

Classic Poetry Series

**Edward Dowden**  
**- poems -**

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# Edward Dowden(3 May 1843 - 4 April 1913)

Edward Dowden was born in Cork, County Cork, Ireland.

Irish critic, biographer, and poet, noted for his critical work on Shakespeare.

Educated at Queen's College, Cork, and Trinity College, Dublin, Dowden became professor of English literature at Trinity in 1867 and lectured at Oxford (1890-93) and Cambridge (1893-96).

His *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (1875) was the first book in English to attempt a unified and rounded picture of Shakespeare's development as an artist, studying him in terms of successive periods. His other works on Shakespeare include the primer *Shakspeare* (1877), which was written for a nonacademic audience, and several edited collections of sonnets. He also provided the text to accompany the illustrations in *Shakespeare Scenes and Characters* (1876).

His wide interests and scholarly methods made his influence on criticism both sound and stimulating, and his own ideals are well described in his essay on *The Interpretation of Literature* in his *Transcripts and Studies*. As commissioner of education in Ireland (1896–1901), trustee of the National Library of Ireland, secretary of the Irish Liberal Union and vice-president of the Irish Unionist Alliance, he enforced his view that literature should not be divorced from practical life. His biographical/critical concepts, particularly in connection with Shakespeare, are played with by Stephen Dedalus in the library chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Leslie Fiedler was to play with them again in *The Stranger in Shakespeare*.

Dowden married twice, first (1866) Mary Clerke, and secondly (1895) Elizabeth Dickinson West, daughter of the dean of St Patrick's. His daughter, Hester Dowden, was a well-known spiritualist medium

# A New Hymn For Solitude

I found Thee in my heart, O Lord,  
As in some secret shrine;  
I knelt, I waited for Thy word,  
I joyed to name Thee mine.

I feared to give myself away  
To that or this; beside  
Thy altar on my face I lay,  
And in strong need I cried.

Those hours are past. Thou art not mine,  
And therefore I rejoice,  
I wait within no holy shrine,  
I faint not for the voice.

In Thee we live; and every wind  
Of heaven is Thine; blown free  
To west, to east, the God unshrined  
Is still discovering me.

Edward Dowden

# Awakening

With brain o'erworn, with heart a summer clod,  
With eye so practised in each form around,—  
And all forms mean,—to glance above the ground  
Irks it, each day of many days we plod,  
Tongue-tied and deaf, along life's common road.  
But suddenly, we know not how, a sound  
Of living streams, an odour, a flower crowned  
With dew, a lark upspringing from the sod,  
And we awake. O joy and deep amaze!  
Beneath the everlasting hills we stand,  
We hear the voices of the morning seas,  
And earnest prophesyings in the land,  
While from the open heaven leans forth at gaze  
The encompassing great cloud of witnesses.

Edward Dowden

# By The Window

STILL deep into the West I gazed; the light  
Clear, spiritual, tranquil as a bird  
Wide-winged that soars on the smooth gale and sleeps,  
Was it from sun far-set or moon unrisen?  
Whether from moon, or sun, or angel's face  
It held my heart from motion, stayed my blood,  
Betrayed each rising thought to quiet death  
Along the blind charm'd way to nothingness,  
Lull'd the last nerve that ached. It was a sky  
Made for a man to waste his will upon,  
To be received as wiser than all toil,  
And much more fair. And what was strife of men?  
And what was time?

Then came a certain thing.  
Are intimations for the elected soul  
Dubious, obscure, of unauthentic power  
Since ghostly to the intellectual eye,  
Shapeless to thinking? Nay, but are not we  
Servile to words and an usurping brain,  
Infidels of our own high mysteries,  
Until the senses thicken and lose the world,  
Until the imprisoned soul forgets to see,  
And spreads blind fingers forth to reach the day,  
Which once drank light, and fed on angels' food?

It happened swiftly, came and straight was gone.

One standing on some aery balcony  
And looking down upon a swarming crowd  
Sees one man beckon to him with finger-tip  
While eyes meet eyes; he turns and looks again—  
The man is lost, and the crowd sways and swarms.  
Shall such an one say, 'Thus 'tis proved a dream,  
And no hand beckoned, no eyes met my own?'  
Neither can I say this. There was a hint,  
A thrill, a summons faint yet absolute,  
Which ran across the West; the sky was touch'd,  
And failed not to respond. Does a hand pass

Lightly across your hair? you feel it pass  
Not half so heavy as a cobweb's weight,  
Although you never stir; so felt the sky  
Not unaware of the Presence, so my soul  
Scarce less aware. And if I cannot say  
The meaning and monition, words are weak  
Which will not paint the small wing of a moth,  
Nor bear a subtile odour to the brain,  
And much less serve the soul in her large needs.  
I cannot tell the meaning, but a change  
Was wrought in me; it was not the one man  
Who came to the luminous window to gaze forth,  
And who moved back into the darkened room  
With awe upon his heart and tender hope;  
From some deep well of life tears rose; the throng  
Of dusty cares, hopes, pleasures, prides fell off,  
And from a sacred solitude I gazed  
Deep, deep into the liquid eyes of Life.

Edward Dowden

# Communion

Lord, I have knelt and tried to pray to-night,  
But Thy love came upon me like a sleep,  
And all desire died out; upon the deep  
Of Thy mere love I lay, each thought in light  
Dissolving like the sunset clouds, at rest  
Each tremulous wish, and my strength weakness, sweet  
As a sick boy with soon o'erwearied feet  
Finds, yielding him unto his mother's breast  
To weep for weakness there. I could not pray,  
But with closed eyes I felt Thy bosom's love  
Beating toward mine, and then I would not move  
Till of itself the joy should pass away;  
At last my heart found voice,—'Take me, O Lord,  
And do with me according to Thy word.'

Edward Dowden

# Deus Absconditus

SINCE Thou dost clothe Thyself to-day in cloud,  
Lord God in heaven, and no voice low or loud  
Proclaims Thee,--see, I turn me to the Earth,  
Its wisdom and its sorrow and its mirth,  
Thy Earth perchance, but sure my very own,  
And precious to me grows the clod, the stone,  
A voiceless moor's brooding monotony,  
A keen star quivering through the sunset dye,  
Young wrinkled beech leaves, saturate with light,  
The arching wave's suspended malachite;  
I turn to men, Thy sons perchance, but sure  
My brethren, and no face shall be too poor  
To yield me some unquestionable gain  
Of wonder, laughter, loathing, pity, pain,  
Some dog-like craving caught in human eyes,  
Some new-wak'd spirit's April ecstasies;  
These will not fail nor foil me; while I live  
There will be actual truck in take and give,  
But Thou hast foil'd me; therefore undistraught,  
I cease from seeking what will not be sought,  
Or sought, will not be found through joy or fear;  
If still Thou claimst me, seek me. I am here.

Edward Dowden

## Durer's 'Melancholia'

THE bow of promise, this lost flaring star,  
Terror and hope are in mid-heaven; but She,  
The mighty-wing'd crown'd Lady Melancholy,  
Heeds not. O to what vision'd goal afar  
Does her thought bear those steadfast eyes which are  
A torch in darkness? There nor shore nor sea,  
Nor ebbing Time vexes Eternity,  
Where that lone thought outsoars the mortal bar.  
Tools of the brain--the globe, the cube--no more  
She deals with; in her hand the compass stays;  
Nor those, industrious genius, of her lore  
Student and scribe, thou gravest of the fays,  
Expect this secret to enlarge thy store;  
She moves through incommunicable ways.

Edward Dowden

# First Love

My long first year of perfect love,  
My deep new dream of joy; She was a little chubby girl,  
I was a chubby boy.

I wore a crimson frock, white drawers,  
A belt, a crown was on it;  
She wore some angel's kind of dress  
And such a tiny bonnet,

Old-fashioned, but the soft brown hair Would never keep its place;  
A little maid with violet eyes,  
And sunshine in her face.

O my child-queen, in those lost days  
How sweet was daily living!  
How humble and how proud I grew,  
How rich by merely giving!

She went to school, the parlour-maid  
Slow stepping to her trot;  
That parlour-maid, ah, did she feel  
How lofty was her lot!  
Across the road I saw her lift  
My Queen, and with a sigh  
I envied Raleigh; my new coat  
Was hung a peg too high.

A hoard of never-given gifts  
I cherished, priceless pelf;  
'Twas two whole days ere I devoured  
That peppermint myself.

In Church I only prayed for her  
'O God bless Lucy Hill;'  
Child, may His angels keep their arms  
Ever around you still.

But when the hymn came round, with heart  
That feared some heart's surprising

Its secret sweet, I climbed the seat  
'Mid rustling and uprising;

And there against her mother's arm  
The sleeping child was leaning,  
While far away the hymn went on,  
The music and the meaning.

Oh I loved with more of pain  
Since then, with more of passion,  
Loved with the aching in my love  
After our grown-up fashion;

Yet could I almost be content  
To lose here at your feet  
A year or two, you murmuring elm,  
To dream a dream so sweet.

Edward Dowden

## In July

WHY do I make no poems? Good my friend  
Now is there silence through the summer woods,  
In whose green depths and lawny solitudes  
The light is dreaming; voicings clear ascend  
Now from no hollow where glad rivulets wend,  
But murmurings low of inarticulate moods,  
Softer than stir of unfledged cushat broods,  
Breathe, till o'er drowsed the heavy flower-heads bend.  
Now sleep the crystal and heart-charmed waves  
Round white, sunstricken rocks the noontide long,  
Or 'mid the coolness of dim lighted caves  
Sway in a trance of vague deliciousness;  
And I,--I am too deep in joy's excess  
For the imperfect impulse of a song.

Edward Dowden

# In September

SPRING scarce had greener fields to show than these  
Of mid September; through the still warm noon  
The rivulets ripple forth a gladder tune  
Than ever in the summer; from the trees  
Dusk-green, and murmuring inward melodies,  
No leaf drops yet; only our evenings swoon  
In pallid skies more suddenly, and the moon  
Finds motionless white mists out on the leas.  
Dear chance it were in some rough wood-god's lair  
A month hence, gazing on the last bright field,  
To sink o'er-drowsed, and dream that wild-flowers blew  
Around my head and feet silently there,  
Till Spring's glad choir adown the valley pealed,  
And violets trembled in the morning dew.

Edward Dowden

# In The Cathedral

THE altar-lights burn low, the incense-fume  
Sickens: O listen, how the priestly prayer  
Runs as a fenland stream; a dim despair  
Hails through their chaunt of praise, who here inhume  
A clay-cold Faith within its carven tomb.  
But come thou forth into the vital air  
Keen, dark, and pure! grave Night is no betrayer,  
And if perchance some faint cold star illumine  
Her brow of mystery, shall we walk forlorn?  
An altar of the natural rock may rise  
Somewhere for men who seek; there may be borne  
On the night-wind authentic prophecies:  
If not, let this--to breathe sane breath--suffice,  
Till in yon East, mayhap, the dark be worn.

Edward Dowden

# In The Cathedral Close

IN the Dean's porch a nest of clay  
With five small tentants may be seen;  
Five solemn faces, each as wise  
As if its owner were a Dean.

Five downy fledglings in a row,  
Packed close, as in the antique pew  
The school-girls are whose foreheads clear  
At the Venite shine on you.

Day after day the swallows sit  
With scarce a stir, with scarce a sound,  
But dreaming and digesting much  
They grow thus wise and soft and round:

They watch the Canons come to dine,  
And hear, the mullion-bars across,  
Over the fragrant fruit and wine  
Deep talk of rood-screen and reredos.

Her hands with field-flowers drenched, a child  
Leaps past in wind-blown dress and hair,  
The swallows turn their heads askew --  
Five judges deem that she is fair.

Prelusive touches sound within,  
Straightway they recognise the sign,  
And, blandly nodding, they approve  
The minuet of Rubinstein.

They mark the cousins' schoolboy talk,  
(Male birds flown wide from minster bell),  
And blink at each broad term of art,  
Binomial or bicycle.

Ah! downy soft ones, soft and warm,  
Doth such a stillness mask from sight  
Such swiftness? can such peace conceal  
Passion and ecstasy of flight?

Yet somewhere 'mid your Easter suns,  
Under a white Greek architrave  
At morn, or when the shaft of fire  
Lies large upon the Indian wave,

A sense of something dear gone by  
Will stir, strange longings thrill the heart  
For a small world embowered close,  
Of which ye sometime were a part.

The dew-drenched flowers, the child's glad eyes  
Your joy inhuman shall control,  
And in your wings a light and wind  
Shall move from the Maestro's soul.

Edward Dowden

## In The Garden I: The Garden

PAST the town's clamour is a garden full  
Of loneness and old greenery; at noon  
When birds are hush'd, save one dim cushat's croon,  
A ripen'd silence hangs beneath the cool  
Great branches; basking roses dream and drop  
A petal, and dream still; and summer's boon  
Of mellow grasses, to be levell'd soon  
By a dew-drenched scythe, will hardly stop  
At the uprunning mounds of chestnut trees.  
Still let me muse in this rich haunt by day,  
And know all night in dusky placidness  
It lies beneath the summer, while great ease  
Broods in the leaves, and every light wind's stress  
Lifts a faint odour down the verdurous way.

Edward Dowden

## In The Garden Ii: Visions

HERE I am slave of visions. When noon heat  
Strikes the red walls, and their environ'd air  
Lies steep'd in sun; when not a creature dare  
Affront the fervour, from my dim retreat  
Where woof of leaves embowers a beechen seat,  
With chin on palm, and wide-set eyes I stare,  
Beyond the liquid quiver and the glare,  
Upon fair shapes that move on silent feet.  
Those Three strait-robed, and speechless as they pass,  
Come often, touch the lute, nor heed me more  
Than birds or shadows heed; that naked child  
Is dove-like Psyche slumbering in deep grass;  
Sleep, sleep,--he heeds thee not, yon Sylvan wild  
Munching the russet apple to its core.

Edward Dowden

## In The Garden Iii: An Interior

THE grass around my limbs is deep and sweet;  
Yonder the house has lost its shadow wholly,  
The blinds are dropped, and softly now and slowly  
The day flows in and floats; a calm retreat  
Of temper'd light where fair things fair things meet;  
White busts and marble Dian make it holy,  
Within a niche hangs Durer's "Melancholy"  
Brooding; and, should you enter, there will greet  
Your sense with vague allurements faint  
Of one magnolia bloom; fair fingers draw  
From the piano Chopin's heart-complaint;  
Alone, white-robed she sits; a fierce macaw  
On the verandah, proud of plume and paint,  
Screams, insolent despot, showing beak and claw.

Edward Dowden

## In The Garden Iv: The Singer

"THAT was the thrush's last good-night," I thought,  
And heard the soft descent of summer rain  
In the droop'd garden leaves; but hush! again  
The perfect iterance,--freer than unsought  
Odours of violets dim in woodland ways,  
Deeper than coiled waters laid a-dream  
Below moss'd ledges of a shadowy stream,  
And faultless as blown roses in June days.  
Full-throat'd singer! art thou thus anew  
Voiceful to hear how round thyself alone  
The enriched silence drops for thy delight  
More soft than snow, more sweet than honey-dew?  
Now cease: the last faint western streak is gone,  
Stir not the blissful quiet of the night.

Edward Dowden

## In The Garden V: A Summer Moon

QUEEN-MOON of this enchanted summer night,  
One virgin slave companioning thee,--I lie  
Vacant to thy possession as this sky  
Conquer'd and calm'd by thy rejoicing might;  
Swim down through my heart's deep, thou dewy bright  
Wanderer of heaven, till thought must faint and die,  
And I am made all thine inseparably,  
Resolv'd into the dream of thy delight.  
Ah no! the place is common for her feet,  
Not here, not here,--beyond the amber mist,  
And breadths of dusky pine, and shining lawn,  
And unstirr'd lake, and gleaming belts of wheat,  
She comes upon her Latmos, and has kiss'd  
The sidelong face of blind Endymion.

Edward Dowden

## In The Garden Vi: A Peach

IF any sense in mortal dust remains  
When mine has been refin'd from flower to flower,  
Won from the sun all colours, drunk the shower  
And delicate winy dews, and gain'd the gains  
Which elves who sleep in airy bells, a-swing  
Through half a summer day, for love bestow,  
Then in some warm old garden let me grow  
To such a perfect, lush, ambrosian thing  
As this. Upon a southward-facing wall  
I bask, and feel my juices dimly fed  
And mellowing, while my bloom comes golden grey:  
Keep the wasps from me! but before I fall  
Pluck me, white fingers, and o'er two ripe-red  
Girl lips O let me richly swoon away!

Edward Dowden

## In The Garden Vii: Early Autumn

IF while I sit flatter'd by this warm sun  
Death came to me, and kiss'd my mouth and brow,  
And eyelids which the warm light hovers through,  
I should not count it strange. Being half won  
By hours that with a tender sadness run,  
Who would not softly lean to lips which woo  
In the Earth's grave speech? Nor could it aught undo  
Of Nature's calm observances begun  
Still to be here the idle autumn day.  
Pale leaves would circle down, and lie unstirr'd  
Where'er they fell; the tir'd wind hither call  
Her gentle fellows; shining beetles stray  
Up their green courts; and only yon shy bird  
A little bolder grow ere evenfall.

Edward Dowden

## In The Garden Viii: Later Autumn

THIS is the year's despair: some wind last night  
Utter'd too soon the irrevocable word,  
And the leaves heard it, and the low clouds heard;  
So a wan morning dawn'd of sterile light;  
Flowers droop'd, or show'd a startled face and white;  
The cattle cower'd, and one disconsolate bird  
Chirp'd a weak note; last came this mist and blurr'd  
The hills, and fed upon the fields like blight.  
Ah, why so swift despair! There yet will be  
Warm noons, the honey'd leavings of the year,  
Hours of rich musing, ripest autumn's core,  
And late-heap'd fruit, and falling hedge-berry,  
Blossoms in cottage-crofts, and yet, once more,  
A song, not less than June's, fervent and clear.

Edward Dowden

## Leonardo's 'Monna Lisa'

MAKE thyself known, Sibyl, or let despair  
Of knowing thee be absolute; I wait  
Hour-long and waste a soul. What word of fate  
Hides 'twixt the lips which smile and still forbear?  
Secret perfection! Mystery too fair!  
Tangle the sense no more lest I should hate  
Thy delicate tyranny, the inviolate  
Poise of thy folded hands, thy fallen hair.  
Nay, nay,--I wrong thee with rough words; still be  
Serene, victorious, inaccessible;  
Still smile but speak not; lightest irony  
Lurk ever 'neath thine eyelids' shadow; still  
O'ertop our knowledge; Sphinx of Italy  
Allure us and reject us at thy will!

Edward Dowden

## Love's Lord

WHEN weight of all the garner'd years  
Bows me, and praise must find relief  
In harvest-song, and smiles and tears  
Twist in the band that binds my sheaf;

Thou known Unknown, dark, radiant sea  
In whom we live, in whom we move,  
My spirit must lose itself in Thee,  
Crying a name—Life, Light, or Love.

Edward Dowden

# The Initiation

UNDER the flaming wings of cherubim  
I moved toward that high altar. O, the hour!  
And the light waxed intenser, and the dim  
Low edges of the hills and the grey sea  
Were caught and captur'd by the present Power,  
My sureties and my witnesses to be.

Then the light drew me in. Ah, perfect pain!  
Ah, infinite moment of accomplishment!  
Thou terror of pure joy, with neither wane  
Nor waxing, but long silence and sharp air  
As womb-forsaking babes breathe. Hush! the event  
Let him who wrought Love's marvellous things declare.

Shall I who fear'd not joy, fear grief at all?  
I on whose mouth Life laid his sudden lips  
Tremble at Death's weak kiss, and not recall  
That sundering from the flesh, the flight from time,  
The judgements stern, the clear apocalypse,  
The lightnings, and the Presences sublime.

How came I back to earth? I know not how,  
Nor what hands led me, nor what words were said.  
Now all things are made mine,—joy, sorrow; now  
I know my purpose deep, and can refrain;  
I walk among the living, not the dead;  
My sight is purged; I love and pity men.

Edward Dowden

# The Secret Of The Universe

AN ODE

(By a Western Spinning Dervish)

I SPIN, I spin, around, around,  
And close my eyes,  
And let the bile arise  
From the sacred region of the soul's Profound;  
Then gaze upon the world; how strange! how new!  
The earth and heaven are one,  
The horizon-line is gone,  
The sky how green! the land how fair and blue!  
Perplexing items fade from my large view,  
And thought which vexed me with its false and true  
Is swallowed up in Intuition; this,  
This is the sole true mode  
Of reaching God,  
And gaining the universal synthesis  
Which makes All—One; while fools with peering eyes  
Dissect, divide, and vainly analyse.  
So round, and round, and round again!  
How the whole globe swells within my brain,  
The stars inside my lids appear,  
The murmur of the spheres I hear  
Throbbing and beating in each ear;  
Right in my navel I can feel  
The centre of the world's great wheel.  
Ah peace divine, bliss dear and deep,  
No stay, no stop,  
Like any top  
Whirling with swiftest speed, I sleep.  
O ye devout ones round me coming,  
Listen! I think that I am humming;  
No utterance of the servile mind  
With poor chop-logic rules agreeing  
Here shall ye find,  
But inarticulate burr of man's unsundered being.  
Ah, could we but devise some plan,  
Some patent jack by which a man

Might hold himself ever in harmony  
With the great whole, and spin perpetually,  
As all things spin  
Without, within,  
As Time spins off into Eternity,  
And Space into the inane Immensity,  
And the Finite into God's Infinity,  
Spin, spin, spin, spin.

Edward Dowden