 That used to light her eye.

"You draw me, and I come to you,
My faithful one," she said,
In voice that had the moving tone
It bore ere breath had fled.

"Seven years have circled since I died :
Few now remember me ;
My husband clasps another bride :
My children's love has she.

"My brethren, sisters, and my friends
Care not to meet my sprite :
Who prized me most I did not know
Till I passed down from sight."

I said : "My days are lonely here ;
I need thy smile always :
I'll use this night my ball or blade,
And join thee ere the day."

A tremor stirred her tender lips,
Which parted to dissuade :
"That cannot be, O friend," she cried ;
"Think, I am but a Shade !

"A Shade but in its mindful ones
Has immortality ;
By living, me you keep alive,
By dying you slay me.

"In you resides my single power
Of sweet continuance here ;
On your fidelity I count
Through many a coming year."

—I started through me at her plight,
So suddenly confessed :
Dismissing late distaste for life,
I craved its bleak unrest.

"I will not die, my One of all !—
To lengthen out thy days
I'll guard me from minutest harms
That may invest my ways !"

WESSEX POEMS

She smiled and went. Since then she comes
 Oft when her birth-moon climbs,
 Or at the seasons' ingresses,
 Or anniversary times ;

But grows my grief. When I surcease,
 Through whom alone lives she,
 Her spirit ends its living lease,
 Never again to be !

THE IVY-WIFE

I LONGED to love a full-boughed beech
 And be as high as he :
 I stretched an arm within his reach,
 And signalled unity.
 But with his drip he forced a breach,
 And tried to poison me.

I gave the grasp of partnership
 To one of other race—
 A plane : he barked him strip by strip
 From upper bough to base ;
 And me therewith ; for gone my grip,
 My arms could not enlace.

In new affection next I strove
 To coll an ash I saw,
 And he in trust received my love ;
 Till with my soft green claw
 I cramped and bound him as I wove . . .
 Such was my love : ha-ha !

By this I gained his strength and height
 Without his rivalry.
 But in my triumph I lost sight
 Of afterhaps. Soon he,
 Being bark-bound, flagged, snapped, fell outright,
 And in his fall felled me !

A MEETING WITH DESPAIR

As evening shaped I found me on a moor
 Sight shunned to entertain :
 The black lean land, of featureless contour,
 Was like a tract in pain.

“This scene, like my own life,” I said, “is one
 Where many glooms abide ;
 Toned by its fortune to a deadly dun—
 Lightless on every side.”

I glanced aloft and halted, pleasure-caught
 To see the contrast there :
 The ray-lit clouds gleamed glory ; and I thought,
 “Ah—solace everywhere !”

Then bitter self-reproaches as I stood
 I dealt me silently
 As one perverse, misrepresenting Good
 In graceless mutiny.

Against the horizon's dim-discernèd wheel
 A form rose, strange of mould :
 That he was hideous, hopeless, I could feel
 Rather than could behold.

“’Tis a dead spot, where even the light lies spent
 To darkness !” croaked the Thing.
 “Not if you look aloft !” said I, intent
 On my new reasoning.

“Yea—but await awhile !” he cried. “Ho-ho !—
 Now look aloft and see !”
 I looked. There, too, sat night : Heaven's radiant show
 Had gone that heartened me.

UNKNOWING

WHEN, soul in soul reflected,
 We breathed an æthered air,
 When we neglected
 All things elsewhere,

WESSEX POEMS

And left the friendly friendless
 To keep our love aglow,
 We deemed it endless . . .
 —We did not know!

When panting passion-goaded,
 We planned to hie away,
 But, unforeboded,
 The livelong day
 Wild storm so pierced and pattered
 That none could up and go,
 Our lives seemed shattered . . .
 —We did not know!

When I found you helpless lying,
 And you waived my long misprise,
 And swore me, dying,
 In phantom-guise
 To wing to me when grieving,
 And touch away my woe,
 We kissed, believing . . .
 —We did not know!

But though, your powers outreckoning,
 You tarry dead and dumb,
 Or scorn my beckoning,
 And will not come:
 And I say, "Why thus inanely
 Brood on her memory so!"
 I say it vainly—
 I feel and know!

FRIENDS BEYOND

WILLIAM DEWY, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
 Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
 And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie in Mellstock churchyard
 now!

"Gone," I call them, gone for good, that group of local hearts
 and heads;

Yet at mothy curfew-tide,
 And at midnight when the noon-heat breathes it back from walls
 and leads,

They've a way of whispering to me—fellow-wight who yet abide—
 In the muted, measured note
 Of a ripple under archways, or a lone cave's stillicide :

“We have triumphed: this achievement turns the bane to
 antidote,
 Unsuccesses to success,
 Many thought-worn eyes and morrows to a morrow free of
 thought.

“No more need we corn and clothing, feel of old terrestrial stress ;
 Chill detraction stirs no sigh ;
 Fear of death has even bygone us: death gave all that we
 possess.”

W. D.—“Ye mid burn the old bass-viol that I set such value
 by.”

Squire.—“You may hold the manse in fee,
 You may wed my spouse, may let my children's memory of
 me die.”

Lady S.—“You may have my rich brocades, my laces ; take each
 household key ;
 Ransack coffer, desk, bureau ;
 Quiz the few poor treasures hid there, con the letters kept by
 me.”

Far.—“Ye mid zell my favourite heifer, ye mid let the charlock
 grow,
 Foul the grinterns, give up thrift.”

Far. Wife.—“If ye break my best blue china, children, I shan't
 care or ho.”

All.—“We've no wish to hear the tidings, how the people's
 fortunes shift ;
 What your daily doings are ;
 Who are wedded, born, divided ; if your lives beat slow or swift.

“Curious not the least are we if our intents you make or mar,
 If you quire to our old tune,
 If the City stage still passes, if the weirs still roar afar.”

—Thus, with very gods' composure, freed those crosses late
 and soon

Which, in life, the Trine allow
 (Why, none witteth), and ignoring all that haps beneath the moon,

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
 Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
 And the Squire, and Lady Susan, murmur mildly to me now.

TO OUTER NATURE

SHOW thee as I thought thee
 When I early sought thee,
 Omen-scouting,
 All undoubting
 Love alone had wrought thee—

Wrought thee for my pleasure,
 Planned thee as a measure
 For expounding
 And resounding
 Glad things that men treasure.

O for but a moment
 Of that old endowment—
 Light to gaily
 See thy daily
 Iris-hued embowment !

But such re-adorning
 Time forbids with scorning—
 Makes me see things
 Cease to be things
 They were in my morning.

Fadest thou, glow-forsaken,
 Darkness-overtaken !
 Thy first sweetness,
 Radiancy, meetness,
 None shall re-awaken.

Why not sempiternal
 Thou and I? Our vernal
 Brightness keeping,
 Time outleaping ;
 Passed the hodiernal !

THOUGHTS OF PHENA

AT NEWS OF HER DEATH

NOT a line of her writing have I,
 Not a thread of her hair,
 No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
 I may picture her there ;
 And in vain do I urge my insight
 To conceive my lost prize
 At her close, whom I knew when her dreams were upbrimming
 with light,
 And with laughter her eyes.

What scenes spread around her last days,
 Sad, shining, or dim ?
 Did her gifts and compassions enray and enarch her sweet ways
 With an aureate nimb ?
 Or did life-light decline from her years,
 And mischances control
 Her full day-star ; unease, or regret, or forebodings, or fears
 Disennoble her soul ?

Thus I do but the phantom retain
 Of the maiden of yore
 As my relic ; yet haply the best of her—fined in my brain
 It may be the more
 That no line of her writing have I,
 Nor a thread of her hair,
 No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
 I may picture her there.

March 1890.

MIDDLE-AGE ENTHUSIASMS

TO M. H.

WE passed where flag and flower
 Signalled a jocund throng ;
 We said : " Go to, the hour
 Is apt !"—and joined the song ;
 And, kindling, laughed at life and care,
 Although we knew no laugh lay there.

WESSEX POEMS

We walked where shy birds stood
 Watching us, wonder-dumb ;
 Their friendship met our mood ;
 We cried : " We'll often come :
 We'll come morn, noon, eve, everywhen !"
 —We doubted we should come again.

We joyed to see strange sheens
 Leap from quaint leaves in shade ;
 A secret light of greens
 They'd for their pleasure made.
 We said : " We'll set such sorts as these !"
 —We knew with night the wish would cease.

" So sweet the place," we said,
 " Its tacit tales so dear,
 Our thoughts, when breath has sped,
 Will meet and mingle here !" . . .
 " Words !" mused we. " Passed the mortal door,
 Our thoughts will reach this nook no more."

IN A WOOD

From " The Woodlanders "

PALE beech and pine so blue,
 Set in one clay,
 Bough to bough cannot you
 Live out your day ?
 When the rains skim and skip,
 Why mar sweet comradeship,
 Blighting with poison-drip
 Neighbourly spray ?
 Heart-halt and spirit-lame,
 City-opprest,
 Unto this wood I came
 As to a nest ;
 Dreaming that sylvan peace
 Offered the harrowed ease—
 Nature a soft release
 From men's unrest.

But, having entered in,
 Great growths and small
 Show them to men akin—
 Combatants all!
 Sycamore shoulders oak,
 Bines the slim sapling yoke,
 Ivy-spun halters choke
 Elms stout and tall.

Touches from ash, O wych,
 Sting you like scorn!
 You, too, brave hollies, twitch
 Sidelong from thorn.
 Even the rank poplars bear
 Illy a rival's air,
 Cankering in black despair
 If overborne.

Since, then, no grace I find
 Taught me of trees,
 Turn I back to my kind,
 Worthy as these.
 There at least smiles abound,
 There discourse trills around,
 There, now and then, are found
 Life-loyalties.

1887: 1896.

TO A LADY

OFFENDED BY A BOOK OF THE WRITER'S

NOW that my page is exiled,—doomed, maybe,
 Never to press thy cosy cushions more,
 Or wake thy ready Yeas as heretofore,
 Or stir thy gentle vows of faith in me:

Knowing thy natural receptivity,
 I figure that, as flambeaux banish eve,
 My sombre image, warped by insidious heave
 Of those less forthright, must lose place in thee.

So be it. I have borne such. Let thy dreams
 Of me and mine diminish day by day,
 And yield their space to shine of smuggler things ;
 Till I shape to thee but in fitful gleams,
 And then in far and feeble visitings,
 And then surcease. Truth will be truth alway.

TO A MOTHERLESS CHILD

AH, child, thou art but half thy darling mother's ;
 Hers couldst thou wholly be,
 My light in thee would outglow all in others ;
 She would relive to me.
 But niggard Nature's trick of birth
 Bars, lest she overjoy,
 Renewal of the loved on earth
 Save with alloy.

The Dame has no regard, alas, my maiden,
 For love and loss like mine—
 No sympathy with mindsight memory-laden ;
 Only with fickle eyne.
 To her mechanic artistry
 My dreams are all unknown,
 And why I wish that thou couldst be
 But One's alone !

NATURE'S QUESTIONING

WHEN I look forth at dawning, pool,
 Field, flock, and lonely tree,
 All seem to gaze at me
 Like chastened children sitting silent in a school ;
 Their faces dulled, constrained, and worn,
 As though the master's ways
 Through the long teaching days
 Had cowed them till their early zest was overborne.

Upon them stirs in lippings mere
 (As if once clear in call,
 But now scarce breathed at all)—
 “We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!

“Has some Vast Imbecility,
 Mighty to build and blend,
 But impotent to tend,
 Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?

“Or come we of an Automaton
 Unconscious of our pains? . . .
 Or are we live remains
 Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?

“Or is it that some high Plan betides,
 As yet not understood,
 Of Evil stormed by Good,
 We the Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides?”

Thus things around. No answerer I. . .
 Meanwhile the winds, and rains,
 And Earth's old glooms and pains
 Are still the same, and Death and glad Life neighbour nigh.

THE IMPERCIPIENT

(AT A CATHEDRAL SERVICE)

THAT with this bright believing band
 I have no claim to be,
 That faiths by which my comrades stand
 Seem fantasies to me,
 And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
 Is a strange destiny.

Why thus my soul should be consigned
 To infelicity,
 Why always I must feel as blind
 To sights my brethren see,
 Why joys they've found I cannot find,
 Abides a mystery.

Since heart of mine knows not that ease
 Which they know ; since it be
 That He who breathes All's Well to these
 Breathes no All's-Well to me,
 My lack might move their sympathies
 And Christian charity !

I am like a gazer who should mark
 An inland company
 Standing upfingered, with, " Hark ! hark !
 The glorious distant sea !"
 And feel, " Alas, 'tis but yon dark
 And wind-swept pine to me !"

Yet I would bear my shortcomings
 With meet tranquillity,
 But for the charge that blessed things
 I'd liefer not have be.
 O, doth a bird deprived of wings
 Go earth-bound wilfully !

Enough. As yet disquiet clings
 About us. Rest shall we.

AT AN INN

WHEN we as strangers sought
 Their catering care,
 Veiled smiles bespoke their thought
 Of what we were.
 They warmed as they opined
 Us more than friends—
 That we had all resigned
 For love's dear ends.
 And that swift sympathy
 With living love
 Which quicks the world—maybe
 The spheres above,
 Made them our ministers,
 Moved them to say,
 " Ah, God, that bliss like theirs
 Would flush our day !"

And we were left alone
 As Love's own pair ;
 Yet never the love-light shone
 Between us there !
 But that which chilled the breath
 Of afternoon,
 And palsied unto death
 The pane-fly's tune.

The kiss their zeal foretold,
 And now deemed come,
 Came not : within his hold
 Love lingered numb.
 Why cast he on our port
 A bloom not ours ?
 Why shaped us for his sport
 In after-hours ?

As we seemed we were not
 That day afar,
 And now we seem not what
 We aching are.
 O severing sea and land,
 O laws of men,
 Ere death, once let us stand
 As we stood then !

THE SLOW NATURE

(AN INCIDENT OF FROMM VALLEY)

“THY husband—poor, poor Heart!—is dead—
 Dead, out by Moreford Rise ;
 A bull escaped the barton-shed,
 Gored him, and there he lies !”

—“Ha, ha—go away ! 'Tis a tale, methink,
 Thou joker Kit !” laughed she.

“I've known thee many a year, Kit Twink,
 And ever hast thou fooled me !”

—"But, Mistress Damon—I can swear
 Thy goodman John is dead!
 And soon th'lt hear their feet who bear
 His body to his bed."

So unwontedly sad was the merry man's face—
 That face which had long deceived—
 That she gazed and gazed; and then could trace
 The truth there; and she believed.

She laid a hand on the dresser-ledge,
 And scanned far Egdon-side;
 And stood; and you heard the wind-swept sedge
 And the rippling Froom; till she cried:

"O my chamber's untidied, unmade my bed,
 Though the day has begun to wear!
 'What a slovenly hussif!' it will be said,
 When they all go up my stair!"

She disappeared; and the joker stood
 Depressed by his neighbour's doom,
 And amazed that a wife struck to widowhood
 Thought first of her unkempt room.

But a fortnight thence she could take no food,
 And she pined in a slow decay;
 While Kit soon lost his mournful mood
 And laughed in his ancient way.

1894.

IN A EWELEAZE NEAR WEATHERBURY

THE years have gathered grayly
 Since I danced upon this leaze
 With one who kindled gaily
 Love's fitful ecstasies!
 But despite the term as teacher,
 I remain what I was then
 In each essential feature
 Of the fantasies of men.

Yet I note the little chisel
 Of never-napping Time
 Defacing wan and grizzel
 The blazon of my prime.
 When at night he thinks me sleeping
 I feel him boring sly
 Within my bones, and heaping
 Quaintest pains for by-and-by.
 Still, I'd go the world with Beauty,
 I would laugh with her and sing,
 I would shun divinest duty
 To resume her worshipping.
 But she'd scorn my brave endeavour,
 She would not balm the breeze
 By murmuring "Thine for ever!"
 As she did upon this leaze.

1890.

THE BRIDE-NIGHT FIRE

(A WESSEX TRADITION)

THEY had long met o' Zundays—her true love and she—
 And at junketings, maypoles, and flings ;
 But she bode wi' a thirtover¹ uncle, and he
 Swore by noon and by night that her goodman should be
 Naibour Sweatley—a wight often weak at the knee
 From taking o' sommat more cheerful than tea—
 Who tranted,² and moved people's things.
 She cried, "O pray pity me!" Nought would he hear ;
 Then with wild rainy eyes she obeyed.
 She chid when her Love was for clinking off wi' her :
 The pa'son was told, as the season drew near,
 To throw over pu'pit the names of the pair
 As fitting one flesh to be made.
 The wedding-day dawned and the morning drew on ;
 The couple stood bridegroom and bride ;
 The evening was passed, and when midnight had gone
 The feasters horned,³ "God save the King," and anon
 The pair took their homealong⁴ ride.

¹ *thirtover*, cross.³ *horned*, sang loudly.² *tranted*, traded as carrier.⁴ *homealong*, homeward.

The lover Tim Tankens mourned heart-sick and leer¹
 To be thus of his darling deprived :
 He roamed in the dark ath'art field, mound, and mere,
 And, a'most without knowing it, found himself near
 The house of the tranter, and now of his Dear,
 Where the lantern-light showed 'em arrived.

The bride sought her chamber so calm and so pale
 That a Northern had thought her resigned ;
 But to eyes that had seen her in tidetimes² of weal,
 Like the white cloud o' smoke, the red battlefield's vail,
 That look spak' of havoc behind.

The bridegroom yet laitered a beaker to drain,
 Then reeled to the linhay³ for more,
 When the candle-snoff kindled some chaff from his grain—
 Flames spread, and red vlankers⁴ wi' might and wi' main
 Around beams, thatch, and chimley-tun⁵ roar.

Young Tim away yond, rafted⁶ up by the light,
 Through brimbles and underwood tears,
 Till he comes to the orchet, when crooping⁷ from sight
 In the lewth⁸ of a codlin-tree, bivering⁹ wi' fright,
 Wi' on'y her night-rail to cover her plight,
 His lonesome young Barbree appears.

Her cwold little figure half-naked he views
 Played about by the frolicsome breeze,
 Her light-tripping totties,¹⁰ her ten little tooes,
 All bare and besprinkled wi' Fall's¹¹ chilly dews,
 While her great gallied¹² eyes through her hair hanging loose
 Shone as stars through a tardle¹³ o' trees.

She eyed him ; and, as when a weir-hatch is drawn,
 Her tears, penned by terror afore,
 With a rushing of sobs in a shower were strawn,
 Till her power to pour 'em seemed 'wasted and gone
 From the heft¹⁴ o' misfortune she bore.

¹ leer, empty-stomached.

³ linhay, lean-to building.

⁵ chimley-tun, chimney-stack.

⁷ crooping, squatting down.

⁹ bivering, with chattering teeth.

¹¹ Fall, autumn.

¹³ tardle, entanglement.

² tidetimes, holidays.

⁴ vlankers, fire-flakes.

⁶ rafted, roused.

⁸ lewth, shelter.

¹⁰ totties, feet.

¹² gallied, frightened.

¹⁴ heft, weight.

"O Tim, my *own* Tim I must call 'ee—I will!
 All the world has turned round on me so!
 Can you help her who loved 'ee, though acting so ill?
 Can you pity her misery—feel for her still?
 When worse than her body so quivering and chill
 Is her heart in its winter o' woe!

"I think I mid¹ almost ha' borne it," she said,
 "Had my griefs one by one come to hand;
 But O, to be slave to thik husbird,² for bread,
 And then, upon top o' that, driven to wed,
 And then, upon top o' that, burnt out o' bed,
 Is more than my nater can stand!"

Like a lion 'ithin en Tim's spirit outsprung—
 (Tim had a great soul when his feelings were wrung)—
 "Feel for 'ee, dear Barbree?" he cried;
 And his warm working-jacket then straightway he flung
 Round about her, and horsed her by jerks, till she clung
 Like a chiel on a gipsy, her figure uphung
 By the sleeves that he tightly had tied.

Over piggeries, and mixens,³ and apples, and hay,
 They lumpered⁴ straight into the night;
 And finding ere long where a halter-path⁵ lay,
 Sighted Tim's house by dawn, on'y seen on their way
 By a naighbour or two who were up wi' the day,
 But who gathered no clue to the sight.

Then tender Tim Tankens he searched here and there
 For some garment to clothe her fair skin;
 But though he had breeches and waistcoats to spare,
 He had nothing quite seemly for Barbree to wear,
 Who, half shrammed⁶ to death, stood and cried on a chair
 At the caddle⁷ she found herself in.

There was one thing to do, and that one thing he did,
 He lent her some clothes of his own,

¹ *mid*, might.

³ *mixens*, manure-heaps.

⁵ *halter-path*, bridle-path.

² *thik husbird*, that rascal.

⁴ *lumpered*, stumbled.

⁶ *shrammed*, numbed.

⁷ *caddle*, quandary.

And she took 'em perforce ; and while swiftly she slid
 Them upon her Tim turned to the winder, as bid,
 Thinking, " O that the picter my duty keeps hid
 To the sight o' my eyes mid¹ be shown ! "

In the tallet² he stowed her ; there huddied³ she lay,
 Shortening sleeves, legs, and tails to her limbs ;
 But most o' the time in a mortal bad way,
 Well knowing that there'd be the divel to pay
 If 'twere found that, instead o' the element's prey,
 She was living in lodgings at Tim's.

" Where's the tranter ? " said men and boys ; " where can
 he be ? "

" Where's the tranter ? " said Barbree alone .

" Where on e'th is the tranter ? " said everybod-y :
 They sifted the dust of his perished roof-tree,
 And all they could find was a bone.

Then the uncle cried, " Lord, pray have mercy on me ! "
 And in terror began to repent.
 But before 'twas complete, and till sure she was free,
 Barbree drew up her loft-ladder, tight turned her key—
 Tim bringing up breakfast and dinner and tea—
 Till the news of her hiding got vent.

Then followed the custom-kept rout, shout, and flare
 Of a skimmity-ride⁴ through the naighbourhood, ere
 Folk had proof o' wold⁵ Sweatley's decay.
 Whereupon decent people all stood in a stare,
 Saying Tim and his lodger should risk it, and pair :
 So he took her to church. An' some laughing lads there
 Cried to Tim, " After Sweatley ! " She said, " I declare
 I stand as a maiden to-day ! "

Written 1866 ; printed 1875.

¹ *mid*, might.

² *huddied*, hidden.

³ *tallet*, loft.

⁴ *skimmity-ride*, satirical procession with effigies.

⁵ *wold*, old.

HEIRESS AND ARCHITECT

FOR A. W. B.

SHE sought the Studios, beckoning to her side
 An arch-designer, for she planned to build.
 He was of wise contrivance, deeply skilled
 In every intervolve of high and wide—
 Well fit to be her guide.

“Whatever it be,”

Responded he,

With cold, clear voice, and cold, clear view,
 “In true accord with prudent fashionings
 For such vicissitudes as living brings,
 And thwarting not the law of stable things,
 That will I do.”

“Shape me,” she said, “high halls with tracery
 And open ogive-work, that scent and hue
 Of buds, and travelling bees, may come in through,
 The note of birds, and singings of the sea,
 For these are much to me.”

“An idle whim!”

Broke forth from him

Whom nought could warm to gallantries :
 “Cede all these buds and birds, the zephyr’s call,
 And scents, and hues, and things that falter all,
 And choose as best the close and surly wall,
 For winters freeze.”

“Then frame,” she cried, “wide fronts of crystal glass,
 That I may show my laughter and my light—
 Light like the sun’s by day, the stars’ by night—
 Till rival heart-queens, envying, wail, ‘Alas,
 Her glory!’ as they pass.”

“O maid misled!”

He sternly said

Whose facile foresight pierced her dire ;
 “Where shall abide the soul when, sick of glee,
 It shrinks, and hides, and prays no eye may see?
 Those house them best who house for secrecy,
 For you will tire.”

WESSEX POEMS

"A little chamber, then, with swan and dove
 Ranged thickly, and engrailed with rare device
 Of reds and purples, for a Paradise
 Wherein my Love may greet me, I my Love,
 When he shall know thereof?"

"This, too, is ill,"

He answered still,

The man who swayed her like a shade.
 "An hour will come when sight of such sweet nook
 Would bring a bitterness too sharp to brook,
 When brighter eyes have won away his look ;
 For you will fade."

Then said she faintly : "O, contrive some way—
 Some narrow winding turret, quite mine own,
 To reach a loft where I may grieve alone !
 It is a slight thing ; hence do not, I pray,
 This last dear fancy slay !"

"Such winding ways

Fit not your days,"

Said he, the man of measuring eye ;
 "I must even fashion as the rule declares,
 To wit : Give space (since life ends unawares)
 To hale a coffined corpse adown the stairs ;
 For you will die."

1867.

THE TWO MEN

THERE were two youths of equal age,
 Wit, station, strength, and parentage ;
 They studied at the selfsame schools,
 And shaped their thoughts by common rules.

One pondered on the life of man,
 His hopes, his ending, and began
 To rate the Market's sordid war
 As something scarce worth living for

"I'll brace to higher aims," said he,
 "I'll further Truth and Purity ;
 Thereby to mend the mortal lot
 And sweeten sorrow. Thrive I not,

"Winning their hearts, my kind will give
 Enough that I may lowly live,
 And house my Love in some dim dell,
 For pleasing them and theirs so well."

Idly attired, with features wan,
 In secret swift he laboured on :
 Such press of power had brought much gold
 Applied to things of meaner mould.

Sometimes he wished his aims had been
 To gather gains like other men ;
 Then thanked his God he'd traced his track
 Too far for wish to drag him back.

He looked down from his loft one day
 To where his slighted garden lay ;
 Nettles and hemlock hid each lawn,
 And every flower was starved and gone.

He fainted in his heart, whereon
 He rose, and sought his plighted one,
 Resolved to loose her bond withal,
 Lest she should perish in his fall.

He met her with a careless air,
 As though he'd ceased to find her fair,
 And said : " True love is dust to me ;
 I cannot kiss : I tire of thee ! "

(That she might scorn him was he fain,
 To put her sooner out of pain ;
 For angered love breathes quick and dies,
 When famished love long-lingering lies.)

Once done, his soul was so betossed,
 It found no more the force it lost :
 Hope was his only drink and food,
 And hope extinct, decay ensued.

And, living long so closely penned,
 He had not kept a single friend ;
 He dwindled thin as phantoms be,
 And drooped to death in poverty. . . .

Meantime his schoolmate had gone out
 To join the fortune-finding rout ;
 He liked the winnings of the mart,
 But wearied of the working part.

He turned to seek a privy lair,
 Neglecting note of garb and hair,
 And day by day reclined and thought
 How he might live by doing nought.

" I plan a valued scheme " he said
 To some. " But lend me of your bread,
 And when the vast result looms nigh,
 In profit you shall stand as I."

Yet they took counsel to restrain
 Their kindness till they saw the gain ;
 And, since his substance now had run,
 He rose to do what might be done.

He went unto his Love by night,
 And said : " My Love, I faint in fight :
 Deserving as thou dost a crown,
 My cares shall never drag thee down."

(He had descried a maid whose line
 Would hand her on much corn and wine,
 And held her far in worth above
 One who could only pray and love.)

But this Fair read him ; whence he failed
 To do the deed so blithely hailed ;
 He saw his projects wholly marred,
 And gloom and want oppressed him hard ;

Till, living to so mean an end,
 Whereby he'd lost his every friend,
 He perished in the pauper sty
 Where his old mate lay dying nigh.

And moralists, reflecting, said,
 As "dust to dust" anon was read
 And echoed from each coffin-lid,
 "These men were like in all they did."

1866.

LINES

*Spoken by Miss ADA REHAN at the Lyceum Theatre, July 23,
 1890, at a performance on behalf of Lady Jeune's Holiday
 Fund for City Children.*

BEFORE we part to alien thoughts and aims,
 Permit the one brief word the occasion claims :
 —When mumming and grave motives are allied,
 Perhaps an Epilogue is justified.

Our under-purpose has, in truth, to-day
 Commanded most our musings ; least the play :
 A purpose futile but for your good-will
 Swiftly responsive to the cry of ill :
 A purpose all too limited !— to aid
 Frail human flowerets, sicklied by the shade,
 In winning some short spell of upland breeze,
 Or strengthening sunlight on the level leas.

Who has not marked, where the full cheek should be,
 Incipient lines of lank flaccidity,
 Lymphatic pallor where the pink should glow,
 And where the throb of transport, pulses low ?—
 Most tragical of shapes from Pole to Line,
 O wondering child, unwitting Time's design,
 Why should Art add to Nature's quandary,
 And worsen ill by thus immuring thee ?
 —That races do despite unto their own,
 That Might supernal do indeed condone
 Wrongs individual for the general ease,
 Instance the proof in victims such as these.

Launched into thoroughfares too thronged before,
 Mothered by those whose protest is "No more !"

Vitalized without option : who shall say
 That did Life hang on choosing—Yea or Nay—
 They had not scorned it with such penalty,
 And nothingness implored of Destiny ?

And yet behind the horizon smile serene
 The down, the cornland, and the stretching green—
 Space—the child's heaven : scenes which at least ensure
 Some palliative for ill they cannot cure.

Dear friends—now moved by this poor show of ours
 To make your own long joy in buds and bowers
 For one brief while the joy of infant eyes,
 Changing their urban murk to paradise—
 You have our thanks !—may your reward include
 More than our thanks, far more : their gratitude.

SAVILE CLUB, *Midnight, July 1890.*

“I LOOK INTO MY GLASS”

I LOOK into my glass,
 And view my wasting skin,
 And say, “Would God it came to pass
 My heart had shrunk as thin !”

For then, I, undistrest
 By hearts grown cold to me,
 Could lonely wait my endless rest
 With equanimity.

But Time, to make me grieve,
 Part steals, lets part abide ;
 And shakes this fragile frame at eve
 With throbbings of noontide.

POEMS OF
THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

PREFACE

HEREWITH I tender my thanks to the editors and proprietors of the *Times*, the *Morning Post*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Westminster Gazette*, *Literature*, the *Graphic*, *Cornhill*, *Sphere*, and other papers, for permission to reprint from their pages such of the following pieces of verse as have already been published.

Of the subject-matter of this volume—even that which is in other than narrative form—much is dramatic or impersonative even where not explicitly so. Moreover, that portion which may be regarded as individual comprises a series of feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances, and at various dates. It will probably be found, therefore, to possess little cohesion of thought or harmony of colouring. I do not greatly regret this. Unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change.

T. H.

August 1901.

V.R. 1819-1901

A REVERIE

THE mightiest moments pass uncalendared,
And when the Absolute
In backward Time pronounced the deedful word
Whereby all life is stirred :
“ Let one be born and throned whose mould shall constitute
The norm of every royal-reckoned attribute,”
No mortal knew or heard.

But in due days the purposed Life outshone—
Serene, sagacious, free ;
—Her waxing seasons bloomed with deeds well done,
And the world's heart was won . . .
Yet may the deed of hers most bright in eyes to be
Lie hid from ours—as in the All-One's thought lay she—
Till ripening years have run.

SUNDAY NIGHT,
January 27, 1901.

WAR POEMS

EMBARCATION

(Southampton Docks : October 1899)

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

Vaster battalions press for further strands,
To argue in the selfsame bloody mode
Which this late age of thought, and pact, and code,
Still fails to mend.—Now deckward tramp the bands,

Yellow as autumn leaves, alive as spring ;
And as each host draws out upon the sea
Beyond which lies the tragical To-be,
None dubious of the cause, none murmuring,

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

DEPARTURE

(Southampton Docks : October 1899)

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

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

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

THE COLONEL'S SOLILOQUY

(Southampton Docks : October 1899)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE GOING OF THE BATTERY

WIVES’ LAMENT

(*November 2, 1899*)

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

Gas-glimmers drearily, bleakly, eerily
 Lit our pale faces outstretched for one kiss,
 While we stood prest to them, with a last quest to them
 Not to court perils that honour could miss.

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

AT THE WAR OFFICE, LONDON

(Affixing the Lists of Killed and Wounded: December 1899)

I

LAST year I called this world of gaingivings
 The darkest thinkable, and questioned sadly
 If my own land could heave its pulse less gladly,
 So charged it seemed with circumstance that brings
 The tragedy of things.

II

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

A CHRISTMAS GHOST-STORY

SOUTH of the Line, inland from far Durban,
 A mouldering soldier lies—your countryman.
 Awry and doubled up are his gray bones,
 And on the breeze his puzzled phantom moans
 Nightly to clear Canopus: "I would know
 By whom and when the All-Earth-gladdening Law
 Of Peace, brought in by that Man Crucified,
 Was ruled to be inept, and set aside?
 And what of logic or of truth appears
 In tacking 'Anno Domini' to the years?
 Near twenty-hundred liveried thus have hied,
 But tarries yet the Cause for which He died."

Christmas-eve 1899.

DRUMMER HODGE

I

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

II

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

III

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

A WIFE IN LONDON

(December 1899)

I

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

A messenger's knock cracks smartly,
 Flashed news is in her hand
 Of meaning it dazes to understand
 Though shaped so shortly :

He—has fallen—in the far South Land. . . .

II

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

Fresh—firm—penned in highest feather—
 Page-full of his hoped return,
 And of home-planned jaunts by brake and burn
 In the summer weather,
 And of new love that they would learn.

THE SOULS OF THE SLAIN

I

THE thick lids of Night closed upon me
 Alone at the Bill
 Of the Isle by the Race¹—
 Many-caverned, bald, wrinkled of face—
 And with darkness and silence the spirit was on me
 To brood and be still.

II

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

III

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

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

"I've flown there before you," he said then :
 "Your households are well ;
 But—your kin linger less
 On your glory and war-mightiness
 Than on dearer things."—"Dearer?" cried these from the
 dead then,
 "Of what do they tell?"

VIII

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

IX

“A father broods : ‘Would I had set him
 To some humble trade,
 And so slacked his high fire,
 And his passionate martial desire ;
 And told him no stories to woo him and whet him
 To this dire crusade !”

X

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

XI

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

XII

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

XIII

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

XIV

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

XV

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

XVI

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

December 1899.

SONG OF THE SOLDIERS' WIVES AND
 SWEETHEARTS

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

THE SICK GOD

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

He rarely gladdens champions now ;
They do and dare, but tensely—pale of brow ;
And would they fain uplift the arm
Of that weak form they know not how

X

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

XI

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

POEMS OF PILGRIMAGE

GENOA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

(*March 1887*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHELLEY'S SKYLARK

(The neighbourhood of Leghorn: March 1887)

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

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

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

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

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

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

IN THE OLD THEATRE, FIESOLE

(April 1887)

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

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

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

ROME: ON THE PALATINE

(*April 1887*)

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

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

When lo, swift hands, on strings nigh overhead,
 Began to melodize a waltz by Strauss :

It stirred me as I stood, in Cæsar's house,
 Raised the old routs Imperial lyres had led,

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

ROME

BUILDING A NEW STREET IN THE ANCIENT
QUARTER

(*April 1887*)

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

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

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

ROME

THE VATICAN : SALA DELLE MUSE

(1887)

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

She looked not this nor that of those beings divine,
But each and the whole—an essence of all the Nine ;
With tentative foot she neared to my halting-place,
A pensive smile on her sweet, small, marvellous face.

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

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

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

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

ROME

AT THE PYRAMID OF CESTIUS NEAR THE
GRAVES OF SHELLEY AND KEATS

(1887)

WHO, then, was Cestius,
 And what is he to me?—
 Amid thick thoughts and memories multitudinous
 One thought alone brings he.

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

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

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

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

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

LAUSANNE

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

June 27, 1897

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

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

Anon the book is closed,
With "It is finished!" And at the alley's end
He turns, and when on me his glances bend
As from the Past comes speech—small, muted, yet composed.

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

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

ZERMATT

TO THE MATTERHORN

(June-July 1897)

THIRTY-TWO years since, up against the sun,
Seven shapes, thin atomies to lower sight,
Labouringly leapt and gained thy gabled height,
And four lives paid for what the seven had won.

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

Yet ages ere men topped thee, late and soon
 Thou didst behold the planets lift and lower ;
 Saw'st, maybe, Joshua's pausing sun and moon,
 And the betokening sky when Cæsar's power
 Approached its bloody end ; yea, even that Noon
 When darkness filled the earth till the ninth hour.

THE BRIDGE OF LODI¹*(Spring 1887)*

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

Pronounce "Loddy."

VI

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

VII

Any ancient crone I'd toady
 Like a lass in young-eyed prime,
 Could she tell some tale of Lodi
 At that moving mighty time.

VIII

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

IX

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

X

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

XI

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

XII

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

XIII

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

XIV

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

XV

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

XVI

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

XVII

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

ON AN INVITATION TO THE UNITED STATES

I

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

II

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

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

THE MOTHER MOURNS

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

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

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

And, heeding, it awed me to gather
That Nature herself there
Was breathing in aëry accents,
With dirge-like refrain,

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

—"I had not proposed me a Creature
(She soughed) so excelling
All else of my kingdom in compass
And brightness of brain .

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

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

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

“Man’s mountings of mindsight I checked not,
 Till range of his vision
 Now tops my intent, and finds blemish
 Throughout my domain.

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

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

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

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

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

- “ If inly a moment I murmured,
 ‘ The simple praise sweetly,
 But sweetlier the sage ’—and did rashly
 Man’s vision unrein,
- “ I rue it ! . . . His guileless forerunners,
 Whose brains I could blandish,
 To measure the deeps of my mysteries
 Applied them in vain.
- “ From them my waste aimings and futile
 I subtly could cover ;
 ‘ Every best thing,’ said they, ‘ to best purpose
 Her powers preordain.’—
- “ No more such ! . . . My species are dwindling,
 My forests grow barren,
 My popinjays fail from their tappings,
 My larks from their strain.
- “ My leopardine beauties are rarer,
 My tusky ones vanish,
 My children have aped mine own slaughters
 To quicken my wane.
- “ Let me grow, then, but mildews and mandrakes,
 And slimy distortions,
 Let nevermore things good and lovely
 To me appertain ;
- “ For Reason is rank in my temples,
 And Vision unruly,
 And chivalrous laud of my cunning
 Is heard not again ! ”

“ I SAID TO LOVE ”

- I SAID to Love,
 “ It is not now as in old days
 When men adored thee and thy ways—
 Set none above ;
 Named thee the Boy, the Bright, the One
 Who spread a heaven beneath the sun,”
 I said to Love.

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

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

"Depart then, Love ! . . .
 —Man's race shall perish, threatenest thou,
 Without thy kindling coupling vow ?
 The age to come the man of now
 Know nothing of?—
 We fear not such a threat from thee ;
 We are too old in apathy !
Mankind shall cease.—So let it be,"
 I said to Love.

A COMMONPLACE DAY

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

I part the fire-gnawed logs,
 Rake forth the embers, spoil the busy flames, and lay the ends
 Upon the shining dogs ;
 Further and further from the nooks the twilight's stride extends,
 And beamless black impends.

Nothing of tiniest worth
 Have I wrought, pondered, planned ; no one thing asking blame
 or praise,

 Since the pale corpse-like birth
 Of this diurnal unit, bearing blanks in all its rays—
 Dullest of dull-hued Days !

 Wanly upon the panes
 The rain slides, as have slid since morn my colourless thoughts ;
 and yet

 Here, while Day's presence wanes,
 And over him the sepulchre-lid is slowly lowered and set,
 He wakens my regret.

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

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

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

AT A LUNAR ECLIPSE

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

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

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

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

THE LACKING SENSE

SCENE.—*A sad-coloured landscape, Waddon Vale*

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

TO LIFE

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

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

But canst thou not array
 Thyself in rare disguise,
 And feign like truth, for one mad day,
 That Earth is Paradise?

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

DOOM AND SHE

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

“World-weaver!” he replies,
 “I scan all thy domain;
 But since nor joy nor pain
 It lies in me to recognize,
 I read thy realms in vain.

VII

“World-weaver! what *is* Grief?
 And what are Right, and Wrong,
 And Feeling, that belong
 To creatures all who owe thee fief?
 Why is Weak worse than Strong?” . . .

VIII

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

THE PROBLEM

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

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

THE SUBALTERNS

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

We smiled upon each other then,
 And life to me wore less
 Of that fell guise it wore ere when
 They owned their passiveness.

THE SLEEP-WORKER

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

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

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

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

THE BULLFINCHES

BROTHER Bulleys, let us sing
 From the dawn till evening!—
 For we know not that we go not
 When the day's pale pinions fold
 Where those be that sang of old.

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

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

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

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

Come then, brethren, let us sing,
 From the dawn till evening!—
 For we know not that we go not
 When the day's pale pinions fold
 Where those be that sang of old.

GOD-FORGOTTEN

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

—“The Earth, sayest thou? The Human race?
 By Me created? Sad its lot?
 Nay: I have no remembrance of such place:
 Such world I fashioned not.”—

—“O Lord, forgive me when I say
 Thou spakest the word, and madest it all.”—
 “The Earth of men—let me bethink me. . . . Yea!
 I dimly do recall

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But sayest it is by pangs distraught,
 And strife, and silent suffering?—
 Sore grieved am I that injury should be wrought
 Even on so poor a thing!

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

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

THE BEDRIDDEN PEASANT

TO AN UNKNOWN GOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BY THE EARTH'S CORPSE

I

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

II

"O Time," replied the Lord,
 "Thou readest me ill, I ween ;
 Were all *the same*, I should not grieve
 At that late earthly scene,

Now blestly past—though planned by me
 With interest close and keen!—
 Nay, nay: things now are *not* the same
 As they have earlier been.

III

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

IV

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

MUTE OPINION

I

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

II

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

TO AN UNBORN PAUPER CHILD

I

BREATHE not, hid Heart : cease silently,
 And though thy birth-hour beckons thee,
 Sleep the long sleep :
 The Doomsters heap
 Travails and teens around us here,
 And Time-wraiths turn our songsingings to fear.

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

TO FLOWERS FROM ITALY IN WINTER

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

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

Frail luckless exiles hither brought !
 Your dust will not regain
 Old sunny haunts of Classic thought
 When you shall waste and wane ;

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

ON A FINE MORNING

I

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

II

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

February 1899.

TO LIZBIE BROWNE

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

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

SONG OF HOPE

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

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

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

THE WELL-BELOVED

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

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

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

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

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

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

—“O maiden lithe and lone, what may
 Thy name and lineage be
 Who so resemblest by this ray
 My darling?—Art thou she?”

The Shape: “Thy bride remains within
 Her father’s grange and grove.”
 —“Thou speakest rightly,” I broke in,
 “Thou art not she I love.”

—“Nay: though thy bride remains inside
 Her father’s walls,” said she,
 “The one most dear is with thee here,
 For thou dost love but me.”

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

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

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

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

—“O then,” I answered miserably,
 Speaking as scarce I knew,
 “My loved one, I must wed with thee
 If what thou sayest be true!”

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

Thereat she vanished by the lane
 Adjoining Kingsbere town,
 Near where, men say, once stood the Fane
 To Venus, on the Down.

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

HER REPROACH

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

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

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

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

WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS, 1867.

THE INCONSISTENT

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

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

A BROKEN APPOINTMENT

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

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

"BETWEEN US NOW"

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

So thoroughly and long
 Have you now known me,
 So real in faith and strong
 Have I now shown me,
 That nothing needs disguise
 Further in any wise,
 Or asks or justifies
 A guarded tongue.

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

"HOW GREAT MY GRIEF"

(TRIOLET)

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

"I NEED NOT GO"

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

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

And if some day,
 When none cries nay,
 I still delay
 To seek her side,
 (Though ample measure
 Of fitting leisure
 Await my pleasure)
 She will not chide.

What—not upbraid me
 That I delayed me,
 Nor ask what stayed me
 So long? Ah, no!—
 New cares may claim me,
 New loves inflame me,
 She will not blame me,
 But suffer it so.

THE COQUETTE, AND AFTER

(TRIOLETS)

I

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

II

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

A SPOT

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

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

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

LONG PLIGHTED

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE WIDOW BETROTHED

I PASSED the lodge and avenue
 To her fair tenement,
 And sunset on her window-panes
 Reflected our intent.

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

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

Again I knocked, and tardily
 An inner tread was heard,
 And I was shown her presence then
 With a mere answering word.

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

"To-morrow—could you—would you call?
 Abridge your present stay?
 My child is ill—my one, my all!—
 And can't be left to-day."

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

—As maid I loyed her; but one came
 And pleased, and coaxed, and wooed.
 And when in time he wedded her
 I deemed her gone for good.

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

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

Yet in my haste I overlooked
 When secondly I sued
 That then, as not at first, she had learnt
 The call of motherhood. . . .

Her word is steadfast, and I know
 How firmly pledged are we :
 But a new love-claim shares her since
 She smiled as maid on me !

AT A HASTY WEDDING

(TRIOLET)

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

THE DREAM-FOLLOWER

A DREAM of mine flew over the mead
 To the halls where my old Love reigns ;
 And it drew me on to follow its lead :
 And I stood at her window-panes ;
 And I saw but a thing of flesh and bone
 Speeding on to its cleft in the clay ;
 And my dream was scared, and expired on a moan,
 And I whitely hastened away.

HIS IMMORTALITY

I

I SAW a dead man's finer part
 Shining within each faithful heart
 Of those bereft. Then said I : "This must be
 His immortality."

II

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

III

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

IV

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

February 1899.

THE TO-BE-FORGOTTEN

I

I HEARD a small sad sound,
 And stood awhile among the tombs around :
 "Wherefore, old friends," said I, "are you distrest,
 Now, screened from life's unrest ?"

II

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

III

"These, our sped ancestry,
 Lie here embraced by deeper death than we ;
 Nor shape nor thought of theirs can you descry
 With keenest backward eye.

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

WIVES IN THE SERE

I

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

II

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

THE SUPERSEDED

I

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

II

Yet there are of us some who grieve
 To go behind ;
 Staunch, strenuous souls who scarce believe
 Their fires declined,
 And know none spares, remembers, cares
 Who go behind.

III

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

AN AUGUST MIDNIGHT

I

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

II

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

MAX GATE, 1899.

THE CAGED THRUSH FREED AND
HOME AGAIN

(VILLANELLE)

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

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

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

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

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

“Eludes great Man’s sagacity
No less than ours, O tribes in treen !
Men know but little more than we
How happy days are made to be.”

BIRDS AT WINTER NIGHTFALL

(TRIOLET)

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

MAX GATE.

THE PUZZLED GAME-BIRDS

(TRIOLET)

THEY are not those who used to feed us
When we were young—they cannot be—
These shapes that now bereave and bleed us ?
They are not those who used to feed us,
For did we then cry, they would heed us.
—If hearts can house such treachery
They are not those who used to feed us
When we were young—they cannot be !

WINTER IN DURNOVER FIELD

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

(TRIOLET)

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

THE LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE DARKLING THRUSH

I LEANT upon a coppice gate
 When Frost was spectre-gray,
 And Winter's dregs made desolate
 The weakening eye of day.
 The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
 Like strings from broken lyres,
 And all mankind that haunted nigh
 Had sought their household fires.
 The land's sharp features seemed to be
 The Century's corpse outleant,
 His crypt the cloudy canopy,
 The wind his death-lament.
 The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
 And every spirit upon earth
 Seemed fervourless as I.
 At once a voice burst forth among
 The bleak twigs overhead
 In a full-hearted evensong
 Of joy illimited ;
 An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
 In blast-beruffled plume,
 Had chosen thus to fling his soul
 Upon the growing gloom.
 So little cause for carollings
 Of such ecstatic sound
 Was written on terrestrial things
 Afar or nigh around,
 That I could think there trembled through
 His happy good-night air
 Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
 And I was unaware.

December 1900.

THE COMET AT YALBURY OR YELL'HAM

I

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

II

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

MAD JUDY

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

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

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

A WASTED ILLNESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A MAN

(IN MEMORY OF H. OF M.)

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

“ Hunger is hard. But since the terms be such—
 No wage, or labour stained with the disgrace
 Of wrecking what our age cannot replace
 To save its tasteless soul—
 I'll do without your dole. Life is not much !”

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

THE DAME OF ATHELHALL

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

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

X

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

THE SEASONS OF HER YEAR

I

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

II

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

THE MILKMAID

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE LEVELLED CHURCHYARD

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

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

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

"Where we are huddled none can trace,
And if our names remain,
They pave some path or p—ing place
Where we have never lain !

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

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

1882.

THE RUINED MAID

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

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

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

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

—"You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,
And you'd sigh, and you'd sock ; but at present you seem
To know not of megrims or melancho-ly !"—
"True. One's pretty lively when ruined," said she.

—“I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,
 And a delicate face, and could strut about Town!”—
 “My dear—a raw country girl, such as you be,
 Cannot quite expect that. You ain’t ruined,” said she.

WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS, 1866.

THE RESPECTABLE BURGHER

ON “THE HIGHER CRITICISM”

SINCE Reverend Doctors now declare
 That clerks and people must prepare
 To doubt if Adam ever were ;
 To hold the flood a local scare ;
 To argue, though the stolid stare,
 That everything had happened ere
 The prophets to its happening sware ;
 That David was no giant-slayer,
 Nor one to call a God-obeyer
 In certain details we could spare,
 But rather was a debonair
 Shrewd bandit, skilled as banjo-player :
 That Solomon sang the fleshly Fair,
 And gave the Church no thought whate’er,
 That Esther with her royal wear,
 And Mordecai, the son of Jair,
 And Joshua’s triumphs, Job’s despair,
 And Balaam’s ass’s bitter blare ;
 Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace-flare,
 And Daniel and the den affair,
 And other stories rich and rare,
 Were writ to make old doctrine wear
 Something of a romantic air :
 That the Nain widow’s only heir,
 And Lazarus with cadaverous glare
 (As done in oils by Piombo’s care)
 Did not return from Sheol’s lair :
 That Jael set a fiendish snare,
 That Pontius Pilate acted square,

That never a sword cut Malchus' ear ;
 And (but for shame I must forbear)
 That ——— did not reappear ! . . .
 —Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,
 All churchgoing will I forswear,
 And sit on Sundays in my chair,
 And read that moderate man Voltaire.

ARCHITECTURAL MASKS

I

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

II

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

III

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

THE TENANT-FOR-LIFE

THE sun said, watching my watering-pot :
 "Some morn you'll pass away ;
 These flowers and plants I parch up hot—
 Who'll water them that day ?

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

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

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

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

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

THE KING'S EXPERIMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE TREE

AN OLD MAN'S STORY

I

ITS roots are bristling in the air
 Like some mad Earth-god's spiny hair ;
 The loud south-wester's swell and yell
 Smote it at midnight, and it fell.

 Thus ends the tree
 Where Some One sat with me.

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

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

X

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

HER LATE HUSBAND

(KING'S HINTOCK, 182—)

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

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

“Widow, your wish shall be obeyed :
 Though, thought I, certainly
 You'd lay him where your folk are laid,
 And your grave, too, will be,
 As custom hath it ; you to right,
 And on the left hand he.”

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

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

THE SELF-UNSEEING

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

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

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

IN TENEBRIS

I

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

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

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

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

Leaves freeze to dun ;
But friends can not turn cold
This season as of old
For him with none.

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

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

IN TENEBRIS

II

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

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

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

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

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

IN TENEBRIS

III

"Heu mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est! Habitavi cum habitantibus Cedar; multum incola fuit anima mea."—*P's.* cxix.

THERE have been times when I well might have passed and the ending have come—

Points in my path when the dark might have stolen on me, artless, unrueing—

Ere I had learnt that the world was a welter of futile doing: Such had been times when I well might have passed, and the ending have come!

Say, on the noon when the half-sunny hours told that April was nigh,

And I upgathered and cast forth the snow from the crocus-border,

Fashioned and furbished the soil into a summer-seeming order, Glowing in gladsome faith that I quickened the year thereby.

Or on that loneliest of eves when afar and benighted we stood, She who upheld me and I, in the midmost of Egdon together, Confident I in her watching and ward through the blackening heather,

Deeming her matchless in might and with measureless scope ended.

Or on that winter-wild night when, reclined by the chimney-nook quoin,

Slowly a drowse overgat me, the smallest and feeblest of folk there,

Weak from my baptism of pain; when at times and anon I awoke there—

Heard of a world wheeling on, with no listing or longing to join.

Even then! while unweeting that vision could vex or that knowledge could numb,

That sweets to the mouth in the belly are bitter, and tart, and untoward,

Then, on some dim-coloured scene should my briefly raised curtain have lowered,

Then might the Voice that is law have said "Cease!" and the ending have come.

THE CHURCH-BUILDER

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

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

X

The rich red windows dim the moon,
 But little light need I ;
 I mount the prie-dieu, lately hewn
 From woods of rarest dye ;
 Then from below
 My garment, so,
 I draw this cord, and tie

XI

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

XII

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

THE LOST PYX

A MEDIÆVAL LEGEND¹

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

¹ On a lonely table-land above the Vale of Blackmore, between High-Stoy and Bubb-Down hills, and commanding in clear weather views that extend from the English to the Bristol Channel, stands a pillar, apparently mediæval, called Cross-and-Hand, or Christ-in-Hand. One tradition of its origin is mentioned in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* ; another, more detailed, preserves the story here given.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

“I mark a phantom through the pane,
 That beckons in despair,
 Its mouth all drawn with heavy moan—
 Her to whom once I swore!”—
 “Nay; 'tis the lately carven stone
 Of some strange girl laid there!”—

IX

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

X

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

XI

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

XII

A year beholds him wend again
 To her who wastes in clay;
 From day-dawn until eve he fares
 Along the wintry way,
 From day-dawn until eve repairs
 Towards her mound to pray.

XIII

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

XIV

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

XV

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

XVI

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

IMITATIONS, ETC.

SAPPHIC FRAGMENT

"Thou shalt be—Nothing."—OMAR KHAYYÁM.
"Tombless, with no remembrance."—W. SHAKESPEARE.

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

CATULLUS: XXXI

(After passing Sirmione, April 1887)

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

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

AFTER SCHILLER

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

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

SONG FROM HEINE

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

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

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

FROM VICTOR HUGO

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

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

CARDINAL BEMBO'S EPITAPH ON RAPHAEL

HERE'S one in whom Nature feared—faint at such vying—
Eclipse while he lived, and decease at his dying.

RETROSPECT

"I HAVE LIVED WITH SHADES"

I

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

II

And take me by the hand,
And lead me through their rooms
In the To-be, where Dooms
Half-wove and shapeless stand :
And show from there
The dwindled dust
And rot and rust
Of things that were.

III

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

IV

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

V

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

February 2, 1899.

MEMORY AND I

“O MEMORY, where is now my youth,
 Who used to say that life was truth ?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ἌΓΝΩΣΤΩι ΘΕΩι.

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

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

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

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

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

PREFACE

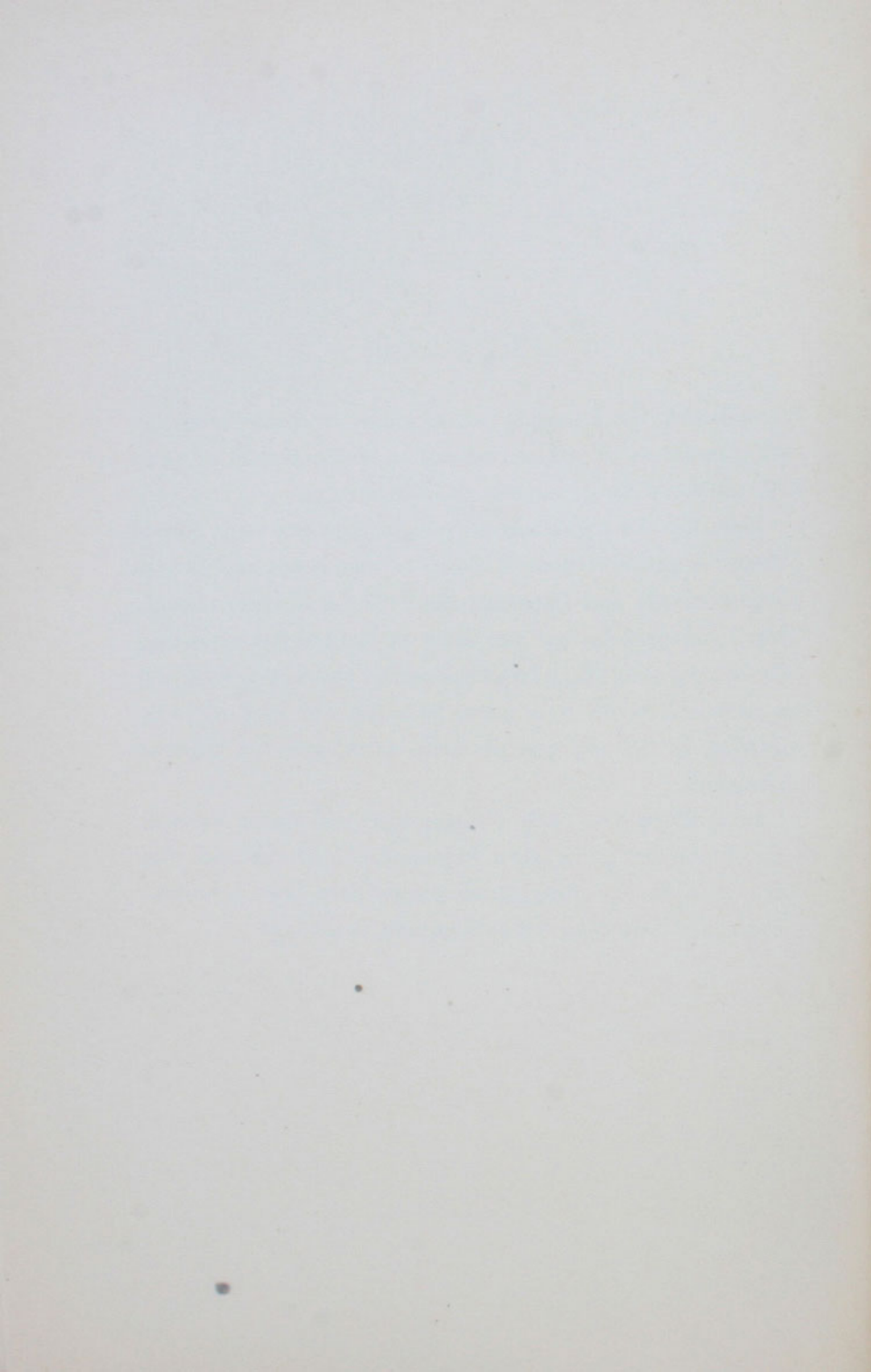
IN collecting the following poems I have to thank the editors and proprietors of the periodicals in which certain of them have appeared for permission to reclaim them.

Now that the miscellany is brought together, some lack of concord in pieces written at widely severed dates, and in contrasting moods and circumstances, will be obvious enough. This I cannot help, but the sense of disconnection, particularly in respect of those lyrics penned in the first person, will be immaterial when it is borne in mind that they are to be regarded, in the main, as dramatic monologues by different characters.

As a whole they will, I hope, take the reader forward, even if not far, rather than backward. I should add that some lines in the early-dated poems have been rewritten, though they have been left substantially unchanged.

T. H.

September 1909.



THE REVISITATION

As I lay awake at night-time
In an ancient country barrack known to ancient cannoneers,
And recalled the hopes that heralded each seeming brave and
 bright time
Of my primal purple years,

Much it haunted me that, nigh there,
I had borne my bitterest loss—when One who went, came not again;
In a joyless hour of discord, in a joyless-hued July there—
A July just such as then.

And as thus I brooded longer,
With my faint eyes on the feeble square of wan-lit window frame,
A quick conviction sprung within me, grew, and grew yet stronger,
That the month-night was the same,

Too, as that which saw her leave me
On the rugged ridge of Waterstone, the peewits plaining round;
And a lapsing twenty years had ruled that—as it were to
 grieve me—

I should near the once-loved ground.

Though but now a war-worn stranger
Chance had quartered here, I rose up and descended to the yard.
All was soundless, save the troopers' horses tossing at the manger,
And the sentry keeping guard.

Through the gateway I betook me
Down the High Street and beyond the lamps, across the battered
 bridge,
Till the country darkness clasped me and the friendly shine
 forsook me,

And I bore towards the Ridge,

With a dim unowned emotion
 Saying softly: "Small my reason, now at midnight, to be here . . .
 Yet a sleepless swain of fifty with a brief romantic notion
 May retrace a track so dear."

Thus I walked with thoughts half-uttered
 Up the lane I knew so well, the grey, gaunt, lonely Lane of Slyre;
 And at whiles behind me, far at sea, a sullen thunder muttered
 As I mounted high and higher.

Till, the upper roadway quitting,
 I adventured on the open drouthy downland thinly grassed,
 While the spry white scuts of conies flashed before me, earthward
 flitting,
 And an arid wind went past.

Round about me bulged the barrows
 As before, in antique silence—immemorial funeral piles—
 Where the sleek herds trampled daily the remains of flint-tipt arrows
 Mid the thyme and chamomiles;

And the Sarsen stone there, dateless,
 On whose breast we had sat and told the zephyrs many a
 tender vow,
 Held the heat of yester sun, as sank thereon one fated mateless
 From those far fond hours till now.

Maybe flustered by my presence
 Rose the peewits, just as all those years back, wailing soft
 and loud,
 And revealing their pale pinions like a fitful phosphorescence
 Up against the cope of cloud,

Where their dolesome exclamations
 Seemed the voicings of the self-same throats I had heard when
 life was green,
 Though since that day uncounted frail forgotten generations
 Of their kind had flecked the scene.—

And so, living long and longer
 In a past that lived no more, my eyes discerned there, suddenly,
 That a figure broke the skyline—first in vague contour, then
 stronger,
 And was crossing near to me.

Some long-missed familiar gesture,
 Something wanted, struck me in the figure's pause to list and
 heed,
 Till I fancied from its handling of its loosely wrapping vesture
 That it might be She indeed.

'Twas not reasonless : below there
 In the vale, had been her home ; the nook might hold her
 even yet,
 And the downlands were her father's fief ; she still might come
 and go there ;—
 So I rose, and said, " Agnette ! "

With a little leap, half-frightened,
 She withdrew some steps ; then letting intuition smother fear
 In a place so long-accustomed, and as one whom thought
 enlightened,
 She replied : " What—*that* voice ?—here ! "

" Yes, Agnette !—And did the occasion
 Of our marching hither make you think I *might* walk where
 we two—"

" O, I often come," she murmured with a moment's coy evasion,
 " ('Tis not far),—and—think of you."

Then I took her hand, and led her
 To the ancient people's stone whereon I had sat. There now
 sat we ;
 And together talked, until the first reluctant shyness fled her,
 And she spoke confidingly.

" It is *just* as ere we parted ! "
 Said she, brimming high with joy.—" And when, then, came you
 here, and why ? "

"—Dear, I could not sleep for thinking of our trystings when
 twin-hearted."

She responded, " Nor could I.

" There are few things I would rather
 Than be wandering at this spirit-hour—lone-lived, my kindred
 dead—

On this wold of well-known feature I inherit from my father :
 Night or day, I have no dread

"O I wonder, wonder whether
Any heartstring bore a signal-thrill between us twain or no?—
Some such influence can, at times, they say, draw severed souls
together."

I said, "Dear, we'll dream it so."

Each one's hand the other's grasping,
And a mutual forgiveness won, we sank to silent thought,
A large content in us that seemed our rended lives reclasping,
And contracting years to nought.

Till I, maybe overweary
From the lateness, and a wayfaring so full of strain and stress
For one no longer buoyant, to a peak so steep and eery,
Sank to slow unconsciousness

How long I slept I knew not,
But the brief warm summer night had slid when, to my swift
surprise,
A red upedging sun, of glory chambered mortals view not,
Was blazing on my eyes,

From the Milton Woods to Dole-Hill
All the spacious landscape lighting, and around about my feet
Flinging tall thin tapering shadows from the meanest mound
and mole-hill,
And on trails the ewes had beat.

She was sitting still beside me,
Dozing likewise; and I turned to her, to take her hanging hand;
When, the more regarding, that which like a spectre shook
and tried me

In her image then I scanned;

That which Time's transforming chisel
Had been tooling night and day for twenty years, and tooled
too well,
In its rendering of crease where curve was, where was raven,
grizzle—
Pits, where peonies once did dwell.

She had wakened, and perceiving
(I surmise) my sigh and shock, my quite involuntary dismay,
Up she started, and—her wasted figure all throughout it heaving—
Said, "Ah, yes: I am *thus* by day!

“Can you really wince and wonder
That the sunlight should reveal you such a thing of skin and bone,
As if unaware a Death's-head must of need lie not far under
Flesh whose years out-count your own ?

“Yes : that movement was a warning
Of the worth of man's devotion !—Yes, Sir, I am *old*,” said she,
“And the thing which should increase love turns it quickly into
scorning—
And your new-won heart from me !”

Then she went, ere I could call her,
With the too proud temper ruling that had parted us before,
And I saw her form descend the slopes, and smaller grow
and smaller,
Till I caught its course no more

True ; I might have dogged her downward ;
—But it *may* be (though I know not) that this trick on us of Time
Disconcerted and confused me.—Soon I bent my footsteps
townward,
Like to one who had watched a crime.

Well I knew my native weakness,
Well I know it still. I cherished her reproach like physic-wine,
For I saw in that emaciate shape of bitterness and bléakness
A nobler soul than mine.

Did I not return, then, ever ?—
Did we meet again ?—mend all ?—Alas, what greyhead
perseveres !—
Soon I got the Route elsewhither.—Since that hour I have seen
her never :
Love is lame at fifty years.

A TRAMPWOMAN'S TRAGEDY

(182-)

I

FROM Wynyard's Gap the livelong day,
 The livelong day,
 We beat afoot the northward way
 We had travelled times before.
 The sun-blaze burning on our backs,
 Our shoulders sticking to our packs,
 By fosseway, fields, and turnpike tracks
 We skirted sad Sedge-Moor.

II

Full twenty miles we jaunted on,
 We jaunted on,—
 My fancy-man, and jeering John,
 And Mother Lee, and I.
 And, as the sun drew down to west,
 We climbed the toilsome Poldon crest,
 And saw, of landskip sights the best,
 The inn that beamed thereby.

III

For months we had padded side by side,
 Ay, side by side
 Through the Great Forest, Blackmoor wide,
 And where the Parret ran.
 We'd faced the gusts on Mendip ridge,
 Had crossed the Yeo unhelped by bridge,
 Been stung by every Marshwood midge,
 I and my fancy-man.

IV

Lone inns we loved, my man and I,
 My man and I ;
 "King's Stag," "Windwhistle" high and dry,
 "The Horse" on Hintock Green,

The cosy house at Wynyard's Gap,
"The Hut" renowned on Bredy Knap,
And many another wayside tap
Where folk might sit unseen.

V

Now as we trudged—O deadly day,
O deadly day!—
I teased my fancy-man in play
And wanton idleness.
I walked alongside jeering John,
I laid his hand my waist upon ;
I would not bend my glances on
My lover's dark distress.

VI

Thus Poldon top at last we won,
At last we won,
And gained the inn at sink of sun
Far-famed as "Marshal's Elm."
Beneath us figured tor and lea,
From Mendip to the western sea—
I doubt if finer sight there be
Within this royal realm.

VII

Inside the settle all a-row—
All four a-row
We sat, I next to John, to show
That he had wooed and won.
And then he took me on his knee,
And swore it was his turn to be
My favoured mate, and Mother Lee
Passed to my former one.

VIII

Then in a voice I had never heard,
I had never heard,
My only Love to me : "One word,
My lady, if you please !

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

Whose is the child you are like to bear?—
His? After all my months o' care?"
 God knows 'twas not! But, O despair!
 I nodded—still to tease.

IX

Then up he sprung, and with his knife—
 And with his knife
 He let out jeering Johnny's life,
 Yes; there, at set of sun.
 The slant ray through the window nigh
 Gilded John's blood and glazing eye,
 Ere scarcely Mother Lee and I
 Knew that the deed was done.

X

The taverns tell the gloomy tale,
 The gloomy tale,
 How that at Ivel-chester jail
 My Love, my sweetheart swung;
 Though stained till now by no misdeed
 Save one horse ta'en in time o' need;
 (Blue Jimmy stole right many a steed
 Ere his last fling he flung.)

XI

Thereaft I walked the world alone,
 Alone, alone!
 On his death-day I gave my groan
 And dropt his dead-born child.
 'Twas nigh the jail, beneath a tree,
 None tending me; for Mother Lee
 Had died at Glaston, leaving me
 Unfriended on the wild.

XII

And in the night as I lay weak,
 As I lay weak,
 The leaves a-falling on my cheek,
 The red moon low declined—

The ghost of him I'd die to kiss
 Rose up and said : " Ah, tell me this !
 Was the child mine, or was it his ?
 Speak, that I rest may find ! "

XIII

O doubt not but I told him then,
 I told him then,
 That I had kept me from all men
 Since we joined lips and swore.
 Whereat he smiled, and thinned away
 As the wind stirred to call up day . . .
 —'Tis past ! And here alone I stray
 Haunting the Western Moor.

NOTES.—" Windwhistle " (Stanza iv.). The highness and dryness of Windwhistle Inn was impressed upon the writer two or three years ago, when, after climbing on a hot afternoon to the beautiful spot near which it stands and entering the inn for tea, he was informed by the landlady that none could be had, unless he would fetch water from a valley half a mile off, the house containing not a drop, owing to its situation. However, a tantalizing row of full barrels behind her back testified to a wetness of a certain sort, which was not at that time desired.

" Marshal's Elm " (Stanza vi.), so picturesquely situated, is no longer an inn, though the house, or part of it, still remains. It used to exhibit a fine old swinging sign.

" Blue Jimmy " (Stanza x.) was a notorious horse-stealer of Wessex in those days, who appropriated more than a hundred horses before he was caught, among others one belonging to a neighbour of the writer's grandfather. He was hanged at the now demolished Ivel-chester or Ilchester jail above mentioned—that building formerly of so many sinister associations in the minds of the local peasantry, and the continual haunt of fever, which at last led to its condemnation. Its site is now an innocent-looking green meadow.

April 1902.

THE TWO ROSALINDS

I

THE dubious daylight ended,
 And I walked the Town alone, unminding whither bound and
 why,
 As from each gaunt street and gaping square a mist of light
 ascended
 And dispersed upon the sky.

II

Files of evanescent faces
 Passed each other without heeding, in their travail, teen, or joy,
 Some in void unvisioned listlessness inwrought with pallid traces
 Of keen penury's annoy.

III

Nebulous flames in crystal cages
 Leered as if with discontent at city movement, murk, and grime,
 And as waiting some procession of great ghosts from bygone ages
 To exalt the ignoble time.

IV

In a colonnade high-lighted,
 By a thoroughfare where stern utilitarian traffic dinned,
 On a red and white emblazonment of players and parts, I sighted
 The name of "Rosalind,"

V

And her famous mates of "Arden,"
 Who observed no stricter customs than "the seasons' difference"
 bade,
 Who lived with running brooks for books in Nature's wildwood
 garden,
 And called idleness their trade

VI

Now the poster stirred an ember
 Still remaining from my ardours of some forty years before,
 When the self-same portal on an eve it thrilled me to remember
 A like announcement bore ;

VII

And expectantly I had entered,
 And had first beheld in human mould a Rosalind woo and plead,
 On whose transcendent figuring my speedy soul had centred
 As it had been she indeed

VIII

So ; all other plans discarding,
 I resolved on entrance, bent on seeing what I once had seen,

And approached the gangway of my earlier knowledge, dis-
regarding
The tract of time between.

IX

"The words, sir?" cried a creature
Hovering mid the shine and shade as 'twixt the live world and
the tomb;
But the well-known numbers needed not for me a text or teacher
To revive and re-illuminate.

X

Then the play. . . . But how unfitted
Was *this* Rosalind!—a mammet quite to me, in memories nurst,
And with chilling disappointment soon I sought the street I had
quitted,
To re-ponder on the first.

XI

The hag still hawked,—I met her
Just without the colonnade. "So you don't like her, sir?" said
she.
"Ah—I was once that Rosalind!—I acted her—none better—
Yes—in eighteen sixty-three.

XII

"Thus I won Orlando to me
In my then triumphant days when I had charm and maidenhood,
Now some forty years ago.—I used to say, *Come woo me, woo
me!*"
And she struck the attitude.

XIII

It was when I had gone there nightly;
And the voice—through raucous now—was yet the old one.—
Clear as noon
My Rosalind was here Thereon the band withinside
lightly
Beat up a merry tune.

A SUNDAY MORNING TRAGEDY

(circa 186-)

I BORE a daughter flower-fair,
 In Pydel Vale, alas for me ;
 I joyed to mother one so rare,
 But dead and gone I now would be.

Men looked and loved her as she grew,
 And she was won, alas for me ;
 She told me nothing, but I knew,
 And saw that sorrow was to be.

I knew that one had made her thrall,
 A thrall to him, alas for me ;
 And then, at last, she told me all,
 And wondered what her end would be.

She owned that she had loved too well,
 Had loved too well, unhappy she,
 And bore a secret time would tell,
 Though in her shroud she'd sooner be.

I plodded to her sweetheart's door
 In Pydel Vale, alas for me :
 I pleaded with him, pleaded sore,
 To save her from her misery.

He frowned, and swore he could not wed,
 Seven times he swore it could not be :
 "Poverty's worse than shame," he said,
 Till all my hope went out of me.

"I've packed my traps to sail the main"—
 Roughly he spake, alas did he—
 "Wessex beholds me not again,
 'Tis worse than any jail would be !"

—There was a shepherd whom I knew,
 A subtle man, alas for me :

I sought him all the pastures through,
Though better I had ceased to be.

I traced him by his lantern light,
And gave him hint, alas for me,
Of how she found her in the plight
That is so scorned in Christendie.

"Is there an herb. . . ?" I asked. "Or none?"
Yes, thus I asked him desperately.
"—There is," he said; "a certain one. . ."
Would he had sworn that none knew he!

"To-morrow I will walk your way,"
He hinted low, alas for me.—
Fieldwards I gazed throughout next day;
Now fields I never more would see!

The sunset-shine, as curfew strook,
As curfew strook beyond the lea,
Lit his white smock and gleaming crook,
While slowly he drew near to me.

He pulled from underneath his smock
The herb I sought, my curse to be—
"At times I use it in my flock,"
He said, and hope waxed strong in me.

"'Tis meant to balk ill-motherings"—
(Ill-motherings! Why should they be?)—
"If not, would God have sent such things?"
So spoke the shepherd unto me.

That night I watched the poppling brew,
With bended back and hand on knee:
I stirred it till the dawnlight grew,
And the wind whiffled wailfully.

"This scandal shall be slain," said I,
"That lours upon her innocency:
I'll give all whispering tongues the lie;"—
But worse than whispers was to be.

"Here's physic for untimely fruit,"
I said to her, alas for me,
Early that morn in fond salute ;
And in my grave I now would be.

—Next Sunday came, with sweet church chimes
In Pydel Vale, alas for me :
I went into her room betimes ;
No more may such a Sunday be !

"Mother, instead of rescue nigh,"
She faintly breathed, alas for me,
"I feel as I were like to die,
And underground soon, soon should be."

From church that noon the people walked
In twos and threes, alas for me,
Showed their new raiment—smiled and talked,
Though sackcloth-clad I longed to be.

Came to my door her lover's friends,
And cheerly cried, alas for me,
"Right glad are we he makes amends,
For never a sweeter bride can be."

My mouth dried, as 'twere scorched within,
Dried at their words, alas for me :
More and more neighbours crowded in,
(O why should mothers ever be !)

"Ha-ha ! Such well-kept news !" laughed they,
Yes—so they laughed, alas for me.
"Whose banns were called in church to-day ?"—
Christ, how I wished my soul could flee !

"Where is she ? O the stealthy miss,"
Still bantered they, alas for me,
"To keep a wedding close as this"
Ay, Fortune worked thus wantonly !

"But you are pale—you did not know ?"
They archly asked, alas for me,

I stammered, "Yes—some days—ago,"
While coffined clay I wished to be.

"'Twas done to please her, we surmise?"
(They spoke quite lightly in their glee)
"Done by him as a fond surprise?"
I thought their words would madden me.

Her lover entered. "Where's my bird?—
My bird—my flower—my picotee?
First time of asking, soon the third!"
Ah, in my grave I well may be.

To me he whispered: "Since your call—"
So spoke he then, alas for me—
"I've felt for her, and righted all."
—I think of it to agony.

"She's faint to-day—tired—nothing more—"
Thus did I lie, alas for me. . . .
I called her at her chamber door
As one who scarce had strength to be.

No voice replied. I went within—
O women! scourged the worst are we. . . .
I shrieked. The others hastened in
And saw the stroke there dealt on me.

There she lay—silent, breathless, dead,
Stone dead she lay—wronged, sinless she!—
Ghost-white the cheeks once rosy-red:
Death had took her. Death took not me.

I kissed her colding face and hair,
I kissed her corpse—the bride to be!—
My punishment I cannot bear,
But pray God *not* to pity me.

January 1904.

• THE HOUSE OF HOSPITALITIES

HERE we broached the Christmas barrel,
 Pushed up the charred log-ends ;
 Here we sang the Christmas carol,
 And called in friends.

Time has tired me since we met here
 When the folk now dead were young,
 Since the viands were outset here
 And quaint songs sung.

And the worm has bored the viol
 That used to lead the tune,
 Rust eaten out the dial
 That struck night's noon.

Now no Christmas brings in neighbours,
 And the New Year comes unlit ;
 Where we sang the mole now labours,
 And spiders knit.

Yet at midnight if here walking,
 When the moon sheets wall and tree,
 I see forms of old time talking,
 Who smile on me.

BEREFT

IN the black winter morning
 No light will be struck near my eyes
 While the clock in the stairway is warning
 For five, when he used to rise.

Leave the door unbarred,
 The clock unwound,
 Make my lone bed hard—
 Would 'twere underground !

When the summer dawns clearly,
 And the appletree-tops seem alight,

Who will undraw the curtain and cheerly
Call out that the morning is bright?

When I tarry at market
No form will cross Durnover Lea
In the gathering darkness, to hark at
Grey's Bridge for the pit-pat o' me.

When the supper crock's steaming,
And the time is the time of his tread,
I shall sit by the fire and wait dreaming
In a silence as of the dead.

Leave the door unbarred,
The clock unwound,
Make my lone bed hard—
Would 'twere underground!

1901.

JOHN AND JANE

I

HE sees the world as a boisterous place
Where all things bear a laughing face,
And humorous scenes go hourly on,
Does John.

II

They find the world a pleasant place
Where all is ecstasy and grace,
Where a light has risen that cannot wane,
Do John and Jane.

III

They see as a palace their cottage-place,
Containing a pearl of the human race,
A hero, maybe, hereafter styled,
Do John and Jane with a baby-child.

IV

They rate the world as a gruesome place,
Where fair looks fade to a skull's grimace,—
As a pilgrimage they would fain get done—
Do John and Jane with their worthless son.

THE CURATE'S KINDNESS

A WORKHOUSE IRONY

I

I THOUGHT they'd be strangers aroun' me,
 But she's to be there!
 Let me jump out o' waggon and go back and drown me
 At Pummery or Ten-Hatches Weir.

II

I thought: "Well, I've come to the Union—
 The workhouse at last—
 After honest hard work all the week, and Communion
 O' Zundays, these fifty years past.

III

"'Tis hard; but," I thought, "never mind it:
 There's gain in the end:
 And when I get used to the place I shall find it
 A home, and may find there a friend.

IV

"Life there will be better than t'other,
 For peace is assured.
The men in one wing and their wives in another
 Is strictly the rule of the Board."

V

Just then one young Pa'son arriving
 Steps up out of breath
 To the side o' the waggon wherein we were driving
 To Union; and calls out and saith:

VI

"Old folks, that harsh order is altered,
 Be not sick of heart!
 The Guardians they poohed and they pished and they paltered
 When urged not to keep you apart."

VII

“‘It is wrong,’ I maintained, ‘to divide them,
Near forty years wed.’
‘Very well, sir. We promise, then, they shall abide them
In one wing together,’ they said.”

VIII

Then I sank—knew ’twas quite a foredone thing
That misery should be
To the end! . . . To get freed of her there was the one thing
Had made the change welcome to me.

IX

To go there was ending but badly ;
’Twas shame and ’twas pain ;
“But anyhow,” thought I, “thereby I shall gladly
Get free of this forty years’ chain.”

X

I thought they’d be strangers aroun’ me,
But she’s to be there !
Let me jump out o’ waggon and go back and drown me
At Pummery or Ten-Hatches Weir.

THE FLIRT'S TRAGEDY

(17—)

HERE alone by the logs in my chamber,
Deserted, decrepit—
Spent flames limning ghosts on the wainscot
Of friends I once knew—

My drama and hers begins weirdly
Its dumb re-enactment,
Each scene, sigh, and circumstance passing
In spectral review.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

—Wealth was mine beyond wish when I met her—
The pride of the lowland—
Embowered in Tintinhull Valley
By laurel and yew ;

And love lit my soul, notwithstanding
My features' ill favour,
Too obvious beside her perfections
Of line and of hue.

But it pleased her to play on my passion,
And whet me to pleadings
That won from her mirthful negations
And scornings undue.

Then I fled her disdains and derisions
To cities of pleasure,
And made me the crony of idlers
In every purlieu,

Of those who lent ear to my story,
A needy Adonis
Gave hint how to grizzle her garden
From roses to rue,

Could his price but be paid for so purging
My scorner of scornings :
Thus tempted, the lust to avenge me
Germed inly and grew.

I clothed him in sumptuous apparel,
Consigned to him coursers,
Meet equipage, liveried attendants
In full retinue.

So dowered, with letters of credit
He wayfared to England,
And spied out the manor she goddessed,
And handy thereto,

Set to hire him a tenantless mansion
As coign-stone of vantage
For testing what gross adulation
Of beauty could do.

He laboured through mornings and evens,
On new moons and sabbaths,
By wiles to enmesh her attention
In park, path, and pew ;

And having afar played upon her,
Advanced his lines nearer,
And boldly outleaping conventions,
Bent briskly to woo.

His gay godlike face, his rare seeming
Anon worked to win her,
And later, at noontides and night-tides
They held rendezvous.

His tarriance full spent, he departed
And met me in Venice,
And lines from her told that my jilter
Was stooping to sue.

Not long could be further concealment,
She pled to him humbly :
" By our love and our sin, O protect me ;
I fly unto you ! "

A mighty remorse overgat me,
I heard her low anguish,
And there in the gloom of the *calle*
My steel ran him through.

A swift push engulfed his hot carrion
Within the canal there—
That still street of waters dividing
The city in two.

—I wandered awhile all unable
To smother my torment,
My brain racked by yells as from Tophet
Of Satan's whole crew.

A month of unrest brought me hovering
At home in her precincts,
To whose hiding-hole local story
Afforded a clue.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

Exposed, and expelled by her people,
 Afar off in London
 I found her alone, in a sombre
 And soul-stifling mew.

Still burning to make reparation
 I pleaded to wive her,
 And father her child, and thus faintly
 My mischief undo.

She yielded, and spells of calm weather
 Succeeded the tempest ;
 And one sprung of him stood as scion
 Of my bone and thew. . . .

But Time unveils sorrows and secrets,
 And so it befell now :
 By inches the curtain was twitched at,
 And slowly undrew.

As we lay, she and I, in the night-time,
 We heard the boy moaning :
 " O misery mine ! My false father
 Has murdered my true ! "

She gasped : yea, she heard ; understood it.
 Next day the child fled us ;
 And nevermore sighted was even
 A print of his shoe.

Thenceforward she shunned me, and languished ;
 Till one day the park-pool
 Embraced her fair form, and extinguished
 Her eyes' living blue.

—So ; ask not what blast may account for
 This aspect of pallor,
 These bones that just prison within them
 Life's poor residue ;

But pass by, and leave unregarded
 A Cain to his suffering,
 For vengeance too dark on the woman
 Whose lover he slew.

THE REJECTED MEMBER'S WIFE

WE shall see her no more
 On the balcony,
 Smiling, while hurt, at the roar
 As of surging sea
 From the stormy sturdy band
 Who have doomed her lord's cause,
 Though she waves her little hand
 As it were applause.

Here will be candidates yet,
 And candidates' wives,
 Fervid with zeal to set
 Their ideals on our lives :
 Here will come market-men
 On the market-days,
 Here will clash now and then
 More such party assays.

And the balcony will fill
 When such times are renewed,
 And the throng in the street will thrill
 With to-day's mettled mood ;
 But she will no more stand
 In the sunshine there,
 With that wave of her white-gloved hand,
 And that chestnut hair.

January 1906.

THE FARM-WOMAN'S WINTER

I

IF seasons all were summers,
 And leaves would never fall,
 And hopping casement-comers
 Were foodless not at all,
 And fragile folk might be here
 That white winds bid depart ;
 Then one I used to see here
 Would warm my wasted heart !

II

One frail, who, bravely tilling
 Long hours in gripping gusts,
 Was mastered by their chilling,
 And now his ploughshare rusts.
 So savage winter catches
 The breath of limber things,
 And what I love he snatches,
 And what I love not, brings.

AUTUMN IN KING'S HINTOCK PARK

HERE by the baring bough
 Raking up leaves,
 Often I ponder how
 Springtime deceives,—
 I, an old woman now,
 Raking up leaves.

Here in the avenue
 Raking up leaves,
 Lords' ladies pass in view,
 Until one heaves
 Sighs at life's russet hue,
 Raking up leaves!

Just as my shape you see
 Raking up leaves,
 I saw, when fresh and free,
 Those memory weaves
 Into grey ghosts by me,
 Raking up leaves.

Yet, Dear, though one may sigh,
 Raking up leaves,
 New leaves will dance on high—
 Earth never grieves!—
 Will not, when missed am I
 Raking up leaves.

SHUT OUT THAT MOON

CLOSE up the casement, draw the blind,
 Shut out that stealing moon,
 She wears too much the guise she wore
 Before our lutes were strewn
 With years-deep dust, and names we read
 On a white stone were hewn.

Step not out on the dew-dashed lawn
 To view the Lady's Chair,
 Immense Orion's glittering form,
 The L^{ess} and Greater Bear:
 Stay in; to such sights we were drawn
 When faded ones were fair.

Brush not the bough for midnight scents
 That come forth lingeringly,
 And wake the same sweet sentiments
 They breathed to you and me
 When living seemed a laugh, and love
 All it was said to be.

Within the common lamp-lit room
 Prison my eyes and thought;
 Let dingy details crudely loom,
 Mechanic speech be wrought:
 Too fragrant was Life's early bloom,
 Too tart the fruit it brought!

1904.

REMINISCENCES OF A DANCING MAN

I

WHO now remembers Almack's balls—
 Willis's sometime named—
 In those two smooth-floored upper halls
 For faded ones so famed?
 Where as we trod to trilling sound
 The fancied phantoms stood around,

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

Or joined us in the maze,
Of the powdered Dears from Georgian years,
Whose dust lay in sightless sealed-up biers,
The fairest of former days.

II

Who now remembers gay Cremorne,
And all its jaunty jills,
And those wild whirling figures born
Of Jullien's grand quadrilles?
With hats on head and morning coats
There footed to his prancing notes
Our partner-girls and we;
And the gas-jets winked, and the lustres clinked,
And the platform throbbed as with arms enlinked
We moved to the minstrelsy.

III

Who now recalls those crowded rooms
Of old yclept "The Argyle,"
Where to the deep Drum-polka's booms
We hopped in standard style?
Whither have danced those damsels now!
Is Death the partner who doth moue
Their wormy chaps and bare?
Do their spectres spin like sparks within
The smoky halls of the Prince of Sin
To a thunderous Jullien air?

THE DEAD MAN WALKING

THEY hail me as one living,
But don't they know
That I have died of late years,
Untombed although?

I am but a shape that stands here,
A pulseless mould,
A pale past picture, screening
Ashes gone cold.

Not at a minute's warning,
Not in a loud hour,
For me ceased Time's enchantments
In hall and bower.

There was no tragic transit,
No catch of breath,
When silent seasons inched me
On to this death. . . .

—A Troubadour-youth I rambled
With Life for lyre,
The beats of being raging
In me like fire.

But when I practised eyeing
The goal of men,
It iced me, and I perished
A little then.

When passed my friend, my kinsfolk,
Through the Last Door,
And left me standing bleakly,
I died yet more ;

And when my Love's heart kindled
In hate of me,
Wherefore I knew not, died I
One more degree.

And if when I died fully
I cannot say,
And changed into the corpse-thing
I am to-day ;

Yet is it that, though whiling
The time somehow
In walking, talking, smiling,
I live not now.

MORE LOVE LYRICS

1967

IN five-score summers! All new eyes,
New minds, new modes, new fools, new wise;
New woes to weep, new joys to prize;

With nothing left of me and you
In that live century's vivid view
Beyond a pinch of dust or two;

A century which, if not sublime,
Will show, I doubt not, at its prime,
A scope above this blinkered time.

—Yet what to me how far above?
For I would only ask thereof
That thy worm should be my worm, Love!

16 WESTBOURNE PARK VILLAS, 1867.

HER DEFINITION

I LINGERED through the night to break of day,
Nor once did sleep extend a wing to me,
Intently busied with a vast array
Of epithets that should outfigure thee.

Full-featured terms—all fittest—hastened by,
And this sole speech remained: "That maiden mine!"—
Debarred from due description then did I
Perceive the indefinite phrase could yet define.

As common chests encasing wares of price
 Are borne with tenderness through halls of state,
 For what they cover, so the poor device
 Of homely wording I could tolerate,
 Knowing its unadornment held as freight
 The sweetest image outside Paradise.

W. P. V., Summer : 1866.

THE DIVISION

RAIN on the windows, creaking doors,
 With blasts that besom the green,
 And I am here, and you are there,
 And a hundred miles between !

O were it but the weather, Dear,
 O were it but the miles
 That summed up all our severance,
 There might be room for smiles.

But that thwart thing betwixt us twain,
 Which nothing cleaves or clears,
 Is more than distance, Dear, or rain,
 And longer than the years !

189-

ON THE DEPARTURE PLATFORM

WE kissed at the barrier ; and passing through
 She left me, and moment by moment got
 Smaller and smaller, until to my view
 She was but a spot ;

A wee white spot of muslin fluff
 That down the diminishing platform bore
 Through hustling crowds of gentle and rough
 To the carriage door.

Under the lamplight's fitful glowers,
 Behind dark groups from far and near,
 Whose interests were apart from ours,
 She would disappear,

Then show again, till I ceased to see
 That flexible form, that nebulous white ;
 And she who was more than my life to me
 Had vanished quite. . . .

We have penned new plans since that fair fond day,
 And in season she will appear again—
 Perhaps in the same soft white array—
 But never as then !

—“ And why, young man, must eternally fly
 A joy you'll repeat, if you love her well ? ”
 —O friend, nought happens twice thus ; why,
 I cannot tell !

IN A CATHEDRAL CITY

THESE people have not heard your name ;
 No loungers in this placid place
 Have helped to bruit your beauty's fame.

The grey Cathedral, towards whose face
 Bend eyes untold, has met not yours ;
 Your shade has never swept its base,

Your form has never darked its doors,
 Nor have your faultless feet once thrown
 A pensive pit-pat on its floors.

Along the street to maids well known
 Blithe lovers hum their tender airs,
 But in your praise voice not a tone. . . .

—Since nought bespeaks you here, or bears,
 As I, your imprint through and through,
 Here might I rest, till my heart shares
 The spot's unconsciousness of you !

SALISBURY.

"I SAY I'LL SEEK HER"

I SAY, "I'll seek her side
Ere hindrance interposes ;"
But eve in midnight closes,
And here I still abide.

When darkness wears I see
Her sad eyes in a vision ;
They ask, "What indecision
Detains you, Love, from me ?—

"The creaking hinge is oiled,
I have unbarred the backway,
But you tread not the trackway ;
And shall the thing be spoiled ?

"Far cockcrows echo shrill,
The shadows are abating,
And I am waiting, waiting ;
But O, you tarry still !"

HER FATHER

I MET her, as we had privily planned,
Where passing feet beat busily :
She whispered : "Father is at hand !
He wished to walk with me."

His presence as he joined us there
Banished our words of warmth away ;
We felt, with cloudings of despair,
What Love must lose that day.

Her crimson lips remained un-kissed,
Our fingers kept no tender hold,
His lack of feeling made the tryst
Embarrassed, stiff, and cold.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

A cynic ghost then rose and said,
 "But is his love for her so small
 That, nigh to yours, it may be read
 As of no worth at all?"

"You love her for her pink and white;
 But what when their fresh splendours close?
 His love will last her in despite
 Of Time, and wrack, and foes."

WEYMOUTH.

AT WAKING

WHEN night was lifting,
 And dawn had crept under its shade,
 Amid cold clouds drifting
 Dead-white as a corpse outlaid,
 With a sudden scare
 I seemed to behold
 My Love in bare
 Hard lines unfold.

Yea, in a moment,
 An insight that would not die
 Killed her old endowment
 Of charm that had capped all nigh,
 Which vanished to none
 Like the gilt of a cloud,
 And showed her but one
 Of the common crowd.

She seemed but a sample
 Of earth's poor average kind,
 Lit up by no ample
 Enrichments of mien or mind.
 I covered my eyes
 As to cover the thought,
 And unrecognize
 What the morn had taught.

O vision appalling
 When the one believed-in thing
 Is seen falling, falling,
 With all to which hope can cling.
 Off: it is not true;
 For it cannot be
 That the prize I drew
 Is a blank to me!

WEYMOUTH, 1869.

FOUR FOOTPRINTS

HERE are the tracks upon the sand
 Where stood last evening she and I—
 Pressed heart to heart and hand to hand;
 The morning sun has baked them dry.

I kissed her wet face—wet with rain,
 For arid grief had burnt up tears,
 While reached us as in sleeping pain
 The distant gurgling of the weirs.

“I have married him—yes; feel that ring;
 ’Tis a week ago that he put it on. . . .
 A dutiful daughter does this thing,
 And resignation succeeds anon!

“But that I body and soul was yours
 Ere he’d possession, he’ll never know.
 He’s a confident man. ‘The husband scores,’
 He says, ‘in the long run’ . . . Now, Dear, go!”

I went. And to-day I pass the spot;
 It is only a smart the more to endure;
 And she whom I held is as though she were not,
 For they have resumed their honeymoon tour.

IN THE VAULTED WAY

IN-the vaulted way, where the passage turned
 To the shadowy corner that none could see,
 You paused to part from me,—plaintively ;
 Though overnight had come words that burned
 My fond frail happiness out of me.

And then I kissed you,—despite my thought
 That our spell must end when reflection came
 On what you had deemed me, whose one long aim
 Had been to serve you ; that what I sought
 Lay not in a heart that could breathe such blame.

But yet I kissed you ; whereon you again
 As of old kissed me. Why, why was it so ?
 Do you cleave to me after that light-tongued blow ?
 If you scorned me at eventide, how love then ?
 The thing is dark, Dear. I do not know.

THE PHANTOM

THAT was once her casement,
 And the taper nigh,
 Shining from within there
 Beckoned, "Here am I!"

Now, as then, I see her
 Moving at the pane ;
 Ah ; 'tis but her phantom
 Borne within my brain!—

Foremost in my vision
 Everywhere goes she ;
 Change dissolves the landscapes,
 She abides with me.

Shape so sweet and shy, Dear,
 Who can say thee nay ?
 Never once do I, Dear,
 Wish thy ghost away.

THE END OF THE EPISODE

INDULGE no more may we
 In this sweet-bitter pastime :
 The love-light shines the last time
 Between you, Sweet, and me.

There shall remain no trace
 Of what so closely tied us,
 And blank as ere love eyed us
 Will be our meeting-place.

The flowers and thymy air,
 Will they now miss our coming ?
 The dumbles thin their humming
 To find we haunt not there ?

Though fervent was our vow,
 Though ruddily ran our pleasure,
 Bliss has fulfilled its measure,
 And sees its sentence now.

Ache deep ; but make no moans :
 Smile out ; but stilly suffer :
 The paths of love are rougher
 Than thoroughfares of stones.



THE SIGH

LITTLE head against my shoulder,
 Shy at first, then somewhat bolder,
 And up-eyed ;
 Till she, with a timid quaver,
 Yielded to the kiss I gave her ;
 But, she sighed.

That there mingled with her feeling
 Some sad thought she was concealing
 It implied.
 —Not that she had ceased to love me,
 None on earth she set above me ;
 But she sighed.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

She could not disguise a passion,
 Dread, or doubt, in weakest fashion
 If she tried :
 Nothing seemed to hold us sundered,
 Hearts were victors ; so I wondered
 Why she sighed.

Afterwards I knew her throughly,
 And she loved me staunchly, truly,
 Till she died ;
 But she never made confession
 Why, at that first sweet concession,
 She had sighed.

It was in our May, remember ;
 And though now I near November,
 And abide
 Till my appointed change, unfretting,
 Sometimes I sit half regretting
 That she sighed.



"IN THE NIGHT SHE CAME"

I TOLD her when I left one day
 That whatsoever weight of care
 Might strain our love, Time's mere assault
 Would work no changes there.
 And in the night she came to me,
 Toothless, and wan, and old,
 With leaden concaves round her eyes,
 And wrinkles manifold.

I tremblingly exclaimed to her,
 "O wherefore do you ghost me thus !
 I have said that dull defacing Time
 Will bring no dreads to us."
 "And is that true of *you* ?" she cried
 In voice of troubled tune.
 I faltered : "Well . . . I did not think
 You would test me quite so soon !"

She vanished with a curious smile,
 Which told me, plainlier than by word,
 That my staunch pledge could scarce beguile
 The fear she had averred.
 Her doubts then wrought their shape in me,
 And when next day I paid
 My due caress, we seemed to be
 Divided by some shade.

✱ THE CONFORMERS

YES ; we'll wed, my little fay,
 And you shall write you mine,
 And in a villa chastely gray
 We'll house, and sleep, and dine.
 But those night-screened, divine,
 Stolen trysts of heretofore,
 We of choice ecstasies and fine
 Shall know no more.

The formal faced cohue
 Will then no more upbraid
 With smiting smiles and whisperings two
 Who have thrown less loves in shade.
 We shall no more evade
 The searching light of the sun,
 Our game of passion will be played,
 Our dreaming done.

We shall not go in stealth
 To rendezvous unknown,
 But friends will ask me of your health,
 And you about my own.
 When we abide alone,
 No leapings each to each,
 But syllables in frigid tone
 Of household speech.

When down to dust we glide
 Men will not say askance,
 As now : "How all the country side
 Rings with their mad romance !"

But as they graveward glance
 Remark: "In them we lose
 A worthy pair, who helped advance
 Sound parish views."

THE DAWN AFTER THE DANCE

HERE is your parents' dwelling with its curtained windows telling
 Of no thought of us within it or of our arrival here ;
 Their slumbers have been normal after one day more of formal
 Matrimonial commonplace and household life's mechanic gear.

I would be candid willingly, but dawn draws on so chillingly
 As to render further cheerlessness intolerable now,
 So I will not stand endeavouring to declare a day for severing,
 But will clasp you just as always—just the olden love avow.

Through serene and surly weather we have walked the ways
 together,
 And this long night's dance this year's end eve now finishes the
 spell ;

Yet we dreamt us but beginning a sweet sempiternal spinning
 Of a cord we have spun to breaking—too intemperately, too well.

Yes ; last night we danced I know, Dear, as we did that year
 ago, Dear,

When a new strange bond between our days was formed, and
 felt, and heard ;

Would that dancing were the worst thing from the latest to the
 first thing

That the faded year can charge us with ; but what avails a word !

That which makes man's love the lighter and the woman's burn
 no brighter

Came to pass with us inevitably while slipped the shortening
 year. . . .

And there stands your father's dwelling with its blind bleak
 windows telling

That the vows of man and maid are frail as filmy gossamere.

THE SUN ON THE LETTER

I DREW the letter out, while gleamed
The sloping sun from under a roof
Of cloud whose verge rose visibly.

The burning ball flung rays that seemed
Stretched like a warp without a woof
Across the levels of the lea

To where I stood, and where they beamed
As brightly on the page of proof
That she had shown her false to me

As if it had shown her true—had teemed
With passionate thought for my behoof
Expressed with their own ardency!

THE NIGHT OF THE DANCE

THE cold moon hangs to the sky by its horn,
And centres its gaze on me ;
The stars, like eyes in reverie,
Their westering as for a while forborne,
Quiz downward curiously.

Old Robert draws the backbrand in,
The green logs steam and spit ;
The half-awakened sparrows flit
From the riddled thatch ; and owls begin
To whoo from the gable-slit.

Yes ; far and nigh things seem to know
Sweet scenes are impending here ;
That all is prepared ; that the hour is near
For welcomes, fellowships, and flow
Of sally, song, and cheer ;

That spigots are pulled and viols strung ;
That soon will arise the sound
Of measures trod to tunes renowned ;
That She will return in Love's low tongue
My vows as we wheel around.

MISCONCEPTION

I BUSIED myself to find a sure
 Snug hermitage
 That should preserve my Love secure
 From the world's rage ;
 Where no unseemly saturnals,
 Or strident traffic-roars,
 Or hum of intervolved cabals
 Should echo at her doors.

I laboured that the diurnal spin
 Of vanities
 Should not contrive to suck her in
 By dark degrees,
 And cunningly operate to blur
 Sweet teachings I had begun ;
 And then I went full-heart to her
 To expound the glad deeds done.

She looked at me, and said thereto
 With a pitying smile,
 "And *this* is what has busied you
 So long a while ?
 O poor exhausted one, I see
 You have worn you old and thin
 For naught ! Those moils you fear for me
 I find most pleasure in !"

THE VOICE OF THE THORN

I

WHEN the thorn on the down
 Quivers naked and cold,
 And the mid-aged and old
 Pace the path there to town,
 In these words dry and drear
 It seems to them sighing :
 "O winter is trying
 To sojourners here !"

II

When it stands fully tressed
 On a hot summer day,
 And the ewes there astray
 Find its shade a sweet rest,
 By the breath of the breeze
 It inquires of each farer :
 "Who would not be sharer
 Of shadow with these?"

III

But by day or by night,
 And in winter or summer,
 Should I be the comer
 Along that lone height,
 In its voicing to me
 Only one speech is spoken :
 "Here once was nigh broken
 A heart, and by thee."

FROM HER IN THE COUNTRY

I THOUGHT and thought of thy crass clanging town
 To folly, till convinced such dreams were ill,
 I held my heart in bond, and tethered down
 Fancy to where I was, by force of will.

I said : How beautiful are these flowers, this wood,
 One little bud is far more sweet to me
 Than all man's urban shows ; and then I stood
 Urging new zest for bird, and bush, and tree ;

And strove to feel my nature brought it forth
 Of instinct, or no rural maid was I ;
 But it was vain ; for I could not see worth
 Enough around to charm a midge or fly,

And mused again on city din and sin,
 Longing to madness I might move therein !

HER CONFESSION

As some bland soul, to whom a debtor says
 "I'll now repay the amount I owe to you,"
 In inward gladness feigns forgetfulness
 That such a payment ever was his due

(His long thought notwithstanding), so did I
 At our last meeting waive your proffered kiss
 With quick divergent talk of scenery nigh,
 By such suspension to enhance my bliss.

And as his looks in consternation fall
 When, gathering that the debt is lightly deemed,
 The debtor makes as not to pay at all,
 So faltered I, when your intention seemed

Converted by my false uneagerness
 To putting off for ever the caress.

W. P. V., 1865-67.

TO AN IMPERSONATOR OF ROSALIND

DID he who drew her in the years ago—
 Till now conceived creator of her grace—
 With telescopic sight high natures know,
 Discern remote in Time's untravelled space

Your soft sweet mien, your gestures, as do we,
 And with a copyist's hand but set them down,
 Glowing yet more to dream our ecstasy
 When his Original should be forthshown?

For, kindled by that animated eye,
 Whereto all fairnesses about thee brim,
 And by thy tender tones, what wight can fly
 The wild conviction welling up in him

That he at length beholds woo, parley, plead,
 The "very, very Rosalind" indeed!

8 ADELPHI TERRACE, 21st April 1867.

TO AN ACTRESS

I READ your name when you were strange to me,
 Where it stood blazoned bold with many more ;
 I passed it vacantly, and did not see
 Any great glory in the shape it wore.

O cruelty, the insight barred me then !
 Why did I not possess me with its sound,
 And in its cadence catch and catch again
 Your nature's essence floating therearound ?

Could *that* man be this I, unknowing you,
 When now the knowing you is all of me,
 And the old world of then is now a new,
 And purpose no more what it used to be—
 A thing of formal journeywork, but due
 To springs that then were sealed up utterly ?

1867.

THE MINUTE BEFORE MEETING

THE grey gaunt days dividing us in twain
 Seemed hopeless hills my strength must faint to climb,
 But they are gone ; and now I would detain
 The few clock-beats that part us ; rein back Time,

And live in close expectance never closed
 In change for far expectance closed at last,
 So harshly has expectance been imposed
 On my long need while these slow blank months passed.

And knowing that what is now about to be
 Will all *have been* in O, so short a space !
 I read beyond it my despondency
 When more dividing months shall take its place,
 Thereby denying to this hour of grace
 A full-up measure of felicity.

1871.

HE ABJURES LOVE

At last I put off love,
For twice ten years
The daysman of my thought,
And hope, and doing ;
Being ashamed thereof,
And faint of fears
And desolations, wrought
In his pursuing,

Since first in youthtime those
Disquietings
That heart-enslavement brings
To hale and hoary,
Became my housefellows,
And, fool and blind,
I turned from kith and kind
To give him glory.

I was as children be
Who have no care ;
I did not shrink or sigh,
I did not sicken ;
But lo, Love beckoned me,
And I was bare,
And poor, and starved, and dry,
And fever-stricken.

Too many times ablaze
With fatuous fires,
Enkindled by his wiles
To new embraces,
Did I, by wilful ways
And baseless ires,
Return the anxious smiles
Of friendly faces.

No more will now rate I
The common rare,

The midnight drizzle dew,
The gray hour golden,
The wind a yearning cry,
The faulty fair,
Things dreamt, of comelier hue
Than things beholden! . . .

—I speak as one who plumbs
Life's dim profound,
One who at length can sound
Clear views and certain.
But—after love what comes?
A scene that lours,
A few sad vacant hours,
And then, the Curtain.

A SET OF COUNTRY SONGS

* LET ME ENJOY

(MINOR KEY)

I

LET me enjoy the earth no less
Because the all-enacting Might
That fashioned forth its loveliness
Had other aims than my delight.

II

About my path there flits a Fair,
Who throws me not a word or sign ;
I'll charm me with her ignoring air,
And laud the lips not meant for mine.

III

From manuscripts of moving song
Inspired by scenes and souls unknown,
I'll pour out raptures that belong
To others, as they were my own.

IV

And some day hence, toward Paradise
And all its blest—if such should be—
I will lift glad, afar-off eyes,
Though it contain no place for me.

AT CASTERBRIDGE FAIR

I

THE BALLAD-SINGER

SING, Ballad-singer, raise a hearty tune ;
 Make me forget that there was ever a one
 I walked with in the meek light of the moon
 When the day's work was done.

Rhyme, Ballad-rhymer, start a country song ;
 Make me forget that she whom I loved well
 Swore she would love me dearly, love me long,
 Then—what I cannot tell !

Sing, Ballad-singer, from your little book ;
 Make me forget those heart-breaks, achings, fears ;
 Make me forget her name, her sweet sweet look—
 Make me forget her tears.

II

FORMER BEAUTIES

THESE market-dames, mid-aged, with lips thin-drawn,
 And tissues sere,
 Are they the ones we loved in years ago,
 And courted here ?

Are these the muslined pink young things to whom
 We vowed and swore
 In nooks on summer Sundays by the Froom,
 Or Budmouth shore ?

Do they remember those gay tunes we trod
 Clasped on the green ;
 Aye ; trod till moonlight set on the beaten sod
 A satin sheen ?

They must forget, forget ! They cannot know
 What once they were,
 Or memory would transfigure them, and show
 Them always fair.

III

AFTER THE CLUB-DANCE

BLACK'ON frowns east on Maidon,
 And westward to the sea,
 But on neither is his frown laden
 With scorn, as his frown on me!

At dawn my heart grew heavy,
 I could not sip the wine,
 I left the jocund bevy
 And that young man o' mine.

The roadside elms pass by me,—
 Why do I sink with shame
 When the birds a-perch there eye me?
 They, too, have done the same!

IV

THE MARKET-GIRL

NOBODY took any notice of her as she stood on the causey kerb,
 All eager to sell her honey and apples and bunches of garden herb;
 And if she had offered to give her wares and herself with them
 too that day,
 I doubt if a soul would have cared to take a bargain so choice away.
 But chancing to trace her sunburnt grace that morning as I
 passed nigh,
 I went and I said "Poor maidy dear!—and will none of the
 people buy?"
 And so it began; and soon we knew what the end of it all
 must be,
 And I found that though no others had bid, a prize had been
 won by me.

V

THE INQUIRY

AND are ye one of Hermitage—
 Of Hermitage, by Ivel Road,
 And do ye know, in Hermitage
 A thatch-roofed house where sengreens grow?

And does John Waywood live there still—
 He of the name that there abode
 When father hurdled on the hill
 Some fifteen years ago?

Does he now speak o' Patty Beech,
 The Patty Beech he used to—see,
 Or ask at all if Patty Beech
 Is known or heard of out this way?
 —Ask ever if she's living yet,
 And where her present home may be,
 And how she bears life's fag and fret
 After so long a day?

In years agone at Hermitage
 This faded face was counted fair,
 None fairer; and at Hermitage
 We swore to wed when he should thrive.
 But never a chance had he or I,
 And waiting made his wish outwear,
 And Time, that dooms man's love to die,
 Preserves a maid's alive.

VI

A WIFE WAITS

WILL'S at the dance in the Club-room below,
 Where the tall liquor-cups foam;
 I on the pavement up here by the Bow,
 Wait, wait, to steady him home.

Will and his partner are treading a tune,
 Loving companions they be;
 Willy, before we were married in June,
 Said he loved no one but me;

Said he would let his old pleasures all go
 Ever to live with his Dear.
 Will's at the dance in the Club-room below,
 Shivering I wait for him here.

NOTE.—“The Bow” (line 3). The old name for the curved corner by the cross-streets in the middle of Casterbridge.

VII

AFTER THE FAIR

THE singers are gone from the Cornmarket-place
 With their broadsheets of rhymes,
 The street rings no longer in treble and bass
 With their skits on the times,
 And the Cross, lately thronged, is a dim naked space
 That but echoes the stammering chimes.

From Clock-corner steps, as each quarter ding-dongs,
 Away the folk roam
 By the "Hart" and Grey's Bridge into byways and "dongs,"
 Or across the ridged loam ;
 The younger ones shrilling the lately heard songs,
 The old saying, "Would we were home."

The shy-seeming maiden so mute in the fair
 Now rattles and talks,
 And that one who looked the most swaggering there
 Grows sad as she walks,
 And she who seemed eaten by cankering care
 In statuesque sturdiness stalks.

And midnight clears High Street of all but the ghosts
 Of its buried burghes,
 From the latest far back to those old Roman hosts
 Whose remains one yet sees,
 Who loved, laughed, and fought, hailed their friends, drank
 their toasts
 At their meeting-times here, just as these !

1902.

NOTE.—"The Chimes" (line 6) will be listened for in vain here at mid-
 night now, having been abolished some years ago.

THE DARK-EYED GENTLEMAN

I

I PITCHED my day's leazings in Crimmercrock Lane,
 To tie up my garter and jog on again,
 When a dear dark-eyed gentleman passed there and said,
 In a way that made all o' me colour rose-red,

“What do I see—

O pretty knee!”

And he came and he tied up my garter for me.

II

'Twixt sunset and moonrise it was, I can mind :
 Ah, 'tis easy to lose what we nevermore find !—
 Of the dear stranger's home, of his name, I knew nought,
 But I soon knew his nature and all that it brought.

Then bitterly

Sobbed I that he

Should ever have tied up my garter for me !

III

Yet now I've beside me a fine lissom lad,
 And my slip's nigh forgot, and my days are not sad ;
 My own dearest joy is he, comrade, and friend,
 He it is who safe-guards me, on him I depend ;

No sorrow brings he,

And thankful I be

That his daddy once tied up my garter for me !

NOTE—“Leazings” (line 1), bundle of gleaned corn.

TO CARREY CLAVEL

YOU turn your back, you turn your back,
 And never your face to me,
 Alone you take your homeward track,
 And scorn my company.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

What will you do when Charley's seen
 Dewbeating down this way?
 —You'll turn your back as now, you mean?
 Nay, Carrey Clavel, nay!

You'll see none's looking; put your lip
 Up like a tulip, so;
 And he will coll you, bend, and sip:
 Yes, Carrey, yes; I know!

THE ORPHANED OLD MAID

I WANTED to marry, but father said, "No—
 'Tis weakness in women to give themselves so;
 If you care for your freedom you'll listen to me,
 Make a spouse in your pocket, and let the men be."

I spake on't again and again: father cried,
 "Why—if you go husbanding, where shall I bide?
 For never a home's for me elsewhere than here!"
 And I yielded; for father had ever been dear.

But now father's gone, and I feel growing old,
 And I'm lonely and poor in this house on the wold,
 And my sweetheart that was found a partner elsewhere,
 And nobody flings me a thought or a care.

THE SPRING CALL

DOWN Wessex way, when spring's a-shine,
 The blackbird's "pret-ty de-urr!"
 In Wessex accents marked as mine
 Is heard afar and near.

He flutes it strong, as if in song
 No R's of feebler tone
 Than his appear in "pretty dear,"
 Have blackbirds ever known.

Yet they pipe "prattie deerh!" I glean,
 Beneath a Scottish sky,

And "pehty de-aw!" amid the treen
Of Middlesex or nigh.

While some folk say—perhaps in play—
Who know the Irish isle,
'Tis "purrity dare!" in treeland there
When songsters would beguile.

Well: I'll say what the listening birds
Say, hearing "pret-ty de-urr!"—
However strangers sound such words,
That's how we sound them here.

Yes, in this clime at pairing time,
As soon as eyes can see her
At dawn of day, the proper way
To call is "pret-ty de-urr!"

JULIE-JANE

SING; how 'a would sing!
How 'a would raise the tune
When we rode in the waggon from harvesting
By the light o' the moon!

Dance; how 'a would dance!
If a fiddlestring did but sound
She would hold out her coats, give a slanting glance,
And go round and round.

Laugh; how 'a would laugh!
Her peony lips would part
As if none such a place for a lover to quaff
At the deeps of a heart.

Julie, O girl of joy,
Soon, soon that lover he came.
Ah, yes; and gave thee a baby-boy,
But never his name. . . .

—Tolling for her, as you guess;
And the baby too. . . . 'Tis well.
You knew her in maidhood likewise?—Yes,
That's her burial bell.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

"I suppose," with a laugh, she said,
 "I should blush that I'm not a wife;
 But how can it matter, so soon to be dead,
 What one does in life!"

When we sat making the mourning
 By her death-bed side, said she,
 "Dears, how can you keep from your lovers, adorning
 In honour of me!"

Bubbling and brightsome eyed!
 But now—O never again.
 She chose her bearers before she died
 From her fancy-men.

NOTE.—It is, or was, a common custom in Wessex, and probably other country places, to prepare the mourning beside the death-bed, the dying person sometimes assisting, who also selects his or her bearers on such occasions.

"Coats" (line 7), old name for petticoats.

NEWS FOR HER MOTHER

I

ONE mile more is
 Where your door is,
 Mother mine!—
 Harvest's coming,
 Mills are strumming,
 Apples fine,
 And the cider made to-year will be as wine.

II

Yet, not viewing
 What's a-doing
 Here around
 Is it thrills me,
 And so fills me
 That I bound
 Like a ball or leaf or lamb along the ground.

III

Tremble not now
 At your lot now,
 Silly soul!
 Hosts have sped them
 Quick to wed them,
 Great and small,
 Since the first two sighing half-hearts made a whole.

IV

Yet I wonder,
 Will it sunder
 Her from me?
 Will she guess that
 I said "Yes,"—that
 His I'd be,
 Ere I thought she might not see him as I see!

V

Old brown gable,
 Granary, stable,
 Here you are!
 O my mother,
 Can another
 Ever bar
 Mine from thy heart, make thy nearness seem afar?

THE FIDDLER

THE fiddler knows what's brewing
 To the lilt of his lyric wiles:
 The fiddler knows what rueing
 Will come of this night's smiles!

He sees couples join them for dancing,
 And afterwards joining for life,
 He sees them pay high for their prancing
 By a welter of wedded strife.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

He twangs : " Music hails from the devil,
 Though vaunted to come from heaven,
 For it makes people do at a revel
 What multiplies sins by seven.

" There's many a heart now mangled,
 And waiting its time to go,
 Whose tendrils were first entangled
 By my sweet viol and bow ! "

THE HUSBAND'S VIEW

" CAN anything avail
 Beldame, for my hid grief?—
 Listen : I'll tell the tale,
 It may bring faint relief!—

" I came where I was not known,
 In hope to flee my sin ;
 And walking forth alone
 A young man said, ' Good e'en,'

" In gentle voice and true
 He asked to marry me ;
 ' You only—only you
 Fulfil my dream ! ' said he.

" We married o' Monday morn,
 In the month of hay and flowers ;
 My cares were nigh forsworn,
 And perfect love was ours.

" But ere the days are long
 Untimely fruit will show ;
 My Love keeps up his song,
 Undreaming it is so.

" And I awake in the night,
 And think of months gone by,
 And of that cause of flight
 Hidden from my Love's eye.

"Discovery borders near,
And then! . . . But something stirred?—
My husband—he is here!
Heaven—has he overheard?"—

"Yes; I have heard, sweet Nan;
I have known it all the time.
I am not a particular man;
Misfortunes are no crime:

"And what with our serious need
Of sons for soldiering,
That accident, indeed,
To maids, is a useful thing!"

ROSE-ANN

WHY didn't you say you was promised, Rose-Ann?
Why didn't you name it to me,
Ere ever you tempted me hither, Rose-Ann,
So often, so wearifully?

O why did you let me be near 'ee, Rose-Ann,
Talking things about wedlock so free,
And never by nod or by whisper, Rose-Ann,
Give a hint that it wasn't to be?

Down home I was raising a flock of stock ewes,
Cocks and hens, and wee chickens by scores,
And lavendered linen all ready to use,
A-dreaming that they would be yours.

Mother said: "She's a sport-making maiden, my son";
And a pretty sharp quarrel had we;
O why do you prove by this wrong you have done
That I saw not what mother could see?

Never once did you say you was promised, Rose-Ann,
Never once did I dream it to be;
And it cuts to the heart to be treated, Rose-Ann,
As you in your scorning treat me!

THE HOMECOMING

*GRUFFLY growled the wind on Toller downland broad and bare,
And lonesome was the house, and dark; and few came there.*

“Now don't ye rub your eyes so red; we're home and have no
cares;
Here's a skimmer-cake for supper, peckled onions, and some
pears;
I've got a little keg o' summat strong, too, under stairs:
—What, slight your husband's victuals? Other brides can tackle
theirs!”

*The wind of winter mooded and mouthed their chimney like a horn,
And round the house and past the house 'twas leafless and lorn.*

“But my dear and tender poppet, then, how came ye to agree
In Ivel church this morning? Sure, there-right you married
me!”
—“Hoo-hoo!—I don't know—I forgot how strange and far
'twould be,
An' I wish I was at home again with dear daddee!”

*Gruffly growled the wind on Toller downland broad and bare,
And lonesome was the house and dark; and few came there.*

“I didn't think such furniture as this was all you'd own,
And great black beams for ceiling, and a floor o' wretched stone,
And nasty pewter platters, horrid forks of steel and bone,
And a monstrous crock in chimney. 'Twas to me quite unbe-
known!”

*Rattle rattle went the door; down flapped a cloud of smoke,
As shifting north the wicked wind assayed a smarter stroke.*

“Now sit ye by the fire, poppet; put yourself at ease:
And keep your little thumb out of your mouth, dear, please!
And I'll sing to 'ee a pretty song of lovely flowers and bees,
And happy lovers taking walks within a grove o' trees.”

*Gruffly growled the wind on Toller Down, so bleak and bare,
And lonesome was the house, and dark; and few came there.*

"Now, don't ye gnaw your handkercher ; 'twill hurt your little tongue,
 And if you do feel spitish, 'tis because ye are over young ;
 But you'll be getting older, like us all, ere very long,
 And you'll see me as I am—a man who never did 'ee wrong."

*Straight from Whit'sheet Hill to Benvill Lane the blusters pass,
 Hitting hedges, milestones, handposts, trees, and tufts of grass.*

"Well, had I only known, my dear, that this was how you'd be,
 I'd have married her of riper years that was so fond of me.
 But since I can't, I've half a mind to run away to sea,
 And leave 'ee to go barefoot to your d—d daddee!"

*Up one wall and down the other—past each window-pane—
 Prance the gusts, and then away down Crimmercrook's long lane.*

"I—I—don't know what to say to't, since your wife I've vowed
 to be ;
 And as 'tis done, I s'pose here I must bide—poor me !
 Aye—as you are ki-ki-kind, I'll try to live along with 'ee,
 Although I'd fain have stayed at home with dear daddee!"

*Gruffly growled the wind on Toller Down, so bleak and bare,
 And lonesome was the house and dark ; and few came there.*

"That's right, my Heart ! And though on haunted Toller Down
 we be,
 And the wind swears things in chimley, we'll to supper merrily !
 So don't ye tap your shoe so pettish-like ; but smile at me,
 And ye'll soon forget to sock and sigh for dear daddee!"

December 1901.

PIECES OCCASIONAL AND VARIOUS

A CHURCH ROMANCE

(Mellstock: circa 1835)

SHE turned in the high pew, until her sight
Swept the west gallery, and caught its row
Of music-men with viol, book, and bow
Against the sinking sad tower-window light.

She turned again; and in her pride's despite
One strenuous viol's inspirer seemed to throw
A message from his string to her below,
Which said: "I claim thee as my own forthright!"

Thus their hearts' bond began, in due time signed.
And long years thence, when Age had scared Romance,
At some old attitude of his or glance
That gallery-scene would break upon her mind,
With him as minstrel, ardent, young, and trim,
Bowing "New Sabbath" or "Mount Ephraim."

THE RASH BRIDE

AN EXPERIENCE OF THE MELLSTOCK QUIRE

I

WE Christmas-carolled down the Vale, and up the Vale, and
round the Vale,
We played and sang that night as we were yearly wont to do—
A carol in a minor key, a carol in the major D,
Then at each house: "Good wishes: many Christmas joys to
you!"

II

Next, to the widow's John and I and all the rest drew on.
 And I
 Discerned that John could hardly hold the tongue of him for joy.
 The widow was a sweet young thing whom John was bent on
 marrying,
 And quiring at her casement seemed romantic to the boy.

III

"She'll make reply, I trust," said he, "to our salute? She
 must!" said he,
 "And then I will accost her gently—much to her surprise!—
 For knowing not I am with you here, when I speak up and call
 her dear
 A tenderness will fill her voice, a bashfulness her eyes."

IV

So, by her window-square we stood; ay, with our lanterns there
 we stood,
 And he along with us,—not singing, waiting for a sign;
 And when we'd quired her carols three a light was lit and out
 looked she,
 A shawl about her bedgown, and her colour red as wine.

V

And sweetly then she bowed her thanks, and smiled, and spoke
 aloud her thanks;
 When lo, behind her back there, in the room, a man appeared.
 I knew him—one from Woolcomb way—Giles Swetman—honest
 as the day,
 But eager, hasty; and I felt that some strange trouble neared.

VI

"How comes he there? . . . Suppose," said we, "she's wed!"
 said we. "Who knows?" said we.
 —"She married yester-morning—only mother yet has known
 The secret o't!" shrilled one small boy. "But now I've told, let's
 wish 'em joy!"
 A heavy fall aroused us: John had gone down like a stone.

VII

We rushed to him and caught him round, and lifted him, and
brought him round,
When, hearing something wrong had happened, oped the
window she :
"Has one of you fallen ill?" she asked, "by these night labours
overtasked?"
None answered. That she'd done poor John a cruel turn
felt we.

VIII

Till up spoke Michael: "Fie, young dame! You've broke your
promise, sly young dame,
By forming this new tie, young dame, and jilting John so true,
Who trudged to-night to sing to 'ee because he thought he'd
bring to 'ee
Good wishes as your coming spouse. May ye such trifling rue!"

IX

Her man had said no word at all; but being behind had heard
it all,
And now cried: "Neighbours, on my soul I knew not 'twas
like this!"
And then to her: "If I had known you'd had in tow not me
alone,
No wife should you have been of mine. It is a dear bought
bliss!"

X

She changed death-white, and heaved a cry: we'd never heard
so grieved a cry
As came from her at this from him: heartbroken quite seemed
she;
And suddenly, as we looked on, she turned, and rushed; and
she was gone,
Whither, her husband, following after, knew not; nor knew we.

XI

We searched till dawn about the house; within the house, with-
out the house,
We searched among the laurel boughs that grew beneath the
wall,

And then among the crocks and things, and stores for winter
junktetings,
In linhay, loft, and dairy; but we found her not at all.

XII

Then John rushed in: "O friends," he said, "hear this, this,
this!" and bends his head:
"I've—searched round by the—*well*, and find the cover open
wide!
I am fearful that—I can't say what . . . Bring lanterns, and
some cords to knot."
We did so, and we went and stood the deep dark hole beside.

XIII

And then they, ropes in hand, and I—ay, John, and all the band,
and I
Let down a lantern to the depths—some hundred feet and more;
It glimmered like a fog-dimmed star; and there, beside its light,
afar,
White drapery floated, and we knew the meaning that it bore.

XIV

The rest is naught. . . . We buried her o' Sunday. Neighbours
carried her;
And Swetman—he who'd married her—now miserablest of men,
Walked mourning first; and then walked John; just quivering,
but composed anon;
And we the quire formed round the grave, as was the custom
then.

XV

Our old bass player, as I recall—his white hair blown—but why
recall!—
His viol upstrapped, bent figure—doomed to follow her full
soon—
Stood bowing, pale and tremulous; and next to him the rest
of us. . . .
We sang the Ninetieth Psalm to her—set to Saint Stephen's
tune,

THE DEAD QUIRE

I

BESIDE the Mead of Memories,
 Where Church-way mounts to Moaning Hill,
 The sad man sighed his phantasies :
 He seems to sigh them still.

II

"'Twas the Birth-tide Eve, and the hamleteers
 Made merry with ancient Mellstock zest,
 But the Mellstock quire of former years
 Had entered into rest.

III

Old Dewy lay by the gaunt yew tree,
 And Reuben and Michael a pace behind,
 And Bowman with his family
 By the wall that the ivies bind.

IV

The singers had followed one by one,
 Treble, and tenor, and thorough-bass ;
 And the worm that wasteth had begun
 To mine their mouldering place.

V

For two-score years, ere Christ-day light,
 Mellstock had throbb'd to strains from these ;
 But now there echoed on the night
 No Christmas harmonies.

VI

Three meadows off, at a dormered inn,
 The youth had gathered in high carouse,
 And, ranged on settles, some therein
 Had drunk them to a drowse.

VII

“ Loud, lively, reckless, some had grown,
 Each dandling on his jiggling knee
 Eliza, Dolly, Nance, or Joan—
 Livers in levity.

VIII

“ The taper flames and hearthfire shine
 Grew smoke-hazed to a lurid light,
 And songs on subjects not divine
 Were warbled forth that night.

IX

“ Yet many were sons and grandsons here
 Of those who, on such eves gone by,
 At that still hour had throated clear
 Their anthems to the sky.

X

“ The clock belled midnight ; and ere long
 One shouted, ‘ Now ’tis Christmas morn ;
 Here’s to our women old and young,
 And to John Barleycorn !’

XI

“ They drink the toast and shout again :
 The pewter-ware rings back the boom,
 And for a breath-while follows then
 A silence in the room.

XII

“ When nigh without, as in old days,
 The ancient quire of voice and string
 Seemed singing words of prayer and praise
 As they had used to sing :

XIII

“ *While shepherds watch'd their flocks by night,—*
 Thus swells the long familiar sound

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

In many a quaint symphonic flight—
To, *Glory shone around.*

XIV

“The sons defined their fathers’ tones,
The widow his whom she had wed,
And others in the minor moans
The viols of the dead.

XV

“Something supernal has the sound
As verse by verse the strain proceeds,
And stilly staring on the ground
Each roysterer holds and heeds.

XVI

“Towards its chorded closing bar
Plaintively, thinly, waned the hymn,
Yet lingered, like the notes afar
Of banded seraphim.

XVII

“With brows abashed, and reverent tread,
The hearkeners sought the tavern door:
But nothing, save wan moonlight, spread
The empty highway o’er.

XVIII

“While on their hearing fixed and tense
The aerial music seemed to sink,
As it were gently moving thence
Along the river brink.

XIX

“Then did the Quick pursue the Dead
By crystal Froom that crinkles there;
And still the viewless quire ahead
Voiced the old holy air,

XX

“By Bank-walk wicket, brightly bleached,
It passed, and 'twixt the hedges twain,
Dogged by the living ; till it reached
The bottom of Church Lane.

XXI

“There, at the turning, it was heard
Drawing to where the churchyard lay :
But when they followed thitherward
It smalled, and died away.

XXII

“Each headstone of the quire, each mound,
Confronted them beneath the moon ;
But no more floated therearound
That ancient Birth-night tune.

XXIII

“There Dewy lay by the gaunt yew tree,
There Reuben and Michael, a pace behind,
And Bowman with his family
By the wall that the ivies bind. . . .

XXIV

“As from a dream each sobered son
Awoke, and musing reached his door :
’Twas said that of them all, not one
Sat in a tavern more.”

XXV

—The sad man ceased ; and ceased to heed
His listener, and crossed the leaze
From Moaning Hill towards the mead—
The Mead of Memories.

THE CHRISTENING

WHOSE child is this they bring
 Into the aisle?—
 At so superb a thing
 The congregation smile
 And turn their heads awhile.

Its eyes are blue and bright,
 Its cheeks like rose;
 Its simple robes unite
 Whitest of calicoes
 With lawn, and satin bows.

A pride in the human race
 At this paragon
 Of mortals, lights each face
 While the old rite goes on;
 But ah, they are shocked anon.

What girl is she who peeps
 From the gallery stair,
 Smiles palely, redly weeps,
 With feverish furtive air
 As though not fitly there?

“I am the baby's mother;
 This gem of the race
 The decent fain would smother,
 And for my deep disgrace
 I am bidden to leave the place.”

“Where is the baby's father?”—
 “In the woods afar.
 He says there is none he'd rather
 Meet under moon or star
 Than me, of all that are.

“To clasp me in lovelike weather,
 Wish fixing when,
 He says: To be together
 At will, just now and then,
 Makes him the blest of men;

"But chained and doomed for life
 To slovening
 As vulgar man and wife,
 He says, is another thing:
 Yea: sweet Love's sepulchring!"

1904.

A DREAM QUESTION

"It shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine,"
 Micah iii. 6.

I ASKED the Lord: "Sire, is this true
 Which hosts of theologians hold,
 That when we creatures censure you
 For shaping griefs and ails untold
 (Deeming them punishments undue)
 You rage, as Moses wrote of old?"

When we exclaim: 'Beneficent
 He is not, for he orders pain,
 Or, if so, not omnipotent:
 To a mere child the thing is plain!'
 Those who profess to represent
 You, cry out: 'Impious and profane!'"

He: "Save me from my friends, who deem
 That I care what my creatures say!
 Mouth as you list: sneer, rail, blaspheme,
 O manikin, the livelong day,
 Not one grief-groan or pleasure-gleam
 Will you increase or take away.

"Why things are thus, whoso derides,
 May well remain my secret still
 A fourth dimension, say the guides,
 To matter is conceivable.
 Think some such mystery resides
 Within the ethic of my will."

BY THE BARROWS

NOT far from Mellstock—so tradition saith—
 Where barrows, bulging as they bosoms were
 Of Multimammia stretched supinely there,
 Catch night and noon the tempest's wanton breath,

A battle, desperate doubtless unto death,
 Was one time fought. The outlook, lone and bare,
 The towering hawk and passing raven share,
 And all the upland round is called "The He'th."

Here once a woman, in our modern age,
 Fought singlehandedly to shield a child—
 One not her own—from a man's senseless rage.
 And to my mind no patriots' bones there piled
 So consecrate the silence as her deed
 Of stoic and devoted self-unheed.

A WIFE AND ANOTHER

"WAR ends, and he's returning
 Early; yea,
 The evening next to-morrow's!"—
 —This I say
 To her, whom I suspiciously survey,

Holding my husband's letter
 To her view.—
 She glanced at it but lightly,
 And I knew
 That one from him that day had reached her too.

There was no time for scruple;
 Secretly
 I filched her missive, conned it,
 L learnt that he
 Would lodge with her ere he came home to me.

To reach the port before her,
 And, unscanned,
 There wait to intercept them
 Soon I planned :
 That, in her stead, *I* might before him stand.

So purposed, so effected ;
 At the inn
 Assigned, I found her hidden :—
 O that sin
 Should bear what she bore when I entered in !

Her heavy lids grew laden
 With despairs,
 Her lips made soundless movements
 Unawares,
 While I peered at the chamber hired as theirs.

And as beside its doorway,
 Deadly hued,
 One inside, one withoutside
 We two stood,
 He came—my husband—as she knew he would.

No pleasurable triumph
 Was that sight !
 The ghastly disappointment
 Broke them quite.
 What love was theirs, to move them with such might !

“ Madam, forgive me ! ” said she,
 Sorrow bent,
 “ A child—I soon shall bear him. . . .
 Yes—I meant
 To tell you—that he won me ere he went.”

Then, as it were, within me
 Something snapped,
 As if my soul had largened :
 Conscience-capped,
 I saw myself the snarer—them the trapped.

“ My hate dies, and I promise,
 Grace-beguiled,”

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

I said, "to care for you, be
 Reconciled ;
 And cherish, and take interest in the child."

Without more words I pressed him
 Through the door
 Within which she stood, powerless
 To say more,
 And closed it on them, and downstairward bore.

"He joins his wife—my sister,"
 I, below,
 Remarked in going—lightly—
 Even as though
 All had come right, and we had arranged it so. . . .

As I, my road retracing,
 Left them free,
 The night alone embracing
 Childless me,
 I held I had not stirred God wrathfully.

THE ROMAN ROAD

THE Roman Road runs straight and bare
 As the pale parting-line in hair
 Across the heath. And thoughtful men
 Contrast its days of Now and Then,
 And delve, and measure, and compare ;

Visioning on the vacant air
 Helmed legionaries, who proudly rear
 The Eagle, as they pace again
 The Roman Road.

But no tall brass-helmed legionnaire
 Haunts it for me. Uprises there
 A mother's form upon my ken,
 Guiding my infant steps, as when
 We walked that ancient thoroughfare,
 The Roman Road.

THE VAMPIRINE FAIR

GILBERT had sailed to India's shore,
And I was all alone :
My lord came in at my open door
And said, " O fairest one ! "

He leant upon the slant bureau,
And sighed, " I am sick for thee ! "
" My Lord," said I, " pray speak not so,
Since wedded wife I be."

Leaning upon the slant bureau,
Bitter his next words came :
" So much I know ; and likewise know
My love burns on the same !

" But since you thrust my love away,
And since it knows no cure,
I must live out as best I may
The ache that I endure."

When Michaelmas browed the nether Coomb,
And Wingreen Hill above,
And made the hollyhocks rags of bloom,
My lord grew ill of love.

My lord grew ill with love for me ;
Gilbert was far from port ;
And—so it was—that time did see
Me housed at Manor Court.

About the bowers of Manor Court
The primrose pushed its head
When, on a day at last, report
Arrived of him I had wed.

" Gilbert, my Lord, is homeward bound,
His sloop is drawing near,
What shall I do when I am found
Not in his house but here ? "

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

"O I will heal the injuries
 I've done to him and thee.
 I'll give him means to live at ease
 Afar from Shastonb'ry."

When Gilbert came we both took thought:
 "Since comfort and good cheer,"
 Said he, "So readily are bought,
 He's welcome to thee, Dear."

So when my lord flung liberally
 His gold in Gilbert's hands,
 I coaxed and got my brothers three
 Made stewards of his lands.

And then I coaxed him to install
 My other kith and kin,
 With aim to benefit them all
 Before his love ran thin.

And next I craved to be possessed
 Of plate and jewels rare.
 He groaned: "You give me, Love, no rest,
 Take all the law will spare!"

And so in course of years my wealth
 Became a goodly hoard,
 My steward brethren, too, by stealth
 Had each a fortune stored.

Thereafter in the gloom he'd walk,
 And by and by began
 To say aloud in absent talk,
 "I am a ruined man!—

"I hardly could have thought," he said,
 "When first I looked on thee,
 That one so soft, so rosy red,
 Could thus have beggared me!"

Seeing his fair estates in pawn,
 And him in such decline,
 I knew that his domain had gone
 To lift up me and mine.

Next month upon a Sunday morn
A gunshot sounded nigh :
By his own hand my lordly born
Had doomed himself to die.

“Live, my dear Lord, and much of thine
Shall be restored to thee !”
He smiled, and said ’twixt word and sign,
“Alas—that cannot be !”

And while I searched his cabinet
For letters, keys, or will,
’Twas touching that his gaze was set
With love upon me still.

And when I burnt each document
Before his dying eyes,
’Twas sweet that he did not resent
My fear of compromise.

The steeple-cock gleamed golden when
I watched his spirit go :
And I became repentant then
That I had wrecked him so.

Three weeks at least had come and gone,
With many a saddened word,
Before I wrote to Gilbert on
The stroke that so had stirred.

And having worn a mournful gown,
I joined, in decent while,
My husband at a dashing town
To live in dashing style.

Yet though I now enjoy my fling,
And dine and dance and drive,
I’d give my prettiest emerald ring
To see my lord alive.

And when the meet on hunting-days
Is near his churchyard home,
I leave my bantering beaux to place
A flower upon his tomb ;

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

And sometimes say : "Perhaps too late
 The saints in Heaven deplore
 That tender time when, moved by Fate,
 He darked my cottage door."

THE REMINDER

WHILE I watch the Christmas blaze
 Paint the room with ruddy rays,
 Something makes my vision glide
 To the frosty scene outside.

There, to reach a rotting berry,
 Toils a thrush,—constrained to very
 Dregs of food by sharp distress,
 Taking such with thankfulness.

Why, O starving bird, when I
 One day's joy would justify,
 And put misery out of view,
 Do you make me notice you !

THE RAMBLER

I DO not see the hills around,
 Nor mark the tints the copses wear ;
 I do not note the grassy ground
 And constellated daisies there.

I hear not the contralto note
 Of cuckoos hid on either hand,
 The whirr that shakes the nighthawk's throat
 When eve's brown awning hoods the land.

Some say each songster, tree, and mead—
 All eloquent of love divine—
 Receives their constant careful heed :
 Such keen appraisement is not mine.

The tones around me that I hear,
 The aspects, meanings, shapes I see,
 Are those far back ones missed when near,
 And now perceived too late by me!

NIGHT IN THE OLD HOME

WHEN the wasting embers redden the chimney-breast,
 And Life's bare pathway looms like a desert track to me,
 And from hall and parlour the living have gone to their rest,
 My perished people who housed them here come back to me.

They come and seat them around in their mouldy places,
 Now and then bending towards me a glance of wistfulness,
 A strange upbraiding smile upon all their faces,
 And in the bearing of each a passive tristfulness.

"Do you uphold me, lingering and languishing here,
 A pale late plant of your once strong stock?" I say to them;
 "A thinker of crooked thoughts upon Life in the sere,
 And on That which consigns men to night after showing the day
 to them?"

"—O let be the Wherefore! We fevered our years not thus:
 Take of Life what it grants, without question!" they answer me
 seemingly.

"Enjoy, suffer, wait: spread the table here freely like us,
 And, satisfied, placid, unfretting, watch Time away beamingly!"

AFTER THE LAST BREATH

(J. H. 1813-1904)

THERE'S no more to be done, or feared, or hoped;
 None now need watch, speak low, and list, and tire;
 No irksome crease outsmoothed, no pillow sloped
 Does she require.

Blankly we gaze. We are free to go or stay;
 Our morrow's anxious plans have missed their aim;
 Whether we leave to-night or wait till day
 Counts as the same.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

The lettered vessels of medicaments
 Seem asking wherefore we have set them here ;
 Each palliative its silly face presents
 As useless gear.

And yet we feel that something savours well ;
 We note a numb relief withheld before ;
 Our well-beloved is prisoner in the cell
 Of Time no more.

We see by littles now the deft achievement
 Whereby she has escaped the Wrongers all,
 In view of which our momentary bereavement
 Outshapes but small.

1904.

IN CHILDBED

IN the middle of the night
 Mother's spirit came and spoke to me,
 Looking weariful and white—
 As 'twere untimely news she broke to me.

“O my daughter, joyed are you
 To own the weetless child you mother there ;
 ‘Men may search the wide world through,’
 You think, ‘nor find so fair another !’

“Dear, this midnight time unwombs
 Thousands just as rare and beautiful ;
 Thousands whom High Heaven foredooms
 To be as bright, as good, as dutiful.

“Source of ecstatic hopes and fears
 And innocent maternal vanity,
 Your fond exploit but shapes for tears
 New thoroughfares in sad humanity.

“Yet as you dream, so dreamt I
 When Life stretched forth its morning ray to me ;
 Other views for by and by !”
 Such strange things did mother say to me.

THE PINE PLANTERS

(MARTY SOUTH'S REVERIE)

I

WE work here together
In blast and breeze ;
He fills the earth in,
I hold the trees.

He does not notice
That what I do
Keeps me from moving
And chills me through.

He has seen one fairer
I feel by his eye,
Which skims me as though
I were not by.

And since she passed here
He scarce has known
But that the woodland
Holds him alone.

I have worked here with him
Since morning shine,
He busy with his thoughts
And I with mine.

I have helped him so many,
So many days,
But never win any
Small word of praise !

Shall I not sigh to him
That I work on
Glad to be nigh to him
Though hope is gone ?

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

Nay, though he never
 Knew love like mine,
 I'll bear it ever
 And make no sign !

II

From the bundle at hand here
 I take each tree,
 And set it to stand, here
 Always to be ;
 When, in a second,
 As if from fear
 Of Life unreckoned
 Beginning here,
 It starts a sighing
 Through day and night,
 Though while there lying
 'Twas voiceless quite.

It will sigh in the morning,
 Will sigh at noon,
 At the winter's warning,
 In wafts of June ;
 Grieving that never
 Kind Fate decreed
 It should for ever
 Remain a seed,
 And shun the welter
 Of things without,
 Unneeding shelter
 From storm and drought.

Thus, all unknowing
 For whom or what
 We set it growing
 In this bleak spot,
 It still will grieve here
 Throughout its time,
 Unable to leave here,
 Or change its clime ;

Or tell the story
 Of us to-day
 When, halt and hoary,
 We pass away.

THE DEAR

I PLODDED to Fairmile Hill-top, where
 A maiden one fain would guard
 From every hazard and every care
 Advanced on the roadside sward.

I wondered how succeeding suns
 Would shape her wayfarings,
 And wished some Power might take such ones
 Under Its warding wings.

The busy breeze came up the hill
 And smartened her cheek to red,
 And frizzled her hair to a haze. With a will
 "Good-morning, my Dear!" I said.

She glanced from me to the far-off gray,
 And, with proud severity,
 "Good-morning to you—though I may say
 I am not *your* Dear," quoth she :

"For I am the Dear of one not here—
 One far from his native land!"—
 And she passed me by; and I did not try
 To make her understand.

1901.

ONE WE KNEW

(M. H. 1772-1857)

SHE told how they used to form for the country dances—
 "The Triumph," "The New-rigged Ship"—
 To the light of the guttering wax in the panelled manses,
 And in cots to the blink of a dip.

She spoke of the wild "poussetting" and "allemanding"
 On carpet, on oak, and on sod ;
 And the two long rows of ladies and gentlemen standing,
 And the figures the couples trod.

She showed us the spot where the maypole was yearly planted,
 And where the bandsmen stood
 While breeched and kerchiefed partners whirled, and panted
 To choose each other for good.

She told of that far-back day when they learnt astounded
 Of the death of the King of France :
 Of the Terror ; and then of Bonaparte's unbounded
 Ambition and arrogance.

Of how his threats woke warlike preparations
 Along the southern strand,
 And how each night brought tremors and trepidations
 Lest morning should see him land.

She said she had often heard the gibbet creaking
 As it swayed in the lightning flash,
 Had caught from the neighbouring town a small child's shrieking
 At the cart-tail under the lash. . . .

With cap-framed face and long gaze into the embers—
 We seated around her knees—
 She would dwell on such dead themes, not as one who remembers,
 But rather as one who sees.

She seemed one left behind of a band gone distant
 So far that no tongue could hail :
 Past things retold were to her as things existent,
 Things present but as a tale.

May 20, 1902.

SHE HEARS THE STORM

THERE was a time in former years—
 While my roof-tree was his—
 When I should have been distressed by fears
 At such a night as this !

I should have murmured anxiously,
 "The pricking rain strikes cold ;
His road is bare of hedge or tree,
 And he is getting old."

But now the fitful chimney-roar,
 The drone of Thorncombe trees,
The Froom in flood upon the moor,
 The mud of Mellstock Leaze,

The candle slanting sooty wick'd,
 The thuds upon the thatch,
The eaves-drops on the window flicked,
 The clacking garden-hatch,

And what they mean to wayfarers,
 I scarcely heed or mind ;
He has won that storm-tight roof of hers
 Which Earth grants all her kind.

A WET NIGHT

I PACE along, the rain-shafts riddling me,
Mile after mile out by the moorland way,
And up the hill, and through the ewe-leaze gray
Into the lane, and round the corner tree ;

Where, as my clothing clams me, mire-bestarred,
And the enfeebled light dies out of day,
Leaving the liquid shades to reign, I say,
"This is a hardship to be calendared !"

Yet sires of mine now perished and forgot,
When worse beset, ere roads were shapen here,
And night and storm were foes indeed to fear,
Times numberless have trudged across this spot
In sturdy muteness on their strenuous lot,
And taking all such toils as trifles mere.

BEFORE LIFE AND AFTER

A TIME there was—as one may guess
 And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell—
 Before the birth of consciousness,
 When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
 None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings ;
 None cared whatever crash or cross
 Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
 If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung ;
 If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
 No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
 And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong ;
 Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
 How long, how long ?

NEW YEAR'S EVE

"I HAVE finished another year," said God,
 "In grey, green, white, and brown ;
 I have strewn the leaf upon the sod,
 Sealed up the worm within the clod,
 And let the last sun down."

"And what's the good of it?" I said,
 "What reasons made you call
 From formless void this earth we tread,
 When nine-and-ninety can be read
 Why nought should be at all?"

"Yea, Sire ; why shaped you us, 'who in
 This tabernacle groan'—
 If ever a joy be found herein,
 Such joy no man had wished to win
 If he had never known!"

Then he : " My labours—logicless—
 You may explain ; not I :
 Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
 That I evolved a Consciousness
 To ask for reasons why.

" Strange that ephemeral creatures who
 By my own ordering are,
 Should see the shortness of my view,
 Use ethic tests I never knew,
 Or made provision for !"

He sank to raptness as of yore,
 And opening New Year's Day
 Wove it by rote as theretofore,
 And went on working evermore
 In his unweeting way.

1906.

GOD'S EDUCATION

I SAW him steal the light away
 That haunted in her eye :
 It went so gently none could say
 More than that it was there one day
 And missing by-and-by.

I watched her longer, and he stole
 Her lily tincts and rose ;
 All her young sprightliness of soul
 Next fell beneath his cold control,
 And disappeared like those.

I asked : " Why do you serve her so ?
 Do you, for some glad day,
 Hoard these her sweets—? " He said, " O no,
 They charm not me ; I bid Time throw
 Them carelessly away."

Said I : " We call that cruelty—
 We, your poor mortal kind."

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

He mused. "The thought is new to me.
 Forsooth, though I men's master be,
 Theirs is the teaching mind!"

TO SINCERITY

O SWEET sincerity!—
 Where modern methods be
 What scope for thine and thee?

Life may be sad past saying,
 Its greens for ever graying,
 Its faiths to dust decaying;

And youth may have foreknown it,
 And riper seasons shown it,
 But custom cries: "Disown it:

"Say ye rejoice, though grieving,
 Believe, while unbelieving,
 Behold, without perceiving!"

—Yet, would men look at true things,
 And unilluded view things,
 And count to bear undue things,

The real might mend the seeming,
 Facts better their foredeeming,
 And Life its disesteeming.

February 1899.

PANTHERA

(For other forms of this legend—first met with in the second century—see Origen contra Celsum; the Talmud; Sepher Toldoth Jeschu; quoted fragments of lost Apocryphal gospels; Strauss, Haeckel; etc.)

YEA, as I sit here, crutched, and cricked, and bent,
 I think of Panthera, who underwent
 Much from insidious aches in his decline;
 But his aches were not radical like mine;

They were the twinges of old wounds—the feel
 Of the hand he had lost, shorn by barbarian steel,
 Which came back, so he said, at a change in the air,
 Fingers and all, as if it still were there.
 My pains are otherwise: upclosing cramps
 And stiffened tendons from this country's damps,
 Where Panthera was never commandant.—
 The Fates sent him by way of the Levant.

He had been blithe in his young manhood's time,
 And as centurion carried well his prime.
 In Ethiop, Araby, climes fair and fell,
 He had seen service and had borne him well.
 Nought shook him then: he was serene as brave;
 Yet later knew some shocks, and would grow grave
 When pondering them; shocks less of corporal kind
 Than phantom-like, that disarranged his mind;
 And it was in the way of warning me
 (By much his junior) against levity
 That he recounted them; and one in chief
 Panthera loved to set in bold relief.

This was a tragedy of his Eastern days,
 Personal in touch—though I have sometimes thought
 That touch a possible delusion—wrought
 Of half-conviction carried to a craze—
 His mind at last being stressed by ails and age:—
 Yet his good faith thereon I well could wage.

I had said it long had been a wish with me
 That I might leave a scion—some small tree
 As channel for my sap, if not my name—
 Ay, offspring even of no legitimate claim,
 In whose advance I secretly could joy.
 Thereat he warmed.

“Cancel such wishes, boy!
 A son may be a comfort or a curse,
 A seer, a doer, a coward, a fool; yea, worse—
 A criminal. . . . That I could testify!” . . .
 “Panthera has no guilty son!” cried I
 All unbelieving. “Friend, you do not know,”
 He darkly dropt: “True, I’ve none now to show,
 For *the law took him*. Ay, in sooth, Jove shaped it so!”

"This noon is not unlike," he again began,
 "The noon these pricking memories print on me—
 Yea, that day, when the sun grew copper-red,
 And I served in Judæa . . . 'Twas a date
 Of rest for arms. The *Pax Romana* ruled,
 To the chagrin of frontier legionaries !
 Palestine was annexed—though sullen yet,—
 I, being in age some two-score years and ten,
 And having the garrison in Jerusalem
 Part in my hands as acting officer
 Under the Governor. A tedious time
 I found it, of routine, amid a folk
 Restless, contentless, and irascible.—
 Quelling some riot, sentrying court and hall,
 Sending men forth on public meeting-days
 To maintain order, were my duties there.

"Then came a morn in spring, and the cheerful sun
 Whitened the city and the hills around,
 And every mountain-road that clambered them,
 Tincturing the greyness of the olives warm,
 And the rank cacti round the valley's sides.
 The day was one whereon death-penalties
 Were put in force, and here and there were set
 The soldiery for order, as I said,
 Since one of the condemned had raised some heat,
 And crowds surged passionately to see him slain.
 I, mounted on a Cappadocian horse,
 With some half-company of auxiliaries,
 Had captained the procession through the streets
 When it came streaming from the judgment-hall
 After the verdicts of the Governor.
 It drew to the great gate of the northern way
 That bears towards Damascus ; and to a knoll
 Upon the common, just beyond the walls—
 Whence could be swept a wide horizon round
 Over the housetops to the remotest heights.
 Here was the public execution-ground
 For city crimes, called then and doubtless now
 Golgotha, Cranion, or Calvaria.

"The usual dooms were duly meted out ;
 Some three or four were stript, transfixed, and nailed,

And no great stir occurred. A day of wont
It was to me, so far, and would have slid
Clean from my memory at its squalid close
But for an incident that followed these.

“Among the tag-rag rabble of either sex
That hung around the wretches as they writhed,
Till thrust back by our spears, one held my eye—
A weeping woman, whose strained countenance,
Sharpened against a looming livid cloud,
Was mocked by the crude rays of afternoon—
The mother of one of those who suffered there
I had heard her called when spoken roughly to
By my ranged men for pressing forward so.
It stole upon me hers was a face I knew ;
Yet when, or how, I had known it, for a while
Eluded me. And then at once it came.

“Some thirty years or more before that noon
I was sub-captain of a company
Drawn from the legion of Calabria,
That marched up from Judæa north to Tyre.
We had pierced the old flat country of Jezreel,
The great Esdraclon Plain and fighting-floor
Of Jew with Canaanite, and with the host
Of Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, met
While crossing there to strike the Assyrian pride.
We left behind Gilboa ; passed by Nain ;
Till bulging Tabor rose, embossed to the top
With arbut, terabinth, and locust growths.

“Encumbering me were sundry sick, so fallen
Through drinking from a swamp beside the way ;
But we pressed on, till, bearing over a ridge,
We dipt into a world of pleasantness—
A vale, the fairest I had gazed upon—
Which lapped a village on its furthest slopes
Called Nazareth, brimmed round by uplands nigh.
In the midst thereof a fountain bubbled, where,
Lime-dry from marching, our glad halt we made
To rest our sick ones, and refresh us all.

“Here a day onward, towards the eventide,
Our men were piping to a Pyrrhic dance

Trod by their comrades, when the young women came
 To fill their pitchers, as their custom was.
 I proffered help to one—a slim girl, coy
 Even as a fawn, meek, and as innocent.
 Her long blue gown, the string of silver coins
 That hung down by her banded beautiful hair,
 Symboled in full immaculate modesty.

“Well, I was young, and hot, and readily stirred
 To quick desire. ’Twas tedious timing out
 The convalescence of the soldiery ;
 And I beguiled the long and empty days
 By blissful yieldance to her sweet allure,
 Who had no arts, but what out-arted all,
 The tremulous tender charm of trustfulness.
 We met, and met, and under the winking stars
 That passed which peoples earth—true union, yea,
 To the pure eye of her simplicity.

“Meanwhile the sick found health ; and we pricked on.
 I made her no rash promise of return,
 As some do use ; I was sincere in that ;
 I said we sundered never to meet again—
 And yet I spoke untruth unknowingly !—
 For meet again we did. Now, guess you aught ?
 The weeping mother on Calvaria
 Was she I had known—albeit that time and tears
 Had wasted rudely her once flowerlike form,
 And her soft eyes, now swollen with sorrowing.

“Though I betrayed some qualms, she marked me not ;
 And I was scarce of mood to comrade her
 And close the silence of so wide a time
 To claim a malefactor as my son—
 (For so I guessed him). And inquiry made
 Brought rumour how at Nazareth long before
 An old man wedded her for pity’s sake
 On finding she had grown pregnant, none knew how,
 Cared for her child, and loved her till he died.

“Well ; there it ended ; save that then I learnt
 That he—the man whose ardent blood was mine—
 Had waked sedition long among the Jews,

And hurled insulting parlance at their god,
 Whose temple bulked upon the adjoining hill,
 Vowing that he would raze it, that himself
 Was god as great as he whom they adored,
 And by descent, moreover, was their king ;
 With sundry other incitements to misrule.

“ The impalements done, and done the soldiers' game
 Of raffling for the clothes, a legionary,
 Longinus, pierced the young man with his lance
 At signs from me, moved by his agonies
 Through naysaying the drug they had offered him.
 It brought the end. And when he had breathed his last
 The woman went. I saw her never again. . . .
 Now glares my moody meaning on you, friend ?—
 That when you talk of offspring as sheer joy
 So trustingly, you blink contingencies.
 Fors Fortuna ! He who goes fathering
 Gives frightful hostages to hazardry ! ”

Thus Panthera's tale. 'Twas one he seldom told,
 But yet it got abroad. He would unfold,
 At other times, a story of less gloom,
 Though his was not a heart where jests had room.
 He would regret discovery of the truth
 Was made too late to influence to ruth
 The Procurator who had condemned his son—
 Or rather him so deemed. For there was none
 To prove that Panthera erred not : and indeed,
 When vagueness of identity I would plead,
 Panther himself would sometimes own as much—
 Yet lothly. But, assuming fact was such,
 That the said woman did not recognize
 Her lover's face, is matter for surprise.
 However, there's his tale, fantasy or otherwise.

Thereafter shone not men of Panthera's kind :
 The indolent heads at home were ill-inclined
 To press campaigning that would hoist the star
 Of their lieutenants valorous afar.
 Jealousies kept him irked abroad, controlled
 And stinted by an Empire no more bold.

Yet in some actions southward he had share—
 In Mauretania and Numidia ; there
 With eagle eye, and sword and steed and spur,
 Quelling uprisings promptly. Some small stir
 In Parthia next engaged him, until maimed,
 As I have said ; and cynic Time proclaimed
 His noble spirit broken. What a waste
 Of such a Roman !—one in youth-time graced
 With indescribable charm, so I have heard,
 Yea, magnetism impossible to word
 When faltering as I saw him. What a fame,
 O Son of Saturn, had adorned his name,
 Might the Three so have urged Thee !—Hour by hour
 His own disorders hampered Panthera's power
 To brood upon the fate of those he had known,
 Even of that one he always called his own—
 Either in morbid dream or memory. . . .
 He died at no great age, untroubulously,
 An exit rare for ardent soldiers such as he.

THE UNBORN

I ROSE at night, and visited
 The Cave of the Unborn :
 And crowding shapes surrounded me
 For tidings of the life to be,
 Who long had prayed the silent Head
 To haste its advent morn.

Their eyes were lit with artless trust,
 Hope thrilled their every tone ;
 " A scene the loveliest, is it not ?
 A pure delight, a beauty-spot
 Where all is gentle, true and just,
 And darkness is unknown ? "

My heart was anguished for their sake,
 I could not frame a word ;
 And they descried my sunken face,
 And seemed to read therein, and trace

The news that pity would not break,
Nor truth leave unaverred.

And as I silently retired
I turned and watched them still,
And they came helter-skelter out,
Driven forward like a rabble rout
Into the world they had so desired,
By the all-immanent Will.

THE MAN HE KILLED

"HAD he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin !

"But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

"I shot him dead because—
Because he was my foe,
Just so : my foe of course he was ;
That's clear enough ; although

"He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like—just as I—
Was out of work—had sold his traps—
No other reason why.

"Yes ; quaint and curious war is !
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown."

GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE

(A MEMORY OF CHRISTIANA C——)

WHERE Blackmoor was, the road that led
 To Bath, she could not show,
 Nor point the sky that overspread
 Towns ten miles off or so.

But that Calcutta stood this way,
 Cape Horn there figured fell,
 That here was Boston, here Bombay,
 She could declare full well.

Less known to her the track athwart
 From Mead or Yell'ham Wood
 Than how to make some Austral port
 In seas of surly mood.

She saw the glint of Guinea's shore
 Behind the plum-tree nigh,
 Heard old unruly Biscay's roar
 In the weir's purl hard by. . . .

"My son's a sailor, and he knows
 All seas and many lands,
 And when he's home he points and shows
 Each country where it stands.

"He's now just there—by Gib's high rock—
 And when he gets, you see,
 To Portsmouth here, behind the clock,
 Then he'll come back to me!"

ONE RALPH BLOSSOM SOLILOQUIZES

("It being deposed that vij women who were mayds before he knew them have been brought upon the towne [rates?] by the fornicacions of one Ralph Blossom, Mr. Maior inquired why he should not contribute xiv pence weekly toward their mayntenance. But it being shewn that the sayd R. B. was dying of a purple feaver, no order was made."—*Budmouth Borough Minutes*: 16—.)

WHEN I am in hell or some such place,
A-groaning over my sorry case,
What will those seven women say to me
Who, when I coaxed them, answered "Aye" to me?

"I did not understand your sign!"
Will be the words of Caroline;
While Jane will cry, "If I'd had proof of you,
I should have learnt to hold aloof of you!"

"I won't reproach: it was to be!"
Will dryly murmur Cicely;
And Rosa: "I feel no hostility,
For I must own I lent facility."

Lizzy says: "Sharp was my regret,
And sometimes it is now! But yet
I joy that, though it brought notoriousness,
I knew Love once and all its gloriousness!"

Says Patience: "Why are we apart?
Small harm did you, my poor Sweet Heart!
A manchild born, now tall and beautiful,
Was worth the ache of days undutiful."

And Anne cries: "O the time was fair,
So wherefore should you burn down there?
There is a deed under the sun, my Love,
And that was ours. What's done is done, my Love.
These trumpets here in Heaven are dumb to me
With you away. Dear, come, O come to me!"

THE NOBLE LADY'S TALE

(circa 1790)

I

“WE moved with pensive paces,
 I and he,
 And bent our faded faces
 Wistfully,
 For something troubled him, and troubled me.

“The lanthorn feebly lightened
 Our grey hall,
 Where ancient brands had brightened
 Hearth and wall,
 And shapes long vanished whither vanish all.

“‘O why, Love, nightly, daily,
 I had said,
 ‘Dost sigh, and smile so palely,
 As if shed
 Were all Life's blossoms, all its dear things dead?

“‘Since silence sets thee grieving,’
 He replied,
 ‘And I abhor deceiving
 One so tried,
 Why, Love, I'll speak, ere time us twain divide.

“He held me, I remember,
 Just as when
 Our life was June—(September
 It was then);
 And we walked on, until he spoke again:

“‘Susie, an Irish mummer,
 Loud-acclaimed
 Through the gay London summer,
 Was I; named
 A master in my art, who would be famed.

“ ‘But lo, there beamed before me
 Lady Su ;
 God's altar-vow she swore me
 When none knew,
 And for her sake I bade the sock adieu.

“ ‘My Lord your father's pardon
 Thus I won :
 He let his heart unhardened
 Towards his son,
 And honourably condoned what we had done ;

“ ‘But said—recall you, dearest ?—
As for Su,
I'd see her—ay, though nearest
Me unto—
Sooner entombed than in a stage purlieu!

“ ‘Just so.—And here he housed us,
 In this nook,
 Where Love like balm has drowsed us :
 Robin, rook,
 Our chief familiars, next to string and book.

“ ‘Our days here, peace-enshrouded,
 Followed strange
 The old stage-joyance, crowded,
 Rich in range ;
 But never did my soul desire a change,

“ ‘Till now, when far uncertain
 Lips of yore
 Call, call me to the curtain,
 There once more,
 But *once*, to tread the boards I trod before.

“ ‘A night—the last and single
 Ere I die—
 To face the lights, to mingle
 As did I
 Once in the game, and rivet every eye !’

“ ‘Such was his wish. He feared it,
 Feared it though

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

Rare memories so endeared it.
 I, also,
 Feared it still more ; its outcome who could know ?

“ ‘Alas, my Love,’ said I then,
 ‘ Since it be
 A wish so mastering, why, then,
 E’en go ye !—
 Despite your pledge to father and to me . . . ’

“ ‘Twas fixed ; no more was spoken
 Thereupon ;
 Our silences were broken
 Only on
 The petty items of his needs while gone.

“ Farewell he bade me, pleading
 That it meant
 So little, thus conceding
 To his bent ;
 And then, as one constrained to go, he went.

“ Thwart thoughts I let deride me,
 As, ’twere vain
 To hope him back beside me
 Ever again :
 Could one plunge make a waxing passion wane ?

“ I thought, ‘ Some wild stage-woman,
 Honour-wrecked . . . ’
 But no : it was inhuman
 To suspect ;
 Though little cheer could my lone heart affect !

II

“ Yet came it, to my gladness,
 That, as vowed,
 He did return.—But sadness
 Swiftly cowed
 The joy with which my greeting was endowed.

“Some woe was there. Estrangement
 Marked his mind.
 Each welcome-warm arrangement
 I had designed
 Touched him no more than deeds of careless kind.

“‘I—*failed!*’ escaped him glumly.
 ‘—I went on
 In my old part. But dumbly—
 Memory gone—
 Advancing, I sank sick; my vision drawn

“‘To something drear, distressing
 As the knell
 Of all hopes worth possessing!’ . . .
 —What befell
 Seemed linked with me, but how I could not tell.

“Hours passed; till I implored him,
 As he knew
 How faith and frankness toward him
 Ruled me through,
 To say what ill I had done, and could undo.

“‘*Faith—frankness.* Ah! Heaven save such!’
 Murmured he,
 ‘They are wedded wealth! I gave such
 Liberally,
 But you, Dear, not. For you suspected me.’

“I was about beseeching
 In hurt haste
 More meaning, when he, reaching
 To my waist,
 Led me to pace the hall as once we paced.

“‘I never meant to draw you
 To own all,’
 Declared he, ‘But—I *saw* you—
 By the wall,
 Half-hid. And that was why I failed withal!

“‘Where? when?’ said I—‘Why, nigh me,
 At the play

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

That night. That you should spy me,
 Doubt my fay,
 And follow, furtive, took my heart away!

“That I had never been there,
 But had gone
 To my locked room—unseen there,
 Curtains drawn,
 Long days abiding—told I, wonder-wan.

“‘Nay, ’twas your form and vesture,
 Cloak and gown,
 Your hooded features—gesture
 Half in frown,
 That faced me, pale,’ he urged, ‘that night in town.

“‘And when, outside, I handed
 To her chair
 (As courtesy demanded
 Of me there)
 The leading lady, you peeped from the stair.

“Straight pleaded I: ‘Forsooth, Love,
 Had I gone,
 I must have been in truth, Love,
 Mad to don
 Such well-known raiment.’ But he still went on

“That he was not mistaken
 Nor misled.—
 I felt like one forsaken,
 Wished me dead,
 That he could think thus of the wife he had wed!

“His going seemed to waste him
 Like a curse,
 To wreck what once had graced him ;
 And, averse
 To my approach, he mused, and moped, and worse.

“Till, what no words effected
 Thought achieved:

It was my wraith—projected,
 He conceived,
 Thither, by my tense brain at home aggrieved.

“Thereon his credence centred
 Till he died ;
 And, no more tempted, entered
 Sanctified,
 The little vault with room for one beside.”

III

Thus far the lady's story.—
 Now she, too,
 Reclines within that hoary
 Last dark mew
 In Mellstock Quire with him she loved so true.

A yellowing marble, placed there
 Tablet-wise,
 And two joined hearts enchased there
 Meet the eyes ;
 And reading their twin names we moralize :

Did she, we wonder, follow
 Jealously ?
 And were those protests hollow ?—
 Or saw he
 Some semblant dame ? Or can wraiths really be ?

Were it she went, her honour,
 All may hold,
 Pressed truth at last upon her
 Till she told—
 (Him only—others as these lines unfold.)

Riddle death-sealed for ever,
 Let it rest ! . . .
 One's heart could blame her never
 If one guessed
 That go she did. She knew her actor best.

UNREALIZED

DOWN comes the winter rain—
 Spoils my hat and bow—
 Runs into the poll of me ;
 But mother won't know.

We've been out and caught a cold,
 Knee-deep in snow ;
 Such a lucky thing it is
 That mother won't know !

Rosy lost herself last night—
 Couldn't tell where to go.
 Yes—it rather frightened her,
 But mother didn't know.

Somebody made Willy drunk
 At the Christmas show :
 O 'twas fun ! It's well for him
 That mother won't know !

Howsoever wild we are,
 Late at school or slow,
 Mother won't be cross with us,
 Mother won't know.

How we cried the day she died !
 Neighbours whispering low . . .
 But we now do what we will—
 Mother won't know.

WAGTAIL AND BABY

A BABY watched a ford, whereto
 A wagtail came for drinking ;
 A blaring bull went wading through,
 The wagtail showed no shrinking.

A stallion splashed his way across,
 The birdie nearly sinking ;
 He gave his plumes a twitch and toss,
 And held his own unblinking.

Next saw the baby round the spot
 A mongrel slowly slinking ;
 The wagtail gazed, but faltered not
 In dip and sip and prinking.

A perfect gentleman then neared ;
 The wagtail, in a winking,
 With terror rose and disappeared ;
 The baby fell a-thinking.

ABERDEEN

(April : 1905)

"And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times."—
 Isaiah xxxiii. 6.

I LOOKED and thought, "All is too gray and cold
 To wake my place-enthusiasms of old !"
 Till a voice passed : "Behind that granite mien
 Lurks the imposing beauty of a Queen."
 I looked anew ; and saw the radiant form
 Of Her who soothes in stress, who steers in storm,
 On the grave influence of whose eyes sublime
 Men count for the stability of the time.

GEORGE MEREDITH

(1828-1909)

FORTY years back, when much had place
 That since has perished out of mind,
 I heard that voice and saw that face.

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS

He spoke as one afoot will wind
 A morning horn ere men awake ;
 His note was trenchant, turning kind.

He was of those whose wit can shake
 And riddle to the very core
 The counterfeits that Time will break. . . .

Of late, when we two met once more,
 The luminous countenance and rare
 Shone just as forty years before.

So that, when now all tongues declare
 His shape unseen by his green hill,
 I scarce believe he sits not there.

No matter. Further and further still
 Through the world's vaporous vitiate air
 His words wing on—as live words will.

May 1909.

YELL'HAM-WOOD'S STORY

COOMB-FIRTREES say that Life is a moan,
 And Clyffe-hill Clump says "Yea!"
 But Yell'ham says a thing of its own :
 It's not "Gray, gray
 Is Life alway!"
 That Yell'ham says,
 Nor that Life is for ends unknown.

It says that Life would signify
 A thwarted purposing :
 That we come to live, and are called to die.
 Yes, that's the thing
 In fall, in spring,
 That Yell'ham says :—
 "Life offers—to deny!"

1902.

A YOUNG MAN'S EPIGRAM ON EXISTENCE

A SENSELESS school, where we must give
Our lives that we may learn to live!
A dolt is he who memorizes
Lessons that leave no time for prizes.

16 W. P. V., 1866.

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE
LYRICS AND REVERIES

LYRICS AND REVERIES

IN FRONT OF THE LANDSCAPE

PLUNGING and labouring on in a tide of visions,
Dolorous and dear,
Forward I pushed my way as amid waste waters
Stretching around,
Through whose eddies there glimmered the customary landscape
Yonder and near

Blotted to feeble mist. And the coomb and the upland
Coppice-crowned,
Ancient chalk-pit, milestone, rills in the grass-flat
Stroked by the light,
Seemed but a ghost-like gauze, and no substantial
Meadow or mound.

What were the infinite spectacles featuring foremost
Under my sight,
Hindering me to discern my paced advancement
Lengthening to miles ;
What were the re-creations killing the daytime
As by the night ?

O they were speechful faces, gazing insistent,
Some as with smiles,
Some as with slow-born tears that brinily trundled
Over the wrecked
Cheeks that were fair in their flush-time, ash now with anguish,
Harrowed by wiles.

Yes, I could see them, feel them, hear them, address them—
 Halo-bedecked—
 And, alas, onwards, shaken by fierce unreason,
 Rigid in hate,
 Smitten by years-long wryness born of misprision,
 Dreaded, suspect.

Then there would breast me shining sights, sweet seasons
 Further in date ;
 Instruments of strings with the tenderest passion
 Vibrant, beside
 Lamps long extinguished, robes, cheeks, eyes with the earth's
 crust
 Now corporate.

Also there rose a headland of hoary aspect
 Gnawed by the tide,
 Frilled by the nimb of the morning as two friends stood there
 Guilelessly glad—
 Wherefore they knew not—touched by the fringe of an ecstasy
 Scantly desried.

Later images too did the day unfurl me,
 Shadowed and sad,
 Clay cadavers of those who had shared in the dramas,
 Laid now at ease,
 Passions all spent, chiefest the one of the broad brow
 Sepulture-clad.

So did beset me scenes, miscalled of the bygone,
 Over the leaze,
 Past the clump, and down to where lay the beheld ones ;
 —Yea, as the rhyme
 Sung by the sea-swell, so in their pleading dumbness
 Captured me these.

For, their lost revisiting manifestations
 In their live time
 Much had I slighted, caring not for their purport,
 Seeing behind
 Things more coveted, reckoned the better worth calling
 Sweet, sad, sublime.

Thus do they now show hourly before the intenser
 Stare of the mind
 As they were ghosts avenging their slights by my bypast
 Body-borne eyes,
 Show, too, with fuller translation than rested upon them
 As living kind.

Hence wag the tongues of the passing people, saying
 In their surmise,
 "Ah—whose is this dull form that perambulates, seeing nought
 Round him that looms
 Whithersoever his footsteps turn in his farings,
 Save a few tombs?"

CHANNEL FIRING

THAT night your great guns, unawares,
 Shook all our coffins as we lay,
 And broke the chancel window-squares,
 We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearisome
 Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
 The mouse let fall the altar-crumbs,
 The worms drew back into the mounds,

The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, "No;
 It's gunnery practice out at sea
 Just as before you went below;
 The world is as it used to be:

"All nations striving strong to make
 Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
 They do no more for Christ's sake
 Than you who are helpless in such matters.

"That this is not the judgment-hour
 For some of them's a blessed thing,
 For if it were they'd have to scour
 Hell's floor for so much threatening. . . .

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE

"Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need)."

So down we lay again. "I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be,"
Said one, "than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!"

And many a skeleton shook his head.
"Instead of preaching forty year,"
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,
"I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer."

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

April 1914.

THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN

(Lines on the loss of the "Titanic")

I

IN a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls—grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed
 To ravish the sensuous mind
 Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
 Gaze at the gilded gear
 And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" . . .

VI

Well: while was fashioning
 This creature of cleaving wing,
 The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII

Prepared a sinister mate
 For her—so gaily great—
 A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew
 In stature, grace, and hue,
 In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be:
 No mortal eye could see
 The intimate welding of their later history,

X

Or sign that they were bent
 By paths coincident
 On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years
 Said "Now!" And each one hears,
 And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

THE GHOST OF THE PAST

WE two kept house, the Past and I,
 The Past and I;
 Through all my tasks it hovered nigh,
 Leaving me never alone.
 It was a spectral housekeeping
 Where fell no jarring tone,
 As strange, as still a housekeeping
 As ever has been known.

As daily I went up the stair
 And down the stair,
 I did not mind the Bygone there—
 The Present once to me;
 Its moving meek companionship
 I wished might ever be,
 There was in that companionship
 Something of ecstasy.

It dwelt with me just as it was,
 Just as it was
 When first its prospects gave me pause
 In wayward wanderings,
 Before the years had torn old troths
 As they tear all sweet things,
 Before gaunt griefs had torn old troths
 And dulled old rapturings.

And then its form began to fade,
 Began to fade,
 Its gentle echoes faintlier played
 At eves upon my ear
 Than when the autumn's look embrowned
 The lonely chambers here,
 When autumn's settling shades embrowned
 Nooks that it haunted near.

And so with time my vision less,
 Yea, less and less
 Makes of that Past my housemistress,
 It dwindles in my eye;

It looms a far-off skeleton
And not a comrade nigh,
A fitful far-off skeleton
Dimming as days draw by.

AFTER THE VISIT

(*To F. E. D.*)

COME again to the place
Where your presence was as a leaf that skims
Down a drouthy way whose ascent bedims
The bloom on the farer's face.

Come again, with the feet
That were light on the green as a thistledown ball,
And those mute ministrations to one and to all
Beyond a man's saying sweet.

Until then the faint scent
Of the bordering flowers swam unheeded away,
And I marked not the charm in the changes of day
As the cloud-colours came and went.

Through the dark corridors
Your walk was so soundless I did not know
Your form from a phantom's of long ago
Said to pass on the ancient floors,

Till you drew from the shade,
And I saw the large luminous living eyes
Regard me in fixed inquiring-wise
As those of a soul that weighed,

Scarce consciously,
The eternal question of what Life was,
And why we were there, and by whose strange laws
That which mattered most could not be.

TO MEET, OR OTHERWISE

WHETHER to sally and see thee, girl of my dreams,
 Or whether to stay
 And see thee not ! How vast the difference seems
 Of Yea from Nay
 Just now. Yet this same sun will slant its beams
 At no far day
 On our two mounds, and then what will the difference weigh !

 Yet I will see thee, maiden dear, and make
 The most I can
 Of what remains to us amid this brake
 Cimmerian
 Through which we grope, and from whose thorns we ache,
 While still we scan
 Round our frail faltering progress for some path or plan.

 By briefest meeting something sure is won ;
 It will have been :
 Nor God nor Demon can undo the done,
 Unsight the seen,
 Make muted music be as unbegun,
 Though things terrene
 Groan in their bondage till oblivion supervene.

 So, to the one long-sweeping symphony
 From times remote
 Till now, of human tenderness, shall we
 Supply one note,
 Small and untraced, yet that will ever be
 Somewhere afloat
 Amid the spheres, as part of sick Life's antidote.

THE DIFFERENCE

I

SINKING down by the gate I discern the thin moon,
 And a blackbird tries over old airs in the pine,
 But the moon is a sorry one, sad the bird's tune,
 For this spot is unknown to that Heartmate of mine.

II

Did my Heartmate but haunt here at times such as now,
 The song would be joyous and cheerful the moon ;
 But she will see never this gate, path, or bough,
 Nor I find a joy in the scene or the tune.

THE SUN ON THE BOOKCASE

(*Student's Love-song*: 1870)

ONCE more the cauldron of the sun
 Smears the bookcase with winy red,
 And here my page is, and there my bed,
 And the apple-tree shadows travel along.
 Soon their intangible track will be run,
 And dusk grow strong
 And they have fled.

Yes : now the boiling ball is gone,
 And I have wasted another day. . . .
 But wasted—*wasted*, do I say ?
 Is it a waste to have imaged one
 Beyond the hills there, who, anon,
 My great deeds done
 Will be mine always ?

"WHEN I SET OUT FOR LYONNESSE"

(1870)

WHEN I set out for Lyonesse,
 A hundred miles away,
 The rime was on the spray,
 And starlight lit my lonesomeness
 When I set out for Lyonesse
 A hundred miles away.

What would bechance at Lyonesse
 While I should sojourn there
 No prophet durst declare,

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Nor did the wisest wizard guess
 What would bechance at Lyonesse
 While I should sojourn there.

When I came back from Lyonesse
 With magic in my eyes,
 All marked with mute surmise
 My radiance rare and fathomless,
 When I came back from Lyonesse
 With magic in my eyes.

A THUNDERSTORM IN TOWN

(*A Reminiscence* : 1893)

SHE wore a new "terra-cotta" dress,
 And we stayed, because of the pelting storm,
 Within the hansom's dry recess,
 Though the horse had stopped; yea, motionless
 We sat on, snug and warm.

Then the downpour ceased, to my sharp sad pain,
 And the glass that had screened our forms before
 Flew up, and out she sprang to her door :
 I should have kissed her if the rain
 Had lasted a minute more.

THE TORN LETTER

I

I TORE your letter into strips
 No bigger than the airy feathers
 That ducks preen out in changing weathers
 Upon the shifting ripple-tips.

II

In darkness on my bed alone
 I seemed to see you in a vision,
 And hear you say : "Why this derision
 Of one drawn to you, though unknown?"