

THOMAS HARDY

POEMS OF THE
PAST AND THE
PRESENT

Thomas Hardy

Poems of the Past and the Present

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Thomas Hardy

Poems of the Past and the Present

V.R. 1819–1901
A REVERIE

Moments the mightiest pass uncalendared,
And when the Absolute
In backward Time outgave the deedful word
Whereby all life is stirred:
“Let one be born and throned whose mould shall constitute
The norm of every royal-reckoned attribute,”
No mortal knew or heard.
But in due days the purposed Life outshone —
Serene, sagacious, free;
– Her waxing seasons bloomed with deeds well done,
And the world’s heart was won.
Yet may the deed of hers most bright in eyes to be
Lie hid from ours – as in the All-One’s thought lay she —
Till ripening years have run.

Sunday Night,
27th January 1901.

WAR POEMS

EMBARCATION

(Southampton Docks: October, 1899)

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

Vaster battalions press for further strands,
To argue in the self-same bloody mode
Which this late age of thought, and pact, and code,
Still fails to mend. – Now deckward tramp the bands,
Yellow as autumn leaves, alive as spring;
And as each host draws out upon the sea
Beyond which lies the tragical To-be,
None dubious of the cause, none murmuring,

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

DEPARTURE
(*Southampton Docks: October, 1899*)

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

Keen sense of severance everywhere prevails,
Which shapes the late long tramp of mounting men
To seeming words that ask and ask again:
“How long, O striving Teutons, Slavs, and Gaels
Must your wroth reasonings trade on lives like these,
That are as puppets in a playing hand? —
When shall the saner softer polities
Whereof we dream, have play in each proud land,
And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?”

THE COLONEL'S SOLILOQUY (*Southampton Docks: October, 1899*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE GOING OF THE BATTERY WIVES' LAMENT

(November 2, 1899)

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

AT THE WAR OFFICE, LONDON
(Affixing the Lists of Killed and Wounded: December, 1899)

I

Last year I called this world of gain-givings
The darkest thinkable, and questioned sadly
If my own land could heave its pulse less gladly,
So charged it seemed with circumstance whence springs
The tragedy of things.

II

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

A CHRISTMAS GHOST-STORY

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

Christmas-eve, 1899.

THE DEAD DRUMMER

I

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

II

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

III

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

A WIFE IN LONDON (*December, 1899*)

I

THE TRAGEDY

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

A messenger's knock cracks smartly,
Flashed news is in her hand
Of meaning it dazes to understand
Though shaped so shortly:
He – has fallen – in the far South Land.

II

THE IRONY

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

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

THE SOULS OF THE SLAIN

I

The thick lids of Night closed upon me
Alone at the Bill
Of the Isle by the Race ¹—
Many-caverned, bald, wrinkled of face —
And with darkness and silence the spirit was on me
To brood and be still.

II

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

III

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

IV

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

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

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

X

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

XI

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

XII

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

XIII

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

XIV

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

XV

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

XVI

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

December 1899.

SONG OF THE SOLDIERS' WIVES

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

And now you are nearing home again,
Dears, home again;

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

THE SICK GOD

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

He scarce impassions champions now;
They do and dare, but tensely – pale of brow;
And would they fain uplift the arm
Of that faint form they know not how.

X

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

XI

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

POEMS OF PILGRIMAGE

GENOA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN (March, 1887)

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHELLEY'S SKYLARK
(The neighbourhood of Leghorn: March, 1887)

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

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

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

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

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

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

IN THE OLD THEATRE, FIESOLE *(April, 1887)*

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

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

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

ROME: ON THE PALATINE
(April, 1887)

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

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

When lo, swift hands, on strings nigh over-head,
Began to melodize a waltz by Strauss:
It stirred me as I stood, in Cæsar's house,
Raised the old routs Imperial lyres had led,

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

ROME BUILDING A NEW STREET IN THE ANCIENT QUARTER

(*April, 1887*)

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

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

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

ROME THE VATICAN – SALA DELLE MUSE

(1887)

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

She was nor this nor that of those beings divine,
But each and the whole – an essence of all the Nine;
With tentative foot she neared to my halting-place,
A pensive smile on her sweet, small, marvellous face.

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

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

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

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

ROME
AT THE PYRAMID OF CESTIUS
NEAR THE GRAVES OF SHELLEY AND KEATS
(1887)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

June 27, 1897

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

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

Anon the book is closed,
With "It is finished!" And at the alley's end
He turns, and soon on me his glances bend;
And, as from earth, comes speech – small, muted, yet composed.

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

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

ZERMATT TO THE MATTERHORN

(June-July, 1897)

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

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

Yet ages ere men topped thee, late and soon
Thou watch'dst each night the planets lift and lower;
Thou gleam'dst to Joshua's pausing sun and moon,
And brav'dst the tokening sky when Cæsar's power
Approached its bloody end: yea, saw'st that Noon
When darkness filled the earth till the ninth hour.

THE BRIDGE OF LODI ² (*Spring, 1887*)

I

When of tender mind and body
I was moved by minstrelsy,
And that strain “The Bridge of Lodi”
Brought a strange delight to me.

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

And to-day, sunlit and smiling,

² Pronounce “Loddy.”

Here I stand upon the scene,
With its saffron walls, dun tiling,
And its meads of maiden green,

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

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

X

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

XI

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

XII

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

XIII

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

XIV

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

XV

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

XVI

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

XVII

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

ON AN INVITATION TO THE UNITED STATES

I

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

II

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

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

THE MOTHER MOURNS

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

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

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

And, heeding, it awed me to gather
That Nature herself there
Was breathing in aërie accents,
With dirgeful refrain,

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

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

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

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

“Why loosened I olden control here
To mechanize skywards,

Undeeming great scope could outshape in
A globe of such grain?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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