

Classic Poetry Series

Alfred Domett

- poems -

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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!"

Alfred Domett

An Invitation

Well! if Truth be all welcomed with hardy reliance,
All the lovely unfoldings of luminous Science,
All that Logic can prove or disprove be avowed:
Is there room for no faith -- though such Evil intrude --
In the dominance still of a Spirit of Good?
Is there room for no hope -- such a handbreadth we scan --
In the permanence yet of the Spirit of Man? --
May we bless the far seeker, nor blame the fine dreamer?
Leave Reason her radiance -- Doubt her due cloud;
Nor their Rainbows enshroud? --

From our Life of realities -- hard -- shallow-hearted,
Has Romance -- has all glory idyllic departed --
From the workaday World all the wonderment flown?
Well, but what if there gleamed, in an Age cold as this,
The divinest of Poets' ideal of bliss?
Yea, an Eden could lurk in this Empire of ours,
With the loneliest love in the loveliest bowers? --
In an era so rapid with railway and steamer,
And with Pan and the Dryads like Raphael gone --
What if this could be shown?

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 illumine
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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