

**ALFRED
EDWARD
HOUSMAN**

LAST POEMS BY A. E.
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Alfred Edward Housman
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A. E. Housman

Last Poems

I publish these poems, few though they are, because it is not likely that I shall ever be impelled to write much more. I can no longer expect to be revisited by the continuous excitement under which in the early months of 1895 I wrote the greater part of my first book, nor indeed could I well sustain it if it came; and it is best that what I have written should be printed while I am here to see it through the press and control its spelling and punctuation. About a quarter of this matter belongs to the April of the present year, but most of it to dates between 1895 and 1910.

September 1922

*We'll to the woods no more,
The laurels are all cut,
The bowers are bare of bay
That once the Muses wore;
The year draws in the day
And soon will evening shut:
The laurels all are cut,
We'll to the woods no more.
Oh we'll no more, no more
To the leafy woods away,
To the high wild woods of laurel
And the bowers of bay no more.*

I. THE WEST

Beyond the moor and the mountain crest
—Comrade, look not on the west—
The sun is down and drinks away
From air and land the lees of day.

The long cloud and the single pine
Sentinel the ending line,
And out beyond it, clear and wan,
Reach the gulfs of evening on.

The son of woman turns his brow
West from forty countries now,
And, as the edge of heaven he eyes,
Thinks eternal thoughts, and sighs.

Oh wide's the world, to rest or roam,
With change abroad and cheer at home,
Fights and furloughs, talk and tale,
Company and beef and ale.

But if I front the evening sky
Silent on the west look I,
And my comrade, stride for stride,
Paces silent at my side,

Comrade, look not on the west:
'Twill have the heart out of your breast;
'Twill take your thoughts and sink them far,
Leagues beyond the sunset bar.

Oh lad, I fear that yon's the sea
Where they fished for you and me,
And there, from whence we both were ta'en,
You and I shall drown again.

Send not on your soul before
To dive from that beguiling shore,
And let not yet the swimmer leave
His clothes upon the sands of eve.

Too fast to yonder strand forlorn
We journey, to the sunken bourn,
To flush the fading tinges eyed
By other lads at eventide.

Wide is the world, to rest or roam,
And early 'tis for turning home:
Plant your heel on earth and stand,
And let's forget our native land.

When you and I are split on air
Long we shall be strangers there;
Friends of flesh and bone are best;

Comrade, look not on the west.

II

As I gird on for fighting
My sword upon my thigh,
I think on old ill fortunes
Of better men than I.

Think I, the round world over,
What golden lads are low
With hurts not mine to mourn for
And shames I shall not know.

What evil luck soever
For me remains in store,
'Tis sure much finer fellows
Have fared much worse before.

So here are things to think on
That ought to make me brave,
As I strap on for fighting
My sword that will not save.

III

Her strong enchantments failing,
Her towers of fear in wreck,
Her limbecks dried of poisons
And the knife at her neck,

The Queen of air and darkness
Begins to shrill and cry,
'O young man, O my slayer,
To-morrow you shall die.'

O Queen of air and darkness,
I think 'tis truth you say,
And I shall die to-morrow;
But you will die to-day.

IV. ILLIC JACET

Oh hard is the bed they have made him,
And common the blanket and cheap;
But there he will lie as they laid him:
Where else could you trust him to sleep?

To sleep when the bugle is crying
And cravens have heard and are brave,
When mothers and sweethearts are sighing
And lads are in love with the grave.

Oh dark is the chamber and lonely,
And lights and companions depart;
But lief will he lose them and only
Behold the desire of his heart.

And low is the roof, but it covers
A sleeper content to repose;
And far from his friends and his lovers
He lies with the sweetheart he chose.

V. GRENADIER

The Queen she sent to look for me,
The sergeant he did say,
'Young man, a soldier will you be
For thirteen pence a day?'

For thirteen pence a day did I
Take off the things I wore,
And I have marched to where I lie,
And I shall march no more.

My mouth is dry, my shirt is wet,
My blood runs all away,
So now I shall not die in debt
For thirteen pence a day.

To-morrow after new young men
The sergeant he must see,
For things will all be over then
Between the Queen and me.

And I shall have to bate my price,
For in the grave, they say,
Is neither knowledge nor device
Nor thirteen pence a day.

VI. LANCER

I 'listed at home for a lancer,
 Oh who would not sleep with the brave?
I 'listed at home for a lancer
 To ride on a horse to my grave.

And over the seas we were bidden
 A country to take and to keep;
And far with the brave I have ridden,
 And now with the brave I shall sleep.

For round me the men will be lying
 That learned me the way to behave.
And showed me my business of dying:
 Oh who would not sleep with the brave?

They ask and there is not an answer;
Says I, I will 'list for a lancer,
 Oh who would not sleep with the brave?

And I with the brave shall be sleeping
 At ease on my mattress of loam,
When back from their taking and keeping
 The squadron is riding home.

The wind with the plumes will be playing,
The girls will stand watching them wave,
And eyeing my comrades and saying
Oh who would not sleep with the brave?

They ask and there is not an answer;
Says you, I will 'list for a lancer,
Oh who would not sleep with the brave?

VII

In valleys green and still
Where lovers wander maying
They hear from over hill
A music playing.

Behind the drum and fife,
Past hawthornwood and hollow,
Through earth and out of life
The soldiers follow.

The soldier's is the trade:
In any wind or weather
He steals the heart of maid
And man together.

The lover and his lass
Beneath the hawthorn lying
Have heard the soldiers pass,
And both are sighing.

And down the distance they
With dying note and swelling
Walk the resounding way
To the still dwelling.

VIII

Soldier from the wars returning,
 Spoiler of the taken town,
Here is ease that asks not earning;
 Turn you in and sit you down.

Peace is come and wars are over,
 Welcome you and welcome all,
While the charger crops the clover
 And his bridle hangs in stall.

Now no more of winters biting,
 Filth in trench from fall to spring,
Summers full of sweat and fighting
 For the Kesar or the King.

Rest you, charger, rust you, bridle;
 Kings and kesars, keep your pay;
Soldier, sit you down and idle
 At the inn of night for aye.

IX

The chestnut casts his flambeaux, and the flowers
Stream from the hawthorn on the wind away,
The doors clap to, the pane is blind with showers.
Pass me the can, lad; there's an end of May.

There's one spoilt spring to scant our mortal lot,
One season ruined of our little store.
May will be fine next year as like as not:
Oh ay, but then we shall be twenty-four.

We for a certainty are not the first
Have sat in taverns while the tempest hurled
Their hopeful plans to emptiness, and cursed
Whatever brute and blackguard made the world.

It is in truth iniquity on high
To cheat our sentenced souls of aught they crave,
And mar the merriment as you and I
Fare on our long fool's-errand to the grave.

Iniquity it is; but pass the can.
My lad, no pair of kings our mothers bore;
Our only portion is the estate of man:
We want the moon, but we shall get no more.

If here to-day the cloud of thunder lours
 To-morrow it will hie on far behests;
The flesh will grieve on other bones than ours
 Soon, and the soul will mourn in other breasts.

The troubles of our proud and angry dust
 Are from eternity, and shall not fail.
Bear them we can, and if we can we must.
 Shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale.

X

Could man be drunk for ever
With liquor, love, or fights,
Lief should I rouse at morning

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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