

Classic Poetry Series

Alfred Domett
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Alfred Domett(20 May 1811 – 2 November 1887)

He was born at Camberwell, Surrey; his father was a ship-owner. He entered St John's College, Cambridge, but left the university in 1833.

Domett published one or two volumes of poetry from 1833, and contributed several poems to Blackwood's Magazine, one of which, A Christmas Hymn, attracted attention. He was called to the bar, but for ten years he lived a life of ease in London, where he became the intimate friend of ["](#)

Among his books of poetry, Ranolf and Amohia, a South Sea Day Dream (1872), about Maori life, is the best known, and Flotsam and Jetsam (1877) is dedicated to Browning.

A Christmas Hymn

IT was the calm and silent night!
Seven hundred years and fifty-three
Had Rome been growing up to might,
And now was Queen of land and sea.
No sound was heard of clashing wars;
Peace brooded o'er the hush'd domain;
Apollo, Pallas, Jove and Mars,
Held undisturb'd their ancient reign,
 In the solemn midnight
 Centuries ago.

'T was in the calm and silent night!
The senator of haughty Rome
Impatient urged his chariot's flight,
From lordly revel rolling home.
Triumphal arches gleaming swell
His breast with thoughts of boundless sway;
What reck'd the Roman what befell
A paltry province far away,
 In the solemn midnight
 Centuries ago!

Within that province far away
Went plodding home a weary boor:
A streak of light before him lay,
Fall'n through a half-shut stable door
Across his path. He pass'd—for nought
Told what was going on within;
How keen the stars! his only thought;
The air how calm and cold and thin,
 In the solemn midnight
 Centuries ago!

O strange indifference!—low and high
Drows'd over common joys and cares:
The earth was still—but knew not why;
The world was listening—unawares.
How calm a moment may precede
One that shall thrill the world for ever!

To that still moment none would heed,
Man's doom was link'd, no more to sever,
In the solemn midnight
Centuries ago.

It is the calm and solemn night!
A thousand bells ring out, and throw
Their joyous peals abroad, and smite
The darkness, charm'd and holy now.
The night that erst no name had worn,
To it a happy name is given;
For in that stable lay new-born
The peaceful Prince of Earth and Heaven,
In the solemn midnight
Centuries ago.

Alfred Domett

A Glee For Winter

HENCE, rude Winter! crabbed old fellow,
Never merry, never mellow!
Well-a-day! in rain and snow
What will keep one's heart aglow?
Groups of kinsmen, old and young,
Oldest they old friends among;
Groups of friends, so old and true
That they seem our kinsmen too;
These all merry all together
Charm away chill Winter weather.

What will kill this dull old fellow?
Ale that 's bright, and wine that 's mellow!
Dear old songs for ever new;
Some true love, and laughter too;
Pleasant wit, and harmless fun,
And a dance when day is done.
Music, friends so true and tried,
Whisper'd love by warm fireside,
Mirth at all times all together,
Make sweet May of Winter weather.

Alfred Domett

A Maori Girl's Song

"Alas, and well-a-day! they are talking of me still:
By the tingling of my nostril, I fear they are talking ill;
Poor hapless I -- poor little I -- so many mouths to fill --

And all for this strange feeling -- O, this sad, sweet pain!

"O! senseless heart -- O simple! to yearn so, and to pine
For one so far above me, confest o'er all to shine,
For one a hundred dote upon, who never can be mine!
 O, 'tis a foolish feeling -- all this fond, sweet pain!

"When I was quite a child -- not so many moons ago --
A happy little maiden -- O, then it was not so;
Like a sunny-dancing wavelet then I sparkled to and fro;
 And I never had this feeling -- O, this sad, sweet pain!

"I think it must be owing to the idle life I lead
In the dreamy house for ever that this new bosom-weed
Has sprouted up and spread its shoots till it troubles me indeed
 With a restless, weary feeling -- such a sad, sweet pain!

"So in this pleasant islet, O, no longer will I stay --
And the shadowy summer dwelling I will leave this very day;
On Arapa I'll launch my skiff, and soon be borne away
 From all that feeds this feeling -- O, this fond, sweet pain!

"I'll go and see dear Rima -- she'll welcome me, I know,
And a flaxen cloak -- her gayest -- o'er my weary shoulders throw,
With purple red and points so free -- O, quite a lovely show --
 To charm away this feeling -- O, this sad, sweet pain!

"Two feathers I will borrow, and so gracefully I'll wear
Two feathers soft and snowy, for my long, black, lustrous hair.
Of the albatross's down they'll be -- O, how charming they'll look there --
 All to chase away this feeling -- O, this fond, sweet pain!

"Then the lads will flock around me with flattering talk all day --
And, with anxious little pinches, sly hints of love convey;
And I shall blush with happy pride to hear them, I daresay,
 And quite forget this feeling -- O, this sad, sweet pain!"

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An Invitation

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O my friends, never deaf to the charms of Denial,
Were its comfortless comforting worth a life-trial --

Discontented content with a chilling despair? --
Better ask as we float down a song-flood unchecked,
If our Sky with no Iris be glory-bedecked?
Through the gloom of eclipse as we wistfully steal
If no darkling aureolar rays may reveal

That the Future is haply not utterly cheerless:
While the Present has joy and adventure as rare

As the Past when most fair?

And if weary of mists you will roam undisdaining
To a land where the fanciful fountains are raining

Swift brilliants of boiling and beautiful spray
In the violet splendour of skies that illume
Such a wealth of green ferns and rare crimson tree-bloom;
Where a people primeval is vanishing fast,

With its faiths and its fables and ways of the past:
 O with reason and fancy unfettered and fearless,
 Come plunge with us deep into regions of Day --
 Come away -- and away! --

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