

Classic Poetry Series

Alfred Austin

- poems -

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Agatha

SHE wanders in the April woods,
That glisten with the fallen shower;
She leans her face against the buds,
She stops, she stoops, she plucks a flower.
She feels the ferment of the hour:
She broodeth when the ringdove broods;
The sun and flying clouds have power
Upon her cheek and changing moods.
She cannot think she is alone,
As o'er her senses warmly steal
Floods of unrest she fears to own,
And almost dreads to feel.

Among the summer woodlands wide
Anew she roams, no more alone;
The joy she fear'd is at her side,
Spring's blushing secret now is known.
The primrose and its mates have flown,
The thrush's ringing note hath died;
But glancing eye and glowing tone
Fall on her from her god, her guide.
She knows not, asks not, what the goal,
She only feels she moves towards bliss,
And yields her pure unquestioning soul
To touch and fondling kiss.

And still she haunts those woodland ways,
Though all fond fancy finds there now
To mind of spring or summer days,
Are sodden trunk and songless bough.
The past sits widow'd on her brow,
Homeward she wends with wintry gaze,
To walls that house a hollow vow,
To hearth where love hath ceas'd to blaze:
Watches the clammy twilight wane,
With grief too fix'd for woe or tear;
And, with her forehead 'gainst the pane,
Envies the dying year.

Alfred Austin

At His Grave

LEAVE me a little while alone,
Here at his grave that still is strown
 With crumbling flower and wreath;
The laughing rivulet leaps and falls,
The thrush exults, the cuckoo calls,
 And he lies hush'd beneath.

With myrtle cross and crown of rose,
And every lowlier flower that blows,
 His new-made couch is dress'd;
Primrose and cowslip, hyacinth wild,
Gather'd by monarch, peasant, child,
 A nation's grief attest.

I stood not with the mournful crowd
That hither came when round his shroud
 Pious farewells were said.
In the fam'd city that he sav'd,
By minaret crown'd, by billow lav'd,
 I heard that he was dead.

Now o'er his tomb at last I bend,
No greeting get, no greeting tend,
 Who never came before
Unto his presence, but I took,
From word or gesture, tone or look,
 Some wisdom from his door.

And must I now unanswer'd wait,
And, though a suppliant at the gate,
 No sound my ears rejoice?
Listen! Yes, even as I stand,
I feel the pressure of his hand,
 The comfort of his voice.

How poor were Fame, did grief confess
That death can make a great life less,
 Or end the help it gave!
Our wreaths may fade, our flowers may wane,
But his well-ripen'd deeds remain,
 Untouch'd, above his grave.

Let this, too, soothe our widow'd minds;
Silenced are the opprobrious winds
 Whene'er the sun goes down;
And free henceforth from noonday noise,
He at a tranquil height enjoys
 The starlight of renown.

Thus hence we something more may take
Than sterile grief, than formless ache,
 Or vainly utter'd vow;

Death hath bestow'd what life withheld
And he round whom detraction swell'd
Hath peace with honor now.

The open jeer, the covert taunt,
The falsehood coin'd in factious haunt,
These loving gifts reprove.
They never were but thwarted sound
Of ebbing waves that bluster round
A rock that will not move.

And now the idle roar rolls off,
Hush'd is the gibe and sham'd the scoff,
Repress'd the envious gird;
Since death, the looking-glass of life,
Clear'd of the misty breath of strife,
Reflects his face unblurr'd.

From callow youth to mellow age,
Men turn the leaf and scan the page,
And note, with smart of loss,
How wit to wisdom did mature,
How duty burn'd ambition pure,
And purged away the dross.

Youth is self-love; our manhood lends
Its heart to pleasure, mistress, friends,
So that when age steals nigh,
How few find any worthier aim
Than to protract a flickering flame,
Whose oil hath long run dry!

But he, unwitting youth once flown,
With England's greatness link'd his own,
And, steadfast to that part,
Held praise and blame but fitful sound,
And in the love of country found
Full solace for his heart.

Now in an English grave he lies:
With flowers that tell of English skies
And mind of English air,
A grateful sovereign decks his bed,
And hither long with pilgrim tread
Will English feet repair.

Yet not beside his grave alone
We seek the glance, the touch, the tone;
His home is nigh,—but there,
See from the hearth his figure fled,
The pen unrais'd, the page unread,
Untenanted the chair!

Vainly the beechen boughs have made
A fresh green canopy of shade,
Vainly the peacocks stray;
While Carlo, with despondent gait,
Wonders how long affairs of State
Will keep his lord away.

Here most we miss the guide, the friend;
Back to the churchyard let me wend,
And, by the posied mound,
Lingering where late stood worthier feet,
Wish that some voice, more strong, more sweet,
A loftier dirge would sound.

At least I bring not tardy flowers:
Votive to him life's budding powers,
Such as they were, I gave—
He not rejecting, so I may
Perhaps these poor faint spices lay,
Unhidden, on his grave!

Alfred Austin

Love's Blindness

Now do I know that Love is blind, for I
Can see no beauty on this beauteous earth,
No life, no light, no hopefulness, no mirth,
Pleasure nor purpose, when thou art not nigh.
Thy absence exiles sunshine from the sky,
Seres Spring's maturity, checks Summer's birth,
Leaves linnets pipe as sad as plover's cry,
And makes me in abundance find but dearth.
But when thy feet flutter the dark, and thou
With orient eyes dawnest on my distress,
Suddenly sings a bird on every bough,
The heavens expand, the earth grows less and less,
The ground is buoyant as the ether now,
And all looks lovely in thy loveliness.

Alfred Austin

Songs From "Prince Lucifer" I - Grave-Digger's Song

THE CRAB, the bullace, and the sloe,
They burgeon in the Spring;
And, when the west wind melts the snow,
The redstarts build and sing.
But Death's at work in rind and root,
And loves the green buds best;
And when the pairing music's mute,
He spares the empty nest.
Death! Death!
Death is master of lord and clown.
Close the coffin, and hammer it down.

When nuts are brown and sere without,
And white and plump within,
And juicy gourds are pass'd about,
And trickle down the chin;
When comes the reaper with his scythe,
And reaps and nothing leaves,
Oh, then it is that Death is blithe,
And sups among the sheaves.
Death! Death!
Lower the coffin and slip the cord:
Death master of clown and lord.

When logs about the house are stack'd,
And next year's hose is knit,
And tales are told and jokes are crack'd,
And faggots blaze and spit;
Death sits down in the ingle-nook,
Sits down and doth not speak:
But he puts his arm round the maid that 's warm,
And she tingles in the cheek.
Death! Death!
Death is master of lord and clown;
Shovel the clay in, tread it down.

Alfred Austin

Songs From "Prince Lucifer" II - Mother-Song

WHITE little hands!
Pink little feet!
Dimpled all over,
Sweet, sweet, sweet!
What dost thou wail for?
The unknown? the unseen?
The ills that are coming,
The joys that have been?

Cling to me closer,
Closer and closer,
Till the pain that is purer
Hath banish'd the grosser.
Drain, drain at the stream, love,
Thy hunger is freeing,
That was born in a dream, love,
Along with thy being!

Little fingers that feel
For their home on my breast,
Little lips that appeal
For their nurture, their rest!
Why, why dost thou weep, dear?
Nay, stifle thy cries,
Till the dew of thy sleep, dear,
Lies soft on thine eyes.

Alfred Austin

The Haymakers' Song

HERE'S to him that grows it,
 Drink, lads, drink!
That lays it in and mows it,
 Clink, jugs, clink!
To him that mows and makes it,
That scatters it and shakes it,
That turns, and teds, and rakes it,
 Clink, jugs, clink!

Now here 's to him that stacks it,
 Drink, lads, drink!
That thrashes and that tacks it,
 Clink, jugs, clink!
That cuts it out for eating,
When March-dropp'd lambs are bleating,
And the slate-blue clouds are sleeting,
 Drink, lads, drink!

And here 's to thane and yeoman,
 Drink, lads, drink!
To horseman and to bowman,
 Clink, jugs, clink!
To lofty and to low man,
Who bears a grudge to no man,
But flinches from no foeman,
 Drink, lads, drink!

Alfred Austin