

THE POEMS OF
THOMAS HARDY

THE POEMS OF
THOMAS HARDY
A New Selection

Selected and introduced by
NED HALLEY



MACMILLAN COLLECTOR'S LIBRARY



This collection first published 2017 by Macmillan Collector's Library
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-5098-2680-3

Introduction copyright © Ned Halley 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means
(electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the publisher.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Casing design and endpaper pattern by Andrew Davidson
Printed and bound in China by Imago

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of
trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out, or otherwise circulated without
the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than
that in which it is published and without a similar condition including
this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Visit www.panmacmillan.com to read more about all our books
and to buy them. You will also find features, author interviews and
news of any author events, and you can sign up for e-newsletters
so that you're always first to hear about our new releases.

Contents

Introduction xxi

WESSEX POEMS AND OTHER VERSES

Preface 3

The Temporary the All 5

Amabel 6

Hap 8

Her Dilemma 9

Revulsion 10

She, to Him I 11

She, to Him II 12

She, to Him III 13

She, to Him IV 14

She at His Funeral 15

The Sergeant's Song 16

The Burghers 17

Her Death and After 20

The Dance at the Phoenix 25

A Sign-Seeker 31

The Ivy-Wife 33

Friends Beyond 34

San Sebastian 37

v

Contents

Thoughts of Phena 40
Middle-Age Enthusiasms 41
 In a Wood 42
 Neutral Tones 44
Nature's Questioning 45
The Bride-Night Fire 47
Heiress and Architect 53
I Look Into My Glass 56

POEMS OF THE PAST AND
THE PRESENT

Preface 59

WAR POEMS

Embarcation 61
Departure 62
At the War Office, London 63
A Christmas Ghost-Story 64
 Drummer Hodge 65
The Souls of the Slain 66
The Sick Battle-God 71

POEMS OF PILGRIMAGE

Genoa and the Mediterranean 74
 Shelley's Skylark 75
In the Old Theatre, Fiesole 76
Rome: On the Palatine 77

Contents

- Rome: Building a New Street in the
Ancient Quarter 78
- Rome The Vatican: Sala delle Muse 79
- Lausanne In Gibbon's Old
Garden: 11–12 p.m. 80
- On an Invitation to the United States 81

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

- I Said to Love 82
- At a Lunar Eclipse 84
- The Subalterns 85
- The Sleep-Worker 86
- The Bullfinches 87
- God-Forgotten 89
- The Bedridden Peasant 91
- By the Earth's Corpse 93
- Mute Opinion 95
- To an Unborn Pauper Child 96
- To Lizbie Browne 98
- The Well-Beloved 101
- Her Reproach 104
- A Broken Appointment 105
- How Great My Grief 106
- I Need Not Go 107
- The Coquette, and After 109
- The Widow Betrothed 110

Contents

His Immortality	112
The To-Be-Forgotten	113
An August Midnight	115
Birds at Winter Nightfall	116
The Puzzled Game-Birds	117
The Last Chrysanthemum	118
The Darkling Thrush	119
The Comet at Yell'ham	121
The Dame of Athelhall	122
A Wasted Illness	125
The Levelled Churchyard	127
The Ruined Maid	128
The Respectable Burgher	129
Architectural Masks	131
The Tenant-for-Life	132
The King's Experiment	133
The Tree	135
The Self-Unseeing	138
In Tenebris I	139
In Tenebris II	140
In Tenebris III	142
The Church-Builder	144
The Lost Pyx	148
Tess's Lament	151

Contents

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS
AND OTHER VERSES

Preface 155

A Trampwoman's Tragedy 157

The House of Hospitalities 162

Bereft 163

John and Jane 164

The Rejected Member's Wife 165

Autumn in King's Hintock Park 166

Reminiscences of a Dancing Man 167

The Dead Man Walking 169

MORE LOVE LYRICS

Her Definition 171

On the Departure Platform 172

In a Cathedral City 173

I Say, 'I'll Seek Her 174

At Waking 175

Four Footprints 177

The End of the Episode 178

The Sigh 179

The Conformers 181

The Dawn after the Dance 183

Misconception 185

The Voice of the Thorn 186

From Her in the Country 187

Contents

To an Impersonator of Rosalind 188

To an Actress 189

He Abjures Love 190

A SET OF COUNTRY SONGS

Let Me Enjoy 192

At Casterbridge Fair 193

The Dark-Eyed Gentleman 200

To Carrey Clavel 201

The Orphaned Old Maid 202

The Spring Call 203

Julie-Jane 204

The Husband's View 206

Rose-Ann 208

PIECES OCCASIONAL AND VARIOUS

A Church Romance 209

A Dream Question 210

By the Barrows 211

The Roman Road 212

The Rambler 213

Night in the Old Home 214

The Pine Planters 215

After the Last Breath 218

One We Knew 219

She Hears the Storm 221

Contents

God's Education 222
 The Unborn 223
The Man He Killed 224
 Wagtail and Baby 225
 George Meredith 226
Yell'ham-Wood's Story 227

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE

LYRICS AND REVERIES

In Front of the Landscape 231
 Channel Firing 234
The Convergence of the Twain 236
 The Ghost of the Past 238
 After the Visit 240
When I Set Out for Lyonesse 241
 Wessex Heights 242
 The Place on the Map 245
 The Schreckhorn 247
A Thunderstorm in Town 248
 The Torn Letter 249
The Face at the Casement 251
 My Spirit Will Not Haunt the
 Mound 254
 In Death Divided 255
 A Singer Asleep 257

Contents

A Plaint to Man 260
God's Funeral 262
Spectres that Grieve 266
Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave? 267
Before and after Summer 269
At Day-Close in November 270
The Year's Awakening 271
Under the Waterfall 272

POEMS OF 1912-13

The Going 274
Your Last Drive 276
The Walk 278
Rain on a Grave 279
I Found Her Out There 281
Without Ceremony 283
Lament 284
The Haunter 286
The Voice 288
His Visitor 289
A Circular 290
A Dream or No 291
After a Journey 292
A Death-Day Recalled 294
Beeny Cliff 295
At Castle Boterel 297

Contents

Places 299

The Phantom Horsewoman 300

The Spell of the Rose 302

St Launce's Revisited 304

Where the Picnic Was 305

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES

The Cheval-Glass 306

She Charged Me 308

The Newcomer's Wife 309

A King's Soliloquy 310

Aquae Sulis 312

Bereft, She Thinks She Dreams 314

In the British Museum 315

In the Servants' Quarters 316

Regret Not Me 318

The Recalcitrants 320

The Moth-Signal 321

Seen by the Waits 323

The Two Soldiers 324

The Death of Regret 325

The Roman Gravemounds 326

The Workbox 327

The Jubilee of a Magazine 329

The Satin Shoes 331

Contents

MOMENTS OF VISION AND
MISCELLANEOUS VERSES

- Moments of Vision 337
- Afternoon Service at Mellstock 338
- In a Museum 339
- Apostrophe to an Old Psalm Tune 340
- At the Word 'Farewell' 342
- Heredity 344
- You Were the Sort that Men Forget 345
- Near Lanivet, 1872 346
- Copying Architecture in an Old Minster 348
- To Shakespeare 350
- On a Midsummer Eve 352
- The Blinded Bird 353
- To My Father's Violin 354
- The Young Churchwarden 356
- Lines 357
- The Occultation 358
- Life Laughs Onward 359
- Something Tapped 360
- The Announcement 361
- The Oxen 362
- In Her Precincts 363
- Transformations 364
- The Last Signal 365

Contents

Great Things 366
The Blow 368
The Musical Box 369
On Sturminster Foot-Bridge 371
Old Furniture 372
Logs on the Hearth 374
The Caged Goldfinch 375
At Madame Tussaud's in Victorian Years 376
The Ballet 377
The Five Students 378
During Wind and Rain 380
Paying Calls 381
Who's in the Next Room? 382
The Memorial Brass: 186– 383
The Upper Birch-Leaves 384
He Revisits His First School 385
Midnight on the Great Western 386
The Choirmaster's Burial 387

POEMS OF WAR AND PATRIOTISM
Men Who March Away 389
His Country 391
England to Germany in 1914 392
On the Belgian Expatriation 393
An Appeal to America on Behalf of the
Belgian Destitute 394

Contents

The Pity of It 395
In Time of Wars and Tumults 396
In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations' 397
 Cry of the Homeless 398
 Before Marching and After 399
 Often When Warring 400
 Then and Now 401
 A Call to National Service 402
The Dead and the Living One 403
A New Year's Eve in War Time 405
 I Met a Man 407
I Looked Up from My Writing 409

FINALE

The Coming of the End 410
 Afterwards 412

LATE LYRICS AND EARLIER

Weathers 417
The Maid of Keinton Mandeville 418
 At a House in Hampstead 419
 'And There Was a Great Calm' 421
 A Young Man's Exhortation 424
At Lulworth Cove a Century Back 425
The Children and Sir Nameless 426
At the Railway Station, Upway 427

Contents

- An Autumn Rain-Scene 428
- Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard 429
- By Henstridge Cross at the Year's End 431
- A Procession of Dead Days 433
- The Marble Tablet 435
- The Master and the Leaves 436
- In the Small Hours 437
- On One Who Lived and Died Where
 He Was Born 438
- She Who Saw Not 440
- The Lament of the Looking-Glass 441
- The Casual Acquaintance 442
- The Whitewashed Wall 443

HUMAN SHOWS, FAR PHANTASIES,
SONGS, AND TRIFLES

- Waiting Both 447
- The Monument-Maker 448
- Last Week in October 449
- An East-End Curate 450
- At Rushy-Pond 451
- A Spellbound Palace 452
- The Graveyard of Dead Creeds 454
- Life and Death at Sunrise 455
- One Who Married Above Him 457
- Nobody Comes 459

Contents

- The Faithful Swallow 460
In Sherborne Abbey 461
Snow in the Suburbs 463
Last Look round St Martin's Fair 464
 The Prospect 465
When Oats Were Reaped 466
 The Harbour Bridge 467
 Not Only I 469
 The Missed Train 470
 The Sheep-Boy 471
 Retty's Phases 472
 Bags of Meat 474
Shortening Days at the Homestead 476
 To C.F.H. 477
 On Martock Moor 478
The Bird-Catcher's Boy 480
 A Hurried Meeting 483
Song to an Old Burden 485

WINTER WORDS IN VARIOUS MOODS
AND METRES

- Introductory Note* 489
The New Dawn's Business 491
Proud Songsters 492
I Am the One 493

Contents

The Prophetess	494
To Louisa in the Lane	495
Liddell and Scott	496
Expectation and Experience	499
Evening Shadows	500
The Lodging-House Fuchsias	501
Throwing a Tree	502
Her Second Husband Hears Her Story	504
The Lady in the Furs	505
Childhood among the Ferns	506
I Watched a Blackbird	507
The Felled Elm and She	508
The Clasped Skeletons	509
After the Burial	511
Concerning Agnes	512
Henley Regatta	513
We Field-Women	514
Squire Hooper	515
The Second Visit	517
He Never Expected Much	518
Our Old Friend Dualism	519
A Forgotten Miniature	520
The Aged Newspaper Soliloquizes	521
June Leaves and Autumn	522
Christmas: 1924	523

Contents

The Single Witness	524
How She Went to Ireland	525
Dead 'Wessex' the Dog to the Household	526
The Boy's Dream	528
Family Portraits	529
He Resolves to Say No More	531
Index of titles	533
Index of first lines	545

Introduction

NED HALLEY

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840, just as the landscape of English literature was relocating from the lyric era of the Romantic movement to the new realism of the Victorian novel. As industrious Britain boomed and literacy burgeoned, the poets of the day, embodied by the ageing William Wordsworth, were making way for the masters of shrewdly observed popular fiction, personified in Charles Dickens.

Hardy, destined to succeed both Wordsworth as a poet of genius and Dickens as the leading novelist of his own day, came from a Dorset family of good lineage (Nelson's famed flag captain was kin), but who had fallen on hard times. His father, also Thomas, was a self-employed builder, but a keen musician besides. A leading member of his parish church choir, he played the violin and successfully coached young Thomas in the instrument. His mother Jemima had been in service before marriage, but her own family had instilled in her a love of books. She taught her son to read by the age of four, and passed on to him her passion for the poetry of Virgil and Milton and the novels of Fielding, Scott and the French Romantics.

From the family's thatched cottage (now a National Trust treasure) at Higher Bockhampton in the parish of Stinsford, an hour's walk from the county town of Dorchester, the young man could roam green pastures and sinuous hills, harsh heaths and dark woodlands, acquiring the lifelong love of nature and the traditions

Introduction

of farming that are elemental in all his writings. He well understood that the customs – and privations – of the rural life of his childhood were being irretrievably transformed by the agricultural and industrial revolutions of the time. He observed the erosion of the close-knit peasant culture that had prevailed for centuries in the region he came to call Wessex in his literature, and missed no opportunity in his poetry, fiction and journalism to examine its passing.

Hardy's education was curtailed. Only when a new National School for 'the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Establish Church' happened to open in his parish in 1848 was he taught by anyone other than his mother. Two years later, aged ten, he went on to a non-conformist school in Dorchester. Jemima, forever determined on his improvement, paid for him to have Latin lessons, but the family could not afford to send their boy, promising though he was, to university. At sixteen he was articled to a Dorchester architect, John Hicks, who built or restored more than twenty churches in Dorset over the next dozen years.

Hicks was a scholarly man dedicated to the Gothic style. Hardy admired him, proved an able apprentice, and in later life described just how much his architectural training influenced his writing. 'He knew,' he recalled in his third-person autobiography *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, 'that in architecture cunning irregularity is of enormous worth, and it is obvious that he carried on into his verse, perhaps unconsciously, the Gothic art-principle in which he had been trained – the principle of spontaneity, found in mouldings, tracery, and such-like – resulting in the "unforeseen" (as it has been called) character of his metres and stanzas.'

In 1862 Hardy, already an aspiring poet, moved to

Introduction

London. He needed to advance his career and very likely also hoped to make a new start on his romantic life. He had fallen first for a Dorset girl, Elizabeth Sarah Bishop – poignantly remembered in the poem ‘Lizbie Browne’ – who spurned him, and then another, Mary Waight, who refused his offer of marriage on the grounds he was too young. In London he found work as ‘a gothic draughtsman who could design and restore churches and rectory houses’ with the architectural practice of Arthur Blomfield. It was a major step up. Blomfield, son of a former Bishop of London, was a leading ecclesiastical architect and a kindly, good-humoured man who thought well of Hardy. The new arrival took to metropolitan life, frequenting the galleries and museums, theatres and dance halls. He formed a close but chaste friendship with a Dorset-born young woman, Eliza Nicholls, who lived near him in Paddington. And he read. He devoured Shakespeare and every kind of poetry; he read political and philosophical periodicals and contemporary novels. He enrolled at King’s College for French lessons. He began to experiment with journalism, and learned shorthand. He honed his poems and offered some of them – including ‘Hap’, ‘Neutral Tones’ and, with its reflections on Eliza Nicholls, ‘She, to Him’ – to the London magazines. None were accepted.

After five years in London, Hardy returned home. Below middle height, of slight build and never robust in health, he was not made for life in an overcrowded metropolis plagued by vile pollution, cholera and crime. And he was wearied by the struggle to subsist on a salary of £110 in the world’s largest and richest city. But he had learned much in his profession, he had made good friends, and he had invented himself as a writer. Although a market for his verse still eluded him,

Introduction

a breakthrough had come in 1865 when the *Chambers's Journal* published 'How I Built Myself a House', an article Hardy had written for the amusement of his work colleagues about architect-client relationships. The acceptance of the piece and the £3 15s paid for it – his first literary earnings – 'determined' the new course of his life, Hardy declared.

Another change had come to him in London. Although brought up in the church and for a time minded to study for holy orders, he now questioned Christian doctrine. He had read Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (published in 1859), and became influenced by religiously sceptical friends. One in particular was Horace Moule, whom Hardy knew from his Dorset days. Handsome and cultivated, Moule was a brilliant classicist, a wayward, perpetual Cambridge student, gifted poet and journalist, musician and teacher. He was eight years Hardy's senior and the younger man idolized him. It was at Moule's urging that Hardy, still in his teens, began to read the liberal weekly *Saturday Review*, which inspired his political, cultural and religious thinking for all his life.

Moule, a depressive alcoholic, committed suicide in 1873. Hardy grieved and forever acknowledged his friend's influence, dedicating several poems to his memory. The loss may have extinguished the last of Hardy's Christian faith, and certainly fuelled his notorious pessimism over the human condition.

But by this time Hardy had found his way. Back in Dorset in 1867, he fell happily in love for the first time, with a cousin, Tryphena Sparks, then just sixteen. In the following year, however, he met his future wife. Emma Gifford was the sister-in-law of the rector at St Juliot, Cornwall, where Hardy was sent to restore the church.

Introduction

He forsook Tryphena (later mourned as ‘my lost prize’ in the poem ‘Thoughts of Phena’) for Emma’s undoubted charms. She was his own age, cultured and attractive, and a fearless horsewoman – an attribute Hardy found particularly alluring. Her family believed themselves socially above her suitor, but she took to Hardy, and encouraged him to write. Anxious to please her, he produced his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, in 1868. A publisher’s reader, the established author George Meredith, rejected the book (a satire of fashionable London life, long lost) but encouraged Hardy to try something more suited to the market. It was a marker of Hardy’s resourcefulness that within a year he wrote a second novel in the ‘sensation’ manner, *Desperate Remedies*, and had it published.

In 1872 came *Under the Greenwood Tree*, followed by *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in 1873. In 1874, *Far from the Madding Crowd* became his first major critical and commercial success. He quit architecture to take up full-time writing, and in the same year finally married Emma – in spite of her family’s continued snobbish disdain.

Hardy’s sudden manifestation as a popular novelist – he had transformed himself from neglected poet to prolific author in just three years – was a remarkable achievement. It was all the more so in light of his own self-view: that he was never really a novelist at all. He tried to explain it, again in the third person, in his autobiography. ‘It was not as if he had been a writer of novels proper, and as more specifically understood, that is, stories of modern artificial life and manners showing a certain smartness of treatment. He had mostly aimed, and mostly succeeded, to keep his narratives close to natural life, and as near to poetry in their subject as the

Introduction

conditions would allow, and had often regretted that those conditions would not let him keep them nearer still.’

He saw himself, first and always, as a poet. All through the years in which he produced his fifteen completed novels, including *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in 1891 and his last, *Jude the Obscure* in 1895, he continued to write poems, but very few were published. He wrote prolifically for magazines including his lifelong favourite *Saturday Review* and *Cornhill*, which serialized his novels as well as publishing his many short stories. Over the same period he also worked on his epic, three-volume drama *The Dynasts*, a saga of the Napoleonic wars, published between 1904 and 1908.

Hardy renounced the writing of novels as abruptly as he had taken it up. He had grown accustomed to criticism that his tales, however beautifully observed, were pessimistic, atheistic and even indecent, but he seemed unprepared for the outrage that greeted *Jude the Obscure*. Among the objectors was the Bishop of Wakefield, who made a theatrical gesture of burning the book. ‘Probably in his despair at not being able to burn me,’ noted Hardy. But he had tired of controversy, and was aware of the strain placed on Emma, who was horrified by the abuse heaped upon her husband. In spite of Hardy’s fame and wealth – there was a large Dorset house, Max Gate, designed by Hardy, plus a place in London and much comfortable travelling on the Continent – the marriage had not been a happy one. There were no children.

In 1896, to the astonishment of his worldwide readership, Hardy made it known he would write no more novels. He would turn to poetry. The first collection, called *Wessex Poems* – the name Wessex for southwest

Introduction

England was very much of his own devising – was published in 1898. Included were poems written in his young London days. These already reveal Hardy's concept of the human struggle for life and love in a cruel cosmos. The opening verse of 'Hap', from 1866, is a clear prototype:

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!'

Hardy's poetry, from the beginning, makes it immediately obvious why he became such a hugely popular author. In verse and fiction equally, he dared to delineate the existential dread that haunts every sentient soul, and he did it in a voice that rang true.

At the time the collection was published, the *Wessex Poems* did not receive the sort of acclaim – or obloquy – that had greeted his novels. But the critics were no doubt still recovering from the disappointment of losing their most celebrated and controversial prey.

In 1901 came Hardy's second collection, *Poems of the Past and Present*. Included were verses of reflection on the Boer War:

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.

Hardy was by now sourcing much of his poetry in events – his later topical verse referenced the sinking of the *Titanic* as well as the Great War – and this collection

Introduction

also included picturesque and keenly observed accounts of European travels. Many of the poems were now published in newspapers and magazines before inclusion in the collections. One poem (among many) that illustrated Hardy's latent comicality was 'The Ruined Maid' of 1866:

'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.

A further collection, *Time's Laughingstocks*, appeared in 1909 and a fourth, *Satires of Circumstance*, in 1914. Among the latter were the *Poems of 1912–13* with the epigraph *Veteris vestigia flammae* – 'traces of remembered love' – from Virgil's *Aeneid*. These twenty-one verses, all included in this edition, were written in shocked memory of Emma, who had died unexpectedly in November 1912. The regret Hardy expressed at his estrangement from Emma in her last years is every bit as poignant as his grief at her passing. It is, as so much of his poetry, a light shone into the soul.

Nevertheless, these masterpieces and the further collections that followed, written in an astounding variety of forms, did not excite a fraction of the interest among critics or the reading public that the novels had done. More attention was paid to his second marriage in 1914 than to *Satires of Circumstance*. The bride was Florence Dugdale, aged 35 (Hardy was 74), who had been the poet's secretary and close friend for some years. This new arrangement might have raised eyebrows but it did not interrupt the process of lionization that the grand old man of letters had already begun. He had reputedly refused a knighthood, but accepted the Order of Merit

Introduction

– in the personal gift of the Sovereign – in 1910, and was serially nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. There was surprise when, in 1913, Hardy was passed over for Poet Laureate. Robert Bridges was preferred. It was whispered that the Anglican Church had not liked verses such as ‘God’s Funeral’ of 1908–10:

And, tricked by our own early dream
And need of solace, we grew self-deceived,
Our making soon our maker did we dream,
And what we had imagined we believed.

Thomas Hardy died aged 87 on 11 January 1928. He had wished to be buried under the stone he had designed for Emma, next to his parents, in the churchyard at Stinsford, but his executors insisted on a service at Westminster Abbey, and the interment of his ashes in Poet’s Corner. A large crowd gathered outside the Abbey on the day and the mourners within included Stanley Baldwin and Ramsay Macdonald. Among the pall-bearers were J. M. Barrie, John Galsworthy, A. E. Housman, Rudyard Kipling and George Bernard Shaw.

Simultaneous with the great national event, a quieter funeral was held at Stinsford. Hardy’s widow Florence and his two surviving siblings had negotiated the removal of the poet’s heart before his cremation, and this was buried alongside Emma.

As a poet, Hardy’s reputation was a shadow of his fame as a novelist in his own time and for many years after. But his place as a poet in the continuum of the English canon has become progressively more sure. He was soon perceived as a bridge between the Victorian era and twentieth-century Modernism. Virginia Woolf, dazzling high priestess of Modernism, wrote a famous essay on Hardy immediately after his death, which

Introduction

concluded with the observation that he had been ‘a profound and poetic genius, a gentle and humane soul’.

Hardy’s high standing as a poet today has been long in the making. Philip Larkin laid a milestone in 1966 when he declared that the *Collected Poems* of 1930 (including more than 900 of Hardy’s verses) was ‘many times over the best body of poetic work this century so far has to show’. Would he revise that judgement now? Fifty years on, in the present century, Hardy’s calm, melancholy rationalism, his theological scepticism and above all his profound sincerity seem ever more convincing and timely. In the lyric context of his enduringly moving poetry, his words will forever ring true.

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.

September 1898

T.H.

¹ The early editions were illustrated by the writer. [*Editor's note:* This footnote and all other footnotes in the text are Hardy's own.]

The Temporary the All

(*Sapphics*)

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 showance those of my onward earth-track –
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!"

1865

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

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 monotones.

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

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-

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

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, undull'd 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-robles, 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.

'I'll 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.’
– ‘Not mortal?’ said he. ‘Lingering – worse,’ said I.

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 whine –
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.

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 nod
 By her hallowed sod
 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
 From its hollows of chalk and loam.

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 compunctions 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,
 It only she could know!

The Dance at the Phoenix

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 Phoenix 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-yearred
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.

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.

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!

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.

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,
Passed 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!

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 unsight
 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.

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

See '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
Lothly 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

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 of 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

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 Life and Death are neighbours
nigh.

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

2 *tranted*, traded as carrier

3 *horned*, sang loudly

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 vlinkers⁴ 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.

1 *leer*, empty-stomached

2 *tidetimes*, holidays

3 *linhay*, lean-to building

4 *vlinkers*, fire-flakes

5 *chimley-tun*, chimney-stack

6 *rafted*, roused

7 *crooping*, squatting down

8 *lewth*, shelter

9 *bivering*, with chattering teeth

Her cwoold little figure half-naked he views
 Played about by the frolicsome breeze,
Her light-tripping totties,¹ her ten little tooes,
All bare and besprinkled wi' Fall's² chilly dews,
While her great gallied³ eyes through her hair hanging
 loose
 Shone as stars through a tardle⁴ 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 heft⁵ o' misfortune she bore.

'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 mid⁶ almost ha' borne it,' she said,
 'Had my griefs one by one come to hand;
But O, to be slave to thik husbird,⁷ 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!'

1 *totties*, feet

2 *Fall*, autumn

3 *gallied*, frightened

4 *tardle*, entanglement

5 *heft*, weight

6 *mid*, might

7 *thik husbird*, that rascal

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,¹ and apples, and hay,
 They lumpered² straight into the night;
And finding ere long where a halter-path³ 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 shrammed⁴ to death, stood and cried on a
 chair
 At the caddie⁵ she found herself in.

There was one thing to do, and that one thing he did,
 He lent her some clothes of his own,
And she took 'em perforce; and while swiftly she slid

1 *mixens*, manure-heaps
2 *lumpered*, stumbled
3 *halter-path*, bridle-path
4 *shrammed*, numbed
5 *caddie*, quandary

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 elements' 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.

1 *mid*, might

2 *tallet*, loft

3 *huddied*, hidden

4 *skimmity-ride*, satirical procession with effigies

5 *wold*, old

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

Heiress and Architect

For A. W. Blomfield

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.’

‘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. 8 Adelphi Terrace

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.

August 1901

T.H.

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 sway in each proud land
And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?'

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.

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 new – deeds of fondness or fret;
Ancient words that were kindly expressed or unkindly,
These, these have their heeds.’

XII

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

XIII

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

XIV

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

XV

And, towering to seaward in legions,
They paused at a spot
Overbending the Race –
That 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

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

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

And thereacross waved fishwives' high-hung smocks,
Chrome kerchiefs, scarlet hose, darned underfrocks;
Often since when my dreams of thee, O Queen, that
frillery 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, wooer, 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 causet to be –
Extern to thee nothing. Grieve not, nor thyself becall,
Woo where thou wilt; and rejoice thou canst love at all!'

Lausanne
In Gibbon's Old Garden: 11–12 p.m.
27 June 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 withal and grand:
He contemplates a volume in his hand,
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"?*'

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

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

I Said to Love

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

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

I said to Love,
'Thou art not young, thou art not fair,
No 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.

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 Subalterns

I

'Poor wanderer,' said the leaden sky,
 'I fain would lighten thee,
But there are 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 had less
Of that fell look 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 to-day's pale pinions fold
Where they 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 unknows or she unheeds,
All things making for Death's taking!
– So the green-gowned faeries say
Living over Blackmoor way.

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

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

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

But Thou, Lord, giv'st 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 songsings to fear.

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

To 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!

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
Slid 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 men's idolatries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

– ‘O then,’ I answered miserably,
Speaking as scarce I knew,
‘My loved one, I must wed with thee
If what thou 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 eclipse it with their own,

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

Westbourne Park Villas, 1867

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?

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 tarry 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!

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 loved 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!

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 distressed,
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.’

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

Birds at Winter Nightfall

(Triolet)

Around the house the flakes fly faster,
And all the berries now are gone
From holly and cotonea-aster
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

(Triplet)

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!

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 of 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 arose 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 carolings
 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.

31 December 1900

The Comet at 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.

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 predesigned:
And they clasped, and mounted, and cleft the air
Upon whirling wheels; till the will to bind
Her life with his made the moments there
 Efface the years behind.

III

Miles slid, and the 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 day tide 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.'

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.

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 porch or 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 sturdy 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 tramped, 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 strain;
And later Hodge, upon the midday stroke,
Returned along the lane,

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Tree
An Old Man's Story

I

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

Thus ends the tree
Where Some One sat with me.

II

Its boughs, which none but darers trod,
A child may step on from the sod,
And twigs that earliest met the dawn
Are lit the last upon the lawn.

Cart off the tree
Beneath whose trunk sat we!

III

Yes, there we sat: she cooed content,
And bats ringed round, and daylight went;
The gnarl, our seat, is wrenched and sunk,
Prone that queer pocket in the trunk

Where lay the key
To her pale mystery.

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

'My lover's wife – aye, wife – knew nought
 Of what we felt, and bore, and thought. . . .
 He'd said: *"I wed with thee or die:
 She stands between, 'tis true. But why?
 Do thou agree,
 And – she 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,
 Distraught went she –
 'Twas said for love of me.

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

1895-96

In Tenebris III

'Heu mihi, quia incolatus meus prolongatus est! Habitavi cum habitantibus Cedar. Multum incola fuit anima mea.'

– Ps. CXIX

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

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

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

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

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

1896

The Church-Builder

I

The church flings forth a battled shade
Over the moon-blanchèd 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 ashlarèd masonry;
I moulded mullions thick and thin,
Hewèd fillet and ogee:
I circletèd
Each sculpturèd head
With nimb and canopy.

III

I callèd in many a craftsman
To fix emblazonèd 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 substanted!' said my soul:
'I heard me bidden to this deed,
And straight obeyed the call.
Illume this fane,
That not in vain
I build it, Lord of all!'

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

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

X

The rich red windows dim the moon,
But little light need I;
I mount the prie-dieu, lately hewn
From woods of rarest dye;
Then from below
My garment, so,
I draw this cord, and tie

XI

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

XII

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

The Lost Pyx
A Mediæval 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.

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.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tess's Lament

I

I would that folk forgot me quite,
 Forgot me quite!
I would that I could shrink from sight,
 And no more see the sun.
Would it were time to say farewell,
To claim my nook, to need my knell,
Time for them all to stand and tell
 Of my day's work as done.

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

TIME'S LAUGHINGSTOCKS
AND OTHER VERSES

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.

September 1909

T.H.

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'¹ 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,

1 'Windwhistle' – 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.

And gained the inn at sink of sun
Far-famed as 'Marshal's Elm'.¹
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!
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.

¹ 'Marshal's Elm', 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.

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 Jimmy¹ 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.

1 'Blue Jimmy' 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 Ivelchester 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.

'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.

April 1902

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 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

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.

1901

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,
 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

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 fitless – 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

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!

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.

The End of the Episode

Indulge no more may we
In this sweet-bitter pastime:
The love-light shines the last time
Between you, Dear, 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.

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 thoroughly,
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.

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.

Weymouth, 1869

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!

16 W.P.V., 1866

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, 21 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 journey work, but due
To springs that then were sealed up utterly?

1867

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.

1883

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 dreams unknown
I'll pour out raptures that belong
To others, as they were my own.

IV

And some day hence, towards 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,¹
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.

¹ 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.¹

From Clock-corner steps, as each quarter ding-dongs,
 Away the folk roam
By the 'Hart' and Grey's Bridge into byways and
 'drongs',
 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

1 'The chimes' will be listened for in vain here at midnight now, having been abolished some years ago.

The Dark-Eyed Gentleman

I

I pitched my day's leazings¹ in Crimmercock 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!

¹ *Leazings*, 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.

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 coats¹, 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.

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.

1 *coats*, old name for petticoats.

‘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.

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!

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'.

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.

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
Helméd legionaries, who proudly rear
The Eagle, as they pace again
The Roman Road.

But no tall brass-helméd 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 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!'

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?

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.

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.

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

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.

20 May 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.

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.'
He mused. 'The thought is new to me.
Forsooth, though I men's master be,
Theirs is the teaching mind!'

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.

1905

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.'

1902

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.

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.

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

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE

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 customed
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 descried.

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 drearissime
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar-crumb,
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. . . .

'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 thrud, 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.

When I Set Out for Lyonesse

(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,
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!

Wessex Heights

(1896)

There are some heights in Wessex, shaped as if by a
 kindly hand
For thinking, dreaming, dying on, and at crises when
 I stand,
Say, on Ingpen Beacon eastward, or on Wyls-Neck
 westwardly,
I seem where I was before my birth, and after death
 may be.

In the lowlands I have no comrade, not even the lone
 man's friend –
Her who suffereth long and is kind; accepts what he is
 too weak to mend:
Down there they are dubious and askance; there
 nobody thinks as I,
But mind-chains do not clank where one's next
 neighbour is the sky.

In the towns I am tracked by phantoms having weird
 detective ways –
Shadows of beings who fellowed with myself of earlier
 days:
They hang about at places, and they say harsh heavy
 things –
Men with a wintry sneer, and women with tart
 disparagings.

Down there I seem to be false to myself, my simple
 self that was,
And is not now, and I see him watching, wondering
 what crass cause

Can have merged him into such a strange continuator
as this,
Who yet has something in common with himself, my
chrysalis.

I cannot go to the great grey Plain; there's a figure
against the moon,
Nobody sees it but I, and it makes my breast beat out
of tune;
I cannot go to the tall-spired town, being barred by
the forms now passed
For everybody but me, in whose long vision they
stand there fast.

There's a ghost at Yell'ham Bottom chiding loud at
the fall of the night,
There's a ghost in Froom-side Vale, thin-lipped and
vague, in a shroud of white,
There is one in the railway train whenever I do not
want it near,
I see its profile against the pane, saying what I would
not hear.

As for one rare fair woman, I am now but a thought
of hers,
I enter her mind and another thought succeeds me
that she prefers;
Yet my love for her in its fulness she herself even did
not know;
Well, time cures hearts of tenderness, and now I can
let her go.

So I am found on Ingpen Beacon, or on Wylls-Neck
to the west,
Or else on homely Bulbarrow, or little Pilsdon Crest,
Where men have never cared to haunt, nor women
have walked with me,
And ghosts then keep their distance; and I know some
liberty.

The Place on the Map

I

I look upon the map that hangs by me –
Its shires and towns and rivers lined in varnished
artistry –

And I mark a jutting height
Coloured purple, with a margin of blue sea.

II

– 'Twas a day of latter summer, hot and dry;
Ay, even the waves seemed drying as we walked on,
she and I,

By this spot where, calmly quite,
She unfolded what would happen by and by.

III

This hanging map depicts the coast and place,
And re-creates therewith our unforeboded troublous
case

All distinctly to my sight,
And her tension, and the aspect of her face.

IV

Weeks and weeks we had loved beneath that
blazing blue,
Which had lost the art of raining, as her eyes to-day
had too,

While she told what, as by sleight,
Shot our firmament with rays of ruddy hue.

V

For the wonder and the wormwood of the whole
Was that what in realms of reason would have joyed
our double soul
 Wore a torrid tragic light
Under order-keeping's rigorous control.

VI

So, the map revives her words, the spot, the time,
And the thing we found we had to face before the
next year's prime;
 The charted coast stares bright,
And its episode comes back in pantomime.

The Schreckhorn

(With thoughts of Leslie Stephen)

(June 1897)

Aloof, as if a thing of mood and whim;
Now that its spare and desolate figure gleams
Upon my nearing vision, less it seems
A looming Alp-height than a guise of him
Who scaled its horn with ventured life and limb,
Drawn on by vague imaginings, maybe,
Of semblance to his personality
In its quaint glooms, keen lights, and rugged trim.

At his last change, when Life's dull coils unwind,
Will he, in old love, hitherward escape,
And the eternal essence of his mind
Enter this silent adamantine shape,
And his low voicing haunt its slipping snows
When dawn that calls the climber dyes them rose?

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?'

III

Yes, eve's quick mood had run its course,
 The night had cooled my hasty madness;
 I suffered a regretful sadness
Which deepened into real remorse.

IV

I thought what pensive patient days
 A soul must know of grain so tender,
 How much of good must grace the sender
Of such sweet words in such bright phrase.

V

Uprising then, as things unpriced
 I sought each fragment, patched and mended;
 The midnight whitened ere I had ended
And gathered words I had sacrificed.

VI

But some, alas, of those I threw
 Were past my search, destroyed for ever:
 They were your name and place; and never
Did I regain those clues to you.

VII

I learnt I had missed, by rash unheed,
 My track; that, so the Will decided,
 In life, death, we should be divided,
And at the sense I ached indeed.

VIII

That ache for you, born long ago,
 Throbs on: I never could outgrow it.
 What a revenge, did you but know it!
But that, thank God, you do not know.

The Face at the Casement

If ever joy leave
An abiding sting of sorrow,
So befell it on the morrow
Of that May eve. . . .

The travelled sun dropped
To the north-west, low and lower,
The pony's trot grew slower,
Until we stopped.

'This cosy house just by
I must call at for a minute,
A sick man lies within it
Who soon will die.

'He wished to – marry me,
So I am bound, when I drive near him,
To inquire, if but to cheer him,
How he may be.'

A message was sent in,
And wordlessly we waited,
Till some one came and stated
The bulletin.

And that the sufferer said,
For her call no words could thank her;
As his angel he must rank her
Till life's spark fled.

Slowly we drove away,
When I turned my head, although not
Called to: why I turned I know not
Even to this day:

And lo, there in my view
Pressed against an upper lattice
Was a white face, gazing at us
As we withdrew.

And well did I divine
It to be the man's there dying,
Who but lately had been sighing
For her pledged mine.

Then I deigned a deed of hell;
It was done before I knew it;
What devil made me do it
I cannot tell!

Yes, while he gazed above,
I put my arm about her
That he might see, nor doubt her
My plighted Love.

The pale face vanished quick,
As if blasted, from the casement,
And my shame and self-abasement
Began their prick.

And they prick on, ceaselessly,
For that stab in Love's fierce fashion
Which, unfired by lover's passion,
Was foreign to me.

She smiled at my caress,
But why came the soft embowment
Of her shoulder at that moment
She did not guess.

Long long years has he lain
In thy garth, O sad Saint Cleather:
What tears there, bared to weather,
Will cleanse that stain!

Love is long-suffering, brave,
Sweet, prompt, precious as a jewel;
But jealousy is cruel,
Cruel as the grave!

My Spirit Will Not Haunt the Mound

My spirit will not haunt the mound
Above my breast,
But travel, memory-possessed,
To where my tremulous being found
Life largest, best.

My phantom-footed shape will go
When nightfall grays
Hither and thither along the ways
I and another used to know
In backward days.

And there you'll find me, if a jot
You still should care
For me, and for my curious air;
If otherwise, then I shall not,
For you, be there.

In Death Divided

I

I shall rot here, with those whom in their day
You never knew,
And alien ones who, ere they chilled to clay,
Met not my view,
Will in your distant grave-place ever neighbour you.

II

No shade of pinnacle or tree or tower,
While earth endures,
Will fall on my mound and within the hour
Steal on to yours;
One robin never haunt our two green covertures.

III

Some organ may resound on Sunday noons
By where you lie,
Some other thrill the panes with other tunes
Where moulder I;
No selfsame chords compose our common lullaby.

IV

The simply-cut memorial at my head
Perhaps may take
A rustic form, and that above your bed
A stately make;
No linking symbol show thereon for our tale's sake.

V

And in the monotonous moils of strained, hard-run
Humanity,
The eternal tie which binds us twain in one
No eye will see
Stretching across the miles that sever you from me.

189-

A Singer Asleep

(Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1837–1909)

I

In this fair niche above the unslumbering sea,
That sentrys up and down all night, all day,
From cove to promontory, from ness to bay,
The Fates have fitly bidden that he should be
Pillowed eternally.

II

– It was as though a garland of red roses
Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
When irresponsibly dropped as from the sun,
In fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes,
Upon Victoria's formal middle time
His leaves of rhythm and rhyme.

III

O that far morning of a summer day
When, down a terraced street whose pavements lay
Glassing the sunshine into my bent eyes,
I walked and read with a quick glad surprise
New words, in classic guise, –

IV

The passionate pages of his earlier years,
Fraught with hot sighs, sad laughters, kisses, tears;
Fresh-fluted notes, yet from a minstrel who
Blew them not naively, but as one who knew
Full well why thus he blew.

V

I still can hear the brabble and the roar
At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!
Their power is spent like spindrift on this shore;
Thine swells yet more and more.

VI

– His singing-mistress verily was no other
Than she the Lesbian, she the music-mother
Of all the tribe that feel in melodies;
Who leapt, love-anguished, from the Leucadian steep
Into the rambling world-encircling deep
Which hides her where none sees.

VII

And one can hold in thought that nightly here
His phantom may draw down to the water's brim,
And hers come up to meet it, as a dim
Lone shine upon the heaving hydrosphere,
And mariners wonder as they traverse near,
Unknowing of her and him.

VIII

One dreams him sighing to her spectral form:
'O teacher, where lies hid thy burning line;
Where are those songs, O poetess divine
Whose very orts are love incarnadine?'
And her smile back: 'Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine.' . . .

IX

So here, beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations
Shake him when storms make mountains of their
plains –

Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes –
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines.

Bonchurch, 1910

A Plaint to Man

When you slowly emerged from the den of Time,
And gained percipience as you grew,
And fleshed you fair out of shapeless slime,

Wherefore, O Man, did there come to you
The unhappy need of creating me –
A form like your own – for praying to?

My virtue, power, utility,
Within my maker must all abide,
Since none in myself can ever be,

One thin as a phasm on a lantern-slide
Shown forth in the dark upon some dim sheet,
And by none but its showman vivified.

‘Such a forced device,’ you may say, ‘is meet
For easing a loaded heart at whiles:
Man needs to conceive of a mercy-seat

Somewhere above the gloomy aisles
Of this wailful world, or he could not bear
The irk no local hope beguiles.’

– But since I was framed in your first despair
The doing without me has had no play
In the minds of men when shadows scare;

And now that I dwindle day by day
Beneath the deicide eyes of seers
In a light that will not let me stay,

And to-morrow the whole of me disappears,
The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
That had best been faced in earlier years:

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced

With loving-kindness fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown.

1909-10

God's Funeral

I

I saw a slowly-stepping train –
Lined on the brows, scoop-eyed and bent and hoar –
Following in files across a twilit plain
A strange and mystic form the foremost bore.

II

And by contagious throbs of thought
Or latent knowledge that within me lay
And had already stirred me, I was wrought
To consciousness of sorrow even as they.

III

The fore-borne shape, to my blurred eyes,
At first seemed man-like, and anon to change
To an amorphous cloud of marvellous size,
At times endowed with wings of glorious range.

IV

And this phantasmal variousness
Ever possessed it as they drew along:
Yet throughout all it symbolled none the less
Potency vast and loving-kindness strong.

V

Almost before I knew I bent
Towards the moving columns without a word;
They, growing in bulk and numbers as they went,
Struck out sick thoughts that could be overheard: –

VI

'O man-projected Figure, of late
Imaged as we, thy knell who shall survive?
Whence came it we were tempted to create
One whom we can no longer keep alive?

VII

'Framing him jealous, fierce, at first,
We gave him justice as the ages rolled,
Will to bless those by circumstance accurst,
And longsuffering, and mercies manifold.

VIII

'And, tricked by our own early dream
And need of solace, we grew self-deceived,
Our making soon our maker did we deem,
And what we had imagined we believed.

IX

'Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,
Uncompromising rude reality
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be.

X

'So, toward our myth's oblivion,
Darkling, and languid-lipped, we creep and grope
Sadlier than those who wept in Babylon,
Whose Zion was a still abiding hope.

XI

'How sweet it was in years far hied
To start the wheels of day with trustful prayer,
To lie down liegely at the eventide
And feel a blest assurance he was there!

XII

'And who or what shall fill his place?
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
Towards the goal of their enterprise?' . . .

XIII

Some in the background then I saw,
Sweet women, youths, men, all incredulous,
Who chimed: 'This is a counterfeit of straw,
This requiem mockery! Still he lives to us!'

XIV

I could not buoy their faith: and yet
Many I had known: with all I sympathized;
And though struck speechless, I did not forget
That what was mourned for, I, too, long had prized.

XV

Still, how to bear such loss I deemed
The insistent question for each animate mind,
And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,

XVI

Whereof, to lift the general night,
A certain few who stood aloof had said,
'See you upon the horizon that small light –
Swelling somewhat?' Each mourner shook his head.

XVII

And they composed a crowd of whom
Some were right good, and many nigh the best. . . .
Thus dazed and puzzled 'twixt the gleam and gloom
Mechanically I followed with the rest.

1908–10

Spectres that Grieve

'It is not death that harrows us,' they lipped,
'The soundless cell is in itself relief,
For life is an unfenced flower, benumbed and nipped
At unawares, and at its best but brief.'

The speakers, sundry phantoms of the gone,
Had risen like filmy flames of phosphor dye,
As if the palest of sheet lightnings shone
From the sward near me, as from a nether sky.

And much surprised was I that, spent and dead,
They should not, like the many, be at rest,
But stray as apparitions; hence I said,
'Why, having slipped life, hark you back distressed?'

'We are among the few death sets not free,
The hurt, misrepresented names, who come
At each year's brink, and cry to History
To do them justice, or go past them dumb.

'We are stript of rights; our shames lie unredressed,
Our deeds in full anatomy are not shown,
Our words in morsels merely are expressed
On the scripted page, our motives blurred,
 unknown.'

Then all these shaken slighted visitants sped
Into the vague, and left me musing there
On fames that well might instance what they had said,
Until the New-Year's dawn strode up the air.

Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?

'Ah, are you digging on my grave,
My loved one? – planting rue?'
– 'No: yesterday he went to wed
One of the brightest wealth has bred.
'It cannot hurt her now,' he said,
"That I should not be true."

'Then who is digging on my grave?
My nearest dearest kin?'
– 'Ah, no: they sit and think, "What use!
What good will planting flowers produce?
No tendance of her mound can loose
Her spirit from Death's gin."'

'But some one digs upon my grave?
My enemy? – prodding sly?'
– 'Nay: when she heard you had passed the Gate
That shuts on all flesh soon or late,
She thought you no more worth her hate,
And cares not where you lie.'

'Then, who is digging on my grave?
Say – since I have not guessed!'
– 'O it is I, my mistress dear,
Your little dog, who still lives near,
And much I hope my movements here
Have not disturbed your rest?'

'Ah, yes! *You* dig upon my grave. . . .
 Why flashed it not on me
That one true heart was left behind!
What feeling do we ever find
To equal among human kind
 A dog's fidelity!'

'Mistress, I dug upon your grave
 To bury a bone, in case
I should be hungry near this spot
When passing on my daily trot.
I am sorry, but I quite forgot
 It was your resting-place.'

Before and after Summer

I

Looking forward to the spring
One puts up with anything.
On this February day
Though the winds leap down the street
Wintry scourgings seem but play,
And these later shafts of sleet
– Sharper pointed than the first –
And these later snows – the worst –
Are as a half-transparent blind
Riddled by rays from sun behind.

II

Shadows of the October pine
Reach into this room of mine:
On the pine there swings a bird;
He is shadowed with the tree.
Mutely perched he bills no word;
Blank as I am even is he.
For those happy suns are past,
Fore-discerned in winter last.
When went by their pleasure, then?
I, alas, perceived not when.

At Day-Close in November

The ten hours' light is abating,
And a late bird wings across,
Where the pines, like waltzers waiting,
Give their black heads a toss.

Beech leaves, that yellow the noon-time,
Float past like specks in the eye;
I set every tree in my June time,
And now they obscure the sky.

And the children who ramble through here
Conceive that there never has been
A time when no tall trees grew here,
That none will in time be seen.

The Year's Awakening

How do you know that the pilgrim track
Along the belting zodiac
Swept by the sun in his seeming rounds
Is traced by now to the Fishes' bounds
And into the Ram, when weeks of cloud
Have wrapt the sky in a clammy shroud,
And never as yet a tinct of spring
Has shown in the Earth's apparelling;
 O vespering bird, how do you know,
 How do you know?

How do you know, deep underground,
Hid in your bed from sight and sound,
Without a turn in temperature,
With weather life can scarce endure,
That light has won a fraction's strength,
And day put on some moments' length,
Whereof in merest rote will come,
Weeks hence, mild airs that do not numb;
 O crocus root, how do you know,
 How do you know?

February 1910

Under the Waterfall

‘Whenever I plunge my arm, like this,
In a basin of water, I never miss
The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day
Fetched back from its thickening shroud of gray.
Hence the only prime
And real love-rhyme
That I know by heart,
And that leaves no smart,
Is the purl of a little valley fall
About three spans wide and two spans tall
Over a table of solid rock,
And into a scoop of the self-same block;
The purl of a runlet that never ceases
In stir of kingdoms, in wars, in peaces;
With a hollow boiling voice it speaks
And has spoken since hills were turfless peaks.’

‘And why gives this the only prime
Idea to you of a real love-rhyme?
And why does plunging your arm in a bowl
Full of spring water, bring throbs to your soul?’
‘Well, under the fall, in a crease of the stone,
Though where precisely none ever has known,
Jammed darkly, nothing to show how prized,
And by now with its smoothness opalized,
Is a drinking-glass:
For, down that pass
My lover and I
Walked under a sky
Of blue with a leaf-wove awning of green,
In the burn of August, to paint the scene,

And we placed our basket of fruit and wine
By the runlet's rim, where we sat to dine;
And when we had drunk from the glass together,
Arched by the oak-copse from the weather,
I held the vessel to rinse in the fall,
Where it slipped, and sank, and was past recall,
Though we stooped and plumbed the little abyss
With long bared arms. There the glass still is.
And, as said, if I thrust my arm below
Cold water in basin or bowl, a throe
From the past awakens a sense of that time,
And the glass we used, and the cascade's rhyme.
The basin seems the pool, and its edge
The hard smooth face of the brook-side ledge,
And the leafy pattern of china-ware
The hanging plants that were bathing there.

'By night, by day, when it shines or lours,
There lies intact that chalice of ours,
And its presence adds to the rhyme of love
Persistently sung by the fall above.
No lip has touched it since his and mine
In turns therefrom sipped lovers' wine.'

POEMS OF 1912–13

Veteris vestigia flammae

The Going

Why did you give no hint that night
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
You would close your term here, up and be gone
 Where I could not follow
 With wing of swallow
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

 Never to bid good-bye,
 Or lip me the softest call,
Or utter a wish for a word, while I
Saw morning harden upon the wall,
 Unmoved, unknowing
 That your great going
Had place that moment, and altered all.

Why do you make me leave the house
And think for a breath it is you I see
At the end of the alley of bending boughs
Where so often at dusk you used to be;
 Till in darkening dankness
 The yawning blankness
Of the perspective sickens me!

You were she who abode
By those red-veined rocks far West,
You were the swan-necked one who rode
Along the beetling Beeny Crest,
And, reining nigh me,
Would muse and eye me,
While Life unrolled us its very best.

Why, then, latterly did we not speak,
Did we not think of those days long dead,
And ere your vanishing strive to seek
That time's renewal? We might have said,
‘In this bright spring weather
We'll visit together
Those places that once we visited.’

Well, well! All's past amend,
Unchangeable. It must go,
I seem but a dead man held on end
To sink down soon. . . . O you could not know
That such swift fleeing
No soul foreseeing –
Not even I – would undo me so!

December 1912

Your Last Drive

Here by the moorway you returned,
And saw the borough lights ahead
That lit your face – all undiscerned
To be in a week the face of the dead,
And you told of the charm of that haloed view
That never again would beam on you.

And on your left you passed the spot
Where eight days later you were to lie,
And be spoken of as one who was not;
Beholding it with a heedless eye
As alien from you, though under its tree
You soon would halt everlastingly.

I drove not with you. . . . Yet had I sat
At your side that eve I should not have seen
That the countenance I was glancing at
Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen,
Nor have read the writing upon your face,
'I go hence soon to my resting-place;

'You may miss me then. But I shall not know
How many times you visit me there,
Or what your thoughts are, or if you go
There never at all. And I shall not care.
Should you censure me I shall take no heed,
And even your praises no more shall need.'

True: never you'll know. And you will not mind.
But shall I then slight you because of such?
Dear ghost, in the past did you ever find
The thought 'What profit,' move me much?
Yet abides the fact, indeed, the same, –
You are past love, praise, indifference, blame.

December 1912

The Walk

You did not walk with me
Of late to the hill-top tree
 By the gated ways,
 As in earlier days;
 You were weak and lame,
So you never came,
And I went alone, and I did not mind,
Not thinking of you as left behind.

I walked up there to-day
Just in the former way;
 Surveyed around
 The familiar ground
 By myself again:
 What difference, then?
Only that underlying sense
Of the look of a room on returning thence.

Rain on a Grave

Clouds spout upon her
 Their waters amain
 In ruthless disdain, –
Her who but lately
 Had shivered with pain
As at touch of dishonour
If there had lit on her
So coldly, so straightly
 Such arrows of rain:

One who to shelter
 Her delicate head
Would quicken and quicken
 Each tentative tread
If drops chanced to pelt her
 That summertime spills
 In dust-paven rills
When thunder-clouds thicken
 And birds close their bills.

Would that I lay there
 And she were housed here!
Or better, together
Were folded away there
Exposed to one weather
We both, – who would stray there
When sunny the day there,
 Or evening was clear
 At the prime of the year.

Soon will be growing
 Green blades from her mound,
And daisies be showing
 Like stars on the ground,
Till she form part of them –
Ay – the sweet heart of them,
Loved beyond measure
With a child's pleasure
 All her life's round.

31 Jan. 1913

I Found Her Out There

I found her out there
On a slope few see,
That falls westwardly
To the salt-edged air,
Where the ocean breaks
On the purple strand,
And the hurricane shakes
The solid land.

I brought her here,
And have laid her to rest
In a noiseless nest
No sea beats near.
She will never be stirred
In her loamy cell
By the waves long heard
And loved so well.

So she does not sleep
By those haunted heights
The Atlantic smites
And the blind gales sweep,
Whence she often would gaze
At Dundagel's famed head,
While the dipping blaze
Dyed her face fire-red;

And would sigh at the tale
Of sunk Lyonesse,
As a wind-tugged tress
Flapped her cheek like a flail;
Or listen at whiles
With a thought-bound brow
To the murmuring miles
She is far from now.

Yet her shade, maybe,
Will creep underground
Till it catch the sound
Of that western sea
As it swells and sobs
Where she once domiciled,
And joy in its throbs
With the heart of a child.

Without Ceremony

It was your way, my dear,
To vanish without a word
When callers, friends, or kin
Had left, and I hastened in
To rejoin you, as I inferred.

And when you'd a mind to career
Off anywhere – say to town –
You were all on a sudden gone
Before I had thought thereon,
Or noticed your trunks were down.

So, now that you disappear
For ever in that swift style,
Your meaning seems to me
Just as it used to be:
'Good-bye is not worth while!'

Lament

How she would have loved
A party to-day! –
Bright-hatted and gloved,
With table and tray
And chairs on the lawn
Her smiles would have shone
With welcomings. . . . But
She is shut, she is shut
 From friendship's spell
 In the jailing shell
 Of her tiny cell.

Or she would have reigned
At a dinner to-night
With ardours unfeigned,
And a generous delight;
All in her abode
She'd have freely bestowed
On her guests. . . . But alas,
She is shut under grass
 Where no cups flow,
 Powerless to know
 That it might be so.

And she would have sought
With a child's eager glance
The shy snowdrops brought
By the new year's advance,

And peered in the rime
Of Candlemas-time
For crocuses . . . chanced
It that she were not tranced
 From sights she loved best;
 Wholly possessed
 By an infinite rest!

And we are here staying
Amid these stale things,
Who care not for gaying,
And those junketings
That used so to joy her,
And never to cloy her
As us they cloy! . . . But
She is shut, she is shut
 From the cheer of them, dead
 To all done and said
 In her yew-arched bed.

The Haunter

He does not think that I haunt here nightly:
 How shall I let him know
That whither his fancy sets him wandering
 I, too, alertly go? –
Hover and hover a few feet from him
 Just as I used to do,
But cannot answer the words he lifts me –
 Only listen thereto!

When I could answer he did not say them:
 When I could let him know
How I would like to join in his journeys
 Seldom he wished to go.
Now that he goes and wants me with him
 More than he used to do,
Never he sees my faithful phantom
 Though he speaks thereto.

Yes, I companion him to places
 Only dreamers know,
Where the shy hares print long paces,
 Where the night rooks go;
Into old aisles where the past is all to him,
 Close as his shade can do,
Always lacking the power to call to him,
 Near as I reach thereto!

What a good haunter I am, O tell him!
Quickly make him know
If he but sigh since my loss befell him
Straight to his side I go.
Tell him a faithful one is doing
All that love can do
Still that his path may be worth pursuing,
And to bring peace thereto.

The Voice

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to
me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all
to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you
then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.

December 1912

His Visitor

I come across from Mellstock while the moon wastes
weaker
To behold where I lived with you for twenty years and
more:
I shall go in the gray, at the passing of the mail-train,
And need no setting open of the long familiar door
As before.

The change I notice in my once own quarters!
A formal-fashioned border where the daisies used to
be,
The rooms new painted, and the pictures altered,
And other cups and saucers, and no cosy nook for tea
As with me.

I discern the dim faces of the sleep-wrapt servants;
They are not those who tended me through feeble
hours and strong,
But strangers quite, who never knew my rule here,
Who never saw me painting, never heard my softling
song
Float along.

So I don't want to linger in this re-decked dwelling,
I feel too uneasy at the contrasts I behold,
And I make again for Mellstock to return here never,
And rejoin the roomy silence, and the mute and
manifold
Souls of old.

1913

A Circular

As 'legal representative'
I read a missive not my own,
On new designs the senders give
 For clothes, in tints as shown.

Here figure blouses, gowns for tea,
And presentation-trains of state,
Charming ball-dresses, millinery,
 Warranted up to date.

And this gay-pictured, spring-time shout
Of Fashion, hails what lady proud?
Her who before last year ebbed out
 Was costumed in a shroud.

A Dream or No

Why go to Saint-Juliot? What's Juliot to me?
Some strange necromancy
But charmed me to fancy
That much of my life claims the spot as its key.

Yes. I have had dreams of that place in the West,
And a maiden abiding
Thereat as in hiding;
Fair-eyed and white-shouldered, broad-browed and
brown-tressed.

And of how, coastward bound on a night long ago,
There lonely I found her,
The sea-birds around her,
And other than nigh things uncaring to know.

So sweet her life there (in my thought has it seemed)
That quickly she drew me
To take her unto me,
And lodge her long years with me. Such have I
dreamed.

But nought of that maid from Saint-Juliot I see;
Can she ever have been here,
And shed her life's sheen here,
The woman I thought a long housemate with me?

Does there even a place like Saint-Juliot exist?
Or a Vallency Valley
With stream and leafed alley,
Or Beeny, or Bos with its flounce flinging mist?

February 1913

After a Journey

Hereto I come to view a voiceless ghost;
 Whither, O whither will its whim now draw me?
Up the cliff, down, till I'm lonely, lost,
 And the unseen waters' ejaculations awe me.
Where you will next be there's no knowing,
 Facing round about me everywhere,
 With your nut-coloured hair,
And gray eyes, and rose-flush coming and going.

Yes: I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;
 Through the years, through the dead scenes I
 have tracked you;
What have you now found to say of our past –
 Scanned across the dark space wherein I have
 lacked you?
Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought
 division?
 Things were not lastly as firstly well
 With us twain, you tell?
But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.

I see what you are doing: you are leading me on
 To the spots we knew when we haunted here
 together,
The waterfall, above which the mist-bow shone
 At the then fair hour in the then fair weather,
And the cave just under, with a voice still so hollow
 That it seems to call out to me from forty years
 ago,
 When you were all aglow,
And not the thin ghost that I now frailly follow!

Ignorant of what there is flitting here to see,
 The waked birds preen and the seals flop lazily;
Soon you will have, Dear, to vanish from me,
 For the stars close their shutters and the dawn
 whitens hazily.
Trust me, I mind not, though Life lours,
 The bringing me here; nay, bring me here again!
 I am just the same as when
Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers.

Pentargan Bay

A Death-Day Recalled

Beeny did not quiver,
 Juliot grew not gray,
Thin Vallency's river
 Held its wonted way.
Bos seemed not to utter
 Dimmest note of dirge,
Targan mouth a mutter
 To its creamy surge.

Yet though these, unheeding,
 Listless, passed the hour
Of her spirit's speeding,
 She had, in her flower,
Sought and loved the places –
 Much and often pined
For their lonely faces
 When in towns confined.

Why did not Vallency
 In his purl deplore
One whose haunts were whence he
 Drew his limpid store?
Why did Bos not thunder,
 Targan apprehend
Body and Breath were sunder
 Of their former friend?

Beeny Cliff

March 1870–March 1913

I

O the opal and the sapphire of that wandering
western sea,
And the woman riding high above with bright hair
flapping free –
The woman whom I loved so, and who loyally loved
me.

II

The pale mews plained below us, and the waves
seemed far away
In a nether sky, engrossed in saying their ceaseless
babbling say,
As we laughed light-heartedly aloft on that clear-
sunned March day.

III

A little cloud then cloaked us, and there flew an irised
rain,
And the Atlantic dyed its levels with a dull
misfeatured stain,
And then the sun burst out again, and purples
prinked the main.

IV

– Still in all its chasmal beauty bulks old Beeny to the
sky,
And shall she and I not go there once again now
March is nigh,
And the sweet things said in that March say anew
there by and by?

V

What if still in chasmal beauty looms that wild weird
western shore,
The woman now is – elsewhere – whom the ambling
pony bore,
And nor knows nor cares for Beeny, and will laugh
there nevermore.

At Castle Boterel

As I drive to the junction of lane and highway,
And the drizzle bedrenches the waggonette,
I look behind at the fading byway,
And see on its slope, now glistening wet,
Distinctly yet

Myself and a girlish form benighted
In dry March weather. We climb the road
Beside a chaise. We had just alighted
To ease the sturdy pony's load
When he sighed and slowed.

What we did as we climbed, and what we talked of
Matters not much, nor to what it led, –
Something that life will not be balked of
Without rude reason till hope is dead,
And feeling fled.

It filled but a minute. But was there ever
A time of such quality, since or before,
In that hill's story? To one mind never,
Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,
By thousands more.

Primaeval rocks form the road's steep border,
And much have they faced there, first and last,
Of the transitory in Earth's long order;
But what they record in colour and cast
Is – that we two passed.

And to me, though Time's unflinching rigour,
In mindless rote, has ruled from sight
The substance now, one phantom figure
Remains on the slope, as when that night
Saw us alight.

I look and see it there, shrinking, shrinking,
I look back at it amid the rain
For the very last time; for my sand is sinking,
And I shall traverse old love's domain
Never again.

March 1913

Places

Nobody says: Ah, that is the place
Where chanced, in the hollow of years ago,
What none of the Three Towns cared to know –
The birth of a little girl of grace –
The sweetest the house saw, first or last;
 Yet it was so
 On that day long past.

Nobody thinks: There, there she lay
In a room by the Hoe, like the bud of a flower,
And listened, just after the bedtime hour,
To the stammering chimes that used to play
The quaint Old Hundred-and-Thirteenth tune
 In Saint Andrew's tower
 Night, morn, and noon.

Nobody calls to mind that here
Upon Boterel Hill, where the waggoners skid,
With cheeks whose airy flush outbid
Fresh fruit in bloom, and free of fear,
She cantered down, as if she must fall
 (Though she never did),
 To the charm of all.

Nay: one there is to whom these things,
That nobody else's mind calls back,
Have a savour that scenes in being lack,
And a presence more than the actual brings;
To whom to-day is beneaped and stale,
 And its urgent clack
 But a vapid tale.

Plymouth, March 1913

The Phantom Horsewoman

I

Queer are the ways of a man I know:
He comes and stands
In a careworn craze,
And looks at the sands
And the seaward haze
With moveless hands
And face and gaze,
Then turns to go . . .
And what does he see when he gazes so?

II

They say he sees as an instant thing
More clear than to-day,
A sweet soft scene
That was once in play
By that briny green;
Yes, notes alway
Warm, real, and keen,
What his back years bring –
A phantom of his own figuring.

III

Of this vision of his they might say more:
Not only there
Does he see this sight,
But everywhere
In his brain – day, night,
As if on the air
It were drawn rose bright –
Yea, far from that shore
Does he carry this vision of heretofore:

IV

A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,
He withers daily,
Time touches her not,
But she still rides gaily
In his rapt thought
On that shagged and shaly
Atlantic spot,
And as when first eyed
Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.

1913

The Spell of the Rose

'I mean to build a hall anon,
And shape two turrets there,
And a broad newelled stair,
And a cool well for crystal water;
Yes; I will build a hall anon,
Plant roses love shall feed upon,
And apple-trees and pear.'

He set to build the manor-hall,
And shaped the turrets there,
And the broad newelled stair,
And the cool well for crystal water;
He built for me that manor-hall,
And planted many trees withal,
But no rose anywhere.

And as he planted never a rose
That bears the flower of love,
Though other flowers throve
Some heart-bane moved our souls to sever
Since he had planted never a rose;
And misconceits raised horrid shows,
And agonies came thereof.

'I'll mend these miseries,' then said I,
And so, at dead of night,
I went and, screened from sight,
That nought should keep our souls in severance,
I set a rose-bush. 'This,' said I,
'May end divisions dire and wry,
And long-drawn days of blight.'

But I was called from earth – yea, called
 Before my rose-bush grew;
 And would that now I knew
What feels he of the tree I planted,
 And whether, after I was called
To be a ghost, he, as of old,
 Gave me his heart anew!

Perhaps now blooms that queen of trees
 I set but saw not grow,
 And he, beside its glow –
Eyes couched of the mis-vision that blurred me –
 Ay, there beside that queen of trees
He sees me as I was, though sees
 Too late to tell me so!

St Launce's Revisited

Slip back, Time!
Yet again I am nearing
Castle and keep, uprearing
 Gray, as in my prime.

At the inn
Smiling nigh, why is it
Not as on my visit
 When hope and I were twin?

Groom and jade
Whom I found here, moulder;
Strange the tavern-holder,
 Strange the tap-maid.

Here I hired
Horse and man for bearing
Me on my wayfaring
 To the door desired.

Evening gloomed
As I journeyed forward
To the faces shoreward,
 Till their dwelling loomed.

If again
Towards the Atlantic sea there
I should speed, they'd be there
 Surely now as then? . . .

Why waste thought,
When I know them vanished
Under earth; yea, banished
 Ever into nought!

Where the Picnic Was

Where we made the fire
In the summer time
Of branch and briar
On the hill to the sea,
I slowly climb
Through winter mire,
And scan and trace
The forsaken place
Quite readily.

Now a cold wind blows,
And the grass is gray,
But the spot still shows
As a burnt circle – aye,
And stick-ends, charred,
Still strew the sward
Whereon I stand,
Last relic of the band
Who came that day!

Yes, I am here
Just as last year,
And the sea breathes brine
From its strange straight line
Up hither, the same
As when we four came.
– But two have wandered far
From this grassy rise
Into urban roar
Where no picnics are,
And one – has shut her eyes
For evermore

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES

The Cheval-Glass

Why do you harbour that great cheval-glass
Filling up your narrow room?
You never preen or plume
Or look in a week at your full-length figure –
Picture of bachelor gloom!

‘Well, when I dwelt in ancient England,
Renting the valley farm,
Thoughtless of all heart-harm,
I used to gaze at the parson’s daughter,
A creature of nameless charm.

‘Thither there came a lover and won her,
Carried her off from my view.
O it was then I knew
Misery of a cast undreamt of –
More than, indeed, my due!

‘Then far rumours of her ill-usage
Came, like a chilling breath
When a man languisheth;
Followed by news that her mind lost balance,
And, in a space, of her death.

‘Soon sank her father; and next was the auction –
Everything to be sold:
Mid things new and old
Stood this glass in her former chamber,
Long in her use, I was told.

'Well, I awaited the sale and bought it. . . .
 There by my bed it stands,
 And as the dawn expands
Often I see her pale-faced form there
 Brushing her hair's bright bands.

'There, too, at pallid midnight moments
 Quick she will come to my call,
 Smile from the frame withal
Ponderingly, as she used to regard me
 Passing her father's wall.

'So that it was for its revelations
 I brought it oversea,
 And drag it about with me. . . .
Anon I shall break it and bury its fragments
 Where my grave is to be.'

She Charged Me

She charged me with having said this and that
To another woman long years before,
In the very parlour where we sat, –

Sat on a night when the endless pour
Of rain on the roof and the road below
Bent the spring of the spirit more and more. . . .

– So charged she me; and the Cupid's bow
Of her mouth was hard, and her eyes, and her face,
And her white forefinger lifted slow.

Had she done it gently, or shown a trace
That not too curiously would she view
A folly flown ere her reign had place,

A kiss might have closed it. But I knew
From the fall of each word, and the pause between,
That the curtain would drop upon us two
Ere long, in our play of slave and queen.

The Newcomer's Wife

He paused on the sill of a door ajar
That screened a lively liquor-bar,
For the name had reached him through the door
Of her he had married the week before.

'We called her the Hack of the Parade;
But she was discreet in the games she played;
If slightly worn, she's pretty yet,
And gossips, after all, forget:

'And he knows nothing of her past;
I am glad the girl's in luck at last;
Such ones, though stale to native eyes,
Newcomers snatch at as a prize.'

'Yes, being a stranger he sees her blent
Of all that's fresh and innocent,
Nor dreams how many a love-campaign
She had enjoyed before his reign!'

That night there was the splash of a fall
Over the slimy harbour-wall:
They searched, and at the deepest place
Found him with crabs upon his face.

A King's Soliloquy
On the Night of His Funeral

From the slow march and muffled drum,
And crowds distrest,
And book and bell, at length I have come
To my full rest.

A ten years' rule beneath the sun
Is wound up here,
And what I have done, what left undone,
Figures out clear.

Yet in the estimate of such
It grieves me more
That I by some was loved so much
Than that I bore,

From others, judgment of that hue
Which over-hope
Breeds from a theoretic view
Of regal scope.

For kingly opportunities
Right many have sighed;
How best to bear its devilries
Those learn who have tried!

I have eaten the fat and drunk the sweet,
Lived the life out
From the first greeting glad drum-beat
To the last shout.

What pleasure earth affords to kings
I have enjoyed
Through its long vivid pulse-stirrings
Even till it cloyed.

What days of drudgery, nights of stress
Can cark a throne,
Even one maintained in peacefulness,
I too have known.

And so, I think, could I step back
To life again,
I should prefer the average track
Of average men,

Since, as with them, what kingship would
It cannot do,
Nor to first thoughts however good
Hold itself true.

Something binds hard the royal hand,
As all that be,
And it is That has shaped, has planned
My acts and me.

May 1910

Aquae Sulis

The chimes called midnight, just at interlune,
And the daytime parle on the Roman investigations
Was shut to silence, save for the husky tune
The bubbling waters played near the excavations.

And a warm air came up from underground,
And the flutter of a filmy shape unsepulchred,
That collected itself, and waited, and looked around:
Nothing was seen, but utterances could be heard:

Those of the Goddess whose shrine was beneath the
pile
Of the God with the baldachined altar overhead:
'And what did you win by raising this nave and aisle
Close on the site of the temple I tenanted?

'The notes of your organ have thrilled down out of
view
To the earth-clogged wrecks of my edifice many a
year,
Though stately and shining once – ay, long ere you
Had set up crucifix and candle here.

'Your priests have trampled the dust of mine without
rueing,
Despising the joys of man whom I so much loved,
Though my springs boil on by your Gothic arcades
and pewing,
And sculptures crude. . . . Would Jove they could be
removed!'

'Repress, O lady proud, your traditional ires;
You know not by what a frail thread we equally hang;
It is said we are images both – twitched by people's
 desires;
And that I, as you, fail like a song men yesterday
 sang!'

'What – a Jumping-jack you, and myself but a poor
 Jumping-jill,
Now worm-eaten, times ago twitched at Humanity's
 bid?
O I cannot endure it! – But, chance to us whatso
 there will,
Let us kiss and be friends! Come, agree you?' – None
 heard if he did. . . .

And the olden dark hid the cavities late laid bare,
And all was suspended and soundless as before,
Except for a gossamery noise fading off in the air,
And the boiling voice of the waters' medicinal pour.

Bath

Bereft, She Thinks She Dreams

I dream that the dearest I ever knew
 Has died and been entombed.
I am sure it's a dream that cannot be true,
 But I am so overglomed
By its persistence, that I would gladly
 Have quick death take me,
Rather than longer think thus sadly;
 So wake me, wake me!

It has lasted days, but minute and hour
 I expect to get aroused
And find him as usual in the bower
 Where we so happily housed.
Yet stays this nightmare too appalling,
 And like a web shakes me,
And piteously I keep on calling,
 And no one wakes me!

In the British Museum

'What do you see in that time-touched stone,
When nothing is there
But ashen blankness, although you give it
A rigid stare?

'You look not quite as if you saw,
But as if you heard,
Parting your lips, and treading softly
As mouse or bird.

'It is only the base of a pillar, they'll tell you,
That came to us
From a far old hill men used to name
Areopagus.'

– 'I know no art, and I only view
A stone from a wall,
But I am thinking that stone has echoed
The voice of Paul;

'Paul as he stood and preached beside it
Facing the crowd,
A small gaunt figure with wasted features,
Calling out loud

'Words that in all their intimate accents
Patterned upon
That marble front, and were wide reflected,
And then were gone.

'I'm a labouring man, and know but little,
Or nothing at all;
But I can't help thinking that stone once echoed
The voice of Paul.'

In the Servants' Quarters

'Man, you too, aren't you, one of these rough followers
of the criminal?

All hanging hereabout to gather how he's going to bear
Examination in the hall.' She flung disdainful glances
on

The shabby figure standing at the fire with others there,
Who warmed them by its flare.

'No indeed, my skipping maiden: I know nothing of the
trial here,

Or criminal, if so he be. – I chanced to come this way,
And the fire shone out into the dawn, and morning airs
are cold now;

I, too, was drawn in part by charms I see before me
play,

That I see not every day.'

'Ha, ha!' then laughed the constables who also stood to
warm themselves,

The while another maiden scrutinized his features hard,
As the blaze threw into contrast every line and knot
that wrinkled them,

Exclaiming, 'Why, last night when he was brought in by
the guard,

You were with him in the yard!'

'Nay, nay, you teasing wench, I say! You know you
speak mistakenly.

Cannot a tired pedestrian who has legged it long and
far

Here on his way from northern parts, engrossed in
humble marketings,
Come in and rest awhile, although judicial doings are
Afoot by morning star?’

‘O, come, come!’ laughed the constables. ‘Why, man,
you speak the dialect
He uses in his answers; you can hear him up the
stairs.
So own it. We sha’n’t hurt ye. There he’s speaking
now! His syllables
Are those you sound yourself when you are talking
unawares,
As this pretty girl declares.’

‘And you shudder when his chain clinks!’ she
rejoined. ‘O yes, I noticed it.
And you winced, too, when those cuffs they gave him
echoed to us here.
They’ll soon be coming down, and you may then have
to defend yourself
Unless you hold your tongue, or go away and keep
you clear
When he’s led to judgment near!’

‘No! I’ll be damned in hell if I know anything about
the man!
No single thing about him more than everybody
knows!
Must not I even warm my hands but I am charged
with blasphemies?’ . . .
– His face convulses as the morning cock that
moment crows,
And he droops, and turns, and goes.

Regret Not Me

Regret not me;
Beneath the sunny tree
I lie uncaring, slumbering peacefully.

Swift as the light
I flew my faery flight;
Ecstatically I moved, and feared no night.

I did not know
That heydays fade and go,
But deemed that what was would be always so.

I skipped at morn
Between the yellowing corn,
Thinking it good and glorious to be born.

I ran at eves
Among the piled-up sheaves,
Dreaming, 'I grieve not, therefore nothing grieves.'

Now soon will come
The apple, pear, and plum,
And hinds will sing, and autumn insects hum.

Again you will fare
To cider-makings rare,
And junketings; but I shall not be there.

Yet gaily sing
Until the pewter ring
Those songs we sang when we went gipsying.

And lightly dance
Some triple-timed romance
In coupled figures, and forget mischance;

And mourn not me
Beneath the yellowing tree;
For I shall mind not, slumbering peacefully.

The Recalcitrants

Let us off and search, and find a place
Where yours and mine can be natural lives,
Where no one comes who dissects and dives
And proclaims that ours is a curious case,
Which its touch of romance can scarcely grace.

You would think it strange at first, but then
Everything has been strange in its time.
When some one said on a day of the prime
He would bow to no brazen god again
He doubtless dazed the mass of men.

None will see in us a pair whose claims
To righteous judgment we care not making;
Who have doubted if breath be worth the taking,
And have no respect for the current fames
Whence the savour has flown while abide the names.

We have found us already shunned, disdained,
And for re-acceptance have not once striven;
Whatever offence our course has given
The brunt thereof we have long sustained.
Well, let us away, scorned, unexplained.

The Moth-Signal

(On Egdon Heath)

'What are you still, still thinking,'
He asked in vague surmise,
'That you stare at the wick unblinking
With those deep lost luminous eyes?'

'O, I see a poor moth burning
In the candle flame,' said she,
'Its wings and legs are turning
To a cinder rapidly.'

'Moths fly in from the heather,'
He said, 'now the days decline.'
'I know,' said she. 'The weather,
I hope, will at last be fine.'

'I think,' she added lightly,
'I'll look out at the door.
The ring the moon wears nightly
May be visible now no more.'

She rose, and, little heeding,
Her life-mate then went on
With his mute and museful reading
In the annals of ages gone.

Outside the house a figure
Came from the tumulus near,
And speedily waxed bigger,
And clasped and called her Dear.

'I saw the pale-winged token
 You sent through the crack,' sighed she.
'That moth is burnt and broken
 With which you lured out me.

'And were I as the moth is
 It might be better far
For one whose marriage troth is
 Shattered as potsherds are!'

Then grinned the Ancient Briton
 From the tumulus treed with pine:
'So, hearts are thwartly smitten
 In these days as in mine!'

Seen by the Waits

Through snowy woods and shady
 We went to play a tune
To the lonely manor-lady
 By the light of the Christmas moon.

We violed till, upward glancing
 To where a mirror leaned,
It showed her airily dancing,
 Deeming her movements screened;

Dancing alone in the room there,
 Thin-draped in her robe of night;
Her postures, glassed in the gloom there,
 Were a strange phantasmal sight.

She had learnt (we heard when homing)
 That her roving spouse was dead:
Why she had danced in the gloaming
 We thought, but never said.

The Two Soldiers

Just at the corner of the wall
 We met – yes, he and I –
Who had not faced in camp or hall
 Since we bade home good-bye,
And what once happened came back – all –
 Out of those years gone by;

And that strange woman whom we knew
 And loved – long dead and gone,
Whose poor half-perished residue,
 Tombless and trod, lay yon,
But at this moment to our view
 Rose like a phantom wan!

And in his fixed face I could see,
 Lit by a lurid shine,
The drama re-enact which she
 Had dyed incarnadine
For us, and more. And doubtless he
 Beheld it too in mine.

A start, as at one slightly known;
 And with an indifferent air
We passed, without a sign being shown
 That, as it real were,
A memory-acted scene had thrown
 Its tragic shadow there.

The Death of Regret

I opened my shutter at sunrise,
And looked at the hill hard by,
And I heartily grieved for the comrade
Who wandered up there to die.

I let in the morn on the morrow,
And failed not to think of him then,
As he trod up that rise in the twilight,
And never came down again.

I undid the shutter a week thence,
But not until after I'd turned
Did I call back his last departure
By the upland there discerned.

Uncovering the casement long later,
I bent to my toil till the gray,
When I said to myself, 'Ah – what ails me,
To forget him all the day!'

As daily I flung back the shutter
In the same blank bald routine,
He scarcely once rose to remembrance
Through a month of my facing the scene.

And ah, seldom now do I ponder
At the window as heretofore
On the long valued one who died yonder,
And wastes by the sycamore.

The Roman Gravemounds

By Rome's dim relics there walks a man,
Eyes bent; and he carries a basket and spade;
I guess what impels him to scrape and scan;
Yea, his dreams of that Empire long decayed.

'Vast was Rome,' he must muse, 'in the world's regard,
Vast it looms there still, vast it ever will be;'
And he stoops as to dig and unmine some shard
Left by those who are held in such memory.

But no; in his basket, see, he has brought
A little white furred thing, stiff of limb,
Whose life never won from the world a thought;
It is this, and not Rome, that is moving him.

And to make it a grave he has come to the spot,
And he delves in the ancient dead's long home;
Their fames, their achievements, the man knows not;
The furred thing is all to him – nothing Rome!

'Here say you that Cæsar's warriors lie? –
But my little white cat was my only friend!
Could she but live, might the record die
Of Cæsar, his legions, his aims, his end!'

Well, Rome's long rule here is oft and again
A theme for the sages of history,
And the small furred life was worth no one's pen;
Yet its mourner's mood has a charm for me.

November 1910

The Workbox

'See, here's the workbox, little wife,
That I made of polished oak.'
He was a joiner, of village life;
She came of borough folk.

He holds the present up to her
As with a smile she nears
And answers to the profferer,
'Twill last all my sewing years!'

'I warrant it will. And longer too.
'Tis a scantling that I got
Off poor John Wayward's coffin, who
Died of they knew not what.

'The shingled pattern that seems to cease
Against your box's rim
Continues right on in the piece
That's underground with him.

'And while I worked it made me think
Of timber's varied doom;
One inch where people eat and drink,
The next inch in a tomb.

'But why do you look so white, my dear,
And turn aside your face?
You knew not that good lad, I fear,
Though he came from your native place?'

'How could I know that good young man,
 Though he came from my native town,
When he must have left far earlier than
 I was a woman grown?'

'Ah, no. I should have understood!
 It shocked you that I gave
To you one end of a piece of wood
 Whose other is in a grave?'

'Don't, dear, despise my intellect,
 Mere accidental things
Of that sort never have effect
 On my imaginings.'

Yet still her lips were limp and wan,
 Her face still held aside,
As if she had known not only John,
 But known of what he died.

The Jubilee of a Magazine

(To the Editor)

Yes; your up-dated modern page –
All flower-fresh, as it appears –
Can claim a time-tried lineage,

That reaches backward fifty years
(Which, if but short for sleepy squires,
Is much in magazines' careers).

– Here, on your cover, never tires
The sower, reaper, thresher, while
As through the seasons of our sires

Each wills to work in ancient style
With seedlip, sickle, share and flail,
Though modes have since moved many a mile!

The steel-roped plough now rips the vale,
With cog and tooth the sheaves are won,
Wired wheels drum out the wheat like hail;

But if we ask, what has been done
To unify the mortal lot
Since your bright leaves first saw the sun,

Beyond mechanic furtherance – what
Advance can rightness, candour, claim?
Truth bends abashed, and answers not.

Despite your volumes' gentle aim
To straighten visions wry and wrong,
Events jar onward much the same!

– Had custom tended to prolong,
As on your golden page engrained,
Old processes of blade and prong,

And best invention been retained
For high crusades to lessen tears
Throughout the race, the world had gained! . . .
But too much, this, for fifty years.

The Satin Shoes

'If ever I walk to church to wed,
As other maidens use,
And face the gathered eyes,' she said,
'I'll go in satin shoes!'

She was as fair as early day
Shining on meads unmown,
And her sweet syllables seemed to play
Like flute-notes softly blown.

The time arrived when it was meet
That she should be a bride;
The satin shoes were on her feet,
Her father was at her side.

They stood within the dairy door,
And gazed across the green;
The church loomed on the distant moor,
But rain was thick between.

'The grass-path hardly can be stepped,
The lane is like a pool!' –
Her dream is shown to be inept,
Her wish they overrule.

'To go forth shod in satin soft
A coach would be required!'
For thickest boots the shoes were doffed –
Those shoes her soul desired. . . .

All day the bride, as overborne,
Was seen to brood apart,
And that the shoes had not been worn
Sat heavy on her heart.

From her wrecked dream, as months flew on,
Her thought seemed not to range.
'What ails the wife,' they said anon,
'That she should be so strange?' . . .

Ah – what coach comes with furtive glide –
A coach of closed-up kind?
It comes to fetch the last year's bride,
Who wanders in her mind.

She strove with them, and fearfully ran
Stairward with one low scream:
'Nay – coax her,' said the madhouse man,
'With some old household theme.'

'If you will go, dear, you must fain
Put on those shoes – the pair
Meant for your marriage, which the rain
Forbade you then to wear.'

She clapped her hands, flushed joyous hues;
'O yes – I'll up and ride
If I am to wear my satin shoes
And be a proper bride!'

Out then her little foot held she,
As to depart with speed;
The madhouse man smiled pleasantly
To see the wile succeed.

She turned to him when all was done,
And gave him her thin hand,
Exclaiming like an enraptured one,
‘This time it will be grand!’

She mounted with a face elate,
Shut was the carriage door;
They drove her to the madhouse gate,
And she was seen no more. . . .

Yet she was fair as early day
Shining on meads unmown,
And her sweet syllables seemed to play
Like flute-notes softly blown.

MOMENTS OF VISION AND
MISCELLANEOUS VERSES

Moments of Vision

That mirror
Which makes of men a transparency,
Who holds that mirror
And bids us such a breast-bare spectacle see
Of you and me?

That mirror
Whose magic penetrates like a dart,
Who lifts that mirror
And throws our mind back on us, and our heart,
Until we start?

That mirror
Works well in these night hours of ache;
Why in that mirror
Are tincts we never see ourselves once take
When the world is awake?

That mirror
Can test each mortal when unaware;
Yea, that strange mirror
May catch his last thoughts, whole life foul or fair,
Glassing it – where?

Afternoon Service at Mellstock

(Circa 1850)

On afternoons of drowsy calm
We stood in the panelled pew,
Singing one-voiced a Tate-and-Brady psalm
To the tune of 'Cambridge New.'

We watched the elms, we watched the rooks,
The clouds upon the breeze,
Between the whiles of glancing at our books,
And swaying like the trees.

So mindless were those outpourings! –
Though I am not aware
That I have gained by subtle thought on things
Since we stood psalming there.

In a Museum

I

Here's the mould of a musical bird long passed from
light,
Which over the earth before man came was winging;
There's a contralto voice I heard last night,
That lodges in me still with its sweet singing.

II

Such a dream is Time that the coo of this ancient bird
Has perished not, but is blent, or will be blending
Mid visionless wilds of space with the voice that I
heard,
In the full-fugued song of the universe unending.

Exeter

Apostrophe to an Old Psalm Tune

I met you first – ah, when did I first meet you?
When I was full of wonder, and innocent,
Standing meek-eyed with those of choric bent,
While dimming day grew dimmer
In the pulpit-glimmer.

Much riper in years I met you – in a temple
Where summer sunset streamed upon our shapes,
And you spread over me like a gauze that drapes,
And flapped from floor to rafters,
Sweet as angels' laughters.

But you had been stripped of some of your old
vesture
By Monk, or another. Now you wore no frill,
And at first you startled me. But I knew you still,
Though I missed the minim's waver,
And the dotted quaver.

I grew accustomed to you thus. And you hailed me
Through one who evoked you often. Then at last
Your raiser was borne off, and I mourned you had
passed
From my life with your late outsetter;
Till I said, "'Tis better!'

But you waylaid me. I rose and went as a ghost goes,
And said, eyes-full: 'I'll never hear it again!
It is overmuch for scathed and memoried men
When sitting among strange people
Under their steeple.'

Now, a new stirrer of tones calls you up before me
And wakes your speech, as she of Endor did
(When sought by Saul who, in disguises hid,
Fell down on the earth to hear it)
Samuel's spirit.

So, your quired oracles beat till they make me tremble
As I discern your mien in the old attire,
Here in these turmoiled years of belligerent fire
Living still on – and onward, maybe,
Till Doom's great day be!

Sunday, 13 August 1916

At the Word 'Farewell'

She looked like a bird from a cloud
On the clammy lawn,
Moving alone, bare-browed
In the dim of dawn.
The candles alight in the room
For my parting meal
Made all things withoutdoors loom
Strange, ghostly, unreal.

The hour itself was a ghost,
And it seemed to me then
As of chances the chance furthestmost
I should see her again.
I beheld not where all was so fleet
That a Plan of the past
Which had ruled us from birthtime to meet
Was in working at last:

No prelude did I there perceive
To a drama at all,
Or foreshadow what fortune might weave
From beginnings so small;
But I rose as if quickened by a spur
I was bound to obey,
And stepped through the casement to her
Still alone in the gray.

'I am leaving you. . . . Farewell!' I said,
As I followed her on
By an alley bare boughs overspread;
'I soon must be gone!'
Even then the scale might have been turned
Against love by a feather,
– But crimson one cheek of hers burned
When we came in together.

Heredity

I am the family face;
Flesh perishes, I live on,
Projecting trait and trace
Through time to times anon,
And leaping from place to place
Over oblivion.

The years-heired feature that can
In curve and voice and eye
Despise the human span
Of durance – that is I;
The eternal thing in man,
That heeds no call to die.

You Were the Sort that Men Forget

You were the sort that men forget;
 Though I – not yet! –
Perhaps not ever. Your slighted weakness
 Adds to the strength of my regret!

You'd not the art – you never had
 For good or bad –
To make men see how sweet your meaning,
 Which, visible, had charmed them glad.

You would, by words inept let fall,
 Offend them all,
Even if they saw your warm devotion
 Would hold your life's blood at their call.

You lacked the eye to understand
 Those friends offhand
Whose mode was crude, though whose dim purport
 Outpriced the courtesies of the bland.

I am now the only being who
 Remembers you
It may be. What a waste that Nature
 Grudged soul so dear the art its due!

Near Lanivet, 1872

There was a stunted handpost just on the crest,
Only a few feet high:
She was tired, and we stopped in the twilight-time for
her rest,
At the crossways close thereby.

She leant back, being so weary, against its stem,
And laid her arms on its own,
Each open palm stretched out to each end of them,
Her sad face sideways thrown.

Her white-clothed form at this dim-lit cease of day
Made her look as one crucified
In my gaze at her from the midst of the dusty way,
And hurriedly 'Don't,' I cried.

I do not think she heard. Loosing thence she said,
As she stepped forth ready to go,
'I am rested now. – Something strange came into my
head;
I wish I had not leant so!'

And wordless we moved onward down from the hill
In the west cloud's murked obscure,
And looking back we could see the handpost still
In the solitude of the moor.

'It struck her too,' I thought, for as if afraid
She heavily breathed as we trailed;
Till she said, 'I did not think how 'twould look in the
shade,
When I leant there like one nailed.'

I, lightly: 'There's nothing in it. For *you*, anyhow!'
– 'O I know there is not,' said she . . .
'Yet I wonder . . . If no one is bodily crucified now,
In spirit one may be!'

And we dragged on and on, while we seemed to see
In the running of Time's far glass
Her crucified, as she had wondered if she might be
Some day. – Alas, alas!

Copying Architecture in an Old Minster

(Wimborne)

How smartly the quarters of the hour march by
That the jack-o'-clock never forgets;
Ding-dong; and before I have traced a cusp's eye,
Or got the true twist of the ogee over,
A double ding-dong ricochetts.

Just so did he clang here before I came,
And so will he clang when I'm gone
Through the Minster's cavernous hollows – the
same
Tale of hours never more to be will he deliver
To the speechless midnight and dawn!

I grow to conceive it a call to ghosts,
Whose mould lies below and around.
Yes; the next 'Come, come,' draws them out from
their posts,
And they gather, and one shade appears, and another,
As the eve-damps creep from the ground.

See – a Courtenay stands by his quatre-foiled tomb,
And a Duke and his Duchess near;
And one Sir Edmund in columned gloom,
And a Saxon king by the presbytery chamber;
And shapes unknown in the rear.

Maybe they have met for a parle on some plan
To better ail-stricken mankind;
I catch their cheepings, though thinner than
The overhead creak of a passager's pinion
When leaving land behind.

Or perhaps they speak to the yet unborn,
And caution them not to come
To a world so ancient and trouble-torn,
Of foiled intents, vain lovingkindness,
And ardours chilled and numb.

They waste to fog as I stir and stand,
And move from the arched recess,
And pick up the drawing that slipped from my hand,
And feel for the pencil I dropped in the cranny
In a moment's forgetfulness.

To Shakespeare
After Three Hundred Years

Bright baffling Soul, least capturable of themes,
Thou, who display'dst a life of commonplace,
Leaving no intimate word or personal trace
Of high design outside the artistry
Of thy penned dreams,
Still shalt remain at heart unread eternally.

Through human orbits thy discourse to-day,
Despite thy formal pilgrimage, throbs on
In harmonies that cow Oblivion,
And, like the wind, with all-uncared effect
Maintain a sway
Not fore-desired, in tracks unchosen and unchecked.

And yet, at thy last breath, with mindless note
The borough clocks but samely tongued the hour,
The Avon just as always glassed the tower,
Thy age was published on thy passing-bell
But in due rote
With other dwellers' deaths accorded a like knell.

And at the strokes some townsman (met, maybe,
And thereon queried by some squire's good dame
Driving in shopward) may have given thy name,
With, 'Yes, a worthy man and well-to-do;
Though, as for me,
I knew him but by just a neighbour's nod, 'tis true.

'I' faith, few knew him much here, save by word,
He having elsewhere led his busier life;
Though to be sure he left with us his wife.'
– 'Ah, one of the tradesmen's sons, I now recall. . . .
Witty, I've heard. . . .
We did not know him. . . . Well, good-day. Death
comes to all.'

So, like a strange bright bird we sometimes find
To mingle with the barn-door brood awhile,
Then vanish from their homely domicile –
Into man's poesy, we wot not whence,
Flew thy strange mind,
Lodged there a radiant guest, and sped for ever
thence.

1916

On a Midsummer Eve

I idly cut a parsley stalk,
And blew therein towards the moon;
I had not thought what ghosts would walk
With shivering footsteps to my tune.

I went, and knelt, and scooped my hand
As if to drink, into the brook,
And a faint figure seemed to stand
Above me, with the bygone look.

I lipped rough rhymes of chance, not choice,
I thought not what my words might be;
There came into my ear a voice
That turned a tenderer verse for me.

The Blinded Bird

So zestfully canst thou sing?
And all this indignity,
With God's consent, on thee!
Blinded ere yet a-wing
By the red-hot needle thou,
I stand and wonder how
So zestfully thou canst sing!

Resenting not such wrong,
Thy grievous pain forgot,
Eternal dark thy lot,
Groping thy whole life long,
After that stab of fire;
Enjailed in pitiless wire;
Resenting not such wrong!

Who hath charity? This bird.
Who suffereth long and is kind,
Is not provoked, though blind
And alive ensepulchred?
Who hopeth, endureth all things?
Who thinketh no evil, but sings?
Who is divine? This bird.

To My Father's Violin

Does he want you down there
In the Nether Glooms where
The hours may be a dragging load upon him,
As he hears the axle grind
Round and round
Of the great world, in the blind
Still profound
Of the night-time? He might liven at the sound
Of your string, revealing you had not forgone him.

In the gallery west the nave,
But a few yards from his grave,
Did you, tucked beneath his chin, to his bowing
Guide the homely harmony
Of the quire
Who for long years strenuously –
Son and sire –
Caught the strains that at his fingering low or higher
From your four thin threads and eff-holes came
outflowing.

And, too, what merry tunes
He would bow at nights or noons
That chanced to find him bent to lute a measure,
When he made you speak his heart
As in dream,
Without book or music-chart,
On some theme
Elusive as a jack-o'-lanthorn's gleam,
And the psalm of duty shelved for trill of pleasure.

Well, you cannot, alas,
The barrier overpass
That screens him in those Mournful Meads hereunder,
Where no fiddling can be heard
 In the glades
 Of silentness, no bird
 Thrills the shades;
Where no viol is touched for songs or serenades,
No bowing wakes a congregation's wonder.

He must do without you now,
Stir you no more anyhow
To yearning concords taught you in your glory;
While, your strings a tangled wreck,
 Once smart drawn,
 Ten worm-wounds in your neck,
 Purflings wan
With dust-hoar, here alone I sadly con
Your present dumbness, shape your olden story.

1916

The Young Churchwarden

When he lit the candles there,
And the light fell on his hand,
And it trembled as he scanned
Her and me, his vanquished air
Hinted that his dream was done,
And I saw he had begun
 To understand.

When Love's viol was unstrung,
Sore I wished the hand that shook
Had been mine that shared her book
While that evening hymn was sung,
His the victor's, as he lit
Candles where he had bidden us sit
 With vanquished look.

Now her dust lies listless there,
His afar from tending hand,
What avails the victory scanned?
Does he smile from upper air:
'Ah, my friend, your dream is done;
And 'tis *you* who have begun
 To understand!'

Lines

To a Movement in Mozart's E-Flat Symphony

Show me again the time
When in the Junetide's prime
We flew by meads and mountains northerly! –
Yea, to such freshness, fairness, fulness, fineness,
freeness,
Love lures life on.

Show me again the day
When from the sandy bay
We looked together upon the pestered sea! –
Yea, to such surging, swaying, sighing, swelling,
shrinking,
Love lures life on.

Show me again the hour
When by the pinnaced tower
We eyed each other and feared futurity! –
Yea, to such bodings, broodings, beatings, blanchings,
blessings,
Love lures life on.

Show me again just this:
The moment of that kiss
Away from the prancing folk, by the strawberry-tree! –
Yea, to such rashness, ratheness, rareness, ripeness,
richness,
Love lures life on.

Begun November 1898

The Occultation

When the cloud shut down on the morning shine,
And darkened the sun,
I said, 'So ended that joy of mine
Years back begun.'

But day continued its lustrous roll
In upper air;
And did my late irradiate soul
Live on somewhere?

Life Laughs Onward

Rambling I looked for an old abode
Where, years back, one had lived I knew;
Its site a dwelling duly showed,
 But it was new.

I went where, not so long ago,
The sod had riven two breasts asunder;
Daisies throve gaily there, as though
 No grave were under.

I walked along a terrace where
Loud children gambolled in the sun;
The figure that had once sat there
 Was missed by none.

Life laughed and moved on unsubdued,
I saw that Old succumbed to Young:
'Twas well. My too regretful mood
 Died on my tongue.

Something Tapped

Something tapped on the pane of my room
When there was never a trace
Of wind or rain, and I saw in the gloom
My weary Beloved's face.

'O I am tired of waiting,' she said,
'Night, morn, noon, afternoon;
So cold it is in my lonely bed,
And I thought you would join me soon!'

I rose and neared the window-glass,
But vanished thence had she:
Only a pallid moth, alas,
Tapped at the pane for me.

August 1913

The Announcement

They came, the brothers, and took two chairs
 In their usual quiet way;
And for a time we did not think
 They had much to say.

And they began and talked awhile
 Of ordinary things,
Till spread that silence in the room
 A pent thought brings.

And then they said: 'The end has come.
 Yes: it has come at last.'
And we looked down, and knew that day
 A spirit had passed.

The Oxen

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
 'Now they are all on their knees,'
An elder said as we sat in a flock
 By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
 They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
 To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
 In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
 'Come; see the oxen kneel

'In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
 Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him in the gloom,
 Hoping it might be so.

1915

In Her Precincts

Her house looked cold from the foggy lea,
And the square of each window a dull black blur
 Where showed no stir:
Yes, her gloom within at the lack of me
Seemed matching mine at the lack of her.

The black squares grew to be squares of light
As the eveshade swathed the house and lawn,
 And viols gave tone;
There was glee within. And I found that night
The gloom of severance mine alone.

Kingston-Maurward Park

Transformations

Portion of this yew
Is a man my grandsire knew,
Bosomed here at its foot:
This branch may be his wife,
A ruddy human life
Now turned to a green shoot.

These grasses must be made
Of her who often prayed,
Last century, for repose;
And the fair girl long ago
Whom I often tried to know
May be entering this rose.

So, they are not underground,
But as nerves and veins abound
In the growths of upper air,
And they feel the sun and rain,
And the energy again
That made them what they were!

The Last Signal

(11 Oct. 1886)

A Memory of William Barnes

Silently I footed by an uphill road
That led from my abode to a spot yew-boughed;
Yellowly the sun sloped low down to westward,
And dark was the east with cloud.

Then, amid the shadow of that livid sad east,
Where the light was least, and a gate stood wide,
Something flashed the fire of the sun that was facing it,
Like a brief blaze on that side.

Looking hard and harder I knew what it meant –
The sudden shine sent from the livid east scene;
It meant the west mirrored by the coffin of my friend
there,
Turning to the road from his green,

To take his last journey forth – he who in his prime
Trudged so many a time from that gate athwart the
land!
Thus a farewell to me he signalled on his grave-way,
As with a wave of his hand.

Winterborne-Came Path

Great Things

Sweet cyder is a great thing,
A great thing to me,
Spinning down to Weymouth town
By Ridgway thirstily,
And maid and mistress summoning
Who tend the hostelry:
O cyder is a great thing,
A great thing to me!

The dance it is a great thing,
A great thing to me,
With candles lit and partners fit
For night-long revelry;
And going home when day-dawning
Peeps pale upon the lea:
O dancing is a great thing,
A great thing to me!

Love is, yea, a great thing,
A great thing to me,
When, having drawn across the lawn
In darkness silently,
A figure flits like one a-wing
Out from the nearest tree:
O love is, yes, a great thing,
A great thing to me!

Will these be always great things,
Great things to me? . . .
Let it befall that One will call,
'Soul, I have need of thee:'
What then? Joy-jaunts, impassioned flings,
Love, and its ecstasy,
Will always have been great things,
Great things to me!

The Blow

That no man schemed it is my hope –
Yea, that it fell by will and scope
 Of That Which some enthrone,
And for whose meaning myriads grope.

For I would not that of my kind
There should, of his unbiassed mind,
 Have been one known
Who such a stroke could have designed;

Since it would augur works and ways
Below the lowest that man assays
 To have hurled that stone
Into the sunshine of our days!

And if it prove that no man did,
And that the Inscrutable, the Hid,
 Was cause alone
Of this foul crash our lives amid,

I'll go in due time, and forget
In some deep graveyard's oubliette
 The thing whereof I groan,
And cease from troubling; thankful yet

Time's finger should have stretched to show
No aimful author's was the blow
 That swept us prone,
But the Immanent Doer's That doth not know,

Which in some age unguessed of us
May lift Its blinding incubus,
 And see, and own:
'It grieves me I did thus and thus!'

The Musical Box

Lifelong to be
Seemed the fair colour of the time;
That there was standing shadowed near
A spirit who sang to the gentle chime
Of the self-struck notes, I did not hear,
I did not see.

Thus did it sing
To the mindless lyre that played indoors
As she came to listen for me without:
'O value what the nonce outpours –
This best of life – that shines about
Your welcoming!'

I had slowed along
After the torrid hours were done,
Though still the posts and walls and road
Flung back their sense of the hot-faced sun,
And had walked by Stour-side Mill, where broad
Stream-lilies throng.

And I descried
The dusky house that stood apart,
And her, white-muslined, waiting there
In the porch with high-expectant heart,
While still the thin mechanic air
Went on inside.

At whiles would flit
Swart bats, whose wings, be-webbed and tanned,
Whirred like the wheels of ancient clocks:
She laughed a hailing as she scanned
Me in the gloom, the tuneful box
Intoning it.

Lifelong to be
I thought it. That there watched hard by
A spirit who sang to the indoor tune,
'O make the most of what is nigh!'
I did not hear in my dull soul-swoon –
I did not see.

On Sturminster Foot-Bridge

(Onomatopoeic)

Reticulations creep upon the slack stream's face
When the wind skims irritably past,
The current clucks smartly into each hollow place
That years of flood have scrabbled in the pier's
sodden base;
The floating-lily leaves rot fast.

On a roof stand the swallows ranged in wistful waiting
rows,
Till they arrow off and drop like stones
Among the eyot-withies at whose foot the river flows:
And beneath the roof is she who in the dark world
shows
As a lattice-gleam when midnight moans.

Old Furniture

I know not how it may be with others
 Who sit amid relics of householdry
That date from the days of their mothers' mothers,
 But well I know how it is with me
 Continually.

I see the hands of the generations
 That owned each shiny familiar thing
In play on its knobs and indentations,
 And with its ancient fashioning
 Still dallying:

Hands behind hands, growing paler and paler,
 As in a mirror a candle-flame
Shows images of itself, each frailer
 As it recedes, though the eye may frame
 Its shape the same.

On the clock's dull dial a foggy finger,
 Moving to set the minutes right
With tentative touches that lift and linger
 In the wont of a moth on a summer night,
 Creeps to my sight.

On this old viol, too, fingers are dancing –
 As whilom – just over the strings by the nut,
The tip of a bow receding, advancing
 In airy quivers, as if it would cut
 The plaintive gut.

And I see a face by that box for tinder,
Glowing forth in fits from the dark,
And fading again, as the linden cinder
Kindles to red at the flinty spark,
Or goes out stark.

Well, well. It is best to be up and doing,
The world has no use for one to-day
Who eyes things thus – no aim pursuing!
He should not continue in this stay,
But sink away.

Logs on the Hearth

A Memory of a Sister

The fire advances along the log
Of the tree we felled,
Which bloomed and bore striped apples by the peck
Till its last hour of bearing knelled.

The fork that first my hand would reach
And then my foot
In climbings upward inch by inch, lies now
Sawn, sapless, darkening with soot.

Where the bark chars is where, one year,
It was pruned, and bled –
Then overgrew the wound. But now, at last,
Its growings all have stagnated.

My fellow-climber rises dim
From her chilly grave –
Just as she was, her foot near mine on the bending
limb,
Laughing, her young brown hand awake.

December 1915

The Caged Goldfinch

Within a churchyard, on a recent grave,
I saw a little cage
That jailed a goldfinch. All was silence save
Its hops from stage to stage.

There was inquiry in its wistful eye,
And once it tried to sing;
Of him or her who placed it there, and why,
No one knew anything.

At Madame Tussaud's in Victorian Years

'That same first fiddler who leads the orchéstra to-night
Here fiddled four decades of years ago;
He bears the same babe-like smile of self-centred
delight,
Same trinket on watch-chain, same ring on the hand
with the bow.

'But his face, if regarded, is woefully wanner, and drier,
And his once dark beard has grown straggling and
gray;
Yet a blissful existence he seems to have led with his
lyre,
In a trance of his own, where no wearing or tearing
had sway.

'Mid these wax figures, who nothing can do, it may
seem
That to do but a little thing counts a great deal;
To be watched by kings, councillors, queens, may be
flattering to him –
With their glass eyes longing they too could wake
notes that appeal.'

★

Ah, but he played staunchly – that fiddler – whoever
he was,
With the innocent heart and the soul-touching string:
May he find the Fair Haven! For did he not smile with
good cause?
Yes; gamuts that graced forty years'-flight were not a
small thing!

The Ballet

They crush together – a rustling heap of flesh –
Of more than flesh, a heap of souls; and then
 They part, enmesh,
 And crush together again,
Like the pink petals of a too sanguine rose
 Frightened shut just when it blows.

Though all alike in their tinsel livery,
And indistinguishable at a sweeping glance,
 They muster, maybe,
 As lives wide in irrelevance;
A world of her own has each one underneath,
 Detached as a sword from its sheath.

Daughters, wives, mistresses; honest or false, sold,
 bought;
Hearts of all sizes; gay, fond, gushing, or penned,
 Various in thought
 Of lover, rival, friend;
Links in a one-pulsed chain, all showing one smile,
 Yet severed so many a mile!

The Five Students

The sparrow dips in his wheel-rut bath,
The sun grows passionate-eyed,
And boils the dew to smoke by the paddock-path;
As strenuously we stride, –
Five of us; dark He, fair He, dark She, fair She, I,
All beating by.

The air is shaken, the high-road hot,
Shadowless swoons the day,
The greens are sobered and cattle at rest; but not
We on our urgent way, –
Four of us; fair She, dark She, fair He, I, are there,
But one – elsewhere.

Autumn moulds the hard fruit mellow,
And forward still we press
Through moors, briar-meshed plantations, clay-pits
yellow,
As in the spring hours – yes,
Three of us; fair He, fair She, I, as heretofore,
But – fallen one more.

The leaf drops: earthworms draw it in
At night-time noiselessly,
The fingers of birch and beech are skeleton-thin,
And yet on the beat are we, –
Two of us; fair She, I. But no more left to go
The track we know.

Icicles tag the church-aisle leads,
The flag-rope gibbers hoarse,
The home-bound foot-folk wrap their snow-flaked
heads,
Yet I still stalk the course –
One of us. . . . Dark and fair He, dark and fair She,
gone:
The rest – anon.

During Wind and Rain

They sing their dearest songs –
He, she, all of them – yea,
Treble and tenor and bass,
 And one to play;
With the candles mooning each face. . . .
 Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss –
Elders and juniors – aye,
Making the pathways neat
 And the garden gay;
And they build a shady seat. . . .
 Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the white storm-birds wing across!

They are blithely breakfasting all –
Men and maidens – yea,
Under the summer tree,
 With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet fowl come to the knee. . . .
 Ah, no; the years O!
And the rotten rose is ript from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them – aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
 On the lawn all day,
And brightest things that are theirs. . . .
 Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

Paying Calls

I went by footpath and by stile
 Beyond where bustle ends,
Strayed here a mile and there a mile
 And called upon some friends.

On certain ones I had not seen
 For years past did I call,
And then on others who had been
 The oldest friends of all.

It was the time of midsummer
 When they had used to roam;
But now, though tempting was the air,
 I found them all at home.

I spoke to one and other of them
 By mound and stone and tree
Of things we had done ere days were dim,
 But they spoke not to me.

Who's in the Next Room?

'Who's in the next room? – who?
I seemed to see
Somebody in the dawning passing through,
Unknown to me.'
'Nay: you saw nought. He passed invisibly.'

'Who's in the next room? – who?
I seem to hear
Somebody muttering firm in a language new
That chills the ear.'
'No: you catch not his tongue who has entered there.'

'Who's in the next room? – who?
I seem to feel
His breath like a clammy draught, as if it drew
From the Polar Wheel.'
'No: none who breathes at all does the door conceal.'

'Who's in the next room? – who?
A figure wan
With a message to one in there of something due?
Shall I know him anon?'
'Yea he; and he brought such; and you'll know him
anon.'

The Memorial Brass: 186–

‘Why do you weep there, O sweet lady,
Why do you weep before that brass? –
(I’m a mere student sketching the mediaeval)
Is some late death lined there, alas? –
Your father’s? . . . Well, all pay the debt that paid he!’

‘Young man, O must I tell! – My husband’s! And
under
His name I set mine, and my *death!* –
Its date left vacant till my heirs should fill it,
Stating me faithful till my last breath.’
– ‘Madam, that you are a widow wakes my wonder!’

‘O wait! For last month I – remarried!
And now I fear ’twas a deed amiss.
We’ve just come home. And I am sick and saddened
At what the new one will say to this;
And will he think – think that I should have tarried?’

‘I may add, surely, – with no wish to harm him –
That he’s a temper – yes, I fear!
And when he comes to church next Sunday morning,
And sees that written . . . O dear, O dear!’
– ‘Madam, I swear your beauty will disarm him!’

The Upper Birch-Leaves

Warm yellowy-green
In the blue serene,
How they skip and sway
On this autumn day!
They cannot know
What has happened below, –
That their boughs down there
Are already quite bare,
That their own will be
When a week has passed, –
For they jig as in glee
To this very last.

But no; there lies
At times in their tune
A note that cries
What at first I fear
I did not hear:
'O we remember
At each wind's hollo –
Though life holds yet –
We go hence soon,
For 'tis November;
– But that you follow
You may forget!'

He Revisits His First School

I should not have shown in the flesh,
I ought to have gone as a ghost;
It was awkward, unseemly almost,
Standing solidly there as when fresh,
 Pink, tiny, crisp-curled,
 My pinions yet furled
 From the winds of the world.

After waiting so many a year
To wait longer, and go as a sprite
From the tomb at the mid of some night
Was the right, radiant way to appear;
 Not as one wanzing weak
 From life's roar and reek,
 His rest still to seek:

Yea, beglimpsed through the quaint quarried glass
Of green moonlight, by me greener made,
When they'd cry, perhaps, 'There sits his shade
In his olden haunt – just as he was
 When in Walkingame he
 Conned the grand Rule-of-Three
 With the bent of a bee.'

But to show in the afternoon sun,
With an aspect of hollow-eyed care,
When none wished to see me come there,
Was a garish thing, better undone.
 Yes; wrong was the way;
 But yet, let me say,
 I may right it – some day.

Midnight on the Great Western

In the third-class seat sat the journeying boy,
And the roof-lamp's oily flame
Played down on his listless form and face,
Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going,
Or whence he came.

In the band of his hat the journeying boy
Had a ticket stuck; and a string
Around his neck bore the key of his box,
That twinkled gleams of the lamp's sad beams
Like a living thing.

What past can be yours, O journeying boy
Towards a world unknown,
Who calmly, as if incurious quite
On all at stake, can undertake
This plunge alone?

Knows your soul a sphere, O journeying boy,
Our rude realms far above,
Whence with spacious vision you mark and mete
This region of sin that you find you in,
But are not of?

The Choirmaster's Burial

He often would ask us
That, when he died,
After playing so many
To their last rest,
If out of us any
Should here abide,
And it would not task us,
We would with our lutes
Play over him
By his grave-brim
The psalm he liked best –
The one whose sense suits
'Mount Ephraim' –
And perhaps we should seem
To him, in Death's dream,
Like the seraphim.

As soon as I knew
That his spirit was gone
I thought this his due,
And spoke thereupon.
'I think,' said the vicar,
'A read service quicker
Than viols out-of-doors
In these frosts and hoars.
That old-fashioned way
Requires a fine day,
And it seems to me
It had better not be.'

Hence, that afternoon,
Though never knew he
That his wish could not be,
To get through it faster
They buried the master
Without any tune.
But 'twas said that, when
At the dead of next night
The vicar looked out,
There struck on his ken
Thronged roundabout,
Where the frost was graying
The headstoned grass,
A band all in white
Like the saints in church-glass,
Singing and playing
The ancient stave
By the choir-master's grave.

Such the tenor man told
When he had grown old.

POEMS OF WAR AND
PATRIOTISM

Men Who March Away
(Song of the Soldiers)

What of the faith and fire within us
Men who march away
Ere the barn-cocks say
Night is growing gray,
Leaving all that here can win us;
What of the faith and fire within us
Men who march away?

Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye,
Who watch us stepping by
With doubt and dolorous sigh?
Can much pondering so hoodwink you!
Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye?

Nay. We well see what we are doing,
Though some may not see –
Dalliers as they be –
England's need are we;
Her distress would leave us rueing:
Nay. We well see what we are doing,
Though some may not see!

In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just,
And that braggarts must
Surely bite the dust,
Press we to the field ungrieving,
In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just.

Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away
Ere the barn-cocks say
Night is growing gray,
Leaving all that here can win us;
Hence the faith and fire within us
Men who march away.

5 September 1914

His Country

I journeyed from my native spot Across the south sea shine, And found that people in hall and cot Labour'd and suffered each his lot Even as I did mine.	He travels southward, and looks around;
Thus noting them in meads and marts It did not seem to me That my dear country with its hearts, Minds, yearnings, worse and better parts Had ended with the sea.	and cannot discover the boundary
I further and further went anon, As such I still surveyed, And further yet – yea, on and on, And all the men I looked upon Had heart-strings fellow-made.	of his native country;
I traced the whole terrestrial round, Homing the other side; Then said I, ‘What is there to bound My denizenship? It seems I have found Its scope to be world-wide.’	or where his duties to his fellow- creatures end;
I asked me: ‘Whom have I to fight, And whom have I to dare, And whom to weaken, crush, and blight? My country seems to have kept in sight On my way everywhere.’	nor who are his enemies.

1913

England to Germany in 1914

'O England, may God punish thee!
– Is it that Teuton genius flowers
Only to breathe malignity
Upon its friend of earlier hours?
– We have eaten your bread, you have eaten ours,
We have loved your burgs, your pines' green moan,
Fair Rhine-stream, and its storied towers;
Your shining souls of deathless dowers
Have won us as they were our own:

We have nursed no dreams to shed your blood,
We have matched your might not rancorously
Save a flushed few whose blatant mood
You heard and marked as well as we
To tongue not in their country's key;
But yet you cry with face aflame,
'O England, may God punish thee!
And foul in onward history,
And present sight, your ancient name.

Autumn 1914

On the Belgian Expatriation

I dreamt that people from the Land of Chimes
Arrived one autumn morning with their bells,
To hoist them on the towers and citadels
Of my own country, that the musical rhymes

Rung by them into space at meted times
Amid the market's daily stir and stress,
And the night's empty star-lit silentness,
Might solace souls of this and kindred climes.

Then I awoke; and lo, before me stood
The visioned ones, but pale and full of fear;
From Bruges they came, and Antwerp, and Ostend,

No carillons in their train. Foes of mad mood
Had shattered these to shards amid the gear
Of ravaged roof, and smouldering gable-end.

18 October 1914

An Appeal to America on Behalf of the Belgian Destitute

Seven millions stand
Emaciate, in that ancient Delta-land: –
We here, full-charged with our own maimed and dead
And coiled in throbbing conflicts slow and sore,
Can poorly soothe these ails unmerited
Of souls forlorn upon the facing shore! –
Where naked, gaunt, in endless band on band
Seven millions stand.

No man can say
To your great country that, with scant delay,
You must, perforce, ease them in their loud need:
We know that nearer first your duty lies;
But – is it much to ask that you let plead
Your lovingkindness with you – wooingwise –
Albeit that aught you owe, and must repay,
No man can say?

December 1914

The Pity of It

I walked in loamy Wessex lanes, afar
From rail-track and from highway, and I heard
In field and farmstead many an ancient word
Of local lineage like 'Thu bist', 'Er war',

'Ich woll, 'Er sholl', and by-talk similar,
Nigh as they speak who in this month's moon gird
At England's very loins, thereunto spurred
By gangs whose glory threats and slaughters are.

Then seemed a Heart crying: 'Whosoever they be
At root and bottom of this, who flung this flame
Between kin folk kin tongued even as are we,

'Sinister, ugly, lurid, be their fame;
May their familiars grow to shun their name,
And their brood perish everlastingly.'

April 1915

In Time of Wars and Tumults

'Would that I'd not drawn breath here!' some one said,
'To stalk upon this stage of evil deeds,
Where purposelessly month by month proceeds
A play so sorely shaped and blood-bespread.'

Yet had his spark not quickened, but lain dead
To the gross spectacles of this our day,
And never put on the proffered cloak of clay,
He had but known not things now manifested;

Life would have swirled the same. Morns would have
dawned

On the uprooting by the night-gun's stroke
Of what the yester noonshine brought to flower;

Brown martial brows in dying throes have wanned
Despite his absence; hearts no fewer been broke
By Empery's insatiate lust of power.

1915

In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'¹

I

Only a man harrowing clods
In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
Half asleep as they stalk.

II

Only thin smoke without flame
From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
Though Dynasties pass.

III

Yonder a maid and her wight
Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die.

1915

¹ Jer., LI 20.

Cry of the Homeless

After the Prussian Invasion of Belgium

‘Instigator of the ruin –
Whichsoever thou mayst be
Of the masterful of Europe
That contrived our misery –
Hear the wormwood-worded greeting
From each city, shore, and lea
Of thy victims:
“Conqueror, all hail to thee!”

‘Yea: “All hail!” we grimly shout thee
That wast author, fount, and head
Of these wounds, whoever proven
When our times are throughly read.
“May thy loved be slighted, blighted,
And forsaken,” be it said
By thy victims,
“And thy children beg their bread!”

‘Nay: a richer malediction! –
Rather let this thing befall
In time’s hurling and unfurling
On the night when comes thy call;
That compassion dew thy pillow
And bedrench thy senses all
For thy victims,
Till death dark thee with his pall.’

August 1915

Before Marching and After

(In Memoriam F.W.G.)

Orion swung southward aslant
Where the starved Egdon pine-trees had thinned,
The Pleiads aloft seemed to pant
With the heather that twitched in the wind;
But he looked on indifferent to sights such as these,
Unswayed by love, friendship, home joy or home
sorrow,
And wondered to what he would march on the
morrow.

The crazed household-clock with its whirr
Rang midnight within as he stood,
He heard the low sighing of her
Who had striven from his birth for his good;
But he still only asked the spring starlight, the breeze,
What great thing or small thing his history would
borrow
From that Game with Death he would play on the
morrow.

When the heath wore the robe of late summer,
And the fuchsia-bells, hot in the sun,
Hung red by the door, a quick comer
Brought tidings that marching was done
For him who had joined in that game overseas
Where Death stood to win, though his name was to
borrow
A brightness therefrom not to fade on the morrow.

September 1915

Often When Warring

Often when warring for he wist not what,
An enemy-soldier, passing by one weak,
Has tendered water, wiped the burning cheek,
And cooled the lips so black and clammed and hot;

Then gone his way, and maybe quite forgot
The deed of grace amid the roar and reek;
Yet larger vision than loud arms bespeak
He there has reached, although he has known it not

For natural mindsight, triumphing in the act
Over the throes of artificial rage,
Has thuswise muffled victory's peal of pride,
Rended to ribands policy's specious page
That deals but with evasion, code, and pact,
And war's apology wholly stultified.

1915

Then and Now

When battles were fought
With a chivalrous sense of Should and Ought,
In spirit men said,
‘End we quick or dead,
Honour is some reward!
Let us fight fair – for our own best or worst;
So, Gentlemen of the Guard,
Fire first!’

In the open they stood,
Man to man in his knightlihood:
They would not deign
To profit by a stain
On the honourable rules,
Knowing that practise perfidy no man durst
Who in the heroic schools
Was nurst.

But now, behold, what
Is warfare wherein honour is not!
Rama laments
Its dead innocents:
Herod breathes: ‘Sly slaughter
Shall rule! Let us, by modes once called accurst,
Overhead, under water,
Stab first.’

1915

A Call to National Service

Up and be doing, all who have a hand
To lift, a back to bend. It must not be
In times like these that vaguely linger we
To air our vaunts and hopes; and leave our land

Untended as a wild of weeds and sand.
– Say, then, ‘I come!’ and go, O women and men
Of palace, ploughshare, easel, counter, pen;
That scareless, scathless, England still may stand.

Would years but let me stir as once I stirred
At many a dawn to take the forward track,
And with a stride plunged on to enterprize,

I now would speed like yester wind that whirred
Through yielding pines; and serve with never a slack,
So loud for promptness all around outcries!

March 1917

The Dead and the Living One

The dead woman lay in her first night's grave,
And twilight fell from the clouds' concave,
And those she had asked to forgive forgave.

The woman passing came to a pause
By the heaped white shapes of wreath and cross,
And looked upon where the other was.

And as she mused there thus spoke she:
'Never your countenance did I see,
But you've been a good good friend to me!'

Rose a plaintive voice from the sod below:
'O woman whose accents I do not know,
What is it that makes you approve me so?'

'O dead one, ere my soldier went,
I heard him saying, with warm intent,
To his friend, when won by your blandishment:

“I would change for that lass here and now!
And if I return I may break my vow
To my present Love, and contrive somehow

“To call my own this new-found pearl,
Whose eyes have the light, whose lips the curl
I always have looked for in a girl!”

' – And this is why that by ceasing to be –
Though never your countenance did I see –
You prove you a good good friend to me;

‘And I pray each hour for your soul’s repose
In gratitude for your joining those
No lover will clasp when his campaigns close.’

Away she turned, when arose to her eve
A martial phantom of gory dye,
That said, with a thin and far-off sigh:

‘O sweetheart, neither shall I clasp you!
For the foe this day has pierced me through,
And sent me to where she is. Adieu! –

‘And forget not when the night-wind’s whine
Calls over this turf where her limbs recline,
That it travels on to lament by mine.’

There was a cry by the white-flowered mound,
There was a laugh from underground,
There was a deeper gloom around.

1915

A New Year's Eve in War Time

I

Phantasmal fears,
And the flap of the flame,
And the throb of the clock,
And a loosened slate,
And the blind night's drone,
Which tiredly the spectral pines intone!

II

And the blood in my ears
Strumming always the same,
And the gable-cock
With its fitful grate,
And myself, alone.

III

The twelfth hour nears
Hand-hid, as in shame;
I undo the lock,
And listen, and wait
For the Young Unknown.

IV

In the dark there careers –
As if Death astride came
To numb all with his knock –
A horse at mad rate
Over rut and stone.

V

No figure appears,
No call of my name,
No sound but 'Tic-toc'
Without check. Past the gate
It clatters – is gone.

VI

What rider it bears
There is none to proclaim;
And the Old Year has struck,
And, scarce animate,
The New makes moan.

VII

Maybe that 'More Tears! –
More Famine and Flame –
More Severance and Shock!'
Is the order from Fate
That the Rider speeds on
To pale Europe; and tiredly the pines intone.

1915–1916

I Met a Man

I met a man when night was nigh,
Who said, with shining face and eye
Like Moses' after Sinai: –

'I have seen the Moulder of Monarchies,
Realms, peoples, plains and hills,
Sitting upon the sunlit seas! –
And, as He sat, soliloquies
Fell from Him like an antiphonic breeze
That pricks the waves to thrills.

'Meseemed that of the maimed and dead
Mown down upon the globe, –
Their plenteous blooms of promise shed
Ere fruiting-time – His words were said,
Sitting against the western web of red
Wrapt in His crimson robe.

'And I could catch them now and then:
– "Why let these gambling clans
Of human Cockers, pit liege men
From mart and city, dale and glen,
In death-mains, but to swell and swell again
Their swollen All-Empery plans,

"When a mere nod (if my malign
Compeer but passive keep)
Would mend that old mistake of mine
I made with Saul, and ever consign
All Lords of War whose sanctuaries enshrine
Liberticide, to sleep?

“With violence the lands are spread
Even as in Israel’s day,
And it repenteth me I bred
Chartered armipotents lust-led
To feuds. . . Yea, grieves my heart, as then I said,
To see their evil way!”

– ‘The utterance grew, and flapped like flame,
And further speech I feared;
But no Celestial tongued acclaim,
And no huzzas from earthlings came,
And the heavens mutely masked as ’twere in shame
Till daylight disappeared.’

Thus ended he as night rode high –
The man of shining face and eye,
Like Moses’ after Sinai.

1916

I Looked Up from My Writing

I looked up from my writing,
And gave a start to see,
As if rapt in my inditing,
The moon's full gaze on me.

Her meditative misty head
Was spectral in its air,
And I involuntarily said,
'What are you doing there?'

'Oh, I've been scanning pond and hole
And waterway hereabout
For the body of one with a sunken soul
Who has put his life-light out.

'Did you hear his frenzied tattle?
It was sorrow for his son
Who is slain in brutish battle,
Though he has injured none.

'And now I am curious to look
Into the blinkered mind
Of one who wants to write a book
In a world of such a kind.'

Her temper overwrought me,
And I edged to shun her view,
For I felt assured she thought me
One who should drown him too.

FINALE

The Coming of the End

How it came to an end!
The meeting afar from the crowd,
And the love-looks and laughters unpenned,
The parting when much was avowed,
How it came to an end!

It came to an end;
Yes, the outgazing over the stream,
With the sun on each serpentine bend,
Or, later, the luring moon-gleam;
It came to an end.

It came to an end,
The housebuilding, furnishing, planting,
As if there were ages to spend
In welcoming, feasting, and jaunting;
It came to an end.

It came to an end,
That journey of one day a week:
(‘It always goes on,’ said a friend,
‘Just the same in bright weathers or bleak;’)
But it came to an end.

‘*How* will come to an end
This orbit so smoothly begun,
Unless some convulsion attend?’
I often said. ‘What will be done
When it comes to an end?’

Well, it came to an end
Quite silently – stopped without jerk;
Better close no prevision could lend;
Working out as One planned it should work
Ere it came to an end.

Afterwards

When the Present has latched its postern behind my
tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like
wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours
say,
'He was a man who used to notice such things?'

If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid's soundless
blink,
The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to
alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may
think,
'To him this must have been a familiar sight.'

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and
warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, 'He strove that such innocent creatures
should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is
gone.'

If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they
stand at the door,
Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face
no more,
'He was one who had an eye for such mysteries?'

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in
the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its
outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
'He hears it not now, but used to notice such
things'?

LATE LYRICS AND EARLIER

Weathers

I

This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
 And so do I;
When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,
 And nestlings fly:
And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
And they sit outside at 'The Travellers' Rest',
And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,
And citizens dream of the south and west,
 And so do I.

II

This is the weather the shepherd shuns,
 And so do I;
When beeches drip in browns and duns,
 And thresh, and ply;
And hill-hid tides throb, throe on throe,
And meadow rivulets overflow,
And drops on gate-bars hang in a row,
And rooks in families homeward go,
 And so do I.

The Maid of Keinton Mandeville

(A Tribute to Sir H. Bishop)

I hear that maiden still
Of Keinton Mandeville
Singing, in flights that played
As wind-wafts through us all,
Till they made our mood a thrall
To their aery rise and fall,
‘Should he upbraid!’

Rose-necked, in sky-gray gown,
From a stage in Stower Town
Did she sing, and singing smile
As she blent that dexterous voice
With the ditty of her choice,
And banished our annoys
Thereawhile.

One with such song had power
To wing the heaviest hour
Of him who housed with her.
Who did I never knew
When her spoused estate on drew,
And her warble flung its woo
In his ear.

Ah, she’s a beldame now,
Time-trenched on cheek and brow,
Whom I once heard as a maid
From Keinton Mandeville
Of matchless scope and skill
Sing, with smile and swell and trill,
‘Should he upbraid!’

1915 or 1916

At a House in Hampstead

Sometime the Dwelling of John Keats

O poet, come you haunting here
Where streets have stolen up all around,
And never a nightingale pours one
Full-throated sound?

Drawn from your drowse by the Seven famed Hills,
Thought you to find all just the same
Here shining, as in hours of old,
If you but came?

What will you do in your surprise
At seeing that changes wrought in Rome
Are wrought yet more on the misty slope
One time your home?

Will you wake wind-wafts on these stairs?
Swing the doors open noisily?
Show as an umbraged ghost beside
Your ancient tree?

Or will you, softening, the while
You further and yet further look,
Learn that a laggard few would fain
Preserve your nook? . . .

– Where the Piazza steps incline,
And catch late light at eventide,
I once stood, in that Rome, and thought,
“’Twas here he died,”

I drew to a violet-sprinkled spot,
Where day and night a pyramid keeps
Uplifted its white hand, and said,
 'Tis there he sleeps.'

Pleasanter now it is to hold
That here, where sang he, more of him
Remains than where he, tuneless, cold,
 Passed to the dim.

July 1920

‘And There Was a Great Calm’
(On the Signing of the Armistice, 11 Nov. 1918)

I

There had been years of Passion – scorching, cold,
And much Despair, and Anger heaving high,
Care whitely watching, Sorrows manifold,
Among the young, among the weak and old,
And the pensive Spirit of Pity whispered, ‘Why?’

II

Men had not paused to answer. Foes distraught
Pierced the thinned peoples in a brute-like blindness,
Philosophies that sages long had taught,
And Selflessness, were as an unknown thought,
And ‘Hell!’ and ‘Shell!’ were yapped at Lovingkindness.

III

The feeble folk at home had grown full-used
To ‘dug-outs’, ‘snipers’, ‘Huns’, from the war-adept
In the mornings heard, and at evetides perused;
To day-dreamt men in millions, when they mused –
To nightmare-men in millions when they slept.

IV

Waking to wish existence timeless, null,
Sirius they watched above where armies fell;
He seemed to check his flapping when, in the lull
Of night a boom came thencewise, like the dull
Plunge of a stone dropped into some deep well.

V

So, when old hopes that earth was bettering slowly
Were dead and damned, there sounded 'War is done!
One morrow. Said the bereft, and meek, and lowly,
'Will men some day be given to grace? yea, wholly,
And in good sooth, as our dreams used to run?'

VI

Breathless they paused. Out there men raised their
glance
To where had stood those poplars lank and lopped,
As they had raised it through the four years' dance
Of Death in the now familiar flats of France;
And murmured, 'Strange, this! How? All firing
stopped?'

VII

Aye; all was hushed. The about-to-fire fired not,
The aimed-at moved away in trance-lipped song.
One checkless regiment slung a clinching shot
And turned. The Spirit of Irony smirked out, 'What?
Spoil peradventures woven of Rage and Wrong?'

VIII

Thenceforth no flying fires inflamed the gray,
No hurtlings shook the dewdrop from the thorn,
No moan perplexed the mute bird on the spray;
Worn horses mused: 'We are not whipped to-day;'
No weft-winged engines blurred the moon's thin horn.

IX

Calm fell. From Heaven distilled a clemency;
There was peace on earth, and silence in the sky;
Some could, some could not, shake off misery:
The Sinister Spirit sneered: 'It had to be!'
And again the Spirit of Pity whispered, 'Why?'

A Young Man's Exhortation

Call off your eyes from care
By some determined deftness; put forth joys
Dear as excess without the core that cloys,
And charm Life's lourings fair.

Exalt and crown the hour
That girdles us, and fill it full with glee,
Blind glee, excelling aught could ever be
Were heedfulness in power.

Send up such touching strains
That limitless recruits from Fancy's pack
Shall rush upon your tongue, and tender back
All that your soul contains.

For what do we know best?
That a fresh love-leaf crumpled soon will dry,
And that men moment after moment die,
Of all scope dispossess.

If I have seen one thing
It is the passing preciousness of dreams;
That aspects are within us; and who seems
Most kingly is the King.

1867: Westbourne Park Villas

At Lulworth Cove a Century Back

Had I but lived a hundred years ago
I might have gone, as I have gone this year,
By Warmwell Cross on to a Cove I know,
And Time have placed his finger on me there:

'You see that man?' – I might have looked, and said,
*'O yes: I see him. One that boat has brought
Which dropped down Channel round Saint Alban's
Head.*

So commonplace a youth calls not my thought.'

'You see that man?' – *'Why yes; I told you; yes:
Of an idling town-sort; thin; hair brown in hue;
And as the evening light scants less and less
He looks up at a star, as many do.'*

'You see that man?' – *'Nay, leave me!'* then I plead,
*'I have fifteen miles to vamp across the lea,
And it grows dark, and I am weary-kneed:
I have said the third time; yes, that man I see!'*

*'Good. That man goes to Rome – to death, despair;
And no one notes him now but you and I:
A hundred years, and the world will follow him there,
And bend with reverence where his ashes lie.'*

September 1920

Note. – In September 1820 Keats, on his way to Rome, landed one day on the Dorset coast, and composed the sonnet, *'Bright Star! would I were steadfast as thou art.'* The spot of his landing is judged to have been Lulworth Cove.

The Children and Sir Nameless

Sir Nameless, once of Athelhall, declared:
‘These wretched children romping in my park
Trample the herbage till the soil is bared,
And yap and yell from early morn till dark!
Go keep them harnessed to their set routines:
Thank God I’ve none to hasten my decay;
For green remembrance there are better means
Than offspring, who but wish their sires away.’

Sir Nameless of that mansion said anon:
‘To be perpetuate for my mightiness
Sculpture must image me when I am gone.’
– He forthwith summoned carvers there express
To shape a figure stretching seven-odd feet
(For he was tall) in alabaster stone,
With shield, and crest, and casque, and sword
complete:
When done a statelier work was never known.

Three hundred years hied; Church-restorers came,
And, no one of his lineage being traced,
They thought an effigy so large in frame
Best fitted for the floor. There it was placed,
Under the seats for schoolchildren. And they
Kicked out his name, and hobnailed off his nose;
And, as they yawn through sermon-time, they say,
‘Who was this old stone man beneath our toes?’

At the Railway Station, Upway

'There is not much that I can do,
For I've no money that's quite my own!'
Spoke up the pitying child –
A little boy with a violin
At the station before the train came in, –
'But I can play my fiddle to you,
And a nice one 'tis, and good in tone!'

The man in the handcuffs smiled;
The constable looked, and he smiled, too,
As the fiddle began to twang;
And the man in the handcuffs suddenly sang
With grimful glee:
'This life so free
Is the thing for me!'
And the constable smiled, and said no word,
As if unconscious of what he heard;
And so they went on till the train came in –
The convict, and boy with the violin.

An Autumn Rain-Scene

There trudges one to a merry-making
With a sturdy swing,
On whom the rain comes down.

To fetch the saving medicament
Is another bent,
On whom the rain comes down.

One slowly drives his herd to the stall
Ere ill befall,
On whom the rain comes down.

This bears his missives of life and death
With quickening breath,
On whom the rain comes down.

One watches for signals of wreck or war
From the hill afar,
On whom the rain comes down.

No care if he gain a shelter or none,
Unhired moves one,
On whom the rain comes down.

And another knows nought of its chilling fall
Upon him at all,
On whom the rain comes down.

October 1904

Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard

These flowers are I, poor Fanny Hurd,
 Sir or Madam,
A little girl here sepultured.
Once I flit-fluttered like a bird
Above the grass, as now I wave
In daisy shapes above my grave,
 All day cheerily,
 All night eerily!

– I am one Bachelor Bowring, ‘Gent’,
 Sir or Madam;
In shingled oak my bones were pent;
Hence more than a hundred years I spent
In my feat of change from a coffin-thrall
To a dancer in green as leaves on a wall,
 All day cheerily,
 All night eerily!

– I, these berries of juice and gloss,
 Sir or Madam,
Am Clean forgotten as Thomas Voss;
Thin-urned, I have burrowed away from the moss
That covers my sod, and have entered this yew,
And turned to clusters ruddy of view,
 All day cheerily,
 All night eerily!

– The Lady Gertrude, proud, high-bred,
 Sir or Madam,
Am I – this laurel that shades your head;
Into its veins I have stilly sped,

And made them of me; and my leaves now shine,
As did my satins superfine,

All day cheerily,

All night eerily!

– I, who as innocent withwind climb,

Sir or Madam,

Am one Eve Greensleeves, in olden time

Kissed by men from many a clime,

Beneath sun, stars, in blaze, in breeze,

As now by glowworms and by bees,

All day cheerily,

All night eerily!¹

– I'm old Squire Audeley Grey, who grew,

Sir or Madam,

Aweary of life, and in scorn withdrew;

Till anon I clambered up anew

As ivy-green, when my ache was stayed,

And in that attire I have longtime gayed

All day cheerily,

All night eerily!

– And so these maskers breathe to each

Sir or Madam

Who lingers there, and their lively speech

Affords an interpreter much to teach,

As their murmurous accents seem to come

Thence hitheraround in a radiant hum,

All day cheerily,

All night eerily!

¹ It was said her real name was Eve Trevillian or Trevelyan; and she was the handsome mother of two or three illegitimate children, circa 1784–95.

By Henstridge Cross at the Year's End

(From this centuries-old cross-road the highway leads east to London, north to Bristol and Bath, west to Exeter and the Land's End, and south to the Channel coast.)

Why go the east road now? . . .
That way a youth went on a morrow
After mirth, and he brought back sorrow
Painted upon his brow:
Why go the east road now?

Why go the north road now?
Tom, leaf-strewn, as if scoured by foemen,
Once edging fiefs of my forefolk yeomen,
Fallows fat to the plough:
Why go the north road now?

Why go the west road now?
Thence to us came she, bosom-burning,
Welcome with joyousness returning. . . .
She sleeps under the bough:
Why go the west road now?

Why go the south road now?
That way marched they some are forgetting,
Stark to the moon left, past regretting
Loves who have falsed their vow. . . .
Why go the south road now?

Why go any road now?
White stands the handpost for brisk onbearers,
'Halt!' is the word for wan-cheeked farers
Musing on Whither, and How. . . .
Why go any road now?

'Yea: we want new feet now'
Answer the stones. 'Want chit-chat, laughter:
Plenty of such to go hereafter
By our tracks, we trow!
We are for new feet now.'

During the War

A Procession of Dead Days

I see the ghost of a perished day;
I know his face, and the feel of his dawn:
'Twas he who took me far away
 To a spot strange and gray:
Look at me, Day, and then pass on,
But come again: yes, come anon!

Enters another into view;
His features are not cold or white,
But rosy as a vein seen through:
 Too soon he smiles adieu.
Adieu, O ghost-day of delight;
But come and grace my dying sight.

Enters the day that brought the kiss:
He brought it in his foggy hand
To where the mumbling river is,
 And the high clematis;
It lent new colour to the land,
And all the boy within me manned.

Ah, this one. Yes, I know his name,
He is the day that wrought a shine
Even on a precinct common and tame,
 As 'twere of purposed aim.
He shows him as a rainbow sign
Of promise made to me and mine.

The next stands forth in his morning clothes,
And yet, despite their misty blue,
They mark no sombre custom-growths
 That joyous living loathes,
But a meteor act, that left in its queue
A train of sparks my lifetime through.

I almost tremble at his nod –
This next in train – who looks at me
As I were slave, and he were god
 Wielding an iron rod.
I close my eyes; yet still is he
In front there, looking mastery.

In semblance of a face averse
The phantom of the next one comes:
I did not know what better or worse
 Chancings might bless or curse
When his original glossed the thrums
Of ivy, bringing that which numbs.

Yes; trees were turning in their sleep
Upon their windy pillows of gray
When he stole in. Silent his creep
 On the grassed eastern steep. . . .
I shall not soon forget that day,
And what his third hour took away!

The Marble Tablet

There it stands, though alas, what a little of her
Shows in its cold white look!
Not her glance, glide, or smile; not a tittle of her
Voice like the purl of a brook;
Not her thoughts, that you read like a book.

It may stand for her once in November
When first she breathed, witless of all;
Or in heavy years she would remember
When circumstance held her in thrall;
Or at last, when she answered her call!

Nothing more. The still marble, date-graven,
Gives all that it can, tersely lined;
That one has at length found the haven
Which every one other will find;
With silence on what shone behind.

St Juliot: 8 September 1916

The Master and the Leaves

I

We are budding, Master, budding,
We of your favourite tree;
March drought and April flooding
Arouse us merrily,
Our stemlets newly studding;
And yet you do not see!

II

We are fully woven for summer
In stuff of limpest green,
The twitterer and the hummer
Here rest of nights, unseen,
While like a long-roll drummer
The nightjar thrills the treen.

III

We are turning yellow, Master,
And next we are turning red,
And faster then and faster
Shall seek our rooty bed,
All wasted in disaster!
But you lift not your head.

IV

– ‘I mark your early going,
And that you’ll soon be clay,
I have seen your summer showing
As in my youthful day;
But why I seem unknowing
Is too sunk in to say!’

1917

In the Small Hours

I lay in my bed and fiddled
 With a dreamland viol and bow,
And the tunes flew back to my fingers
 I had melodied years ago.
It was two or three in the morning
 When I fancy-fiddled so
Long reels and country-dances,
 And hornpipes swift and slow.

And soon anon came crossing
 The chamber in the gray
Figures of jigging fieldfolk –
 Saviours of corn and hay –
To the air of ‘Haste to the Wedding’,
 As after a wedding-day;
Yea, up and down the middle
 In windless whirls went they!

There danced the bride and bridegroom,
 And couples in a train,
Gay partners time and travail
 Had longwhiles stilled amain! . . .
It seemed a thing for weeping
 To find, at slumber’s wane
And morning’s sly in creeping,
 That Now, not Then, held reign.

On One Who Lived and Died Where
He Was Born

When a night in November
 Blew forth its bleared airs
An infant descended
 His birth-chamber stairs
 For the very first time,
 At the still, midnight chime;
All unapprehended
 His mission, his aim. –
Thus, first, one November,
An infant descended
 The stairs.

On a night in November
 Of weariful cares,
A frail aged figure
 Ascended those stairs
 For the very last time:
 All gone his life's prime,
All vanished his vigour,
 And fine, forceful frame:
Thus, last, one November
Ascended that figure
 Upstairs.

On those nights in November –
 Apart eighty years –
The babe and the bent one
 Who traversed those stairs
 From the early first time
 To the last feeble climb –
That fresh and that spent one –
 Were even the same:
Yea, who passed in November
As infant, as bent one,
 Those stairs.

Wise child of November!
 From birth to blanched hairs
Descending, ascending,
 Wealth-wantless, those stairs;
 Who saw quick in time
 As a vain pantomime
Life's tending, its ending,
 The worth of its fame.
Wise child of November,
Descending, ascending
 Those stairs!

She Who Saw Not

‘Did you see something within the house
That made me call you before the red sunsetting?
Something that all this common scene endows
With a richened impress there can be no forgetting?’

‘ – I have found nothing to see therein,
O Sage, that should have made you urge me to enter,
Nothing to fire the soul, or the sense to win:
I rate you as a rare misrepresenter!’

‘ – Go anew, Lady, – in by the right. . . .
Well: why does your face not shine like the face of
Moses?’

‘ – I found no moving thing there save the light
And shadow flung on the wall by the outside roses.’

‘ – Go yet once more, pray. Look on a seat.’
‘ – I go. . . . O Sage, it’s only a man that sits there
With eyes on the sun. Mute, – average head to feet.’
‘ – No more?’ – ‘No more. Just one the place befits
there,

‘As the rays reach in through the open door,
And he looks at his hand, and the sun glows through
his fingers,
While he’s thinking thoughts whose tenour is no more
To me than the swaying rose-tree shade that lingers.’

No more. And years drew on and on
Till no sun came, dank fogs the house enfolding;
And she saw inside, when the form in the flesh had gone,
As a vision what she had missed when the real
beholding.

The Lament of the Looking-Glass

Words from the mirror softly pass
To the curtains with a sigh:
'Why should I trouble again to glass
These smileless things hard by,
Since she I pleased once, alas,
Is now no longer nigh!

'I've imaged shadows of coursing cloud,
And of the plying limb
On the pensive pine when the air is loud
With its aerial hymn;
But never do they make me proud
To catch them within my rim!

'I flash back phantoms of the night
That sometimes flit by me,
I echo roses red and white –
The loveliest blooms that be –
But now I never hold to sight
So sweet a flower as she.'

The Casual Acquaintance

While he was here with breath and bone,
 To speak to and to see,
Would I had known – more clearly known –
 What that man did for me

When the wind scraped a minor lay,
 And the spent west from white
To gray turned tiredly, and from gray
 To broadest bands of night!

But I saw not, and he saw not
 What shining life-tides flowed
To me-ward from his casual jot
 Of service on that road.

He would have said: 'Twas nothing new;
 We all do what we can;
'Twas only what one man would do
 For any other man.'

Now that I gauge his goodliness
 He's slipped from human eyes;
And when he passed there's none can guess,
 Or point out where he lies.

The Whitewashed Wall

Why does she turn in that shy soft way
Whenever she stirs the fire,
And kiss to the chimney-corner wall,
As if entranced to admire
Its whitewashed bareness more than the sight
Of a rose in richest green?
I have known her long, but this raptured rite
I never before have seen.

– Well, once when her son cast his shadow there,
A friend took a pencil and drew him
Upon that flame-lit wall. And the lines
Had a lifelike semblance to him.
And there long stayed his familiar look;
But one day, ere she knew,
The whitener came to cleanse the nook,
And covered the face from view.

‘Yes,’ he said: ‘My brush goes on with a rush,
And the draught is buried under;
When you have to whiten old cots and brighten,
What else can you do, I wonder?
But she knows he’s there. And when she yearns
For him, deep in the labouring night,
She sees him as close at hand, and turns
To him under his sheet of white.’

HUMAN SHOWS, FAR PHANTASIES,
SONGS, AND TRIFLES

Waiting Both

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

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

The Monument-Maker

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

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

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

1916

Last Week in October

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

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

An East-End Curate

A small blind street off East Commercial Road;
Window, door; window, door;
Every house like the one before,
Is where the curate, Mr Dowle, has found a pinched
abode.
Spectacled, pale, moustache straw-coloured, and with a
long thin face,
Day or dark his lodgings' narrow doorstep does he pace.
A bleached pianoforte, with its drawn silk plaitings
faded,
Stands in his room, its keys much yellowed, cyphering,
and abraded,
'Novello's Anthems' lie at hand, and also a few glees,
And 'Laws of Heaven for Earth' in a frame upon the
wall one sees.
He goes through his neighbours' houses as his own,
and none regards,
And opens their back-doors off-hand, to look for them
in their yards:
A man is threatening his wife on the other side of the
wall,
But the curate lets it pass as knowing the history of it all.
Freely within his hearing the children skip and laugh
and say:
 'There's Mister Dow-well! There's Mister
Dow-well!' in their play;
 And the long, pallid, devoted face notes not,
But stoops along abstractedly, for good, or in vain, Got
wot!

At Rushy-Pond

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Spellbound Palace

(*Hampton Court*)

On this kindly yellow day of mild low-travelling winter
sun

The stirless depths of the yews

Are vague with misty blues:

Across the spacious pathways stretching spires of
shadow run,

And the wind-gnawed walls of ancient brick are fired
vermilion.

Two or three early sanguine finches tune

Some tentative strains, to be enlarged by May or June:

From a thrush or blackbird

Comes now and then a word,

While an enfeebled fountain somewhere within is
heard.

Our footsteps wait awhile,

Then draw beneath the pile,

When an inner court outspreads

As 'twere History's own asile,

Where the now-visioned fountain its attenuate crystal
sheds

In passive lapse that seems to ignore the yon world's
clamorous clutch,

And lays an insistent numbness on the place, like a
cold hand's touch.

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

The Graveyard of Dead Creeds

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

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

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

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

Life and Death at Sunrise

(Near Dogbury Gate, 1867)

The hills uncap their tops
Of woodland, pasture, copse,
And look on the layers of mist
At their foot that still persist:

They are like awakened sleepers on one elbow lifted,
Who gaze around to learn if things during night have
shifted.

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

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

'And what have you got covered there?'
He nods to the waggon and mare.
'Oh, a coffin for old John Thinn:
We are just going to put him in.'

- ' – So he's gone at last. He always had a good constitution.'
- ' – He was ninety-odd. He could call up the French Revolution.'

One Who Married Above Him

‘Tis you, I think? Back from your week’s work,
Steve?’

‘It is I. Back from work this Christmas Eve.’

‘But you seem off again? – in this night-rime?’

‘I am off again, and thoroughly off this time.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘More than may first be seen. . . .

Half an hour ago I footed homeward here,

No wife found I, nor child, nor maid, indoors or
near.

She has, as always, gone with them to her mother’s at
the farm,

Where they fare better far than here, and, maybe,
meet less harm.

She’s left no fire, no light, has cooked me nothing
to eat,

Though she had fuel, and money to get some
Christmas meat.

Christmas with them is grand, she knows, and
brings good victual,

Other than how it is here, where it’s but lean and
little.

But though not much, and rough,

If managed neat there’s enough.

She and hers are too highmade for me;

But she’s whimmed her once too often, she’ll see!

Farmer Bollen’s daughter should never have married
a man that’s poor;

And I can stand it no longer; I’m leaving; you’ll see
me no more, be sure.’

'But nonsense: you'll be back again ere bedtime, and
lighting a fire,
And sizzling your supper, and vexing not that her
views of supper are higher.'

'Never for me.'

'Well, we shall see.'

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

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

Nobody Comes

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

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

9 October 1924

The Faithful Swallow

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

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

In Sherborne Abbey

(17—)

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

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

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

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

‘Why did you make me ride in your front?’ says she.
‘To outwit the law. That was my strategy.
As I was borne off on the pillion behind you,
Th’abductor was you, Dearest, let me remind you;
And seizure of me by an heiress is no felony,
Whatever to do with me as the seizer may be.’

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

A Family tradition

Snow in the Suburbs

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

A sparrow enters the tree,
Whereon immediately
A snow-lump thrice his own slight size
Descends on him and showers his head and eyes,
And overturns him,
And near inurns him,
And lights on a nether twig, when its brush
Starts off a volley of other lodging lumps with a rush.

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

Last Look round St Martin's Fair

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

The Prospect

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

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

December 1912

When Oats Were Reaped

That day when oats were reaped, and wheat was ripe,
and barley ripening,
The road-dust hot, and the bleaching grasses dry,
I walked along and said,
While looking just ahead to where some silent people
lie:

'I wounded one who's there, and now know well I
wounded her;
But, ah, she does not know that she wounded me!'
And not an air stirred,
Nor a bill of any bird; and no response accorded she.

August 1913

The Harbour Bridge

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

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

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

'No,' he says gloomily. 'And, anyhow,
I can't give up the other woman now:
You should have talked like that in former days,
When I was last home.' They go different ways.

And the west dims, and yellow lamplights shine:
And soon above, like lamps more opaline,
White stars ghost forth, that care not for men's wives,
Or any other lives.

Weymouth

Not Only I

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

And the joyous springs and summers,
And the jaunts with blithe newcomers,
And my plans and appearances; drives and rides
That fanned my face to a lively red;
And the grays and blues
Of the far-off views,
That nobody else discerned outspread;
And little achievements for blame or praise;
Things left undone; things left unsaid;
In brief, my days!

Compressed here in six feet by two,
In secrecy
To lie with me
Till the Call shall be,
Are all these things I knew,
Which cannot be handed on;
Strange happenings quite unrecorded,
Lost to the world and disregarded,
That only thinks: 'Here moulders till Doom's-dawn
A woman's skeleton.'

The Missed Train

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

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

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

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

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

The Sheep-Boy

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

Suddenly there intunes a hum:
This side, that side, it seems to come.
From the purple in myriads rise the bees
With consternation mid their rapt employ.
So headstrongly each speeds him past, and flees,
As to strike the face of the shepherd-boy.
Awhile he waits, and wonders what they mean;
Till none is left upon the shagged demesne.

To learn what ails, the sheep-boy looks around;
Behind him, out of the sea in swirls
Flexuous and solid, clammy vapour-curles
Are rolling over Pokeswell Hills to the inland ground.
Into the heath they sail,
And travel up the vale
Like the moving pillar of cloud raised by the
Israelite: –
In a trice the lonely sheep-boy seen so late ago,
Draäts'-Hollow in gorgeous blow,
And Kite-Hill's regal glow,
Are viewless – folded into those creeping scrolls of
white.

On Rainbarrows

Retty's Phases

I

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

II

Retty used to think she loved
(Just a little) me.
Not untruly, as it proved
Afterwards to be.
For, when weakness forced her rest
If we walked a mile,
She would whisper she was blest
By my clasp awhile.

III

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

IV

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

From an old draft of 1868

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

Bags of Meat

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

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

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

'Now this young bull – for thirty pound?
Worth that to manure your ground!
'Or to stand,' chimed the second one,
'And have his picter done!'
The beast was rapped on the horns and snout
To make him turn about.
'Well,' cried a buyer, 'another crown –
Since I've dragged here from Taunton Town!'

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

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

Shortening Days at the Homestead

The first fire since the summer is lit, and is smoking
into the room:

The sun-rays thread it through, like woof-lines in a
loom.

Sparrows spurt from the hedge, whom misgivings
appal

That winter did not leave last year for ever, after all.
Like shock-headed urchins, spiny-haired,
Stand pollard willows, their twigs just bared.

Who is this coming with pondering pace,
Black and ruddy, with white embossed,
His eyes being black, and ruddy his face,
And the marge of his hair like morning frost?

It's the cider-maker,
And appletree-shaker,

And behind him on wheels, in readiness,
His mill, and tubs, and vat, and press.

To C.F.H.
On Her Christening-Day

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

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

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

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

On Martock Moor

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

1899

The Bird-Catcher's Boy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That night at Durdle-Door¹
Foundered a hoy,
And the tide washed ashore
One sailor boy.

21 November 1912

1 Durdle-Door, a rock on the south coast.

A Hurried Meeting

It is August moonlight in the tall plantation,
Whose elms, by aged squirrels' footsteps worn,
 Outscreen the noon, and eve, and morn.
On the facing slope a faint irradiation
 From a mansion's marble front is borne,
 Mute in its woodland wreathing.
 Up here the night-jar whirrs forlorn,
And the trees seem to withhold their softest breathing.

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

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

‘But what shall we do, my Love, and how?’
‘You need not call me by that name now.’
Then he more coldly: ‘What is your suggestion?’
‘I’ve told my mother, and she sees a way,
Since of our marriage there can be no question.
We are crossing South – near about New Year’s Day
The event will happen there.
It is the only thing that we can dare
To keep them unaware!’
‘Well, you can marry me.’
She shook her head. ‘No: that can never be.

‘Twill be brought home as hers. She’s forty-one,
When many a woman’s bearing is not done,
And well might have a son. –
We should have left off specious self-deceiving:
I feared that such might come,
And knowledge struck me numb.
Love is a terrible thing: witching when first begun,
To end in grieving, grieving!’

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

Song to an Old Burden

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

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

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

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

WINTER WORDS IN VARIOUS
MOODS AND METRES

[*'Winter Words', though prepared for the press, would have undergone further revision, had the author lived to issue it on the birthday of which he left the number uninserted below.*]

Introductory Note

So far as I am aware, I happen to be the only English poet who has brought out a new volume of his verse on his . . . birthday, whatever may have been the case with the ancient Greeks, for it must be remembered that poets did not die young in those days.

This, however, is not the point of the present few preliminary words. My last volume of poems was pronounced wholly gloomy and pessimistic by reviewers – even by some of the more able class. My sense of the oddity of this verdict may be imagined when, in selecting them, I had been, as I thought, rather too liberal in admitting flippant, not to say farcical, pieces into the collection. However, I did not suppose that the licensed tasters had wilfully misrepresented the book, and said nothing, knowing well that they could not have read it.

As labels stick, I foresee readily enough that the same perennial inscription will be set on the following pages, and therefore take no trouble to argue on the proceeding, notwithstanding the surprises to which I could treat my critics by uncovering a place here and there to them in the volume.

This being probably my last appearance on the literary stage, I would say, more seriously, that though, alas, it

would be idle to pretend that the publication of these poems can have much interest for me, the track having been adventured so many times before to-day, the pieces themselves have been prepared with reasonable care, if not quite with the zest of a young man new to print.

I also repeat what I have often stated on such occasions, that no harmonious philosophy is attempted in these pages – or in any bygone pages of mine, for that matter.

T.H.

The New Dawn's Business

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

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

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

Proud Songsters

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

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

I Am the One

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

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

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

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

The Prophetess

I

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

2

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

3

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

To Louisa in the Lane

Meet me again as at that time
In the hollow of the lane;
I will not pass as in my prime
I passed at each day's wane.
– Ah, I remember!
To do it you will have to see
Anew this sorry scene wherein you have ceased
to be!

But I will welcome your aspen form
As you gaze wondering round
And say with spectral frail alarm,
'Why am I still here found?
– Ah, I remember!
It is through him with blitheful brow
Who did not love me then, but loves and draws
me now!'

And I shall answer: 'Sweet of eyes,
Carry me with you, Dear,
To where you donned this spirit-guise;
It's better there than here!'
– Till I remember
Such is a deed you cannot do:
Wait must I, till with flung-off flesh I follow you.

Liddell and Scott

*On the Completion of their Lexicon
(Written after the death of Liddell in 1898.
Scott had died some ten years earlier.)*

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

'I've often, I own,
Belched many a moan
At undertaking it,
And dreamt forsaking it.
— Yes, on to Pi,
When the end loomed nigh,
And friends said: "You've as good as done,"
I almost wished we'd not begun.
Even now, if people only knew
My sinkings, as we slowly drew
Along through Kappa, Lambda, Mu,
They'd be concerned at my misgiving,
And how I mused on a College living
Right down to Sigma,
But feared a stigma
If I succumbed, and left old Donnegan
For weary freshmen's eyes to con again:

And how I often, often wondered
What could have led me to have blundered
So far away from sound theology
To dialects and etymology;
Words, accents not to be breathed by men
Of any country ever again!’

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

‘O that first morning, smiling bland,
With sheets of foolscap, quills in hand,
To write ἀάατος and ἀαγής,
Followed by fifteen hundred pages,
What nerve was ours
So to back our powers,
Assured that we should reach ὠώδης
While there was breath left in our bodies!’

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

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

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

Expectation and Experience

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

Evening Shadows

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

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

The Lodging-House Fuchsias

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

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

Throwing a Tree

New Forest

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

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

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

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

Her Second Husband Hears Her Story

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

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

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

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

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

The Lady in the Furs

'I'm a lofty lovely woman,'
Says the lady in the furs,
In the glance she throws around her
On the poorer dames and sirs:
'This robe, that cost three figures,
Yes, is mine,' her nod avers.

'True, my money did not buy it,
But my husband's, from the trade;
And they, they only got it
From things feeble and afraid
By murdering them in ambush
With a cunning engine's aid.

'True, my hands, too, did not shape it
To the pretty cut you see,
But the hands of midnight workers
Who are strangers quite to me:
It was fitted, too, by dressers
Ranged around me toilsomely.

'But I am a lovely lady,
Though sneerers say I shine
By robbing Nature's children
Of apparel not mine,
And that I am but a broom-stick,
Like a scarecrow's wooden spine.'

1925

Childhood among the Ferns

I sat one sprinkling day upon the lea,
Where tall-stemmed ferns spread out luxuriantly,
And nothing but those tall ferns sheltered me.

The rain gained strength, and damped each lopping
frond,
Ran down their stalks beside me and beyond,
And shaped slow-creeping rivulets as I conned,

With pride, my spray-roofed house. And though anon
Some drops pierced its green rafters, I sat on,
Making pretence I was not rained upon.

The sun then burst, and brought forth a sweet breath
From the limp ferns as they dried underneath:
I said: 'I could live on here thus till death;'

And queried in the green rays as I sate:
'Why should I have to grow to man's estate,
And this afar-noised World perambulate?'

I Watched a Blackbird

I watched a blackbird on a budding sycamore
One Easter Day, when sap was stirring twigs to the
 core;
 I saw his tongue, and crocus-coloured bill
 Parting and closing as he turned his trill;
 Then he flew down, seized on a stem of hay,
And upped to where his building scheme was under
 way,
As if so sure a nest were never shaped on spray.

The Felled Elm and She

When you put on that inmost ring
She, like you, was a little thing:
When your circles reached their fourth,
Scarce she knew life's south from north:
When your year-zones counted twenty
She had fond admirers plenty:
When you'd grown your twenty-second
She and I were lovers reckoned:

When you numbered twenty-three
She went everywhere with me:
When you, at your fortieth line,
Showed decay, she seemed to pine:
When you were quite hollow within
She was felled – mere bone and skin:
You too, lacking strength to grow
Further trunk-rings, were laid low,
Matching her; both unaware
That your lives formed such a pair.

The Clasped Skeletons

Surmised Date 1800 B.C.

(In an Ancient British barrow near the writer's house)

O why did we uncover to view
So closely clasped a pair?
Your chalky bedclothes over you,
This long time here!

Ere Paris lay with Helena –
The poets' dearest dear –
Ere David bedded Bathsheba
You two were bedded here.

Aye, even before the beauteous Jael
Bade Sisera doff his gear
And lie in her tent; then drove the nail,
You two lay here.

Wicked Aholah, in her youth,
Colled loves from far and near
Until they slew her without ruth;
But you had long colled here.

Aspasia lay with Pericles,
And Philip's son found cheer
At eves in lying on Thais' knees
While you lay here.

Cleopatra with Antony,
Resigned to dalliance sheer,
Lay, fatuous he, insatiate she,
Long after you'd lain here.

Pilate by Procula his wife
Lay tossing at her tear
Of pleading for an innocent life;
You tossed not here.

Ages before Monk Abélard
Gained tender Héloïse' ear,
And loved and lay with her till scarred,
Had you lain loving here.

So long, beyond chronology,
Lovers in death as 'twere,
So long in placid dignity
Have you lain here!

Yet what is length of time? But dream!
Once breathed this atmosphere
Those fossils near you, met the gleam
Of day as you did here;

But so far earlier theirs beside
Your life-span and career,
That they might style of yestertide
Your coming here!

After the Burial

The family had buried him,
Their bread-bringer, their best:
They had returned to the house, whose hush a dim
Vague vacancy expressed.

There sat his sons, mute, rigid-faced,
His daughters, strained, red-eyed,
His wife, whose wan, worn features, vigil-traced,
Bent over him when he died.

At once a peal bursts from the bells
Of a large tall tower hard by:
Along the street the jocund clangour swells,
And upward to the sky.

Probably it was a wedding-peal,
Or possibly for a birth,
Or townsman knighted for political zeal,
This resonant mark of mirth.

The mourners, heavy-browed, sat on
Motionless. Well they heard,
They could not help it; nevertheless thereon
Spoke not a single word,

Nor window did they close, to numb
The bells' insistent calls
Of joy; but suffered the harassing din to come
And penetrate their souls.

Concerning Agnes

I am stopped from hoping what I have hoped
before –
 Yes, many a time! –
To dance with that fair woman yet once more
 As in the prime
Of August, when the wide-faced moon looked
 through
The boughs at the faery lamps of the Larmer Avenue.

I could not, though I should wish, have over again
 That old romance,
And sit apart in the shade as we sat then
 After the dance
The while I held her hand, and, to the booms
Of contrabassos, feet still pulsed from the distant
 rooms.

I could not. And you do not ask me why.
 Hence you infer
That what may chance to the fairest under the sky
 Has chanced to her.
Yes. She lies white, straight, features marble-keen,
Unapproachable, mute, in a nook I have never seen.

There she may rest like some vague goddess, shaped
 As out of snow;
Say Aphrodite sleeping; or bedraped
 Like Kalupso;
Or Amphintrite stretched on the Mid-sea swell,
Or one of the Nine grown stiff from thought. I cannot
 tell!

Henley Regatta

She looks from the window: still it pours down direly,
And the avenue drips. She cannot go, she fears;
And the Regatta will be spoilt entirely;
 And she sheds half-crazed tears.

Regatta Day and rain come on together
Again, years after. Gutters trickle loud;
But Nancy cares not. She knows nought of weather,
 Or of the Henley crowd:

She's a Regatta quite her own. Inanely
She laughs in the asylum as she floats
Within a water-tub, which she calls 'Henley',
 Her little paper boats.

We Field-Women

How it rained

When we worked at Flintcomb-Ash,
And could not stand upon the hill
Trimming swedes for the slicing-mill.
The wet washed through us – plash, plash, plash:
How it rained!

How it snowed

When we crossed from Flintcomb-Ash
To the Great Barn for drawing reed,
Since we could nowise chop a swede. –
Flakes in each doorway and casement-sash:
How it snowed!

How it shone

When we went from Flintcomb-Ash
To start at dairy work once more
In the laughing meads, with cows three-score,
And pails, and songs, and love – too rash:
How it shone!

Squire Hooper

Hooper was ninety. One September dawn
He sent a messenger
For his physician, who asked thereupon
What ailed the sufferer
Which he might circumvent, and promptly bid begone.

‘Doctor, I summoned you,’ the squire replied –
‘Pooh-pooh me though you may –
To ask what’s happened to me – burst inside,
It seems – not much, I’d say –
But awkward with a house-full here for a shoot to-day.’

And he described the symptoms. With bent head
The listener looked grave.
‘H’m. . . . *You’re a dead man in six hours,*’ he said. –
‘I speak out, since you are brave –
And best ’tis you should know, that last things may be
sped.’

‘Right,’ said the squire. ‘And now comes – what to do?
One thing: on no account
Must I now spoil the sport I’ve asked them to –
My guests are paramount –
They must scour scrub and stubble; and big bags bring
as due.’

He downed to breakfast, and bespoke his guests: –
‘I find I have to go
An unexpected journey, and it rests
With you, my friends, to show
The shoot can go off gaily, whether I’m there or no.’

Thus blandly spoke he; and to the fields they went,
And Hooper up the stair.
They had a glorious day; and stiff and spent
Returned as dusk drew near. –
'Gentlemen,' said the doctor, 'he's not back as meant,

To his deep regret!' – So they took leave, each guest
Observing: 'I dare say
Business detains him in the town: 'tis best
We should no longer stay
Just now. We'll come again anon;' and they went their
way.

Meeting two men in the obscurity
Shouldering a box a thin
Cloth-covering wrapt, one sportsman cried: 'Damn
me,
I thought them carrying in,
At first, a coffin; till I knew it could not be.'

The Second Visit

Clack, clack, clack, went the mill-wheel as I came,
And she was on the bridge with the thin hand-rail,
And the miller at the door, and the ducks at mill-tail;
I come again years after, and all there seems the same.

And so indeed it is: the apple-tree'd old house,
And the deep mill-pond, and the wet wheel clacking,
And a woman on the bridge, and white ducks
quacking,
And the miller at the door, powdered pale from boots
to brows.

But it's not the same miller whom long ago I knew,
Nor are they the same apples, nor the same drops that
dash
Over the wet wheel, nor the ducks below that splash,
Nor the woman who to fond complaints replied, 'You
know I do!'

He Never Expected Much

[*or*]

A Consideration

[*A reflection*] on My Eighty-Sixth Birthday

Well, World, you have kept faith with me,
 Kept faith with me;
Upon the whole you have proved to be
 Much as you said you were.
Since as a child I used to lie
Upon the leaze and watch the sky,
Never, I own, expected I
 That life would all be fair.

'Twas then you said, and since have said,
 Times since have said,
In that mysterious voice you shed
 From clouds and hills around:
'Many have loved me desperately,
Many with smooth serenity,
While some have shown contempt of me
 Till they dropped underground.

'I do not promise overmuch,
 Child; overmuch;
Just neutral-tinted haps and such,'
 You said to minds like mine.
Wise warning for your credit's sake!
Which I for one failed not to take,
And hence could stem such strain and ache
 As each year might assign.

Our Old Friend Dualism

All hail to him, the Protean! A tough old chap is he:
Spinoza and the Monists cannot make him cease to
be.

We pound him with our 'Truth, Sir, please!' and quite
appear to still him:

He laughs; holds Bergson up, and James; and swears
we cannot kill him.

We argue them pragmatic cheats. 'Aye,' says he.
'They're deceiving:

But I must live; for flamens plead I am all that's
worth believing!

1920

A Forgotten Miniature

There you are in the dark,
 Deep in a box
Nobody ever unlocks,
Or even turns to mark;
 – Out of mind stark.

Yet there you have not been worsed
 Like your sitter
By Time, the Fair's hard-hitter;
Your beauties, undispersed,
 Glow as at first.

Shut in your case for years,
 Never an eye
Of the many passing nigh,
Fixed on their own affairs,
 Thinks what it nears!

– While you have lain in gloom,
 A form forgot,
Your reign remembered not,
Much life has come to bloom
 Within this room.

Yea, in Time's cyclic sweep
 Unrest has ranged:
Women and men have changed:
Some you knew slumber deep;
 Some wait for sleep.

The Aged Newspaper Soliloquizes

Yes; yes; I am old. In me appears
The history of a hundred years;
Empires', kings', captives', births and deaths,
Strange faiths, and fleeting shibboleths.
– Tragedy, comedy, throngs my page
Beyond all mummied on any stage:
Cold hearts beat hot, hot hearts beat cold,
And I beat on. Yes; yes; I am old.

June Leaves and Autumn

I

Lush summer lit the trees to green;
 But in the ditch hard by
Lay dying boughs some hand unseen
Had lopped when first with festal mien
 They matched their mates on high.
It seemed a melancholy fate
That leaves but brought to birth so late
 Should rust there, red and numb,
In quickened fall, while all their race
Still joyed aloft in pride of place
 With store of days to come.

II

At autumn-end I fared that way,
 And traced those boughs fore-hewn
Whose leaves, awaiting their decay
In slowly browning shades, still lay
 Where they had lain in June
And now, no less embrowned and curst
Than if they had fallen with the first,
 Nor known a morning more,
Lay there alongside, dun and sere,
Those that at my last wandering here
 Had length of days in store.

19 November 1898

Christmas: 1924

'Peace upon earth!' was said. We sing it,
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison-gas.

1924

The Single Witness

'Did no one else, then, see them, man,
Lying among the whin?
Did no one else, behold them at all
Commit this shameless sin,
But you, in the hollow of the down
No traveller's eye takes in?'

'Nobody else, my noble lord,
Saw them together there –
Your young son's tutor and she. I made
A short cut from the fair,
And lit on them. I've said no word
About it anywhere.'

'Good. . . . Now, you see my father's sword,
Hanging up in your view;
No hand has swung it since he came
Home after Waterloo.
I'll show it you. . . . There is the sword:
And this is what I'll do.'

He ran the other through the breast,
Ere he could plead or cry.
'It is a dire necessity,
But – since no one was nigh
Save you and they, my historied name
Must not be smirched thereby.'

How She Went to Ireland

Dora's gone to Ireland
Through the sleet and snow;
Promptly she has gone there
In a ship, although
Why she's gone to Ireland
Dora does not know.

That was where, yea, Ireland,
Dora wished to be:
When she felt, in lone times,
Shoots of misery,
Often there, in Ireland,
Dora wished to be.

Hence she's gone to Ireland,
Since she meant to go,
Through the drift and darkness
Onward labouring, though
That she's gone to Ireland
Dora does not know.

Dead 'Wessex' the Dog to
the Household

Do you think of me at all,
Wistful ones?

Do you think of me at all
As if nigh?

Do you think of me at all
At the creep of evenfall,
Or when the sky-birds call
As they fly?

Do you look for me at times,
Wistful ones?

Do you look for me at times
Strained and still?

Do you look for me at times,
When the hour for walking chimes,
On that grassy path that climbs
Up the hill?

You may hear a jump or trot,
Wistful ones,

You may hear a jump or trot –
Mine, as 'twere –

You may hear a jump or trot
On the stair or path or plot;
But I shall cause it not,
Be not there.

Should you call as when I knew you,
 Wistful ones,
Should you call as when I knew you,
 Shared your home;
Should you call as when I knew you,
I shall not turn to view you,
I shall not listen to you,
 Shall not come.

The Boy's Dream

Provincial town-boy he, – frail, lame,
His face a waning lily-white,
A court the home of his wry, wrenched frame,
Where noontide shed no warmth or light.

Over his temples – flat, and wan,
Where bluest veins were patterned keen,
The skin appeared so thinly drawn
The skull beneath was almost seen.

Always a wishful, absent look
Expressed it in his face and eye;
At the strong shape this longing took
One guessed what wish must underlie.

But no. That wish was not for strength,
For other boys' agility,
To race with ease the field's far length,
Now hopped across so painfully.

He minded not his lameness much,
To shine at feats he did not long,
Nor to be best at goal and touch,
Nor at assaults to stand up strong.

But sometimes he would let be known
What the wish was: – to have, next spring,
A real green linnet – his very own –
Like that one he had late heard sing.

And as he breathed the cherished dream
To those whose secrecy was sworn,
His face was beautified by the theme,
And wore the radiance of the morn.

Family Portraits

Three picture-drawn people stepped out of their
frames –
 The blast, how it blew!
And the white-shrouded candles flapped smoke-
headed flames;
– Three picture-drawn people came down from their
frames,
And dumbly in lippings they told me their names,
 Full well though I knew.

The first was a maiden of mild wistful tone,
 Gone silent for years,
The next a dark woman in former time known;
But the first one, the maiden of mild wistful tone,
So wondering, unpractised, so vague and alone,
 Nigh moved me to tears.

The third was a sad man – a man of much gloom;
 And before me they passed
In the shade of the night, at the back of the room,
The dark and fair woman, the man of much gloom,
Three persons, in far-off years forceful, but whom
 Death now fettered fast.

They set about acting some drama, obscure,
 The women and he,
With puppet-like movements of mute strange allure;
Yea, set about acting some drama, obscure,
Till I saw 'twas their own lifetime's tragic amour,
 Whose course begot me;

Yea – a mystery, ancestral, long hid from my reach
 In the perished years past,
That had mounted to dark doings each against each
In those ancestors' days, and long hid from my reach;
Which their restless enghostings, it seemed, were to
 teach
 Me in full, at this last.

But fear fell upon me like frost, of some hurt
 If they entered anew
On the orbits they smartly had swept when expert
In the law-lacking passions of life, – of some hurt
To their souls – and thus mine – which I fain would
 avert;
 So, in sweat cold as dew,

'Why wake up all this?' I cried out. 'Now, so late!
 Let old ghosts be laid!'
And they stiffened, drew back to their frames and
 numb state,
Gibbering: 'Thus are your own ways to shape, know
 too late!'
Then I grieved that I'd not had the courage to wait
 And see the play played.

I have grieved ever since: to have balked future pain,
 My blood's tendance foreknown,
Had been triumph. Nights long stretched awake I
 have lain
Perplexed in endeavours to balk future pain
By uncovering the drift of their drama. In vain,
 Though therein lay my own.

He Resolves to Say No More

O my soul, keep the rest unknown!
It is too like a sound of moan
 When the charnel-eyed
 Pale Horse has nighed:
Yea, none shall gather what I hide!

Why load men's minds with more to bear
That bear already ails to spare?
 From now always
 Till my last day
What I discern I will not say.

Let Time roll backward if it will;
(Magians who drive the midnight quill
 With brain aglow
 Can see it so,)
What I have learnt no man shall know.

And if my vision range beyond
The blinkered sight of souls in bond,
 – By truth made free –
 I'll let all be,
And show to no man what I see.

Index of titles

- A Broken Appointment 105
A Call to National Service 402
A Christmas Ghost-Story 64
A Church Romance 209
A Circular 290
A Death-Day Recalled 294
A Dream or No 291
A Dream Question 210
A Forgotten Miniature 520
A Hurried Meeting 483
A King's Soliloquy 310
A New Year's Eve in War Time 405
A Plaint to Man 260
A Procession of Dead Days 433
A Sign-Seeker 31
A Singer Asleep 257
A Spellbound Palace 452
A Thunderstorm in Town 248
A Trampwoman's Tragedy 157
A Wasted Illness 125
A Young Man's Exhortation 424
After a Journey 292
After the Burial 511
After the Last Breath 218
After the Visit 240
Afternoon Service at Mellstock 338
Afterwards 412
Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave? 267

Index of titles

- Amabel 6
An Appeal to America on Behalf of the Belgian
 Destitute 394
An August Midnight 115
An Autumn Rain-Scene 428
An East-End Curate 450
'And There Was a Great Calm' 421
Apostrophe to an Old Psalm Tune 340
Aquae Sulis 312
Architectural Masks 131
At a House in Hampstead 419
At a Lunar Eclipse 84
At Casterbridge Fair 193
At Castle Boterel 297
At Day-Close in November 270
At Lulworth Cove a Century Back 425
At Madame Tussaud's in Victorian Years 376
At Rushy-Pond 451
At the Railway Station, Upway 427
At the War Office, London 63
At the Word 'Farewell' 342
At Waking 175
Autumn in King's Hintock Park 166
- Bags of Meat 474
Beeny Cliff 295
Before and after Summer 269
Before Marching and After 399
Bereft 163
Bereft, She Thinks She Dreams 314
Birds at Winter Nightfall 116
By Henstridge Cross at the Year's End 431
By the Barrows 211
By the Earth's Corpse 93

Index of titles

- Channel Firing 234
Childhood among the Ferns 506
Christmas: 1924 523
Concerning Agnes 512
Copying Architecture in an Old Minster 348
Cry of the Homeless 398
- Dead 'Wessex' the Dog to the Household 426
Departure 62
Drummer Hodge 65
During Wind and Rain 380
- Embarcation 61
England to Germany in 1914 392
Evening Shadows 500
Expectation and Experience 499
- Family Portraits 529
Four Footprints 177
Friends Beyond 34
From Her in the Country 187
- Garden: 11–12 p.m. 80
Genoa and the Mediterranean 74
George Meredith 226
God-Forgotten 89
God's Education 222
God's Funeral 262
Great Things 366
- Hap 8
He Abjures Love 190
He Never Expected Much 518
He Resolves to Say No More 531

Index of titles

He Revisits His First School 385
Heiress and Architect 53
Henley Regatta 513
Her Death and After 20
Her Definition 171
Her Dilemma 9
Her Reproach 104
Her Second Husband Hears Her Story 504
Heredity 344
His Country 391
His Immortality 112
His Visitor 289
How Great My Grief 106
How She Went to Ireland 525

I Am the One 493
I Found Her Out There 281
I Look Into My Glass 56
I Looked Up from My Writing 409
I Met a Man 407
I Need Not Go 107
I Said to Love 82
I Say, 'I'll Seek Her 174
I Watched a Blackbird 507
In a Cathedral City 173
In a Museum 339
In a Wood 42
In Death Divided 255
In Front of the Landscape 231
In Her Precincts 363
In Sherborne Abbey 461
In Tenebris I 139
In Tenebris II 140
In Tenebris III 142

Index of titles

- In the British Museum 315
In the Old Theatre, Fiesole 77
In the Servants' Quarters 316
In the Small Hours 437
In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations' 397
In Time of Wars and Tumults 396
- John and Jane 164
Julie-Jane 204
June Leaves and Autumn 522
- Lament 284
Last Look round St Martin's Fair 464
Last Week in October 449
Lausanne In Gibbon's Old
Let Me Enjoy 192
Liddell and Scott 496
Life and Death at Sunrise 455
Life Laughs Onward 359
Lines 357
Logs on the Hearth 374
- Men Who March Away 389
Middle-Age Enthusiasms 41
Midnight on the Great Western 386
Misconception 185
Moments of Vision 337
Mute Opinion 95
My Spirit Will Not Haunt the Mound 254
- Nature's Questioning 45
Near Lanivet, 1872 346
Neutral Tones 44
Night in the Old Home 214

Index of titles

- Nobody Comes 459
Not Only I 469
- Often When Warring 400
Old Furniture 372
On a Midsummer Eve 352
On an Invitation to the United States 81
On Martock Moor 478
On One Who Lived and Died Where He Was Born
438
On Sturminster Foot-Bridge 371
On the Belgian Expatriation 393
On the Departure Platform 172
One We Knew 219
One Who Married Above Him 457
Our Old Friend Dualism 519
- Paying Calls 381
Places 299
Proud Songsters 492
- Rain on a Grave 279
Regret Not Me 318
Reminiscences of a Dancing Man 167
Retty's Phases 472
Revulsion 10
Rome: Building a New Street in the Ancient Quarter
79
Rome: On the Palatine 78
Rome: The Vatican: Sala delle Muse 80
Rose-Ann 208
- San Sebastian 37
Seen by the Waits 323

Index of titles

- She at His Funeral 15
She Charged Me 308
She Hears the Storm 221
She, to Him I 11
She, to Him II 12
She, to Him III 13
She, to Him IV 14
She Who Saw Not 440
Shelley's Skylark 76
Shortening Days at the Homestead 476
Snow in the Suburbs 463
Something Tapped 360
Song to an Old Burden 485
Spectres that Grieve 266
Squire Hooper 515
St Launce's Revisited 304
- Tess's Lament 151
The Aged Newspaper Soliloquizes 521
The Announcement 361
The Ballet 377
The Bedridden Peasant 91
The Bird-Catcher's Boy 480
The Blinded Bird 353
The Blow 368
The Boy's Dream 528
The Bride-Night Fire 47
The Bullfinches 87
The Burghers 17
The Caged Goldfinch 375
The Casual Acquaintance 442
The Cheval-Glass 306
The Children and Sir Nameless 426
The Choirmaster's Burial 387

Index of titles

- The Church-BUILDER 144
The Clasped Skeletons 509
The Comet at Yell'ham 121
The Coming of the End 410
The Conformers 181
The Convergence of the Twain 236
The Coquette, and After 109
The Dame of Athelhall 122
The Dance at the Phoenix 25
The Dark-Eyed Gentleman 200
The Darkling Thrush 119
The Dawn after the Dance 183
The Dead and the Living One 403
The Dead Man Walking 169
The Death of Regret 325
The End of the Episode 178
The Face at the Casement 251
The Faithful Swallow 460
The Felled Elm and She 508
The Five Students 378
The Ghost of the Past 238
The Going 274
The Graveyard of Dead Creeds 454
The Harbour Bridge 467
The Haunter 286
The House of Hospitalities 162
The Husband's View 206
The Ivy-Wife 33
The Jubilee of a Magazine 329
The King's Experiment 133
The Lady in the Furs 505
The Lament of the Looking-Glass 441
The Last Chrysanthemum 118
The Last Signal 365

Index of titles

- The Levelled Churchyard 127
The Lodging-House Fuchsias 501
The Lost Pyx 148
The Maid of Keinton Mandeville 418
The Man He Killed 224
The Marble Tablet 435
The Master and the Leaves 436
The Memorial Brass: 186– 383
The Missed Train 470
The Monument-Maker 448
The Moth-Signal 321
The Musical Box 369
The New Dawn's Business 491
The Newcomer's Wife 309
The Occultation 358
The Orphaned Old Maid 202
The Oxen 362
The Phantom Horsewoman 300
The Pine Planters 215
The Pity of It 395
The Place on the Map 245
The Prophetess 494
The Prospect 465
The Puzzled Game-Birds 117
The Rambler 213
The Recalcitrants 320
The Rejected Member's Wife 165
The Respectable Burgher 129
The Roman Gravemounds 326
The Roman Road 212
The Ruined Maid 128
The Satin Shoes 331
The Schreckhorn 247
The Second Visit 517

Index of titles

- The Self-Unseeing 138
The Sergeant's Song 16
The Sheep-Boy 471
The Sick Battle-God 71
The Sigh 179
The Single Witness 524
The Sleep-Worker 86
The Spell of the Rose 302
The Spring Call 203
The Souls of the Slain 66
The Subalterns 85
The Temporary the All 5
The Tenant-for-Life 132
The To-Be-Forgotten 113
The Torn Letter 249
The Tree 135
The Two Soldiers 324
The Unborn 223
The Upper Birch-Leaves 384
The Voice 288
The Voice of the Thorn 186
The Walk 278
The Well-Beloved 101
The Whitewashed Wall 443
The Widow Betrothed 110
The Workbox 327
The Year's Awakening 271
The Young Churchwarden 356
Then and Now 401
Thoughts of Phena 40
Throwing a Tree 502
To an Actress 189
To an Impersonator of Rosalind 188
To an Unborn Pauper Child 96

Index of titles

- To C.F.H. 477
To Carrey Clavel 201
To Lizbie Browne 98
To Louisa in the Lane 495
To My Father's Violin 354
To Shakespeare 350
Transformations 364
- Under the Waterfall 272
- Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard 429
- Wagtail and Baby 225
Waiting Both 447
We Field-Women 514
Weathers 417
Wessex Heights 242
When I Set Out for Lyonesse 241
When Oats Were Reaped 466
Where the Picnic Was 305
Who's in the Next Room? 382
Without Ceremony 283
- Yell'ham-Wood's Story 227
You Were the Sort that Men Forget 345
Your Last Drive 276

Index of first lines

- A baby watched a ford, whereto 225
A shaded lamp and a waving blind, 115
A small blind street off East Commercial Road; 450
A spirit seems to pass, 80
A star looks down at me, 447
A yawning, sunned concave 471
'Ah, are you digging on my grave, 267
All hail to him, the Protean! A tough old chap is he: 519
Aloof, as if a thing of mood and whim; 247
And are ye one of Hermitage – 197
Around the house the flakes fly faster, 116
As I drive to the junction of lane and highway, 297
As 'legal representative' 290
At last I put off love, 190
- Beeny did not quiver 294
Black'on frowns east on Maidon, 195
Breathe not, hid Heart: cease silently, 96
Bright baffling Soul, least capturable of themes, 350
Brother Bulleys, let us sing 87
By Rome's dim relics there walks a man, 326
- Call off your eyes from care 424
'Can anything avail 206
Change and chancefulness in my flowering youthtime,
5
Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock. 362
Clack, clack, clack, went the mill-wheel as I came, 517

Index of first lines

Clouds spout upon her 279
Come again to the place 240
Con the dead page as 'twere live love: press on! 104
Coomb-Firtrees say that Life is a moan, 227

Dear Lizbie Browne, 98
'Dear! Shall I see thy face,' she said, 122
Did he who drew her in the years ago – 188
'Did no one else, then, see them, man, 524
'Did you see something within the house 440
Do you think of me at all, 526
Does he want you down there 354
Dora's gone to Ireland 525
Down Wessex way, when spring's a-shine, 203

Every branch big with it, 463

Fair Caroline, I wonder what 477
'Father, I fear your trade: 480
For long the cruel wish I knew 109
Forty years back, when much had place 226
From here, the quay, one looks above to mark 467
From the slow march and muffled drum, 310
From Wynyard's Gap the livelong day, 157

'Had he and I but met 224
Had I but lived a hundred years ago 425
He does not think that I haunt here nightly: 286
He often would ask us 387
He paused on the sill of a door ajar 309
He sees the world as a boisterous place 164
Her house looked cold from the foggy lea, 363
Here are the tracks upon the sand 177
Here by the baring bough 166

Index of first lines

- Here by the moorway you returned, 276
Here is the ancient floor, 138
Here is your parents' dwelling with its curtained
 windows telling 183
Here we broached the Christmas barrel, 162
Here, where Vespasian's legions struck the sands, 61
'Here's a fine bag of meat,' 474
Here's the mould of a musical bird long passed from
 light, 339
Hereto I come to view a voiceless ghost; 292
Hooper was ninety. One September dawn 515
How do you know that the pilgrim track 271
How great my grief, my joys how few, 106
How it came to an end! 410
How it rained 514
How she would have loved 284
How smartly the quarters of the hour march by 348
How was I caught 470
- I am stopped from hoping what I have hoped before
 – 512
I am the family face; 344
I am the one whom ringdoves see 493
I asked the Lord: 'Sire, is this true 210
I busied myself to find a sure 185
I chiselled her monument 448
I come across from Mellstock while the moon wastes
 weaker 289
I do not see the hills around, 213
I dream that the dearest I ever knew 314
I dreamt that people from the Land of Chimes 393
I found her out there 281
'I had a holiday once,' said the woman – 499
I hear that maiden still 418

Index of first lines

- I heard a small sad sound, 113
I idly cut a parsley stalk, 352
I journeyed from my native spot 391
I know not how it may be with others 372
I lay in my bed and fiddled 437
I leant upon a coppice gate 119
I lingered through the night to break of day, 171
I lit upon the graveyard of dead creeds 454
I longed to love a full-boughed beech 33
I look into my glass, 56
I look upon the map that hangs by me – 245
I looked up from my writing, 409
I mark the months in liveries dank and dry, 31
I marked her ruined hues, 6
'I mean to build a hall anon, 302
I met a man when night was nigh, 407
I met you first – ah, when did I first meet you? 340
I need not go 107
I opened my shutter at sunrise, 325
I passed the lodge and avenue 110
I pitched my day's leazings in Crimmercrock Lane,
200
I read your name when you were strange to me, 189
I rose at night, and visited 223
I said to Love, 82
I sat in the Muses' Hall at the mid of the day, 79
I sat one sprinkling day upon the lea, 506
I saw a dead man's finer part 112
I saw a slowly-stepping train – 262
I saw him steal the light away 222
I say, 'I'll seek her side 174
I see the ghost of a perished day; 433
I shall rot here, with those whom in their day 255
I should not have shown in the flesh, 385

Index of first lines

- I thought and thought of thy crass clanging town 187
I tore your letter into strips 249
I towered far, and lo! I stood within 89
I traced the Circus whose gray stones incline 76
I traversed a dominion 95
I walked in loamy Wessex lanes, afar 395
I wanted to marry, but father said, 'No – 202
I watched a blackbird on a budding sycamore 507
I went by footpath and by stile 381
I went by star and planet shine 101
I will be faithful to thee; aye, I will! 13
I would that folk forgot me quite, 151
If but some vengeful god would call to me 8
'If ever I walk to church to wed, 331
If ever joy leave 251
'I'm a lofty lovely woman,' 505
In a solitude of the sea 236
In days when men found joy in war, 71
In the black winter morning 163
In the third-class seat sat the journeying boy, 386
In this fair niche above the unslumbering sea, 257
Indulge no more may we 178
'Instigator of the ruin – 398
It bends far over Yell'ham Plain, 121
It is August moonlight in the tall plantation, 483
'It is not death that harrows us,' they lipped, 266
It was a wet wan hour in spring, 133
It was your way, my dear, 283
Its roots are bristling in the air 135
- Just at the corner of the wall 324
- Last year I called this world of gaingivings 63
Let me enjoy the earth no less 192

Index of first lines

- Let us off and search, and find a place 320
Lifelong to be 369
Little head against my shoulder, 179
Looking forward to the spring 269
Lush summer lit the trees to green; 522
- ‘Man, you too, aren’t you, one of these rough
 followers of the criminal? 316
Meet me again as at that time 495
Mrs Masters’s fuchsias hung 501
Much wonder I – here long low-laid – 91
My ardours for emprize nigh lost 81
My deep-dyed husband trusts me, 478
My spirit will not haunt the mound 254
- Nobody says: Ah, that is the place 299
Nobody took any notice of her as she stood on the
 causey kerb, 196
Not a line of her writing have I, 40
Not far from Mellstock – so tradition saith – 211
Not only I 469
‘Now shall I sing 494
- ‘O England, may God punish thee!’ 392
O epic-famed, god-haunted Central Sea, 74
‘O Lord, why grieveest Thou? – 93
‘O ’melia, my dear, this does everything crown! 128
O my soul, keep the rest unknown! 531
‘O Passenger, pray list and catch 127
O poet, come you haunting here 419
O the opal and the sapphire of that wandering
 western sea, 295
O why did we uncover to view 509
Often when warring for he wist not what, 400

Index of first lines

- On afternoons of drowsy calm 338
On the frigid face of the heath-hemmed pond 451
On this kindly yellow day of mild low-travelling winter
sun 452
Only a man harrowing clods 397
Orion swung southward aslant 399
- Pale beech and pine so blue, 42
'Peace upon earth!' was said. We sing it, 523
Perhaps, long hence, when I have passed away, 12
Phantasmal fears 405
Plunging and labouring on in a tide of visions, 231
'Poor wanderer,' said the leaden sky, 85
Portion of this yew 364
Provincial town-boy he, – frail, lame, 528
- Queer are the ways of a man I know: 300
- Rambling I looked for an old abode 359
Regret not me; 318
Reticulations creep upon the slack stream's face 371
Retty used to shake her head, 472
- 'See, here's the workbox, little wife, 327
Seven millions stand 394
She charged me with having said this and that 308
She looked like a bird from a cloud 342
She looks from the window: still it pours down direly,
513
She sought the Studios, beckoning to her side 53
She told how they used to form for the country
dances 219
She turned in the high pew, until her sight 209
She wore a new 'terra-cotta' dress, 248

Index of first lines

- Show me again the time 357
Silently I footed by an uphill road 365
Since Reverend Doctors now declare 129
Sing, Ballad-singer, raise a hearty tune; 193
Sing; how 'a would sing! 204
Sir Nameless, once of Athelhall, declared: 426
Slip back, Time! 304
So zestfully canst thou sing? 353
Some say the spot is banned: that the pillar Cross-
and-Hand 148
Something tapped on the pane of my room 360
Somewhere afield here something lies 75
South of the Line, inland from far Durban, 64
'Still, Dear, it is incredible to me 504
Sweet cyder is a great thing, 366
- That day when oats were reaped, and wheat was ripe,
and barley ripening, 466
That mirror 337
That night your great guns, unawares, 234
That no man schemed it is my hope – 368
'That same first fiddler who leads the orchéstra
to-night 376
The chimes called midnight, just at interlune, 312
The church flings forth a battled shade 144
The dead woman lay in her first night's grave, 403
The family had buried him, 511
The feet have left the wormholed flooring, 485
The fire advances along the log 374
The first fire since the summer is lit, and is smoking
into the room: 476
The hills uncap their tops 455
The moon has passed to the panes of the south-aisle
wall, 461

Index of first lines

- The Roman Road runs straight and bare 212
The shadows of my chimneys stretch afar 500
The singers are gone from the Cornmarket-place 199
The sparrow dips in his wheel-rut bath, 378
The summons was urgent: and forth I went – 20
The sun had wheeled from Grey's to Dammer's Crest,
17
The sun is like an open furnace door, 464
The sun said, watching my watering-pot: 132
The ten hours' light is abating, 270
The thick lids of Night closed upon me 66
The thrushes sing as the sun is going, 492
The trees are undressing, and fling in many places –
449
The twigs of the birch imprint the December sky 465
The two executioners stalk along over the knolls, 502
The two were silent in a sunless church, 9
There are some heights in Wessex, shaped as if by a
kindly hand 242
There had been years of Passion – scorching, cold,
421
There have been times when I well might have passed
and the ending have come – 142
There is a house with ivied walls, 131
'There is not much that I can do, 427
There it stands, though alas, what a little of her 435
There trudges one to a merry-making 428
There was a stunted handpost just on the crest, 346
There was a time in former years – 221
There you are in the dark, 520
There's no more to be done, or feared, or hoped; 218
These flowers are I, poor Fanny Hurd, 429
These market-dames, mid-aged, with lips thin-drawn,
194

Index of first lines

- These people have not heard your name; 173
These umbered cliffs and gnarls of masonry 78
They are not those who used to feed us 117
They bear him to his resting-place – 15
They came, the brothers, and took two chairs 361
They crush together – a rustling heap of flesh – 377
They had long met o' Zundays – her true love and
she – 47
They hail me as one living, 169
They sing their dearest songs – 380
They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest 65
This is the weather the cuckoo likes, 417
This love puts all humanity from me; 14
Though I waste watches framing words to fetter 10
Three picture-drawn people stepped out of their
frames – 529
Through snowy woods and shady 323
Through vaults of pain, 125
Thy shadow, Earth, from Pole to Central Sea, 84
'Tis you, I think? Back from your week's work,
Steve?' 457
To Jenny came a gentle youth 25
Tree-leaves labour up and down, 459

Up and be doing, all who have a hand 402

Warm yellowy-green 384
We are budding, Master, budding, 436
We kissed at the barrier; and passing through 172
We passed where flag and flower 41
We shall see her no more 165
We stood by a pond that winter day, 44
We two kept house, the Past and I, 238
We walked where Victor Jove was shrined awhile, 77

Index of first lines

- We work here together 215
'Well, though it seems 496
Well, World, you have kept faith with me, 518
What are you doing outside my walls, 491
'What are you still, still thinking,' 321
'What do you see in that time-touched stone, 315
What of the faith and fire within us 389
When a night in November 438
When battles were fought 401
When he lit the candles there, 356
When I look forth at dawning, pool, 45
When I set out for Yonne, 241
When Lawyers strive to heal a breach, 16
When light was lifting 175
When summer shone 460
When the cloud shut down on the morning shine, 358
When the clouds' swoln bosoms echo back the shouts
of the many and strong 140
When the Present has latched its postern behind my
tremulous stay, 412
When the thorn on the down 186
When the wasting embers redden the chimney-breast,
When wilt thou wake, O Mother, wake and see – 86
When you put on that inmost ring 508
When you shall see me in the toils of Time, 11
When you slowly emerged from the den of Time, 260
'Whenever I plunge my arm, like this, 272
Where we made the fire 305
While he was here with breath and bone, 442
While the far farewell music thins and fails, 62
Who now remembers Almack's balls – 167
'Who's in the next room? – who? 382
Why did you give no hint that night 274
Why didn't you say you was promised, Rose-Ann? 208

Index of first lines

- Why do you harbour that great cheval-glass 306
'Why do you weep there, O sweet lady, 383
Why does she turn in that shy soft way 443
Why go the east road now? . . . 431
Why go to Saint-Juliot? What's Juliot to me? 291
'Why, Sergeant, stray on the Ivel Way, 37
Why should this flower delay so long 118
William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late
 at plough, 34
Will's at the dance in the Club-room below, 198
Wintertime nights; 139
Within a churchyard, on a recent grave, 375
Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
 288
Words from the mirror softly pass 441
'Would that I'd not drawn breath here!' some one
 said, 396
- Yes; we'll wed, my little fay, 181
Yes; yes; I am old. In me appears 521
Yes; your up-dated modern page – 329
You did not come, 105
You did not walk with me 278
You turn your back, you turn your back, 201
You were the sort that men forget; 345

