

THOMAS HARDY

LATE LYRICS AND
EARLIER, WITH MANY
OTHER VERSES

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APOLOGY

About half the verses that follow were written quite lately. The rest are older, having been held over in MS. when past volumes were published, on considering that these would contain a sufficient number of pages to offer readers at one time, more especially during the distractions of the war. The unusually far back poems to be found here are, however, but some that were overlooked in gathering previous collections. A freshness in them, now unattainable, seemed to make up for their inexperience and to justify their inclusion. A few are dated; the dates of others are not discoverable.

The launching of a volume of this kind in neo-Georgian days by one who began writing in mid-Victorian, and has published nothing to speak of for some years, may seem to call for a few words of excuse or explanation. Whether or no, readers may feel assured that a new book is submitted to them with great hesitation at so belated a date. Insistent practical reasons, however, among which were requests from some illustrious men of letters who

are in sympathy with my productions, the accident that several of the poems have already seen the light, and that dozens of them have been lying about for years, compelled the course adopted, in spite of the natural disinclination of a writer whose works have been so frequently regarded askance by a pragmatic section here and there, to draw attention to them once more.

I do not know that it is necessary to say much on the contents of the book, even in deference to suggestions that will be mentioned presently. I believe that those readers who care for my poems at all – readers to whom no passport is required – will care for this new instalment of them, perhaps the last, as much as for any that have preceded them. Moreover, in the eyes of a less friendly class the pieces, though a very mixed collection indeed, contain, so far as I am able to see, little or nothing in technic or teaching that can be considered a Star-Chamber matter, or so much as agitating to a ladies' school; even though, to use Wordsworth's observation in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, such readers may suppose "that by the act of writing in verse an author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association: that he not only thus apprises the reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded."

It is true, nevertheless, that some grave, positive, stark, delineations are interspersed among those of the passive, lighter, and traditional sort presumably nearer to stereotyped tastes. For – while I am quite aware that a thinker is not expected,

and, indeed, is scarcely allowed, now more than heretofore, to state all that crosses his mind concerning existence in this universe, in his attempts to explain or excuse the presence of evil and the incongruity of penalizing the irresponsible – it must be obvious to open intelligences that, without denying the beauty and faithful service of certain venerable cults, such disallowance of “obstinate questionings” and “blank misgivings” tends to a paralysed intellectual stalemate. Heine observed nearly a hundred years ago that the soul has her eternal rights; that she will not be darkened by statutes, nor lullabied by the music of bells. And what is to-day, in allusions to the present author’s pages, alleged to be “pessimism” is, in truth, only such “questionings” in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul’s betterment, and the body’s also.

If I may be forgiven for quoting my own old words, let me repeat what I printed in this relation more than twenty years ago, and wrote much earlier, in a poem entitled “In Tenebris”:

If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst:

that is to say, by the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism. But it is called pessimism nevertheless; under which word, expressed with condemnatory emphasis, it is regarded by many as some pernicious new thing (though so old as to underlie the Christian

idea, and even to permeate the Greek drama); and the subject is charitably left to decent silence, as if further comment were needless.

Happily there are some who feel such Levitical passing-by to be, alas, by no means a permanent dismissal of the matter; that comment on where the world stands is very much the reverse of needless in these disordered years of our prematurely afflicted century: that amendment and not madness lies that way. And looking down the future these few hold fast to the same: that whether the human and kindred animal races survive till the exhaustion or destruction of the globe, or whether these races perish and are succeeded by others before that conclusion comes, pain to all upon it, tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by lovingkindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces – unconscious or other – that have “the balancings of the clouds,” happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often.

To conclude this question I may add that the argument of the so-called optimists is neatly summarized in a stern pronouncement against me by my friend Mr. Frederic Harrison in a late essay of his, in the words: “This view of life is not mine.” The solemn declaration does not seem to me to be so annihilating to the said “view” (really a series of fugitive impressions which I have never tried to co-ordinate) as is complacently assumed.

Surely it embodies a too human fallacy quite familiar in logic. Next, a knowing reviewer, apparently a Roman Catholic young man, speaks, with some rather gross instances of the *suggestio falsi* in his article, of “Mr. Hardy refusing consolation,” the “dark gravity of his ideas,” and so on. When a Positivist and a Catholic agree there must be something wonderful in it, which should make a poet sit up. But.. O that ’twere possible!

I would not have alluded in this place or anywhere else to such casual personal criticisms – for casual and unreflecting they must be – but for the satisfaction of two or three friends in whose opinion a short answer was deemed desirable, on account of the continual repetition of these criticisms, or more precisely, quizzings. After all, the serious and truly literary inquiry in this connection is: Should a shaper of such stuff as dreams are made on disregard considerations of what is customary and expected, and apply himself to the real function of poetry, the application of ideas to life (in Matthew Arnold’s familiar phrase)? This bears more particularly on what has been called the “philosophy” of these poems – usually reproved as “queer.” Whoever the author may be that undertakes such application of ideas in this “philosophic” direction – where it is specially required – glacial judgments must inevitably fall upon him amid opinion whose arbiters largely decry individuality, to whom *ideas* are oddities to smile at, who are moved by a yearning the reverse of that of the Athenian inquirers on Mars Hill; and stiffen their features not only at sound of a new thing, but at a restatement of old things

in new terms. Hence should anything of this sort in the following adumbrations seem “queer” – should any of them seem to good Panglossians to embody strange and disrespectful conceptions of this best of all possible worlds, I apologize; but cannot help it.

Such divergences, which, though piquant for the nonce, it would be affectation to say are not saddening and discouraging likewise, may, to be sure, arise sometimes from superficial aspect only, writer and reader seeing the same thing at different angles. But in palpable cases of divergence they arise, as already said, whenever a serious effort is made towards that which the authority I have cited – who would now be called old-fashioned, possibly even parochial – affirmed to be what no good critic could deny as the poet’s province, the application of ideas to life. One might shrewdly guess, by the by, that in such recommendation the famous writer may have overlooked the cold-shouldering results upon an enthusiastic disciple that would be pretty certain to follow his putting the high aim in practice, and have forgotten the disconcerting experience of Gil Blas with the Archbishop.

To add a few more words to what has already taken up too many, there is a contingency liable to miscellanies of verse that I have never seen mentioned, so far as I can remember; I mean the chance little shocks that may be caused over a book of various character like the present and its predecessors by the juxtaposition of unrelated, even discordant, effusions; poems perhaps years apart in the making, yet facing each other. An odd

result of this has been that dramatic anecdotes of a satirical and humorous intention (such, *e. g.*, as "Royal Sponsors") following verse in graver voice, have been read as misfires because they raise the smile that they were intended to raise, the journalist, deaf to the sudden change of key, being unconscious that he is laughing with the author and not at him. I admit that I did not foresee such contingencies as I ought to have done, and that people might not perceive when the tone altered. But the difficulties of arranging the themes in a graduated kinship of moods would have been so great that irrelation was almost unavoidable with efforts so diverse. I must trust for right note-catching to those finely-touched spirits who can divine without half a whisper, whose intuitiveness is proof against all the accidents of inconsequence. In respect of the less alert, however, should any one's train of thought be thrown out of gear by a consecutive piping of vocal reeds in jarring tonics, without a semiquaver's rest between, and be led thereby to miss the writer's aim and meaning in one out of two contiguous compositions, I shall deeply regret it.

Having at last, I think, finished with the personal points that I was recommended to notice, I will forsake the immediate object of this Preface; and, leaving *Late Lyrics* to whatever fate it deserves, digress for a few moments to more general considerations. The thoughts of any man of letters concerned to keep poetry alive cannot but run uncomfortably on the precarious prospects of English verse at the present day. Verily the hazards

and casualties surrounding the birth and setting forth of almost every modern creation in numbers are ominously like those of one of Shelley's paper-boats on a windy lake. And a forward conjecture scarcely permits the hope of a better time, unless men's tendencies should change. So indeed of all art, literature, and "high thinking" nowadays. Whether owing to the barbarizing of taste in the younger minds by the dark madness of the late war, the unabashed cultivation of selfishness in all classes, the plethoric growth of knowledge simultaneously with the stunting of wisdom, "a degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" (to quote Wordsworth again), or from any other cause, we seem threatened with a new Dark Age.

I formerly thought, like so many roughly handled writers, that so far as literature was concerned a partial cause might be impotent or mischievous criticism; the satirizing of individuality, the lack of whole-seeing in contemporary estimates of poetry and kindred work, the knowingness affected by junior reviewers, the overgrowth of meticulousness in their peerings for an opinion, as if it were a cultivated habit in them to scrutinize the tool-marks and be blind to the building, to hearken for the key-creaks and be deaf to the diapason, to judge the landscape by a nocturnal exploration with a flash-lantern. In other words, to carry on the old game of sampling the poem or drama by quoting the worst line or worst passage only, in ignorance or not of Coleridge's proof that a versification of any length neither can be nor ought to be all poetry; of reading meanings into a

book that its author never dreamt of writing there. I might go on interminably.

But I do not now think any such temporary obstructions to be the cause of the hazard, for these negligences and ignorances, though they may have stifled a few true poets in the run of generations, disperse like stricken leaves before the wind of next week, and are no more heard of again in the region of letters than their writers themselves. No: we may be convinced that something of the deeper sort mentioned must be the cause.

In an event poetry, pure literature in general, religion – I include religion because poetry and religion touch each other, or rather modulate into each other; are, indeed, often but different names for the same thing – these, I say, the visible signs of mental and emotional life, must like all other things keep moving, becoming; even though at present, when belief in witches of Endor is displacing the Darwinian theory and “the truth that shall make you free,” men’s minds appear, as above noted, to be moving backwards rather than on. I speak, of course, somewhat sweepingly, and should except many isolated minds; also the minds of men in certain worthy but small bodies of various denominations, and perhaps in the homely quarter where advance might have been the very least expected a few years back – the English Church – if one reads it rightly as showing evidence of “removing those things that are shaken,” in accordance with the wise Epistolary recommendation to the Hebrews. For since the historic and once august hierarchy of Rome some generation

ago lost its chance of being the religion of the future by doing otherwise, and throwing over the little band of neo-Catholics who were making a struggle for continuity by applying the principle of evolution to their own faith, joining hands with modern science, and outflanking the hesitating English instinct towards liturgical reform (a flank march which I at the time quite expected to witness, with the gathering of many millions of waiting agnostics into its fold); since then, one may ask, what other purely English establishment than the Church, of sufficient dignity and footing, and with such strength of old association, such architectural spell, is left in this country to keep the shreds of morality together?

It may be a forlorn hope, a mere dream, that of an alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality, which must come, unless also the world is to perish, by means of the interfusing effect of poetry – “the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; the impassioned expression of science,” as it was defined by an English poet who was quite orthodox in his ideas. But if it be true, as Comte argued, that advance is never in a straight line, but in a looped orbit, we may, in the aforesaid ominous moving backward, be doing it *pour mieux sauter*, drawing back for a spring. I repeat that I forlornly hope so, notwithstanding the supercilious regard of hope by Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and other philosophers down to Einstein who have my respect. But one dares not prophesy. Physical, chronological, and other

contingencies keep me in these days from critical studies and literary circles

Where once we held debate, a band

Of youthful friends, on mind and art

(if one may quote Tennyson in this century of free verse).

Hence I cannot know how things are going so well as I used to know them, and the aforesaid limitations must quite prevent my knowing hence-forward.

I have to thank the editors and owners of *The Times*, *Fortnightly*, *Mercury*, and other periodicals in which a few of the poems have appeared for kindly assenting to their being reclaimed for collected publication.

T. H

February 1922.

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 ondrew,

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.

SUMMER SCHEMES

When friendly summer calls again,
 Calls again
Her little fifers to these hills,
We'll go – we two – to that arched fane
Of leafage where they prime their bills
Before they start to flood the plain
With quavers, minims, shakes, and trills.
 “ – We'll go,” I sing; but who shall say
 What may not chance before that day!

And we shall see the waters spring,
 Waters spring
From chinks the scrubby copses crown;
And we shall trace their oncreeping
To where the cascade tumbles down
And sends the bobbing growths aswing,
And ferns not quite but almost drown.
 “ – We shall,” I say; but who may sing
 Of what another moon will bring!

EPEISODIA

I

Past the hills that peep
Where the leaze is smiling,
On and on beguiling
Crisply-cropping sheep;
Under boughs of brushwood
Linking tree and tree
In a shade of lushwood,
 There caressed we!

II

Hemmed by city walls
That outshut the sunlight,
In a foggy dun light,
Where the footstep falls
With a pit-pat wearisome
In its cadency
On the flagstones drearisome

There pressed we!

III

Where in wild-winged crowds
Blown birds show their whiteness
Up against the lightness
Of the clammy clouds;
By the random river
Pushing to the sea,
Under bents that quiver
There rest we.

FAINTHEART IN A RAILWAY TRAIN

At nine in the morning there passed a church,
At ten there passed me by the sea,
At twelve a town of smoke and smirch,
At two a forest of oak and birch,
And then, on a platform, she:

A radiant stranger, who saw not me.
I queried, "Get out to her do I dare?"
But I kept my seat in my search for a plea,
And the wheels moved on. O could it but be
That I had alighted there!

AT MOONRISE AND ONWARDS

I thought you a fire
On Heron-Plantation Hill,
Dealing out mischief the most dire
To the chattels of men of hire

There in their vill.
But by and by
You turned a yellow-green,
Like a large glow-worm in the sky;

And then I could descry
Your mood and mien.
How well I know
Your furtive feminine shape!

As if reluctantly you show
You nude of cloud, and but by favour throw
Aside its drape.
– How many a year

Have you kept pace with me,
Wan Woman of the waste up there,
Behind a hedge, or the bare
Bough of a tree!

No novelty are you,
O Lady of all my time,
Veering unbid into my view
Whether I near Death's mew,
Or Life's top cyme!

THE GARDEN SEAT

Its former green is blue and thin,
And its once firm legs sink in and in;
Soon it will break down unaware,
Soon it will break down unaware.

At night when reddest flowers are black
Those who once sat thereon come back;
Quite a row of them sitting there,
Quite a row of them sitting there.

With them the seat does not break down,
Nor winter freeze them, nor floods drown,
For they are as light as upper air,
They are as light as upper air!

BARTHÉLÉMON AT VAUXHALL

François Hippolite Barthélémon, first-fiddler at Vauxhall Gardens, composed what was probably the most popular morning hymn-tune ever written. It was formerly sung, full-voiced, every Sunday in most churches, to Bishop Ken's words, but is now seldom heard.

He said: "Awake my soul, and with the sun,"
And paused upon the bridge, his eyes due east,
Where was emerging like a full-robed priest
The irradiate globe that vouched the dark as done.

It lit his face – the weary face of one
Who in the adjacent gardens charged his string,
Nightly, with many a tuneful tender thing,
Till stars were weak, and dancing hours outrun.

And then were threads of matin music spun
In trial tones as he pursued his way:
"This is a morn," he murmured, "well begun:
This strain to Ken will count when I am clay!"

And count it did; till, caught by echoing lyres,
It spread to galleried naves and mighty quires.

“I SOMETIMES THINK” (FOR F. E. H.)

I sometimes think as here I sit
Of things I have done,
Which seemed in doing not unfit
To face the sun:
Yet never a soul has paused a whit
On such – not one.

There was that eager strenuous press
To sow good seed;
There was that saving from distress
In the nick of need;
There were those words in the wilderness:
Who cared to heed?

Yet can this be full true, or no?
For one did care,
And, spiriting into my house, to, fro,
Like wind on the stair,
Cares still, heeds all, and will, even though
I may despair.

JEZREEL ON ITS SEIZURE BY THE ENGLISH UNDER ALLENBY, SEPTEMBER 1918

Did they catch as it were in a Vision at shut of the day —
When their cavalry smote through the ancient Esdraelon
Plain,

And they crossed where the Tishbite stood forth in his
enemy's way —

His gaunt mournful Shade as he bade the King haste off
amain?

On war-men at this end of time – even on Englishmen's eyes
—

Who slay with their arms of new might in that long-ago place,
Flashed he who drove furiously?.. Ah, did the phantom arise
Of that queen, of that proud Tyrian woman who painted her
face?

Faintly marked they the words “Throw her down!” rise from
Night eerily,

Spectre-spots of the blood of her body on some rotten wall?
And the thin note of pity that came: “A King's daughter is

she,”

As they passed where she trodden was once by the chargers’
footfall?

Could such be the hauntings of men of to-day, at the cease
Of pursuit, at the dusk-hour, ere slumber their senses could
seal?

Enghosted seers, kings – one on horseback who asked “Is it
peace?”.

Yea, strange things and spectral may men have beheld in
Jezreel!

September 24, 1918.

A JOG-TROT PAIR

Who were the twain that trod this track
So many times together
Hither and back,
In spells of certain and uncertain weather?

Commonplace in conduct they
Who wandered to and fro here
Day by day:
Two that few dwellers troubled themselves to know here.

The very gravel-path was prim
That daily they would follow:
Borders trim:
Never a wayward sprout, or hump, or hollow.

Trite usages in tamest style
Had tended to their plighting.
“It’s just worth while,
Perhaps,” they had said. “And saves much sad good-
nighting.”

And petty seemed the happenings
That ministered to their joyance:
Simple things,

Onerous to satiate souls, increased their buoyance.

Who could those common people be,

Of days the plainest, barest?

They were we;

Yes; happier than the cleverest, smartest, rarest.

“THE CURTAINS NOW ARE DRAWN” (SONG)

I

The curtains now are drawn,
And the spindrift strikes the glass,
Blown up the jagged pass
By the surly salt sou'-west,
And the sneering glare is gone
Behind the yonder crest,
While she sings to me:
“O the dream that thou art my Love, be it thine,
And the dream that I am thy Love, be it mine,
And death may come, but loving is divine.”

II

I stand here in the rain,
With its smite upon her stone,

And the grasses that have grown
Over women, children, men,
And their texts that “Life is vain”;
But I hear the notes as when
 Once she sang to me:
“O the dream that thou art my Love, be it thine,
And the dream that I am thy Love, be it mine,
And death may come, but loving is divine.”

1913.

“ACCORDING TO THE MIGHTY WORKING”

I

When moiling seems at cease
In the vague void of night-time,
And heaven's wide roomage stormless
Between the dusk and light-time,
And fear at last is formless,
We call the allurement Peace.

II

Peace, this hid riot, Change,
This revel of quick-cued mumming,
This never truly being,
This evermore becoming,
This spinner's wheel onfleeing
Outside perception's range.

1917.

“I WAS NOT HE” (SONG)

I was not he – the man
Who used to pilgrim to your gate,
At whose smart step you grew elate,
And rosed, as maidens can,
For a brief span.

It was not I who sang
Beside the keys you touched so true
With note-bent eyes, as if with you
It counted not whence sprang
The voice that rang.

Yet though my destiny
It was to miss your early sweet,
You still, when turned to you my feet,
Had sweet enough to be
A prize for me!

THE WEST-OF-WESSEX GIRL

A very West-of-Wessex girl,
As blithe as blithe could be,
Was once well-known to me,
And she would laud her native town,
And hope and hope that we
Might sometime study up and down
Its charms in company.

But never I squired my Wessex girl
In jaunts to Hoe or street
When hearts were high in beat,
Nor saw her in the marbled ways
Where market-people meet
That in her bounding early days
Were friendly with her feet.

Yet now my West-of-Wessex girl,
When midnight hammers slow
From Andrew's, blow by blow,
As phantom draws me by the hand
To the place – Plymouth Hoe —
Where side by side in life, as planned,
We never were to go!

Begun in Plymouth, March 1913.

WELCOME HOME

To my native place
Bent upon returning,
Bosom all day burning
To be where my race
Well were known, 'twas much with me
There to dwell in amity.

Folk had sought their beds,
But I hailed: to view me
Under the moon, out to me
Several pushed their heads,
And to each I told my name,
Plans, and that therefrom I came.

“Did you?.. Ah, 'tis true
I once heard, back a long time,
Here had spent his young time,
Some such man as you.
Good-night.” The casement closed again,
And I was left in the frosty lane.

GOING AND STAYING

I

The moving sun-shapes on the spray,
The sparkles where the brook was flowing,
Pink faces, plightings, moonlit May,
These were the things we wished would stay;
 But they were going.

II

Seasons of blankness as of snow,
The silent bleed of a world decaying,
The moan of multitudes in woe,
These were the things we wished would go;
 But they were staying.

III

Then we looked closelier at Time,
And saw his ghostly arms revolving
To sweep off woeful things with prime,
Things sinister with things sublime
Alike dissolving.

READ BY MOONLIGHT

I paused to read a letter of hers
By the moon's cold shine,
Eyeing it in the tenderest way,
And edging it up to catch each ray
Upon her light-penned line.
I did not know what years would flow
Of her life's span and mine
Ere I read another letter of hers
By the moon's cold shine!

I chance now on the last of hers,
By the moon's cold shine;
It is the one remaining page
Out of the many shallow and sage
Whereto she set her sign.
Who could foresee there were to be
Such letters of pain and pine
Ere I should read this last of hers
By the moon's cold shine!

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.

A WOMAN'S FANCY

“Ah Madam; you’ve indeed come back here?

’Twas sad – your husband’s so swift death,
And you away! You shouldn’t have left him:
It hastened his last breath.”

“Dame, I am not the lady you think me;

I know not her, nor know her name;
I’ve come to lodge here – a friendless woman;
My health my only aim.”

She came; she lodged. Wherever she rambled

They held her as no other than
The lady named; and told how her husband
Had died a forsaken man.

So often did they call her thuswise

Mistakenly, by that man’s name,
So much did they declare about him,
That his past form and fame

Grew on her, till she pitied his sorrow

As if she truly had been the cause —
Yea, his deserter; and came to wonder
What mould of man he was.

“Tell me my history!” would exclaim she;
“*Our* history,” she said mournfully.
“But *you* know, surely, Ma’am?” they would answer,
Much in perplexity.

Curious, she crept to his grave one evening,
And a second time in the dusk of the morrow;
Then a third time, with crescent emotion
Like a bereaved wife’s sorrow.

No gravestone rose by the rounded hillock;
– “I marvel why this is?” she said.
– “He had no kindred, Ma’am, but you near.”
– She set a stone at his head.

She learnt to dream of him, and told them:
“In slumber often uprises he,
And says: ‘I am joyed that, after all, Dear,
You’ve not deserted me!’”

At length died too this kinless woman,
As he had died she had grown to crave;
And at her dying she besought them
To bury her in his grave.

Such said, she had paused; until she added:
“Call me by his name on the stone,
As I were, first to last, his dearest,

Not she who left him lone!”

And this they did. And so it became there
That, by the strength of a tender whim,
The stranger was she who bore his name there,
Not she who wedded him.

HER SONG

I sang that song on Sunday,
 To witch an idle while,
I sang that song on Monday,
 As fittest to beguile;
I sang it as the year outwore,
 And the new slid in;
I thought not what might shape before
 Another would begin.

I sang that song in summer,
 All unforeknowingly,
To him as a new-comer
 From regions strange to me:
I sang it when in afteryears
 The shades stretched out,
And paths were faint; and flocking fears
 Brought cup-eyed care and doubt.

Sings he that song on Sundays
 In some dim land afar,
On Saturdays, or Mondays,
 As when the evening star
Glimpsed in upon his bending face
 And my hanging hair,

And time untouched me with a trace
Of soul-smart or despair?

A WET AUGUST

Nine drops of water bead the jessamine,
And nine-and-ninety smear the stones and tiles:
– 'Twas not so in that August – full-rayed, fine —
When we lived out-of-doors, sang songs, strode miles.

Or was there then no noted radiancy
Of summer? Were dun clouds, a dribbling bough,
Gilt over by the light I bore in me,
And was the waste world just the same as now?

It can have been so: yea, that threatenings
Of coming down-drip on the sunless gray,
By the then possibilities in things
Were wrought more bright than brightest skies to-day.

1920.

THE DISSEMBLERS

“It was not you I came to please,
Only myself,” flipped she;
“I like this spot of phantasies,
And thought you far from me.”
But O, he was the secret spell
That led her to the lea!

“It was not she who shaped my ways,
Or works, or thoughts,” he said.
“I scarcely marked her living days,
Or missed her much when dead.”
But O, his joyance knew its knell
When daisies hid her head!

TO A LADY PLAYING AND SINGING IN THE MORNING

Joyful lady, sing!
And I will lurk here listening,
Though nought be done, and nought begun,
And work-hours swift are scurrying.

Sing, O lady, still!
Aye, I will wait each note you trill,
Though duties due that press to do
This whole day long I unfulfil.

“ – It is an evening tune;
One not designed to waste the noon,”
You say. I know: time bids me go —
For daytide passes too, too soon!

But let indulgence be,
This once, to my rash ecstasy:
When sounds nowhere that carolled air
My idled morn may comfort me!

“A MAN WAS DRAWING NEAR TO ME”

On that gray night of mournful drone,
A part from aught to hear, to see,
I dreamt not that from shires unknown
 In gloom, alone,
 By Halworthy,
A man was drawing near to me.

I'd no concern at anything,
No sense of coming pull-heart play;
Yet, under the silent outspreading
 Of even's wing
 Where Otterham lay,
A man was riding up my way.

I thought of nobody – not of one,
But only of trifles – legends, ghosts —
Though, on the moorland dim and dun
 That travellers shun
 About these coasts,
The man had passed Tresparret Posts.

There was no light at all inland,
Only the seaward pharos-fire,

Nothing to let me understand
That hard at hand
By Hennett Byre
The man was getting nigh and nigher.

There was a rumble at the door,
A draught disturbed the drapery,
And but a minute passed before,
With gaze that bore
My destiny,
The man revealed himself to me.

THE STRANGE HOUSE (MAX GATE, A.D. 2000)

“I hear the piano playing —
Just as a ghost might play.”
“ – O, but what are you saying?
There’s no piano to-day;
Their old one was sold and broken;
Years past it went amiss.”
“ – I heard it, or shouldn’t have spoken:
A strange house, this!

“I catch some undertone here,
From some one out of sight.”
“ – Impossible; we are alone here,
And shall be through the night.”
“ – The parlour-door – what stirred it?”
“ – No one: no soul’s in range.”
“ – But, anyhow, I heard it,
And it seems strange!

“Seek my own room I cannot —
A figure is on the stair!”
“ – What figure? Nay, I scan not
Any one lingering there.
A bough outside is waving,

And that's its shade by the moon."

" – Well, all is strange! I am craving
Strength to leave soon."

" – Ah, maybe you've some vision
Of showings beyond our sphere;
Some sight, sense, intuition
Of what once happened here?
The house is old; they've hinted
It once held two love-thralls,
And they may have imprinted
Their dreams on its walls?"

"They were – I think 'twas told me —
Queer in their works and ways;
The teller would often hold me
With weird tales of those days.
Some folk can not abide here,
But we – we do not care
Who loved, laughed, wept, or died here,
Knew joy, or despair."

“AS ’TWERE TO-NIGHT”

(SONG)

As ’twere to-night, in the brief space
Of a far eventime,
My spirit rang achime
At vision of a girl of grace;
As ’twere to-night, in the brief space
Of a far eventime.

As ’twere at noontide of to-morrow
I airily walked and talked,
And wondered as I walked
What it could mean, this soar from sorrow;
As ’twere at noontide of to-morrow
I airily walked and talked.

As ’twere at waning of this week
Broke a new life on me;
Trancings of bliss to be
In some dim dear land soon to seek;
As ’twere at waning of this week
Broke a new life on me!

THE CONTRETEMPS

A forward rush by the lamp in the gloom,
And we clasped, and almost kissed;
But she was not the woman whom
I had promised to meet in the thawing brume
On that harbour-bridge; nor was I he of her tryst.

So loosening from me swift she said:
“O why, why feign to be
The one I had meant! – to whom I have sped
To fly with, being so sorrily wed!”
– ’Twas thus and thus that she upbraided me.

My assignation had struck upon
Some others’ like it, I found.
And her lover rose on the night anon;
And then her husband entered on
The lamplit, snowflaked, sloppiness around.

“Take her and welcome, man!” he cried:
“I wash my hands of her.
I’ll find me twice as good a bride!”
– All this to me, whom he had eyed,
Plainly, as his wife’s planned deliverer.

And next the lover: “Little I knew,
Madam, you had a third!
Kissing here in my very view!”
– Husband and lover then withdrew.
I let them; and I told them not they erred.

Why not? Well, there faced she and I —
Two strangers who’d kissed, or near,
Chancewise. To see stand weeping by
A woman once embraced, will try
The tension of a man the most austere.

So it began; and I was young,
She pretty, by the lamp,
As flakes came waltzing down among
The waves of her clinging hair, that hung
Heavily on her temples, dark and damp.

And there alone still stood we two;
She one cast off for me,
Or so it seemed: while night on drew,
Forcing a parley what should do
We twain hearts caught in one catastrophe.

In stranded souls a common strait
Wakes latencies unknown,
Whose impulse may precipitate
A life-long leap. The hour was late,
And there was the Jersey boat with its funnel agroan.

“Is wary walking worth much pother?”

It grunted, as still it stayed.

“One pairing is as good as another

Where all is venture! Take each other,
And scrap the oaths that you have aforetime made.”.

– Of the four involved there walks but one

On earth at this late day.

And what of the chapter so begun?

In that odd complex what was done?

Well; happiness comes in full to none:

Let peace lie on lulled lips: I will not say.

Weymouth.

A GENTLEMAN'S EPITAPH ON HIMSELF AND A LADY, WHO WERE BURIED TOGETHER

I dwelt in the shade of a city,
 She far by the sea,
With folk perhaps good, gracious, witty;
 But never with me.

Her form on the ballroom's smooth flooring
 I never once met,
To guide her with accents adoring
 Through Weippert's "First Set."¹

I spent my life's seasons with pale ones
 In Vanity Fair,
And she enjoyed hers among hale ones
 In salt-smelling air.

Maybe she had eyes of deep colour,
 Maybe they were blue,
Maybe as she aged they got duller;
 That never I knew.

¹ Quadrilles danced early in the nineteenth century.

She may have had lips like the coral,
But I never kissed them,
Saw pouting, nor curling in quarrel,
Nor sought for, nor missed them.

Not a word passed of love all our lifetime,
Between us, nor thrill;
We'd never a husband-and-wife time,
For good or for ill.

Yet as one dust, through bleak days and vernal,
Lie I and lies she,
This never-known lady, eternal
Companion to me!

THE OLD GOWN

(SONG)

I have seen her in gowns the brightest,
Of azure, green, and red,
And in the simplest, whitest,
Muslined from heel to head;
I have watched her walking, riding,
Shade-flecked by a leafy tree,
Or in fixed thought abiding
By the foam-fingered sea.

In woodlands I have known her,
When boughs were mourning loud,
In the rain-reek she has shown her
Wild-haired and watery-browed.
And once or twice she has cast me
As she pumped along the street
Court-clad, ere quite she had passed me,
A glance from her chariot-seat.

But in my memoried passion
For evermore stands she
In the gown of fading fashion
She wore that night when we,
Doomed long to part, assembled

In the snug small room; yea, when
She sang with lips that trembled,
“Shall I see his face again?”

A NIGHT IN NOVEMBER

I marked when the weather changed,
And the panes began to quake,
And the winds rose up and ranged,
That night, lying half-awake.

Dead leaves blew into my room,
And alighted upon my bed,
And a tree declared to the gloom
Its sorrow that they were shed.

One leaf of them touched my hand,
And I thought that it was you
There stood as you used to stand,
And saying at last you knew!

(?) 1913.

A DUETTIST TO HER PIANOFORTE SONG OF SILENCE (E. L. H. – H. C. H.)

Since every sound moves memories,
How can I play you
Just as I might if you raised no scene,
By your ivory rows, of a form between
My vision and your time-worn sheen,
As when each day you
Answered our fingers with ecstasy?
So it's hushed, hushed, hushed, you are for me!

And as I am doomed to counterchord
Her notes no more
In those old things I used to know,
In a fashion, when we practised so,
“Good-night! – Good-bye!” to your pleated show
Of silk, now hoar,
Each nodding hammer, and pedal and key,
For dead, dead, dead, you are to me!

I fain would second her, strike to her stroke,

As when she was by,
Aye, even from the ancient clamorous “Fall
Of Paris,” or “Battle of Prague” withal,
To the “Roving Minstrels,” or “Elfin Call”
Sung soft as a sigh:
But upping ghosts press achefully,
And mute, mute, mute, you are for me!

Should I fling your polyphones, plaints, and quavers
Afresh on the air,
Too quick would the small white shapes be here
Of the fellow twain of hands so dear;
And a black-tressed profile, and pale smooth ear;
– Then how shall I bear
Such heavily-haunted harmony?
Nay: hushed, hushed, hushed you are for me!

“WHERE THREE ROADS JOINED”

Where three roads joined it was green and fair,
And over a gate was the sun-glazed sea,
And life laughed sweet when I halted there;

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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