Wessex Poems and Other Verses

by Thomas Hardy

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WESSEX POEMS AND OTHER VERSES

BY THOMAS HARDY

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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.

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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.

Sketch of hour-glass

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 ghast 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 unware, 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 unknows.

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.

Sketch of church with person outside wall

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–.

Sketch of open book with two letters hand-written on left-hand page

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 monotones.

Leaning against a wormy poppy-head, So wan and worn that he could scarcely stand, —For he was soon to die,—he softly said, “Tell me you love me!”—holding hard her hand.

She would have given a world to breathe “yes” truly, So much his life seemed handing 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.

Sketch of two people in a church

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.

Sketch of person walking long path to building on hill

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 HIM IV

This love puts all humanity from me; I can but maledict her, pray her dead, For

giving love and getting love of thee— Feeding a heart that else mine own had fed!

How much I love I know not, life not known, Save as 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 barters, 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.

Sketch of man in military dress

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.

Published in "The Trumpet-Major," 1880.

Sketch of cannons overlooking a town

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 disagreën; 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 wownded 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 Corpel!" 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 vlanker-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.

Sketch of mountain

“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!

Printed in "The Three Strangers," 1883.

Sketch of man in old street

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-sped! . . .

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 unware; Our hands will earn a pittance week by week."

And next I saw she'd piled her raiment rare Within the garde-robes, 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?" —"Hast thou struck home?" came with the boughs' night-sighs.

It was my friend. "I have struck well. They fly, But carry wounds that none can

cicatrize.” —“Not mortal?” said he. “Lingering—worse,” said I.

LEIPZIG (1813)

Scene: The Master-tradesmen’s Parlour at the Old Ship Inn, Casterbridge. Evening.

“Old Norbert with the flat blue cap— A German said to be— Why let your pipe die on your lap, Your eyes blink absently?”—

—“Ah! . . . Well, I had thought till my cheek was wet Of my mother—her voice and mien When she used to sing and pirouette, And touse the tambourine

“To the march that yon street-fiddler plies: She told me ’twas the same She’d heard from the trumpets, when the Allies Her city overcame.

“My father was one of the German Hussars, My mother of Leipzig; but he, Long quartered here, fetched her at close of the wars, And a Wessex lad reared me.

“And as I grew up, again and again She’d tell, after trilling that air, Of her youth, and the battles on Leipzig plain And of all that was suffered there! . . .

“—’Twas a time of alarms. Three Chiefs-at-arms Combined them to crush One, And by numbers’ might, for in equal fight He stood the matched of none.

“Carl Schwarzenberg was of the plot, And Blücher, prompt and prow, And Jean the Crown-Prince Bernadotte: Buonaparte was the foe.

“City and plain had felt his reign From the North to the Middle Sea, And he’d now sat down in the noble town Of the King of Saxony.

“October’s deep dew its wet gossamer threw Upon Leipzig’s lawns, leaf-strewn, Where lately each fair avenue Wrought shade for summer noon.

“To westward two dull rivers crept Through miles of marsh and slough, Whereover a streak of whiteness swept— The Bridge of Lindenau.

“Hard by, in the City, the One, care-tossed, Gloomed over his shrunken power; And without the walls the hemming host Waxed denser every hour.

“He had speech that night on the morrow’s designs With his chiefs by the bivouac fire, While the belt of flames from the enemy’s lines Flared nigher him yet and nigher.

“Three sky-lights then from the girdling trine Told, ‘Ready!’ As they rose Their flashes seemed his Judgment-Sign For bleeding Europe’s woes.

“’Twas seen how the French watch-fires that night Glowed still and steadily; And the Three rejoiced, for they read in the sight That the One disdained to flee . . .

“—Five hundred guns began the affray On next day morn at nine; Such mad and mangling cannon-play Had never torn human line.

“Around the town three battles beat, Contracting like a gin; As nearer marched the million feet Of columns closing in.

“The first battle nighed on the low Southern side; The second by the Western way; The nearing of the third on the North was heard: —The French held all at bay.

“Against the first band did the Emperor stand; Against the second stood Ney; Marmont against the third gave the order-word: —Thus raged it throughout the day.

“Fifty thousand sturdy souls on those trampled plains and knolls, Who met the dawn hopefully, And were lotted their shares in a quarrel not theirs, Dropt then in their agony.

“‘O,’ the old folks said, ‘ye Preachers stern! O so-called Christian time! When will men’s swords to ploughshares turn? When come the promised prime?’ . . .

“—The clash of horse and man which that day began, Closed not as evening wore; And the morrow’s armies, rear and van, Still mustered more and more.

“From the City towers the Confederate Powers Were eyed in glittering lines, And up from the vast a murmuring passed As from a wood of pines.

“‘’Tis well to cover a feeble skill By numbers!’ scoffèd He; ‘But give me a third of their strength, I’d fill Half Hell with their soldiery!’

Sketch of town square, Leipzig?

“All that day raged the war they waged, And again dumb night held reign, Save that ever upspread from the dark deathbed A miles-wide pant of pain.

“Hard had striven brave Ney, the true Bertrand, Victor, and Augereau, Bold Poniatowski, and Lauriston, To stay their overthrow;

“But, as in the dream of one sick to death There comes a narrowing room That pens him, body and limbs and breath, To wait a hideous doom,

“So to Napoleon, in the hush That held the town and towers Through these dire nights, a creeping crush Seemed inborne with the hours.

“One road to the rearward, and but one, Did fitful Chance allow; ’Twas where the Pleiss’ and Elster run— The Bridge of Lindenau.

“The nineteenth dawned. Down street and Platz The wasted French sank back, Stretching long lines across the Flats And on the bridge-way track;

“When there surged on the sky an earthen wave, And stones, and men, as though Some rebel churchyard crew updrave Their sepulchres from below.

“To Heaven is blown Bridge Lindenau; Wrecked regiments reel therefrom; And rank and file in masses plough The sullen Elster-Strom.

“A gulf was Lindenau; and dead Were fifties, hundreds, tens; And every current rippled red With Marshal’s blood and men’s.

“The smart Macdonald swam therein, And barely won the verge; Bold Poniatowski plunged him in Never to re-emerge.

“Then stayed the strife. The remnants wound Their Rhineward way pell-mell; And thus did Leipzig City sound An Empire’s passing bell;

“While in cavalcade, with band and blade, Came Marshals, Princes, Kings; And the town was theirs . . . Ay, as simple maid, My mother saw these things!

“And whenever those notes in the street begin, I recall her, and that far scene, And

her acting of how the Allies marched in, And her touse of the tambourine!”

Sketch of person standing outside bay window, looking in

THE PEASANT’S CONFESSION

“Si le maréchal Grouchy avait été rejoint par l’officier que Napoléon lui avait expédié la veille à dix heures du soir, toute question eût disparu. Mais cet officier n’était point parvenu à sa destination, ainsi que le maréchal n’a cessé de l’affirmer toute sa vie, et il faut l’en croire, car autrement il n’aurait eu aucune raison pour hésiter. Cet officier avait-il été pris? avait-il passé à l’ennemi? C’est ce qu’on a toujours ignoré.”

—Thiers: Histoire de l’Empire. “Waterloo.”

Good Father! . . . ’Twas an eve in middle June, And war was waged anew By great Napoleon, who for years had strewn Men’s bones all Europe through.

Three nights ere this, with columned corps he’d crossed The Sambre at Charleroi, To move on Brussels, where the English host Dallied in Parc and Bois.

The yestertide we’d heard the gloomy gun Growl through the long-sunned day From Quatre-Bras and Ligny; till the dun Twilight suppressed the fray;

Albeit therein—as lated tongues bespoke— Brunswick’s high heart was drained, And Prussia’s Line and Landwehr, though unbroke, Stood cornered and constrained.

And at next noon-time Grouchy slowly passed With thirty thousand men: We hoped thenceforth no army, small or vast, Would trouble us again.

My hut lay deeply in a vale recessed, And never a soul seemed nigh When, reassured at length, we went to rest— My children, wife, and I.

But what was this that broke our humble ease? What noise, above the rain, Above the dripping of the poplar trees That smote along the pane?

—A call of mastery, bidding me arise, Compelled me to the door, At which a

horseman stood in martial guise— Splashed—sweating from every pore.

Had I seen Grouchy? Yes? Which track took he? Could I lead thither on?— Fulfilment would ensure gold pieces three, Perchance more gifts anon.

“I bear the Emperor’s mandate,” then he said, “Charging the Marshal straight To strike between the double host ahead Ere they co-operate,

“Engaging Blücher till the Emperor put Lord Wellington to flight, And next the Prussians. This to set afoot Is my emprise to-night.”

I joined him in the mist; but, pausing, sought To estimate his say. Grouchy had made for Wavre; and yet, on thought, I did not lead that way.

I mused: “If Grouchy thus instructed be, The clash comes sheer hereon; My farm is stript. While, as for pieces three, Money the French have none.

“Grouchy unwarned, moreo’er, the English win, And mine is left to me— They buy, not borrow.”—Hence did I begin To lead him treacherously.

By Joidoigne, near to east, as we ondrew, Dawn pierced the humid air; And eastward faced I with him, though I knew Never marched Grouchy there.

Near Ottignies we passed, across the Dyle (Lim’lette left far aside), And thence direct toward Pervez and Noville Through green grain, till he cried:

“I doubt thy conduct, man! no track is here— I doubt thy gagèd word!” Thereat he scowled on me, and pranced me near, And pricked me with his sword.

“Nay, Captain, hold! We skirt, not trace the course Of Grouchy,” said I then: “As we go, yonder went he, with his force Of thirty thousand men.”

—At length noon nighed; when west, from Saint-John’s-Mound, A hoarse artillery boomed, And from Saint-Lambert’s upland, chapel-crowned, The Prussian squadrons loomed.

Then to the wayless wet gray ground he leapt; “My mission fails!” he cried; “Too late for Grouchy now to intercept, For, peasant, you have lied!”

He turned to pistol me. I sprang, and drew The sabre from his flank, And ’twixt his nape and shoulder, ere he knew, I struck, and dead he sank.

Sketch of landscape

I hid him deep in nodding rye and oat— His shroud green stalks and loam; His requiem the corn-blade’s husky note— And then I hastened home, . . .

—Two armies writhe in coils of red and blue, And brass and iron clang From Goumont, past the front of Waterloo, To Pap’lotte and Smohain.

The Guard Imperial wavered on the height; The Emperor’s face grew glum; “I sent,” he said, “to Grouchy yesternight, And yet he does not come!”

’Twas then, Good Father, that the French espied, Streaking the summer land, The men of Blücher. But the Emperor cried, “Grouchy is now at hand!”

And meanwhile Vand’leur, Vivian, Maitland, Kempt, Met d’Erlon, Friant, Ney; But Grouchy—mis-sent, blamed, yet blame-exempt— Grouchy was far away.

By even, slain or struck, Michel the strong, Bold Travers, Dnop, Delord, Smart Guyot, Reil-le, l’Heriter, Friant, Scattered that champaign o’er.

Fallen likewise wronged Duhesme, and skilled Lobau Did that red sunset see; Colbert, Legros, Blancard! . . . And of the foe Picton and Ponsonby;

With Gordon, Canning, Blackman, Ompteda, L’Estrange, Delancey, Packe, Grose, D’Oyly, Stables, Morice, Howard, Hay, Von Schwerin, Watzdorf, Boek,

Smith, Phelips, Fuller, Lind, and Battersby, And hosts of ranksmen round . . . Memorials linger yet to speak to thee Of those that bit the ground!

The Guards’ last column yielded; dykes of dead Lay between vale and ridge, As, thinned yet closing, faint yet fierce, they sped In packs to Genappe Bridge.

Safe was my stock; my capple cow unslain; Intact each cock and hen; But Grouchy far at Wavre all day had lain, And thirty thousand men.

O Saints, had I but lost my earing corn And saved the cause once prized! O Saints,

why such false witness had I borne When late I'd sympathized! . . .

So now, being old, my children eye askance My slowly dwindling store, And crave my mite; till, worn with tarriance, I care for life no more.

To Almighty God henceforth I stand confessed, And Virgin-Saint Marie; O Michael, John, and Holy Ones in rest, Entreat the Lord for me!

Silhouette of solder standing on hill

THE ALARM (1803)

See "The Trumpet-Major"

In Memory of one of the Writer's Family who was a Volunteer during the War with Napoleon

In a ferny byway Near the great South-Wessex Highway, A homestead raised its breakfast-smoke aloft; The dew-damps still lay steamless, for the sun had made no sky-way, And twilight cloaked the croft.

'Twas hard to realize on This snug side the mute horizon That beyond it hostile armaments might steer, Save from seeing in the porchway a fair woman weep with eyes on A harnessed Volunteer.

In haste he'd flown there To his comely wife alone there, While marching south hard by, to still her fears, For she soon would be a mother, and few messengers were known there In these campaigning years.

'Twas time to be Good-bying, Since the assembly-hour was nighing In royal George's town at six that morn; And betwixt its wharves and this retreat were ten good miles of hieing Ere ring of bugle-horn.

"I've laid in food, Dear, And broached the spiced and brewed, Dear; And if our July hope should antedate, Let the char-wench mount and gallop by the halterpath and wood, Dear, And fetch assistance straight.

“As for Buonaparte, forget him; He’s not like to land! But let him, Those strike with aim who strike for wives and sons! And the war-boats built to float him; ’twere but wanted to upset him A slat from Nelson’s guns!

“But, to assure thee, And of creeping fears to cure thee, If he should be rumoured anchoring in the Road, Drive with the nurse to Kingsbere; and let nothing thence allure thee Till we’ve him safe-bestowed.

“Now, to turn to marching matters:— I’ve my knapsack, firelock, spatters, Crossbelts, priming-horn, stock, bay’net, blackball, clay, Pouch, magazine, flints, flint-box that at every quick-step clatters; . . . My heart, Dear; that must stay!”

—With breathings broken Farewell was kissed unspoken, And they parted there as morning stroked the panes; And the Volunteer went on, and turned, and twirled his glove for token, And took the coastward lanes.

When above He’th Hills he found him, He saw, on gazing round him, The Barrow-Beacon burning—burning low, As if, perhaps, uplighted ever since he’d homeward bound him; And it meant: Expect the Foe!

Sketch of person riding with wide landscape behind

Leaving the byway, And following swift the highway, Car and chariot met he, faring fast inland; “He’s anchored, Soldier!” shouted some: “God save thee, marching thy way, Th’lt front him on the strand!”

He slowed; he stopped; he paltered Awhile with self, and faltered, “Why courting misadventure shoreward roam? To Molly, surely! Seek the woods with her till times have altered; Charity favours home.

“Else, my denying He would come she’ll read as lying— Think the Barrow-Beacon must have met my eyes— That my words were not unwareness, but deceit of her, while trying My life to jeopardize.

“At home is stocked provision, And to-night, without suspicion, We might bear it

with us to a covert near; Such sin, to save a childing wife, would earn it Christ's remission, Though none forgive it here!"

While thus he, thinking, A little bird, quick drinking Among the crowfoot tufts the river bore, Was tangled in their stringy arms, and fluttered, well-nigh sinking, Near him, upon the moor.

He stepped in, reached, and seized it, And, preening, had released it But that a thought of Holy Writ occurred, And Signs Divine ere battle, till it seemed him Heaven had pleased it As guide to send the bird.

"O Lord, direct me! . . . Doth Duty now expect me To march a-coast, or guard my weak ones near? Give this bird a flight according, that I thence know to elect me The southward or the rear."

He loosed his clasp; when, rising, The bird—as if surmising— Bore due to southward, crossing by the Froom, And Durnover Great-Field and Fort, the soldier clear advising— Prompted he wist by Whom.

Then on he panted By grim Mai-Don, and slanted Up the steep Ridge-way, hearkening betwixt whiles; Till, nearing coast and harbour, he beheld the shore-line planted With Foot and Horse for miles.

Mistrusting not the omen, He gained the beach, where Yeomen, Militia, Fencibles, and Pikemen bold, With Regulars in thousands, were enmassed to meet the Foemen, Whose fleet had not yet shoaled.

Captain and Colonel, Sere Generals, Ensigns vernal, Were there; of neighbour-natives, Michel, Smith, Meggs, Bingham, Gambier, Cunningham, roused by the hued nocturnal Swoop on their land and kith.

But Buonaparte still tarried; His project had miscarried; At the last hour, equipped for victory, The fleet had paused; his subtle combinations had been parried By British strategy.

Homeward returning Anon, no beacons burning, No alarms, the Volunteer, in modest bliss, Te Deum sang with wife and friends: “We praise Thee, Lord, discerning That Thou hast helped in this!”

HER DEATH AND AFTER

’Twas a death-bed summons, and forth I went By the way of the Western Wall, so drear On that winter night, and sought a gate— The home, by Fate, Of one I had long held dear.

And there, as I paused by her tenement, And the trees shed on me their rime and hoar, I thought of the man who had left her lone— Him who made her his own When I loved her, long before.

The rooms within had the piteous shine That home-things wear when there’s aught amiss; From the stairway floated the rise and fall Of an infant’s call, Whose birth had brought her to this.

Her life was the price she would pay for that whine— For a child by the man she did not love. “But let that rest for ever,” I said, And bent my tread To the chamber up above.

She took my hand in her thin white own, And smiled her thanks—though nigh too weak— And made them a sign to leave us there Then faltered, ere She could bring herself to speak.

“’Twas to see you before I go—he’ll condone Such a natural thing now my time’s not much— When Death is so near it hustles hence All passioned sense Between woman and man as such!

“My husband is absent. As heretofore The City detains him. But, in truth, He has not been kind . . . I will speak no blame, But—the child is lame; O, I pray she may reach his ruth!

“Forgive past days—I can say no more— Maybe if we’d wedded you’d now repine! . . . But I treated you ill. I was punished. Farewell! —Truth shall I tell? Would the child were yours and mine!

“As a wife I was true. But, such my unease That, could I insert a deed back in Time, I’d make her yours, to secure your care; And the scandal bear, And the penalty for the crime!”

—When I had left, and the swinging trees Rang above me, as lauding her candid say, Another was I. Her words were enough: Came smooth, came rough, I felt I could live my day.

Next night she died; and her obsequies In the Field of Tombs, by the Via renowned, Had her husband’s heed. His tendance spent, I often went And pondered by her mound.

All that year and the next year whiled, And I still went thitherward in the gloam; But the Town forgot her and her nook, And her husband took Another Love to his home.

And the rumour flew that the lame lone child Whom she wished for its safety child of mine, Was treated ill when offspring came Of the new-made dame, And marked a more vigorous line.

Sketch of cemetery

A smarter grief within me wrought Than even at loss of her so dear; Dead the being whose soul my soul suffused, Her child ill-used, I helpless to interfere!

One eve as I stood at my spot of thought In the white-stoned Garth, brooding thus her wrong, Her husband neared; and to shun his view By her hallowed mew I went from the tombs among

To the Cirque of the Gladiators which faced— That haggard mark of Imperial Rome, Whose Pagan echoes mock the chime Of our Christian time: It was void, and I inward clomb.

Scarce night the sun's gold touch displaced From the vast Rotund and the neighbouring dead When her husband followed; bowed; half-passed, With lip upcast; Then, halting, sullenly said:

"It is noised that you visit my first wife's tomb. Now, I gave her an honoured name to bear While living, when dead. So I've claim to ask By what right you task My patience by vigiling there?

"There's decency even in death, I assume; Preserve it, sir, and keep away; For the mother of my first-born you Show mind undue! —Sir, I've nothing more to say."

A desperate stroke discerned I then— God pardon—or pardon not—the lie; She had sighed that she wished (lest the child should pine Of slights) 'twere mine, So I said: "But the father I.

"That you thought it yours is the way of men; But I won her troth long ere your day: You learnt how, in dying, she summoned me? 'Twas in fealty. —Sir, I've nothing more to say,

"Save that, if you'll hand me my little maid, I'll take her, and rear her, and spare you toil. Think it more than a friendly act none can; I'm a lonely man, While you've a large pot to boil.

"If not, and you'll put it to ball or blade— To-night, to-morrow night, anywhen— I'll meet you here . . . But think of it, And in season fit Let me hear from you again."

—Well, I went away, hoping; but nought I heard Of my stroke for the child, till there greeted me A little voice that one day came To my window-frame And babbled innocently:

"My father who's not my own, sends word I'm to stay here, sir, where I belong!" Next a writing came: "Since the child was the fruit Of your lawless suit, Pray take her, to right a wrong."

And I did. And I gave the child my love, And the child loved me, and estranged us

none. But compunctions loomed; for I'd harmed the dead By what I'd said For the good of the living one.

—Yet though, God wot, I am sinner enough, And unworthy the woman who drew me so, Perhaps this wrong for her darling's good She forgives, or would, If only she could know!

Sketch of tree-lined path

Sketch of a decorative stave of music

THE DANCE AT THE PHŒNIX

To Jenny came a gentle youth From inland leazes lone, His love was fresh as apple-blooth By Parrett, Yeo, or Tone. And duly he entreated her To be his tender minister, And call him aye her own.

Fair Jenny's life had hardly been A life of modesty; At Casterbridge experience keen Of many loves had she From scarcely sixteen years above; Among them sundry troopers of The King's-Own Cavalry.

But each with charger, sword, and gun, Had bluffed the Biscay wave; And Jenny prized her gentle one For all the love he gave. She vowed to be, if they were wed, His honest wife in heart and head From bride-ale hour to grave.

Wedded they were. Her husband's trust In Jenny knew no bound, And Jenny kept her pure and just, Till even malice found No sin or sign of ill to be In one who walked so decently The duteous helpmate's round.

Two sons were born, and bloomed to men, And roamed, and were as not: Alone was Jenny left again As ere her mind had sought A solace in domestic joys, And ere the vanished pair of boys Were sent to sun her cot.

She numbered near on sixty years, And passed as elderly, When, in the street, with flush of fears, One day discovered she, From shine of swords and thump of drum.

Her early loves from war had come, The King's-Own Cavalry.

She turned aside, and bowed her head Anigh Saint Peter's door; "Alas for chastened thoughts!" she said; "I'm faded now, and hoar, And yet those notes—they thrill me through, And those gay forms move me anew As in the years of yore!" . . .

'Twas Christmas, and the Phœnix Inn Was lit with tapers tall, For thirty of the trooper men Had vowed to give a ball As "Theirs" had done ('twas handed down) When lying in the selfsame town Ere Buonaparté's fall.

That night the throbbing "Soldier's Joy," The measured tread and sway Of "Fancy-Lad" and "Maiden Coy," Reached Jenny as she lay Beside her spouse; till springtide blood Seemed scouring through her like a flood That whisked the years away.

She rose, and rayed, and decked her head Where the bleached hairs ran thin; Upon her cap two bows of red She fixed with hasty pin; Unheard descending to the street, She trod the flags with tune-led feet, And stood before the Inn.

Save for the dancers', not a sound Disturbed the icy air; No watchman on his midnight round Or traveller was there; But over All-Saints', high and bright, Pulsed to the music Sirius white, The Wain by Bullstake Square.

She knocked, but found her further stride Checked by a sergeant tall: "Gay Granny, whence come you?" he cried; "This is a private ball." —"No one has more right here than me! Ere you were born, man," answered she, "I knew the regiment all!"

"Take not the lady's visit ill!" Upspoke the steward free; "We lack sufficient partners still, So, prithee let her be!" They seized and whirled her 'mid the maze, And Jenny felt as in the days Of her immodesty.

Hour chased each hour, and night advanced; She sped as shod with wings; Each time and every time she danced— Reels, jigs, poussettes, and flings: They cheered her as she soared and swooped, (She'd learnt ere art in dancing drooped From hops to slothful swings).

The favourite Quick-step “Speed the Plough”— (Cross hands, cast off, and wheel)— “The Triumph,” “Sylph,” “The Row-dow-dow,” Famed “Major Malley’s Reel,” “The Duke of York’s,” “The Fairy Dance,” “The Bridge of Lodi” (brought from France), She beat out, toe and heel.

The “Fall of Paris” clanged its close, And Peter’s chime told four, When Jenny, bosom-beating, rose To seek her silent door. They tiptoed in escorting her, Lest stroke of heel or clink of spur Should break her goodman’s snore.

The fire that late had burnt fell slack When lone at last stood she; Her nine-and-fifty years came back; She sank upon her knee Beside the durn, and like a dart A something arrowed through her heart In shoots of agony.

Their footsteps died as she leant there, Lit by the morning star Hanging above the moorland, where The aged elm-rows are; And, as o’ernight, from Pummery Ridge To Maembury Ring and Standfast Bridge No life stirred, near or far.

Though inner mischief worked amain, She reached her husband’s side; Where, toil-weary, as he had lain Beneath the patchwork pied When yestereve she’d forthward crept, And as unwitting, still he slept Who did in her confide.

A tear sprang as she turned and viewed His features free from guile; She kissed him long, as when, just wooed, She chose his domicile. She felt she could have given her life To be the single-hearted wife That she had been erstwhile.

Time wore to six. Her husband rose And struck the steel and stone; He glanced at Jenny, whose repose Seemed deeper than his own. With dumb dismay, on closer sight, He gathered sense that in the night, Or morn, her soul had flown.

When told that some too mighty strain For one so many-yeared Had burst her bosom’s master-vein, His doubts remained unstirred. His Jenny had not left his side Betwixt the eve and morning-tide: —The King’s said not a word.

Well! times are not as times were then, Nor fair ones half so free; And truly they were martial men, The King’s-Own Cavalry. And when they went from

Casterbridge And vanished over Mellstock Ridge, ’Twas saddest morn to see.

Two lines of military men on horses

Sketch of wooden panel

THE CASTERBRIDGE CAPTAINS (KHYBER PASS, 1842)

A Tradition of J. B. L—, T. G. B—, AND J. L—.

Three captains went to Indian wars, And only one returned: Their mate of yore, he singly wore The laurels all had earned.

At home he sought the ancient aisle Wherein, untrumped of fame, The three had sat in pupilage, And each had carved his name.

The names, rough-hewn, of equal size, Stood on the panel still; Unequal since.—“’Twas theirs to aim, Mine was it to fulfil!”

—“Who saves his life shall lose it, friends!” Outspake the preacher then, Unweeting he his listener, who Looked at the names again.

That he had come and they’d been stayed, ’Twas but the chance of war: Another chance, and they’d sat here, And he had lain afar.

Yet saw he something in the lives Of those who’d ceased to live That sphered them with a majesty Which living failed to give.

Transcendent triumph in return No longer lit his brain; Transcendence rayed the distant urn Where slept the fallen twain.

Sketch of comet

A SIGN-SEEKER

I mark the months in liveries dank and dry, The noontides many-shaped and hued; I

see the nightfall shades subtrude, And hear the monotonous hours clang negligently by.

I view the evening bonfires of the sun On hills where morning rains have hissed; The eyeless countenance of the mist Pallidly rising when the summer droughts are done.

I have seen the lightning-blade, the leaping star, The cauldrons of the sea in storm, Have felt the earthquake's lifting arm, And trodden where abysmal fires and snow-cones are.

I learn to prophesy the hid eclipse, The coming of eccentric orbs; To mete the dust the sky absorbs, To weigh the sun, and fix the hour each planet dips.

I witness fellow earth-men surge and strive; Assemblies meet, and throb, and part; Death's soothing finger, sorrow's smart; —All the vast various moils that mean a world alive.

But that I fain would wot of shuns my sense— Those sights of which old prophets tell, Those signs the general word so well, Vouchsafed to their unheed, denied my long suspense.

In graveyard green, behind his monument To glimpse a phantom parent, friend, Wearing his smile, and "Not the end!" Outbreathing softly: that were blest enlightenment;

Or, if a dead Love's lips, whom dreams reveal When midnight imps of King Decay Delve sly to solve me back to clay, Should leave some print to prove her spirit-kisses real;

Or, when Earth's Frail lie bleeding of her Strong, If some Recorder, as in Writ, Near to the weary scene should flit And drop one plume as pledge that Heaven inscrolls the wrong.

—There are who, rapt to heights of trancéd trust, These tokens claim to feel and see,

Read radiant hints of times to be— Of heart to heart returning after dust to dust.

Such scope is granted not to lives like mine . . . I have lain in dead men's beds, have walked The tombs of those with whom I'd talked, Called many a gone and goodly one to shape a sign,

And panted for response. But none replies; No warnings loom, nor whisperings To open out my limitings, And Nescience mutely muses: When a man falls he lies.

Sketch of person on horseback in wide landscape

MY CICELY (17–)

"Alive?"—And I leapt in my wonder, Was faint of my joyance, And grasses and grove shone in garments Of glory to me.

"She lives, in a plenteous well-being, To-day as aforehand; The dead bore the name—though a rare one— The name that bore she."

She lived . . . I, afar in the city Of frenzy-led factions, Had squandered green years and maturer In bowing the knee

To Baals illusive and specious, Till chance had there voiced me That one I loved vainly in nonage Had ceased her to be.

The passion the planets had scowled on, And change had let dwindle, Her death-rumour smartly relifted To full apogee.

I mounted a steed in the dawning With acheful remembrance, And made for the ancient West Highway To far Exonb'ry.

Passing heaths, and the House of Long Sieging, I neared the thin steeple That tops the fair fane of Poore's olden Episcopal see;

And, changing anew my onbearer, I traversed the downland Whereon the bleak hill-graves of Chieftains Bulge barren of tree;

And still sadly onward I followed That Highway the Icen, Which trails its pale

riband down Wessex O'er lynchet and lea.

Along through the Stour-bordered Forum, Where Legions had wayfared, And where the slow river upglasses Its green canopy,

And by Weatherbury Castle, and thencefrom Through Casterbridge held I Still on, to entomb her my vision Saw stretched pallidly.

No highwayman's trot blew the night-wind To me so life-weary, But only the creak of the gibbets Or waggoners' jee.

Triple-ramparted Maidon gloomed grayly Above me from southward, And north the hill-fortress of Eggar, And square Pummerie.

The Nine-Pillared Cromlech, the Bride-streams, The Axe, and the Otter I passed, to the gate of the city Where Exe scents the sea;

Till, spent, in the graveacre pausing, I learnt 'twas not my Love To whom Mother Church had just murmured A last lullaby.

—"Then, where dwells the Canon's kinswoman, My friend of aforetime?"— ('Twas hard to repress my heart-heavings And new ecstasy.)

"She wedded."—"Ah!"—"Wedded beneath her— She keeps the stage-hostel Ten miles hence, beside the great Highway— The famed Lions-Three.

"Her spouse was her lackey—no option 'Twixt wedlock and worse things; A lapse over-sad for a lady Of her pedigree!"

I shuddered, said nothing, and wandered To shades of green laurel: Too ghastly had grown those first tidings So brightsome of blee!

For, on my ride hither, I'd halted Awhile at the Lions, And her—her whose name had once opened My heart as a key—

I'd looked on, unknowing, and witnessed Her jests with the tapsters, Her liquor-fired face, her thick accents In naming her fee.

"O God, why this seeming derision!" I cried in my anguish: "O once Loved, O fair

Unforgotten— That Thing—meant it thee!

“Inurned and at peace, lost but sainted, Were grief I could compass; Depraved—’tis for Christ’s poor dependent A cruel decree!”

I backed on the Highway; but passed not The hostel. Within there Too mocking to Love’s re-expression Was Time’s repartee!

Uptracking where Legions had wayfared, By cromlechs unstoried, And lynchets, and sepultured Chieftains, In self-colloquy,

A feeling stirred in me and strengthened That she was not my Love, But she of the garth, who lay rapt in Her long reverie.

And thence till to-day I persuade me That this was the true one; That Death stole intact her young dearness And innocency.

Frail-witted, illuded they call me; I may be. ’Tis better To dream than to own the debasement Of sweet Cicely.

Moreover I rate it unseemly To hold that kind Heaven Could work such device—to her ruin And my misery.

So, lest I disturb my choice vision, I shun the West Highway, Even now, when the knaps ring with rhythms From blackbird and bee;

And feel that with slumber half-conscious She rests in the church-hay, Her spirit unsoiled as in youth-time When lovers were we.

Sketch of top of church tower

Sketch of fields with trees

HER IMMORTALITY

Upon a noon I pilgrimed through A pasture, mile by mile, Unto the place where I last saw My dead Love’s living smile.

And sorrowing I lay me down Upon the heated sod: It seemed as if my body pressed The very ground she trod.

I lay, and thought; and in a trance She came and stood me by— The same, even to the marvellous ray That used to light her eye.

“You draw me, and I come to you, My faithful one,” she said, In voice that had the moving tone It bore ere breath had fled.

She said: “’Tis seven years since I died: Few now remember me; My husband clasps another bride; My children’s love has she.

“My brethren, sisters, and my friends Care not to meet my sprite: Who prized me most I did not know Till I passed down from sight.”

I said: “My days are lonely here; I need thy smile alway: I’ll use this night my ball or blade, And join thee ere the day.”

A tremor stirred her tender lips, Which parted to dissuade: “That cannot be, O friend,” she cried; “Think, I am but a Shade!

“A Shade but in its mindful ones Has immortality; By living, me you keep alive, By dying you slay me.

“In you resides my single power Of sweet continuance here; On your fidelity I count Through many a coming year.”

—I started through me at her plight, So suddenly confessed: Dismissing late distaste for life, I craved its bleak unrest.

“I will not die, my One of all!— To lengthen out thy days I’ll guard me from minutest harms That may invest my ways!”

She smiled and went. Since then she comes Oft when her birth-moon climbs, Or at the seasons’ ingresses Or anniversary times;

But grows my grief. When I surcease, Through whom alone lives she, Ceases my Love, her words, her ways, Never again to be!

THE IVY-WIFE

I longed to love a full-boughed beech And be as high as he: I stretched an arm within his reach, And signalled unity. But with his drip he forced a breach, And tried to poison me.

I gave the grasp of partnership To one of other race— A plane: he barked him strip by strip From upper bough to base; And me therewith; for gone my grip, My arms could not enlace.

In new affection next I strove To coll an ash I saw, And he in trust received my love; Till with my soft green claw I cramped and bound him as I wove . . . Such was my love: ha-ha!

By this I gained his strength and height Without his rivalry. But in my triumph I lost sight Of afterhaps. Soon he, Being bark-bound, flagged, snapped, fell outright, And in his fall felled me!

A MEETING WITH DESPAIR

As evening shaped I found me on a moor Which sight could scarce sustain: The black lean land, of featureless contour, Was like a tract in pain.

“This scene, like my own life,” I said, “is one Where many glooms abide; Toned by its fortune to a deadly dun— Lightless on every side.

I glanced aloft and halted, pleasure-caught To see the contrast there: The ray-lit clouds gleamed glory; and I thought, “There’s solace everywhere!”

Then bitter self-reproaches as I stood I dealt me silently As one perverse—misrepresenting Good In graceless mutiny.

Against the horizon’s dim-discernèd wheel A form rose, strange of mould: That he was hideous, hopeless, I could feel Rather than could behold.

"'Tis a dead spot, where even the light lies spent To darkness!" croaked the Thing. "Not if you look aloft!" said I, intent On my new reasoning.

"Yea—but await awhile!" he cried. "Ho-ho!— Look now aloft and see!" I looked. There, too, sat night: Heaven's radiant show Had gone. Then chuckled he.

UNKNOWING

When, soul in soul reflected, We breathed an æthered air, When we neglected All things elsewhere, And left the friendly friendless To keep our love aglow, We deemed it endless . . . —We did not know!

When, by mad passion goaded, We planned to hie away, But, unforeboded, The storm-shafts gray So heavily down-pattered That none could forthward go, Our lives seemed shattered . . . —We did not know!

When I found you, helpless lying, And you waived my deep misprise, And swore me, dying, In phantom-guise To wing to me when grieving, And touch away my woe, We kissed, believing . . . —We did not know!

But though, your powers outreckoning, You hold you dead and dumb, Or scorn my beckoning, And will not come; And I say, "'Twere mood ungainly To store her memory so:" I say it vainly— I feel and know!

FRIENDS BEYOND

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough, Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's, And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie in Mellstock churchyard now!

"Gone," I call them, gone for good, that group of local hearts and heads; Yet at mothy curfew-tide, And at midnight when the noon-heat breathes it back from walls and leads,

They've a way of whispering to me—fellow-wight who yet abide— In the muted, measured note Of a ripple under archways, or a lone cave's stillicide:

"We have triumphed: this achievement turns the bane to antidote, Unsuccesses to success, —Many thought-worn eves and morrows to a morrow free of thought.

"No more need we corn and clothing, feel of old terrestrial stress; Chill detraction stirs no sigh; Fear of death has even bygone us: death gave all that we possess."

W. D.—"Ye mid burn the wold bass-viol that I set such vallie by." Squire.—"You may hold the manse in fee, You may wed my spouse, my children's memory of me may decry."

Lady.—"You may have my rich brocades, my laces; take each household key; Ransack coffer, desk, bureau; Quiz the few poor treasures hid there, con the letters kept by me."

Far.—"Ye mid zell my favourite heifer, ye mid let the charlock grow, Foul the grinterns, give up thrift." Wife.—"If ye break my best blue china, children, I shan't care or ho."

All. —"We've no wish to hear the tidings, how the people's fortunes shift; What your daily doings are; Who are wedded, born, divided; if your lives beat slow or swift.

"Curious not the least are we if our intents you make or mar, If you quire to our old tune, If the City stage still passes, if the weirs still roar afar."

—Thus, with very gods' composure, freed those crosses late and soon Which, in life, the Trine allow (Why, none witteth), and ignoring all that haps beneath the moon,

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough, Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's, And the Squire, and Lady Susan, murmur mildly to me now.

Sketch of vase with dead flowers

TO OUTER NATURE

Show thee as I thought thee When I early sought thee, Omen-scouting, All undoubting Love alone had wrought thee—

Wrought thee for my pleasure, Planned thee as a measure For expounding And resounding Glad things that men treasure.

O for but a moment Of that old endowment— Light to gaily See thy daily Irisèd embowment!

But such re-adorning Time forbids with scorning— Makes me see things Cease to be things They were in my morning.

Fad’st thou, glow-forsaken, Darkness-overtaken! Thy first sweetness, Radiance, meetness, None shall re-awaken.

Why not sempiternal Thou and I? Our vernal Brightness keeping, Time outleaping; Passed the hodiernal!

THOUGHTS OF PHENA AT NEWS OF HER DEATH

Not a line of her writing have I, Not a thread of her hair, No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby I may picture her there; And in vain do I urge my unsight To conceive my lost prize At her close, whom I knew when her dreams were upbrimming with light, And with laughter her eyes.

What scenes spread around her last days, Sad, shining, or dim? Did her gifts and compassions enray and enarch her sweet ways With an aureate nimb? Or did life-light decline from her years, And mischances control Her full day-star; unease, or regret, or forebodings, or fears Disennoble her soul?

Thus I do but the phantom retain Of the maiden of yore As my relic; yet haply the best of her—fined in my brain It maybe the more That no line of her writing have I, Nor a thread of her hair, No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby

I may picture her there.

March 1890.

Sketch of woman cover in sheet lying on couch

MIDDLE-AGE ENTHUSIASMS To M. H.

We passed where flag and flower Signalled a jocund throng; We said: “Go to, the hour Is apt!”—and joined the song; And, kindling, laughed at life and care, Although we knew no laugh lay there.

We walked where shy birds stood Watching us, wonder-dumb; Their friendship met our mood; We cried: “We’ll often come: We’ll come morn, noon, eve, everywhen!” —We doubted we should come again.

We joyed to see strange sheens Leap from quaint leaves in shade; A secret light of greens They’d for their pleasure made. We said: “We’ll set such sorts as these!” —We knew with night the wish would cease.

“So sweet the place,” we said, “Its tacit tales so dear, Our thoughts, when breath has sped, Will meet and mingle here!” . . . “Words!” mused we. “Passed the mortal door, Our thoughts will reach this nook no more.”

IN A WOOD See “THE WOODLANDERS”

Pale beech and pine-tree blue, Set in one clay, Bough to bough cannot you Bide out your day? When the rains skim and skip, Why mar sweet comradeship, Blighting with poison-drip Neighbourly spray?

Heart-halt and spirit-lame, City-opprest, Unto this wood I came As to a nest; Dreaming that sylvan peace Offered the harrowed ease— Nature a soft release From men’s unrest.

But, having entered in, Great growths and small Show them to men akin—

Combatants all! Sycamore shoulders oak, Bines the slim sapling yoke, Ivy-spun halters choke Elms stout and tall.

Touches from ash, O wych, Sting you like scorn! You, too, brave hollies, twitch Sidelong from thorn. Even the rank poplars bear Illy a rival's air, Cankering in black despair If overborne.

Since, then, no grace I find Taught me of trees, Turn I back to my kind, Worthy as these. There at least smiles abound, There discourse trills around, There, now and then, are found Life-loyalties.

1887: 1896.

TO A LADY OFFENDED BY A BOOK OF THE WRITER'S

Now that my page upcloses, doomed, maybe, Never to press thy cosy cushions more, Or wake thy ready Yeas as heretofore, Or stir thy gentle vows of faith in me:

Knowing thy natural receptivity, I figure that, as flambeaux banish eve, My sombre image, warped by insidious heave Of those less forthright, must lose place in thee.

So be it. I have borne such. Let thy dreams Of me and mine diminish day by day, And yield their space to shine of smugger things; Till I shape to thee but in fitful gleams, And then in far and feeble visitings, And then surcease. Truth will be truth alway.

TO AN ORPHAN CHILD A WHIMSEY

Ah, child, thou art but half thy darling mother's; Hers couldst thou wholly be, My light in thee would outglow all in others; She would relive to me. But niggard Nature's trick of birth Bars, lest she overjoy, Renewal of the loved on earth Save with alloy.

The Dame has no regard, alas, my maiden, For love and loss like mine— No sympathy with mind-sight memory-laden; Only with fickle eyne. To her mechanic artistry My dreams are all unknown, And why I wish that thou couldst be But One's alone!

Sketch of broken key?

NATURE'S QUESTIONING

When I look forth at dawning, pool, Field, flock, and lonely tree, All seem to gaze at me Like chastened children sitting silent in a school;

Their faces dulled, constrained, and worn, As though the master's ways Through the long teaching days Their first terrestrial zest had chilled and overborne.

And on them stirs, in lippings mere (As if once clear in call, But now scarce breathed at all)— "We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!

"Has some Vast Imbecility, Mighty to build and blend, But impotent to tend, Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?

"Or come we of an Automaton Unconscious of our pains? . . . Or are we live remains Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?

"Or is it that some high Plan betides, As yet not understood, Of Evil stormed by Good, We the Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides?"

Thus things around. No answerer I . . . Meanwhile the winds, and rains, And Earth's old glooms and pains Are still the same, and gladdest Life Death neighbours nigh.

THE IMPERCIPIENT (AT A CATHEDRAL SERVICE)

That from this bright believing band An outcast I should be, That faiths by which my comrades stand Seem fantasies to me, And mirage-mists their Shining Land, Is a drear destiny.

Why thus my soul should be consigned To infelicity, Why always I must feel as blind To sights my brethren see, Why joys they've found I cannot find, Abides a mystery.

Since heart of mine knows not that ease Which they know; since it be That He who breathes All's Well to these Breathes no All's-Well to me, My lack might move their sympathies And Christian charity!

I am like a gazer who should mark An inland company Standing upfingered, with, "Hark! hark! The glorious distant sea!" And feel, "Alas, 'tis but yon dark And wind-swept pine to me!"

Yet I would bear my shortcomings With meet tranquillity, But for the charge that blessed things I'd liefer have unbe. O, doth a bird deprived of wings Go earth-bound wilfully!

* * * * *

Enough. As yet disquiet clings About us. Rest shall we.

Sketch of inside of church

AT AN INN

When we as strangers sought Their catering care, Veiled smiles bespoke their thought Of what we were. They warmed as they opined Us more than friends— That we had all resigned For love's dear ends.

And that swift sympathy With living love Which quicks the world—maybe The spheres above, Made them our ministers, Moved them to say, "Ah, God, that bliss like theirs Would flush our day!"

And we were left alone As Love's own pair; Yet never the love-light shone Between us there! But that which chilled the breath Of afternoon, And palsied unto death The pane-fly's tune.

The kiss their zeal foretold, And now deemed come, Came not: within his hold Love lingered-numb. Why cast he on our port A bloom not ours? Why shaped us for his sport In after-hours?

As we seemed we were not That day afar, And now we seem not what We aching are. O severing sea and land, O laws of men, Ere death, once let us stand As we stood then!

THE SLOW NATURE (AN INCIDENT OF FROOM VALLEY)

“Thy husband—poor, poor Heart!—is dead— Dead, out by Moreford Rise; A bull escaped the barton-shed, Gored him, and there he lies!”

—“Ha, ha—go away! ’Tis a tale, methink, Thou joker Kit!” laughed she. “I’ve known thee many a year, Kit Twink, And ever hast thou fooled me!”

—“But, Mistress Damon—I can swear Thy goodman John is dead! And soon th’lt hear their feet who bear His body to his bed.”

So unwontedly sad was the merry man’s face— That face which had long deceived— That she gazed and gazed; and then could trace The truth there; and she believed.

She laid a hand on the dresser-ledge, And scanned far Egdon-side; And stood; and you heard the wind-swept sedge And the rippling Froom; till she cried:

“O my chamber’s untidied, unmade my bed Though the day has begun to wear! ‘What a slovenly hussif!’ it will be said, When they all go up my stair!”

She disappeared; and the joker stood Depressed by his neighbour’s doom, And amazed that a wife struck to widowhood Thought first of her unkempt room.

But a fortnight thence she could take no food, And she pined in a slow decay; While Kit soon lost his mournful mood And laughed in his ancient way.

1894.

IN A EWELEAZE NEAR WEATHERBURY

The years have gathered grayly Since I danced upon this leaze With one who kindled gaily Love’s fitful ecstasies! But despite the term as teacher, I remain what I was then In each essential feature Of the fantasies of men.

Yet I note the little chisel Of never-napping Time, Defacing ghast and grizzel The blazon of my prime. When at night he thinks me sleeping, I feel him boring sly Within my bones, and heaping Quaintest pains for by-and-by.

Still, I’d go the world with Beauty, I would laugh with her and sing, I would shun divinest duty To resume her worshipping. But she’d scorn my brave endeavour, She would not balm the breeze By murmuring “Thine for ever!” As she did upon this leaze.

1890.

Sketch of pair of glasses on sketch of landscape

ADDITIONS

THE FIRE AT TRANTER SWEATLEY’S

They had long met o’ Zundays—her true love and she— And at junketings, maypoles, and flings; But she bode wi’ a thirtover uncle, and he Swore by noon and by night that her goodman should be Naibour Sweatley—a gaffer oft weak at the knee From taking o’ sommat more cheerful than tea— Who tranted, and moved people’s things.

She cried, “O pray pity me!” Nought would he hear; Then with wild rainy eyes she obeyed. She chid when her Love was for clinking off wi’ her. The pa’son was told,

as the season drew near To throw over pu'pit the names of the peäir As fitting one flesh to be made.

The wedding-day dawned and the morning drew on; The couple stood bridegroom and bride; The evening was passed, and when midnight had gone The folks horned out, "God save the King," and anon The two home-along gloomily hied.

The lover Tim Tankens mourned heart-sick and drear To be thus of his darling deprived: He roamed in the dark ath'art field, mound, and mere, And, a'most without knowing it, found himself near The house of the tranter, and now of his Dear, Where the lantern-light showed 'em arrived.

The bride sought her cham'er so calm and so pale That a Northern had thought her resigned; But to eyes that had seen her in tide-times of weal, Like the white cloud o' smoke, the red battle-field's vail, That look spak' of havoc behind.

The bridegroom yet laitered a beaker to drain, Then reeled to the linhay for more, When the candle-snoff kindled some chaff from his grain— Flames spread, and red vlankers, wi' might and wi' main, And round beams, thatch, and chimley-tun roar.

Young Tim away yond, rafted up by the light, Through brimble and underwood tears, Till he comes to the orchet, when crooping thereright In the lewth of a codlin-tree, bivering wi' fright, Wi' on'y her night-rail to screen her from sight, His lonesome young Barbree appears.

Her cwold little figure half-naked he views Played about by the frolicsome breeze, Her light-tripping totties, her ten little tooes, All bare and besprinkled wi' Fall's chilly dews, While her great gallied eyes, through her hair hanging loose, Sheened as stars through a tardle o' trees.

She eyed en; and, as when a weir-hatch is drawn, Her tears, penned by terror afore, With a rushing of sobs in a shower were strawn, Till her power to pour 'em seemed wasted and gone From the heft o' misfortune she bore.

"O Tim, my own Tim I must call 'ee—I will! All the world ha' turned round on me

so! Can you help her who loved ’ee, though acting so ill? Can you pity her misery—feel for her still? When worse than her body so quivering and chill Is her heart in its winter o’ woe!

“I think I mid almost ha’ borne it,” she said, “Had my griefs one by one come to hand; But O, to be slave to thik husbird for bread, And then, upon top o’ that, driven to wed, And then, upon top o’ that, burnt out o’ bed, Is more than my nater can stand!”

Tim’s soul like a lion ’ithin en outsprung— (Tim had a great soul when his feelings were wrung)— “Feel for ’ee, dear Barbree?” he cried; And his warm working-jacket about her he flung, Made a back, horsed her up, till behind him she clung Like a chiel on a gipsy, her figure uphung By the sleeves that around her he tied.

Over piggeries, and mixens, and apples, and hay, They lumpered straight into the night; And finding bylong where a halter-path lay, At dawn reached Tim’s house, on’y seen on their way By a naibour or two who were up wi’ the day; But they gathered no clue to the sight.

Then tender Tim Tankens he searched here and there For some garment to clothe her fair skin; But though he had breeches and waistcoats to spare, He had nothing quite seemly for Barbree to wear, Who, half shrammed to death, stood and cried on a chair At the caddle she found herself in.

There was one thing to do, and that one thing he did, He lent her some clouts of his own, And she took ’em perforce; and while in ’em she slid, Tim turned to the winder, as modesty bid, Thinking, “O that the picter my duty keeps hid To the sight o’ my eyes mid be shown!”

In the tallet he stowed her; there huddied she lay, Shortening sleeves, legs, and tails to her limbs; But most o’ the time in a mortal bad way, Well knowing that there’d be the divel to pay If ’twere found that, instead o’ the elements’ prey, She was living in lodgings at Tim’s.

“Where’s the tranter?” said men and boys; “where can er be?” “Where’s the tranter?” said Barbree alone. “Where on e’th is the tranter?” said everybod-y: They sifted the dust of his perished roof-tree, And all they could find was a bone.

Then the uncle cried, “Lord, pray have mercy on me!” And in terror began to repent. But before ’twas complete, and till sure she was free, Barbree drew up her loft-ladder, tight turned her key— Tim bringing up breakfast and dinner and tea— Till the news of her hiding got vent.

Then followed the custom-kept rout, shout, and flare Of a skimmington-ride through the naibourhood, ere Folk had proof o’ wold Sweatley’s decay. Whereupon decent people all stood in a stare, Saying Tim and his lodger should risk it, and pair: So he took her to church. An’ some laughing lads there Cried to Tim, “After Sweatley!” She said, “I declare I stand as a maiden to-day!”

Written 1866; printed 1875.

HEIRESS AND ARCHITECT For A. W. B.

She sought the Studios, beckoning to her side An arch-designer, for she planned to build. He was of wise contrivance, deeply skilled In every intervolve of high and wide— Well fit to be her guide.

“Whatever it be,” Responded he, With cold, clear voice, and cold, clear view, “In true accord with prudent fashionings For such vicissitudes as living brings, And thwarting not the law of stable things, That will I do.”

“Shape me,” she said, “high halls with tracery And open ogive-work, that scent and hue Of buds, and travelling bees, may come in through, The note of birds, and singings of the sea, For these are much to me.”

“An idle whim!” Broke forth from him Whom nought could warm to gallantries: “Cede all these buds and birds, the zephyr’s call, And scents, and hues, and things that falter all, And choose as best the close and surly wall, For winters freeze.”

Sketch of people carrying a large object up stairs

“Then frame,” she cried, “wide fronts of crystal glass, That I may show my laughter and my light— Light like the sun’s by day, the stars’ by night— Till rival heart-queens, envying, wail, ‘Alas, Her glory!’ as they pass.”

“O maid misled!” He sternly said, Whose facile foresight pierced her dire; “Where shall abide the soul when, sick of glee, It shrinks, and hides, and prays no eye may see? Those house them best who house for secrecy, For you will tire.”

“A little chamber, then, with swan and dove Ranged thickly, and engrailed with rare device Of reds and purples, for a Paradise Wherein my Love may greet me, I my Love, When he shall know thereof?”

“This, too, is ill,” He answered still, The man who swayed her like a shade. “An hour will come when sight of such sweet nook Would bring a bitterness too sharp to brook, When brighter eyes have won away his look; For you will fade.”

Then said she faintly: “O, contrive some way— Some narrow winding turret, quite mine own, To reach a loft where I may grieve alone! It is a slight thing; hence do not, I pray, This last dear fancy slay!”

“Such winding ways Fit not your days,” Said he, the man of measuring eye; “I must even fashion as my rule declares, To wit: Give space (since life ends unawares) To hale a coffined corpse adown the stairs; For you will die.”

1867.

THE TWO MEN

There were two youths of equal age, Wit, station, strength, and parentage; They studied at the selfsame schools, And shaped their thoughts by common rules.

One pondered on the life of man, His hopes, his ending, and began To rate the Market’s sordid war As something scarce worth living for.

“I’ll brace to higher aims,” said he, “I’ll further Truth and Purity; Thereby to mend

the mortal lot And sweeten sorrow. Thrive I not,

“Winning their hearts, my kind will give Enough that I may lowly live, And house my Love in some dim dell, For pleasing them and theirs so well.”

Idly attired, with features wan, In secret swift he laboured on: Such press of power had brought much gold Applied to things of meaner mould.

Sometimes he wished his aims had been To gather gains like other men; Then thanked his God he’d traced his track Too far for wish to drag him back.

He lookèd from his loft one day To where his slighted garden lay; Nettles and hemlock hid each lawn, And every flower was starved and gone.

He fainted in his heart, whereon He rose, and sought his plighted one, Resolved to loose her bond withal, Lest she should perish in his fall.

He met her with a careless air, As though he’d ceased to find her fair, And said: “True love is dust to me; I cannot kiss: I tire of thee!”

(That she might scorn him was he fain, To put her sooner out of pain; For incensed love breathes quick and dies, When famished love a-lingering lies.)

Once done, his soul was so betossed, It found no more the force it lost: Hope was his only drink and food, And hope extinct, decay ensued.

And, living long so closely penned, He had not kept a single friend; He dwindled thin as phantoms be, And drooped to death in poverty . . .

Meantime his schoolmate had gone out To join the fortune-finding rout; He liked the winnings of the mart, But wearied of the working part.

He turned to seek a privy lair, Neglecting note of garb and hair, And day by day reclined and thought How he might live by doing nought.

“I plan a valued scheme,” he said To some. “But lend me of your bread, And when the vast result looms nigh, In profit you shall stand as I.”

Yet they took counsel to restrain Their kindness till they saw the gain; And, since his

substance now had run, He rose to do what might be done.

He went unto his Love by night, And said: “My Love, I faint in fight: Deserving as thou dost a crown, My cares shall never drag thee down.”

(He had descried a maid whose line Would hand her on much corn and wine, And held her far in worth above One who could only pray and love.)

But this Fair read him; whence he failed To do the deed so blithely hailed; He saw his projects wholly marred, And gloom and want oppressed him hard;

Till, living to so mean an end, Whereby he’d lost his every friend, He perished in a pauper sty, His mate the dying pauper nigh.

And moralists, reflecting, said, As “dust to dust” in burial read Was echoed from each coffin-lid, “These men were like in all they did.”

1866.

LINES

Spoken by Miss Ada Rehan at the Lyceum Theatre, July 23, 1890, at a performance on behalf of Lady Jeune’s Holiday Fund for City Children.

Before we part to alien thoughts and aims, Permit the one brief word the occasion claims: —When mumming and grave projects are allied, Perhaps an Epilogue is justified.

Our under-purpose has, in truth, to-day Commanded most our musings; least the play: A purpose futile but for your good-will Swiftly responsive to the cry of ill: A purpose all too limited!—to aid Frail human flowerets, sicklied by the shade, In winning some short spell of upland breeze, Or strengthening sunlight on the level leas.

Who has not marked, where the full cheek should be, Incipient lines of lank flaccidity, Lymphatic pallor where the pink should glow, And where the throb of transport, pulses low?— Most tragical of shapes from Pole to Line, O wondering

child, unwitting Time's design, Why should Art add to Nature's quandary, And worsen ill by thus immuring thee? —That races do despite unto their own, That Might supernal do indeed condone Wrongs individual for the general ease, Instance the proof in victims such as these.

Launched into thoroughfares too thronged before, Mothered by those whose protest is "No more!" Vitalized without option: who shall say That did Life hang on choosing—Yea or Nay— They had not scorned it with such penalty, And nothingness implored of Destiny?

And yet behind the horizon smile serene The down, the cornland, and the stretching green— Space—the child's heaven: scenes which at least ensure Some palliative for ill they cannot cure.

Dear friends—now moved by this poor show of ours To make your own long joy in buds and bowers For one brief while the joy of infant eyes, Changing their urban murk to paradise— You have our thanks!—may your reward include More than our thanks, far more: their gratitude.

"I LOOK INTO MY GLASS"

I look into my glass, And view my wasting skin, And say, "Would God it came to pass My heart had shrunk as thin!"

For then, I, undistrest By hearts grown cold to me, Could lonely wait my endless rest With equanimity.

But Time, to make me grieve; Part steals, lets part abide; And shakes this fragile frame at eve With throbbings of noontide.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK WESSEX POEMS AND OTHER VERSES ***

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