

THOMAS HARDY

SATIRES OF
CIRCUMSTANCE, LYRICS
AND REVERIES, WITH
MISCELLANEOUS PIECES

Thomas Hardy
Satires of Circumstance,
Lyrics and Reveries, with
Miscellaneous Pieces

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Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries, with Miscellaneous Pieces:*

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LYRICS AND REVERIES

IN FRONT OF THE LANDSCAPE

Plunging and labouring on in a tide of visions,
Dolorous and dear,
Forward I pushed my way as amid waste waters
Stretching around,
Through whose eddies there glimmered the customed
landscape
Yonder and near,

Blotted to feeble mist. And the coomb and the upland
Foliage-crowned,
Ancient chalk-pit, milestone, rills in the grass-flat
Stroked by the light,

Seemed but a ghost-like gauze, and no substantial
Meadow or mound.

What were the infinite spectacles bulking foremost
Under my sight,
Hindering me to discern my paced advancement
Lengthening to miles;
What were the re-creations killing the daytime
As by the night?

O they were speechful faces, gazing insistent,
Some as with smiles,
Some as with slow-born tears that brinily trundled
Over the wrecked
Cheeks that were fair in their flush-time, ash now with
anguish,
Harrowed by wiles.

Yes, I could see them, feel them, hear them, address them —
Halo-bedecked —
And, alas, onwards, shaken by fierce unreason,
Rigid in hate,
Smitten by years-long wryness born of misprision,
Dreaded, suspect.

Then there would breast me shining sights, sweet seasons
Further in date;
Instruments of strings with the tenderest passion
Vibrant, beside

Lamps long extinguished, robes, cheeks, eyes with the earth's
crust

Now corporate.

Also there rose a headland of hoary aspect

Gnawed by the tide,

Frilled by the nimb of the morning as two friends stood there

Guilelessly glad —

Wherefore they knew not – touched by the fringe of an
ecstasy

Scantly descried.

Later images too did the day unfurl me,

Shadowed and sad,

Clay cadavers of those who had shared in the dramas,

Laid now at ease,

Passions all spent, chiefest the one of the broad brow

Sepulture-clad.

So did beset me scenes miscalled of the bygone,

Over the leaze,

Past the clump, and down to where lay the beheld ones;

– Yea, as the rhyme

Sung by the sea-swell, so in their pleading dumbness

Captured me these.

For, their lost revisiting manifestations

In their own time

Much had I slighted, caring not for their purport,

Seeing behind
Things more coveted, reckoned the better worth calling
Sweet, sad, sublime.

Thus do they now show hourly before the intenser
Stare of the mind
As they were ghosts avenging their slights by my bypast
Body-borne eyes,
Show, too, with fuller translation than rested upon them
As living kind.

Hence wag the tongues of the passing people, saying
In their surmise,
“Ah – whose is this dull form that perambulates, seeing
nought
Round him that looms
Whithersoever his footsteps turn in his farings,
Save a few tombs?”

CHANNEL FIRING

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearisome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar-crumbs,
The worms drew back into the mounds,

The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, "No;
It's gunnery practice out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be:

"All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
They do no more for Christ's sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

"That this is not the judgment-hour
For some of them's a blessed thing,
For if it were they'd have to scour
Hell's floor for so much threatening.

“Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need).”

So down we lay again. “I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be,”
Said one, “than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!”

And many a skeleton shook his head.
“Instead of preaching forty year,”
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,
“I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer.”

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

April 1914.

THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN

(Lines on the loss of the “Titanic”)

I

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrud, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls – grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: “What does this vaingloriousness down here?”.

VI

Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII

Prepared a sinister mate
For her – so gaily great —
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

X

Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

THE GHOST OF THE PAST

We two kept house, the Past and I,
The Past and I;
I tended while it hovered nigh,
Leaving me never alone.
It was a spectral housekeeping
Where fell no jarring tone,
As strange, as still a housekeeping
As ever has been known.

As daily I went up the stair
And down the stair,
I did not mind the Bygone there —
The Present once to me;
Its moving meek companionship
I wished might ever be,
There was in that companionship
Something of ecstasy.

It dwelt with me just as it was,
Just as it was
When first its prospects gave me pause
In wayward wanderings,
Before the years had torn old troths
As they tear all sweet things,
Before gaunt griefs had torn old troths

And dulled old rapturings.

And then its form began to fade,
 Began to fade,
Its gentle echoes faintlier played
 At eves upon my ear
Than when the autumn's look embrowned
 The lonely chambers here,
The autumn's settling shades embrowned
 Nooks that it haunted near.

And so with time my vision less,
 Yea, less and less
Makes of that Past my housemistress,
 It dwindles in my eye;
It looms a far-off skeleton
 And not a comrade nigh,
A fitful far-off skeleton
 Dimming as days draw by.

AFTER THE VISIT

(To F. E. D.)

Come again to the place
Where your presence was as a leaf that skims
Down a drouthy way whose ascent bedims
The bloom on the farer's face.

Come again, with the feet
That were light on the green as a thistledown ball,
And those mute ministrations to one and to all
Beyond a man's saying sweet.

Until then the faint scent
Of the bordering flowers swam unheeded away,
And I marked not the charm in the changes of day
As the cloud-colours came and went.

Through the dark corridors
Your walk was so soundless I did not know
Your form from a phantom's of long ago
Said to pass on the ancient floors,

Till you drew from the shade,
And I saw the large luminous living eyes
Regard me in fixed inquiring-wise

As those of a soul that weighed,

Scarce consciously,
The eternal question of what Life was,
And why we were there, and by whose strange laws
That which mattered most could not be.

TO MEET, OR OTHERWISE

Whether to sally and see thee, girl of my dreams,
Or whether to stay
And see thee not! How vast the difference seems
Of Yea from Nay
Just now. Yet this same sun will slant its beams
At no far day
On our two mounds, and then what will the difference weigh!

Yet I will see thee, maiden dear, and make
The most I can
Of what remains to us amid this brake Cimmerian
Through which we grope, and from whose thorns we ache,
While still we scan
Round our frail faltering progress for some path or plan.

By briefest meeting something sure is won;
It will have been:
Nor God nor Daemon can undo the done,
Unseen the seen,
Make muted music be as unbegun,
Though things terrene
Groan in their bondage till oblivion supervene.

So, to the one long-sweeping symphony
From times remote

Till now, of human tenderness, shall we

Supply one note,

Small and untraced, yet that will ever be

Somewhere afloat

Amid the spheres, as part of sick Life's antidote.

THE DIFFERENCE

I

Sinking down by the gate I discern the thin moon,
And a blackbird tries over old airs in the pine,
But the moon is a sorry one, sad the bird's tune,
For this spot is unknown to that Heartmate of mine.

II

Did my Heartmate but haunt here at times such as now,
The song would be joyous and cheerful the moon;
But she will see never this gate, path, or bough,
Nor I find a joy in the scene or the tune.

THE SUN ON THE BOOKCASE

(Student's Love-song)

Once more the cauldron of the sun
Smears the bookcase with winy red,
And here my page is, and there my bed,
And the apple-tree shadows travel along.
Soon their intangible track will be run,
 And dusk grow strong
 And they be fled.

Yes: now the boiling ball is gone,
And I have wasted another day.
But wasted —*wasted*, do I say?
Is it a waste to have imaged one
Beyond the hills there, who, anon,
 My great deeds done
 Will be mine always?

“WHEN I SET OUT FOR LYONNESSE”

When I set out for Lyonesse,
A hundred miles away,
The rime was on the spray,
And starlight lit my lonesomeness
When I set out for Lyonesse
A hundred miles away.

What would bechance at Lyonesse
While I should sojourn there
No prophet durst declare,
Nor did the wisest wizard guess
What would bechance at Lyonesse
While I should sojourn there.

When I came back from Lyonesse
With magic in my eyes,
None managed to surmise
What meant my godlike gloriousness,
When I came back from Lyonesse
With magic in my eyes.

A THUNDERSTORM IN TOWN

(*A Reminiscence*)

She wore a new “terra-cotta” dress,
And we stayed, because of the pelting storm,
Within the hansom’s dry recess,
Though the horse had stopped; yea, motionless
 We sat on, snug and warm.

Then the downpour ceased, to my sharp sad pain,
And the glass that had screened our forms before
Flew up, and out she sprang to her door:
I should have kissed her if the rain
 Had lasted a minute more.

THE TORN LETTER

I

I tore your letter into strips
No bigger than the airy feathers
That ducks preen out in changing weathers
Upon the shifting ripple-tips.

II

In darkness on my bed alone
I seemed to see you in a vision,
And hear you say: "Why this derision
Of one drawn to you, though unknown?"

III

Yes, eve's quick mood had run its course,
The night had cooled my hasty madness;

I suffered a regretful sadness
Which deepened into real remorse.

IV

I thought what pensive patient days
A soul must know of grain so tender,
How much of good must grace the sender
Of such sweet words in such bright phrase.

V

Uprising then, as things unpriced
I sought each fragment, patched and mended;
The midnight whitened ere I had ended
And gathered words I had sacrificed.

VI

But some, alas, of those I threw
Were past my search, destroyed for ever:

They were your name and place; and never
Did I regain those clues to you.

VII

I learnt I had missed, by rash unheed,
My track; that, so the Will decided,
In life, death, we should be divided,
And at the sense I ached indeed.

VIII

That ache for you, born long ago,
Throbs on; I never could outgrow it.
What a revenge, did you but know it!
But that, thank God, you do not know.

BEYOND THE LAST LAMP (Near Tooting Common)

I

While rain, with eve in partnership,
Descended darkly, drip, drip, drip,
Beyond the last lone lamp I passed
 Walking slowly, whispering sadly,
 Two linked loiterers, wan, downcast:
Some heavy thought constrained each face,
And blinded them to time and place.

II

The pair seemed lovers, yet absorbed
In mental scenes no longer orb'd
By love's young rays. Each countenance
 As it slowly, as it sadly
 Caught the lamplight's yellow glance
Held in suspense a misery
At things which had been or might be.

III

When I retrud that watery way
Some hours beyond the droop of day,
Still I found pacing there the twain
 Just as slowly, just as sadly,
 Heedless of the night and rain.
One could but wonder who they were
And what wild woe detained them there.

IV

Though thirty years of blur and blot
Have slid since I beheld that spot,
And saw in curious converse there
 Moving slowly, moving sadly
 That mysterious tragic pair,
Its olden look may linger on —
All but the couple; they have gone.

V

Whither? Who knows, indeed.. And yet
To me, when nights are weird and wet,
Without those comrades there at tryst
 Creeping slowly, creeping sadly,
 That lone lane does not exist.
There they seem brooding on their pain,
And will, while such a lane remain.

THE FACE AT THE CASEMENT

If ever joy leave
An abiding sting of sorrow,
So befell it on the morrow
Of that May eve.

The travelled sun dropped
To the north-west, low and lower,
The pony's trot grew slower,
And then we stopped.

“This cosy house just by
I must call at for a minute,
A sick man lies within it
Who soon will die.

“He wished to marry me,
So I am bound, when I drive near him,
To inquire, if but to cheer him,
How he may be.”

A message was sent in,
And wordlessly we waited,
Till some one came and stated
The bulletin.

And that the sufferer said,
For her call no words could thank her;
As his angel he must rank her
Till life's spark fled.

Slowly we drove away,
When I turned my head, although not
Called; why so I turned I know not
Even to this day.

And lo, there in my view
Pressed against an upper lattice
Was a white face, gazing at us
As we withdrew.

And well did I divine
It to be the man's there dying,
Who but lately had been sighing
For her pledged mine.

Then I deigned a deed of hell;
It was done before I knew it;
What devil made me do it
I cannot tell!

Yes, while he gazed above,
I put my arm about her
That he might see, nor doubt her
My plighted Love.

The pale face vanished quick,
As if blasted, from the casement,
And my shame and self-abasement
Began their prick.

And they prick on, ceaselessly,
For that stab in Love's fierce fashion
Which, unfired by lover's passion,
Was foreign to me.

She smiled at my caress,
But why came the soft embowment
Of her shoulder at that moment
She did not guess.

Long long years has he lain
In thy garth, O sad Saint Cleather:
What tears there, bared to weather,
Will cleanse that stain!

Love is long-suffering, brave,
Sweet, prompt, precious as a jewel;
But O, too, Love is cruel,
Cruel as the grave.

LOST LOVE

I play my sweet old airs —
The airs he knew
When our love was true —
But he does not balk
His determined walk,
And passes up the stairs.

I sing my songs once more,
And presently hear
His footstep near
As if it would stay;
But he goes his way,
And shuts a distant door.

So I wait for another morn
And another night
In this soul-sick blight;
And I wonder much
As I sit, why such
A woman as I was born!

“MY SPIRIT WILL NOT HAUNT THE MOUND”

My spirit will not haunt the mound
Above my breast,
But travel, memory-possessed,
To where my tremulous being found
Life largest, best.

My phantom-footed shape will go
When nightfall grays
Hither and thither along the ways
I and another used to know
In backward days.

And there you'll find me, if a jot
You still should care
For me, and for my curious air;
If otherwise, then I shall not,
For you, be there.

WESSEX HEIGHTS (1896)

There are some heights in Wessex, shaped as if by a kindly hand

For thinking, dreaming, dying on, and at crises when I stand,
Say, on Ingpen Beacon eastward, or on Wylls-Neck westwardly,

I seem where I was before my birth, and after death may be.

In the lowlands I have no comrade, not even the lone man's friend —

Her who suffereth long and is kind; accepts what he is too weak to mend:

Down there they are dubious and askance; there nobody thinks as I,

But mind-chains do not clank where one's next neighbour is the sky.

In the towns I am tracked by phantoms having weird detective ways —

Shadows of beings who fellowed with myself of earlier days:
They hang about at places, and they say harsh heavy things —
Men with a frigid sneer, and women with tart disparagings.

Down there I seem to be false to myself, my simple self that was,

And is not now, and I see him watching, wondering what crass
cause

Can have merged him into such a strange continuator as this,
Who yet has something in common with himself, my
chrysalis.

I cannot go to the great grey Plain; there's a figure against
the moon,

Nobody sees it but I, and it makes my breast beat out of tune;
I cannot go to the tall-spired town, being barred by the forms
now passed

For everybody but me, in whose long vision they stand there
fast.

There's a ghost at Yell'ham Bottom chiding loud at the fall
of the night,

There's a ghost in Froom-side Vale, thin lipped and vague, in
a shroud of white,

There is one in the railway-train whenever I do not want it
near,

I see its profile against the pane, saying what I would not hear.

As for one rare fair woman, I am now but a thought of hers,
I enter her mind and another thought succeeds me that she
prefers;

Yet my love for her in its fulness she herself even did not
know;

Well, time cures hearts of tenderness, and now I can let her
go.

So I am found on Ingpen Beacon, or on Wylls-Neck to the
west,
Or else on homely Bulbarrow, or little Pilsdon Crest,
Where men have never cared to haunt, nor women have
walked with me,
And ghosts then keep their distance; and I know some liberty.

IN DEATH DIVIDED

I

I shall rot here, with those whom in their day
You never knew,
And alien ones who, ere they chilled to clay,
Met not my view,
Will in your distant grave-place ever neighbour you.

II

No shade of pinnacle or tree or tower,
While earth endures,
Will fall on my mound and within the hour
Steal on to yours;
One robin never haunt our two green covertures.

III

Some organ may resound on Sunday noons
By where you lie,
Some other thrill the panes with other tunes
Where moulder I;
No selfsame chords compose our common lullaby.

IV

The simply-cut memorial at my head
Perhaps may take
A Gothic form, and that above your bed
Be Greek in make;
No linking symbol show thereon for our tale's sake.

V

And in the monotonous moils of strained, hard-run
Humanity,
The eternal tie which binds us twain in one
No eye will see
Stretching across the miles that sever you from me.

THE PLACE ON THE MAP

I

I look upon the map that hangs by me —
Its shires and towns and rivers lined in varnished artistry —
And I mark a jutting height
Coloured purple, with a margin of blue sea.

II

– 'Twas a day of latter summer, hot and dry;
Ay, even the waves seemed drying as we walked on, she and I,
By this spot where, calmly quite,
She informed me what would happen by and by.

III

This hanging map depicts the coast and place,
And resuscitates therewith our unexpected troublous case

All distinctly to my sight,
And her tension, and the aspect of her face.

IV

Weeks and weeks we had loved beneath that blazing blue,
Which had lost the art of raining, as her eyes to-day had too,
While she told what, as by sleight,
Shot our firmament with rays of ruddy hue.

V

For the wonder and the wormwood of the whole
Was that what in realms of reason would have joyed our
double soul
Wore a torrid tragic light
Under order-keeping's rigorous control.

VI

So, the map revives her words, the spot, the time,

And the thing we found we had to face before the next year's
prime;

 The charted coast stares bright,
And its episode comes back in pantomime.

WHERE THE PICNIC WAS

Where we made the fire,
In the summer time,
Of branch and briar
On the hill to the sea
I slowly climb
Through winter mire,
And scan and trace
The forsaken place
Quite readily.

Now a cold wind blows,
And the grass is gray,
But the spot still shows
As a burnt circle – aye,
And stick-ends, charred,
Still strew the sward
Whereon I stand,
Last relic of the band
Who came that day!

Yes, I am here
Just as last year,
And the sea breathes brine
From its strange straight line
Up hither, the same

As when we four came.
– But two have wandered far
From this grassy rise
Into urban roar
Where no picnics are,
And one – has shut her eyes
For evermore.

THE SCHRECKHORN

(With thoughts of Leslie Stephen)

(June 1897)

Aloof, as if a thing of mood and whim;
Now that its spare and desolate figure gleams
Upon my nearing vision, less it seems
A looming Alp-height than a guise of him
Who scaled its horn with ventured life and limb,
Drawn on by vague imaginings, maybe,
Of semblance to his personality
In its quaint glooms, keen lights, and rugged trim.

At his last change, when Life's dull coils unwind,
Will he, in old love, hitherward escape,
And the eternal essence of his mind
Enter this silent adamant shape,
And his low voicing haunt its slipping snows
When dawn that calls the climber dyes them rose?

A SINGER ASLEEP

(Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1837–1909)

I

In this fair niche above the unslumbering sea,
That sentrys up and down all night, all day,
From cove to promontory, from ness to bay,

The Fates have fitly bidden that he should be Pillowed
eternally.

II

– It was as though a garland of red roses
Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
When irresponsibly dropped as from the sun,
In fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes,
Upon Victoria's formal middle time
His leaves of rhythm and rhyme.

III

O that far morning of a summer day
When, down a terraced street whose pavements lay
Glassing the sunshine into my bent eyes,
I walked and read with a quick glad surprise
New words, in classic guise, —

IV

The passionate pages of his earlier years,
Fraught with hot sighs, sad laughters, kisses, tears;
Fresh-fluted notes, yet from a minstrel who
Blew them not naïvely, but as one who knew
Full well why thus he blew.

V

I still can hear the brabble and the roar
At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!

Their power is spent like spindrift on this shore;
Thine swells yet more and more.

VI

– His singing-mistress verily was no other
Than she the Lesbian, she the music-mother
Of all the tribe that feel in melodies;
Who leapt, love-anguished, from the Leucadian steep
Into the rambling world-encircling deep
Which hides her where none sees.

VII

And one can hold in thought that nightly here
His phantom may draw down to the water's brim,
And hers come up to meet it, as a dim
Lone shine upon the heaving hydrosphere,
And mariners wonder as they traverse near,
Unknowing of her and him.

VIII

One dreams him sighing to her spectral form:
“O teacher, where lies hid thy burning line;
Where are those songs, O poetess divine
Whose very arts are love incarnadine?”
And her smile back: “Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine.”

IX

So here, beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations
Shake him when storms make mountains of their plains —
Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes —
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines.

Bonchurch, 1910.

A PLAINT TO MAN

When you slowly emerged from the den of Time,
And gained percipience as you grew,
And fleshed you fair out of shapeless slime,

Wherefore, O Man, did there come to you
The unhappy need of creating me —
A form like your own – for praying to?

My virtue, power, utility,
Within my maker must all abide,
Since none in myself can ever be,

One thin as a shape on a lantern-slide
Shown forth in the dark upon some dim sheet,
And by none but its showman vivified.

“Such a forced device,” you may say, “is meet
For easing a loaded heart at whiles:
Man needs to conceive of a mercy-seat

Somewhere above the gloomy aisles
Of this wailful world, or he could not bear
The irk no local hope beguiles.”

– But since I was framed in your first despair

The doing without me has had no play
In the minds of men when shadows scare;

And now that I dwindle day by day
Beneath the deicide eyes of seers
In a light that will not let me stay,

And to-morrow the whole of me disappears,
The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
That had best been faced in earlier years:

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced

With loving-kindness fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown.

1909-10.

GOD'S FUNERAL

I

I saw a slowly-stepping train —
Lined on the brows, scoop-eyed and bent and hoar —
Following in files across a twilit plain
A strange and mystic form the foremost bore.

II

And by contagious throbs of thought
Or latent knowledge that within me lay
And had already stirred me, I was wrought
To consciousness of sorrow even as they.

III

The fore-borne shape, to my blurred eyes,
At first seemed man-like, and anon to change

To an amorphous cloud of marvellous size,
At times endowed with wings of glorious range.

IV

And this phantasmal variousness
Ever possessed it as they drew along:
Yet throughout all it symbolled none the less
Potency vast and loving-kindness strong.

V

Almost before I knew I bent
Towards the moving columns without a word;
They, growing in bulk and numbers as they went,
Struck out sick thoughts that could be overheard: —

VI

“O man-projected Figure, of late
Imaged as we, thy knell who shall survive?”

Whence came it we were tempted to create
One whom we can no longer keep alive?

VII

“Framing him jealous, fierce, at first,
We gave him justice as the ages rolled,
Will to bless those by circumstance accurst,
And longsuffering, and mercies manifold.

VIII

“And, tricked by our own early dream
And need of solace, we grew self-deceived,
Our making soon our maker did we deem,
And what we had imagined we believed.

IX

“Till, in Time’s stayless stealthy swing,
Uncompromising rude reality

Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be.

X

“So, toward our myth’s oblivion,
Darkling, and languid-lipped, we creep and grope
Sadlier than those who wept in Babylon,
Whose Zion was a still abiding hope.

XI

“How sweet it was in years far hied
To start the wheels of day with trustful prayer,
To lie down liegely at the eventide
And feel a blest assurance he was there!

XII

“And who or what shall fill his place?
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes

For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
Towards the goal of their enterprise?”.

XIII

Some in the background then I saw,
Sweet women, youths, men, all incredulous,
Who chimed as one: “This figure is of straw,
This requiem mockery! Still he lives to us!”

XIV

I could not prop their faith: and yet
Many I had known: with all I sympathized;
And though struck speechless, I did not forget
That what was mourned for, I, too, once had prized.

XV

Still, how to bear such loss I deemed
The insistent question for each animate mind,

And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,

XVI

Whereof to lift the general night,
A certain few who stood aloof had said,
“See you upon the horizon that small light —
Swelling somewhat?” Each mourner shook his head.

XVII

And they composed a crowd of whom
Some were right good, and many nigh the best.
Thus dazed and puzzled 'twixt the gleam and gloom
Mechanically I followed with the rest.

1908–10.

SPECTRES THAT GRIEVE

“It is not death that harrows us,” they lipped,
“The soundless cell is in itself relief,
For life is an unfenced flower, benumbed and nipped
At unawares, and at its best but brief.”

The speakers, sundry phantoms of the gone,
Had risen like filmy flames of phosphor dye,
As if the palest of sheet lightnings shone
From the sward near me, as from a nether sky.

And much surprised was I that, spent and dead,
They should not, like the many, be at rest,
But stray as apparitions; hence I said,
“Why, having slipped life, hark you back distressed?”

“We are among the few death sets not free,
The hurt, misrepresented names, who come
At each year’s brink, and cry to History
To do them justice, or go past them dumb.

“We are stript of rights; our shames lie unredressed,
Our deeds in full anatomy are not shown,
Our words in morsels merely are expressed
On the scripted page, our motives blurred, unknown.”

Then all these shaken slighted visitants sped
Into the vague, and left me musing there
On fames that well might instance what they had said,
Until the New-Year's dawn strode up the air.

“AH, ARE YOU DIGGING ON MY GRAVE?”

“Ah, are you digging on my grave
My loved one? – planting rue?”
– “No: yesterday he went to wed
One of the brightest wealth has bred.
‘It cannot hurt her now,’ he said,
“That I should not be true.””

“Then who is digging on my grave?
My nearest dearest kin?”
– “Ah, no; they sit and think, ‘What use!
What good will planting flowers produce?
No tendance of her mound can loose
Her spirit from Death’s gin.””

“But some one digs upon my grave?
My enemy? – prodding sly?”
– “Nay: when she heard you had passed the Gate
That shuts on all flesh soon or late,
She thought you no more worth her hate,
And cares not where you lie.”

“Then, who is digging on my grave?
Say – since I have not guessed!”

– “O it is I, my mistress dear,
Your little dog, who still lives near,
And much I hope my movements here
Have not disturbed your rest?”

“Ah, yes! *You* dig upon my grave.
Why flashed it not on me
That one true heart was left behind!
What feeling do we ever find
To equal among human kind
A dog’s fidelity!”

“Mistress, I dug upon your grave
To bury a bone, in case
I should be hungry near this spot
When passing on my daily trot.
I am sorry, but I quite forgot
It was your resting-place.”

SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCES IN FIFTEEN GLIMPSSES

I AT TEA

The kettle descants in a cozy drone,
And the young wife looks in her husband's face,
And then at her guest's, and shows in her own
Her sense that she fills an envied place;
And the visiting lady is all abloom,
And says there was never so sweet a room.

And the happy young housewife does not know
That the woman beside her was first his choice,
Till the fates ordained it could not be so.
Betraying nothing in look or voice
The guest sits smiling and sips her tea,
And he throws her a stray glance yearningly.

II IN CHURCH

“And now to God the Father,” he ends,
And his voice thrills up to the topmost tiles:
Each listener chokes as he bows and bends,
And emotion pervades the crowded aisles.
Then the preacher glides to the vestry-door,
And shuts it, and thinks he is seen no more.

The door swings softly ajar meanwhile,
And a pupil of his in the Bible class,
Who adores him as one without gloss or guile,
Sees her idol stand with a satisfied smile
And re-enact at the vestry-glass
Each pulpit gesture in deft dumb-show
That had moved the congregation so.

III

BY HER AUNT'S GRAVE

“Sixpence a week,” says the girl to her lover,
“Aunt used to bring me, for she could confide
In me alone, she vowed. ’Twas to cover
The cost of her headstone when she died.
And that was a year ago last June;
I’ve not yet fixed it. But I must soon.”

“And where is the money now, my dear?”
“O, snug in my purse.. Aunt was *so* slow
In saving it – eighty weeks, or near.”.
“Let’s spend it,” he hints. “For she won’t know.
There’s a dance to-night at the Load of Hay.”
She passively nods. And they go that way.

IV

IN THE ROOM OF THE BRIDE-ELECT

“Would it had been the man of our wish!”
Sighs her mother. To whom with vehemence she
In the wedding-dress – the wife to be —
“Then why were you so mollyish
As not to insist on him for me!”
The mother, amazed: “Why, dearest one,
Because you pleaded for this or none!”

“But Father and you should have stood out strong!
Since then, to my cost, I have lived to find
That you were right and that I was wrong;
This man is a dolt to the one declined.
Ah! – here he comes with his button-hole rose.
Good God – I must marry him I suppose!”

V

AT A WATERING-PLACE

They sit and smoke on the esplanade,
The man and his friend, and regard the bay
Where the far chalk cliffs, to the left displayed,
Smile sallowly in the decline of day.
And saunterers pass with laugh and jest —
A handsome couple among the rest.

“That smart proud pair,” says the man to his friend,
“Are to marry next week.. How little he thinks
That dozens of days and nights on end
I have stroked her neck, unhooked the links
Of her sleeve to get at her upper arm.
Well, bliss is in ignorance: what’s the harm!”

VI IN THE CEMETERY

“You see those mothers squabbling there?”
Remarks the man of the cemetery.
One says in tears, *“Tis mine lies here!*
Another, *‘Nay, mine, you Pharisee!’*
Another, *‘How dare you move my flowers*
And put your own on this grave of ours!’
But all their children were laid therein
At different times, like sprats in a tin.

“And then the main drain had to cross,
And we moved the lot some nights ago,
And packed them away in the general foss
With hundreds more. But their folks don’t know,
And as well cry over a new-laid drain
As anything else, to ease your pain!”

VII

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW

“My stick!” he says, and turns in the lane
To the house just left, whence a vixen voice
Comes out with the firelight through the pane,
And he sees within that the girl of his choice
Stands rating her mother with eyes aglare
For something said while he was there.

“At last I behold her soul undraped!”
Thinks the man who had loved her more than himself;
“My God – ’tis but narrowly I have escaped. —
My precious porcelain proves it delf.”
His face has reddened like one ashamed,
And he steals off, leaving his stick unclaimed.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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