

# THOMAS HARDY

WESSEX POEMS AND  
OTHER VERSES

Thomas Hardy

**Wessex Poems and Other Verses**

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## Wessex Poems and Other Verses

### PREFACE TO WESSEX POEMS

Of the miscellaneous collection of verse that follows, only four pieces have been published, though many were written long ago, and other 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, which have been recently made, and, as may be surmised, are inserted for personal and local reasons rather than for their intrinsic qualities.

*T. H.*

*September 1898.*

## THE TEMPORARY THE ALL

Change and chancefulness in my flowering youthtime,  
Set me sun by sun near to one unchosen;  
Wrought us fellow-like, and despite divergence,  
Friends interlinked us.

“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, the while 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 achieving;  
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 undecrease;  
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, and clench myself, and die,  
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;  
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I  
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

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

*1866.*

**“IN VISION I ROAMED”  
TO —**

In vision I roamed the flashing Firmament,  
So fierce in blazon that the Night waxed wan,  
As though with an awed sense of such ostent;  
And as I thought my spirit ranged on and on

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

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

*1866.*

## AT A BRIDAL TO —

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

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

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

*1866.*

## POSTPONEMENT

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

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

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

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

*1866.*

## A CONFESSION TO A FRIEND IN TROUBLE

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

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

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

1866.

## NEUTRAL TONES

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

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

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

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

*1867.*

## **SHE AT HIS FUNERAL**

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

*187—.*

## HER INITIALS

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

*1869.*

## **HER DILEMMA (IN – CHURCH)**

The two were silent in a sunless church,  
Whose mildewed walls, uneven paving-stones,  
And wasted carvings passed antique research;  
And nothing broke the clock's dull monotonous.

Leaning against a wormy poppy-head,  
So wan and worn that he could scarcely stand,  
– For he was soon to die, – he softly said,  
“Tell me you love me!” – holding hard 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 spirit to mine own 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 feel no more 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 that with me lies 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 yours but 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, and make Life all aim,

My old dexterities of hue quite gone,  
And nothing left for Love to look upon.

*1866.*

## SHE, TO HIMIV

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 some unit I would add love by;  
But this I know, my being is but thine own —  
Fused from its separateness by ecstasy.

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

*1866.*

## DITTY (E. L G.)

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

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

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

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

And Devotion droops her glance  
To recall  
What bond-servants of Chance

We are all.  
I but found her in that, going  
On my errant path unknowing,  
I did not out-skirt the spot  
That no spot on earth excels,  
– Where she dwells!

*1870.*

## THE SERGEANT'S SONG (1803)

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

*1878.*

## VALENCIENNES (1793)

By Corp'l Tullidge: *see "The Trumpet-Major"*

**In Memory of S. C. (Pensioner). Died 184–**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They bore my wounded frame to camp,  
And shut my gapèn skull, and washed en cleän,

And jined en wi' a zilver clamp  
Thik night at Valencieën.

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

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

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

As for the Duke o’ Yark in war,  
There be some volk whose judgment o’ en is mean;  
But this I say – a was not far  
From great at Valencieën.

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

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

*1878–1897.*

## SAN SEBASTIAN (August 1813)

With Thoughts of Sergeant M – (Pensioner), who died 185–

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

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

“My daughter is now,” he again began,  
“Of just such an age as one I knew  
When we of the Line and 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 vlander-light  
Of burning towers, and the mortar’s boom:  
We’d topped the breach; but had failed to stay,  
For our files were misled by the baffling gloom;  
And we said we’d storm by day.

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

“From the battened 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 swayed 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.

“Down the stony steps of the house-fronts 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.. Seemingly  
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.

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

## THE STRANGER'S SONG

*(As sung by Mr. Charles Charrington in the play of "The Three Wayfarers")*

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

My tools are but common ones,  
Simple shepherds all —  
My tools are no sight to see:  
A little hempen string, and a post whereon to swing,  
Are implements enough for me!

To-morrow is my working day,  
Simple shepherds all —  
To-morrow is a working day for me:  
For the farmer's sheep is slain, and the lad who did it ta'en,  
And on his soul may God ha' mer-cy!

## 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 passioned dream.  
I'll watch with thee, to testify thy wrong —  
To aid, maybe. — Law consecrates the scheme."

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

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

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

And met in clasp so close I had but bent  
My lifted blade upon them 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 thorough-spel!

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," said she; "and nothing seek.  
'Twere base in me to rob my lord unaware;  
Our hands will earn a pittance week by week."

And next I saw she'd piled her raiment rare  
Within the garde-robles, and her household purse,  
Her jewels, and 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 to 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?"

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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