

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Henry Austin Dobson**

**- poems -**

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## **Henry Austin Dobson (18 January 1840 – 2 September 1921)**

Commonly known as Austin Dobson, was an English poet and essayist.

### Life

He was born at Plymouth, the eldest son of George Clarisse Dobson, a civil engineer, of French descent. When he was about eight, the family moved to Holyhead, and his first school was at Beaumaris in Anglesey. He was later educated at Coventry, and the Gymnase, Strasbourg. He returned at the age of sixteen with the intention of becoming a civil engineer. At the beginning of his career, he continued to study at the South Kensington School of Art, in his spare time, but without definite ambition. In December 1856 he entered the Board of Trade, gradually rising to the rank of principal in the harbour department, from which he retired in the autumn of 1901. In 1868, he had married Frances Mary, daughter of the distinguished civil engineer Nathaniel Beardmore (1816–1872) of Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, and settled at Ealing. He died in 1921 and is buried in the Westminster Cemetery, Uxbridge Rd, Hanwell, Middlesex.

### Works

His official career was uneventful, but as a poet and biographer he was distinguished. Those who study his work are struck by its maturity. It was about 1864 that he turned his attention to writing original prose and verse, and some of his earliest work was his best. It was not until 1868 that the appearance of *St Paul's*, a magazine edited by Anthony Trollope, gave Harry Dobson an opportunity and an audience; and during the next six years he contributed some of his favourite poems, including "Tu Quoque," "A Gentleman of the Old School," "A Dialogue from Plato," and "Une Marquise." Many of his poems in their original form were illustrated—some, indeed, were written to support illustrations.

By the autumn of 1873 Dobson had produced enough verse for a volume, and published *Vignettes in Rhyme*, which quickly went through three editions. During the period of their appearance in the magazine the poems had received unusual attention, <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/george-eliot-mary-ann-evans/">George Eliot</a>, among others, encouraging the anonymous author. The little book immediately introduced him to a larger public. The period was an interesting one for a first appearance, since the air was full of metrical experiment. <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/algernon-charles-swinburne/">Swinburne's</a> bold excursions into classical metre had broken new ground; it was hopeless to attempt to compete, and the poets of the day were looking for fresh forms and variations. Early in 1876, a small body of English poets

discovered the French forms of <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/theodore-de-banville/">Théodore de Banville</a>, <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/clement-marot/">Clement Marot</a> and <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/fran-ois-villon/">François Villon</a>, and determined to introduce them into English verse.

Austin Dobson, who had already made successful use of the triolet, was at the head of this movement, and in May 1876 he published in *The Prodigals* the first original ballade written in English. This he followed by English versions of the rondel, rondeau and villanelle. An article in the *Cornhill Magazine* by Edmund Gosse, "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse," appearing in July 1877, simultaneously with Dobson's second volume, *Proverbs in Porcelain*, drew the general eye to the possibilities and achievements of the movement. The experiment was deemed a success. In 1883 Dobson published *Old-World Idylls*, which contained some of his most characteristic work. By this time his taste was gradually settling on the period with which it has since become almost exclusively associated; and the spirit of the 18th century was revived in "The Ballad of Beau Brocade" and in "The Story of Rosina", as nowhere else in modern English poetry. In "Beau Brocade", the pictorial quality of his work is at its very best. He has been compared with Randolph Caldecott, with which it has much in common; but Dobson's humour was not so "rollicking" and his portraiture not so broad as that of the illustrator of John Gilpin. His appeal was more intellectual.

*At the Sign of the Lyre* (1885) was the next of Dobson's separate volumes of verse, and he also published a volume of *Collected Poems* (1897). *At the Sign of the Lyre* contains much variety. The admirably fresh and breezy "Ladies of St James's" has precisely the qualities we have traced in his other 18th-century poems; there are ballades and rondeaus, with all the earlier charm; and in "A Revolutionary Relic," as in "The Child Musician" of the *Old-World Idylls*, the poet reaches a depth of true pathos which he does not often attempt, but in which, when he seeks it, he never fails. Contrasting with these are the light occasional verses, influenced by Winthrop Mackworth Praed, but also quite individual. The chief novelty in *At the Sign of the Lyre* was the series of "Fables of Literature and Art," founded in manner upon John Gay. It is in these perhaps, more than in any other of his poems, that we see how Dobson interpenetrates the literature of fancy with the literature of judgment.

After 1885 Dobson was engaged mainly in critical and biographical prose, by which he added considerably to the general knowledge of his favourite 18th century. His biographies of Henry Fielding (1883), Thomas Bewick (1884), Richard Steele (1886), Oliver Goldsmith (1888), Horace Walpole (1890) and William Hogarth (1879-1891-1897-1902-1907) are studies marked alike by assiduous research, sympathetic presentation and sound criticism. In *Four Frenchwomen* (1890), in the three series of *Eighteenth-Century Vignettes* (1892-1894-1896), and in *The Paladin of Philanthropy* (1899), which contain unquestionably his most delicate prose work, the accurate detail of each study is relieved by a charm of expression which could only be attained by a poet. In 1901 he collected his hitherto unpublished poems in a volume entitled *Carmina Votiva*.

In 2005 the Industrial/Nu metal band, Industrial Frost, used the words of a Dobson poem called "Before Sedan" as the lyrics of a song of the same name.

Works:

Principal Monographs & Stand-alone Works

[trans.] *The authentic history of Captain Castagnette: nephew of the "Man with the wooden head"* (1866), London: S.O. Beeton  
[revision of] *The Civil Service History of England: Being a Fact-Book of English White* (1870), by Frederick Averne White  
"The drama of the doctor's window" : a brief statement concerning that poem since its appearance in "St. Paul's magazine," for February, 1870: with

appendices respecting its "earlier history" (1872), London: samizdat. Only 30 copies were printed.

Vignettes in rhyme: and Vers de société. London: H. S. King. 1873.  
[text of] Marguerite's letter: ballad (1873), London : Chappell & Co.,  
composed by Elizabeth Philp

[contributor to] The London Boy Problem, Some Reasons and Remedies:  
Homes for Working Boys in London (1876), London: s.n.

Proverbs in porcelain, and other verses (1877), London: H. S. King  
Hogarth. London: Sampson Low, Marston. 1879.

A Handbook of English Literature, for the use of Candidates for Examinations,  
Public Schools, and Students generally (1880) London: Crosby Lockwood  
Eighteenth Century Essays: selected and annotated (1882), London: Kegan  
Paul, Trench

Old-world Idylls and other verses (1883), London: Kegan Paul, Trench. The  
preliminary leaf reads "This selection is based upon one published at New  
York in 1880. With a few exceptions, the pieces are chosen from Vignettes in  
Rhyme, 1873, and Proverbs in Porcelain, 1877. Both volumes are out of  
print."

Fielding (1883)

Thomas Bewick and his pupils (1884), London: Chatto & Windus

At the Sign of the Lyre. New York: Holt & Co.. 1885.

Life of Oliver Goldsmith (1888, act. [1887]), London: Walter Scott

[compiled] Pope Commemoration 1888: Loan Museum, Catalogue of Exhibits  
in the Town Hall, Twickenham (1888), Richmond: Edward King. Only 100  
copies were printed.

Poems on several occasions (1889), New York: Dodd, Mead. The 1895  
Edition contains corrections and additions to the text (pub. Kegan Paul,  
Trench, Trubner).

Horace Walpole: a memoir with an appendix of books printed at the  
Strawberry Hill press (1890), London: Osgood, McIlvaine

Four Frenchwomen (1890), London: Chatto & Windus. The work treats the  
lives of Charlotte Corday, Madame Roland, the Princess de Lamballe, and  
Madame de Genlis.

[ed.] The Citizen of The World (1891), London: Dent, by Oliver Goldsmith  
Eighteenth Century Vignettes (1892), London: Chatto & Windus

The Ballad of Beau Brocade and Other Poems of the XVIIIth Century, with  
fifty illustrations (1892), London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner. Hugh  
Thomson (illus.)

The Story of Rosina and other Verses (1895), London: Kegan Paul, Trench,  
Trubner. Hugh Thomson (illus.)

#### Posthumous Collections & Editions

The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Austin Dobson (1923), A. T. A.  
Dobson (ed.)

## A Dead Letter

I DREW it from its china tomb;—  
It came out feebly scented  
With some thin ghost of past perfume  
That dust and days had lent it.

An old, letter,—folded still!  
To read with due composure,  
I sought the sun-lit window-sill,  
Above the gray enclosure,

That glimmering in the sultry haze,  
Faint flowered, dimly shaded,  
Slumbered like Goldsmith's Madam Blaize,  
Bedizened and brocaded.

A queer old place! You 'd surely say  
Some tea-board garden-maker  
Had planned it in Dutch William's day  
To please some florist Quaker,

So trim it was. The yew-trees still,  
With pious care perverted,  
Grew in the same grim shapes; and still  
The lipless dolphin spurted;

Still in his wonted state abode  
The broken-nosed Apollo;  
And still the cypress-arbor showed  
The same umbrageous hollow.

Only,—as fresh young Beauty gleams  
From coffee-colored laces,—  
So peeped from its old-fashioned dreams  
The fresher modern traces;

For idle mallet, hoop, and ball  
Upon the lawn were lying;  
A magazine, a tumbled shawl,  
Round which the swifts were flying;

And, tossed beside the Guelder rose,  
A heap of rainbow knitting,  
Where, blinking in her pleased repose,  
A Persian cat was sitting.

"A place to love in,—live,—for aye,  
If we too, like Tithonus,  
Could find some God to stretch the gray  
Scant life the Fates have thrown us;

"But now by steam we run our race,  
With buttoned heart and pocket;

Our Love's a gilded, surplus grace,—  
Just like an empty locket!

"The time is out of joint.' Who will,  
May strive to make it better;  
For me, this warm old window-sill,  
And this old dusty letter."

## II

"Dear John (the letter ran), it can't, can't be,  
For Father's gone to Chorley Fair with Sam,  
And Mother's storing Apples,—Prue and Me  
Up to our Elbows making Damson Jam:  
But we shall meet before a Week is gone,—  
'T is a long Lane that has no turning,' John!

"Only till Sunday next, and then you 'll wait  
Behind the White-Thorn, by the broken Stile—  
We can go round and catch them at the Gate,  
All to Ourselves, for nearly one long Mile;  
Dear Prue won't look, and Father he'll go on,  
And Sam's two Eyes are all for Cissy, John!

"John, she 's so smart,—with every ribbon new,  
Flame-colored Sack, and Crimson Padesoy;  
As proud as proud; and has the Vapours too,  
Just like My Lady;—calls poor Sam a Boy,  
And vows no Sweet-heart's worth the Thinking-on  
Till he 's past Thirty ... I know better, John!

"My Dear, I don't think that I thought of much  
Before we knew each other, I and you;  
And now, why, John, your least, least Finger-touch,  
Gives me enough to think a Summer through.  
See, for I send you Something! There, 't is gone!  
Look in this corner,—mind you find it, John!"

## III

This was the matter of the note,—  
A long-forgot deposit,  
Dropped in an Indian dragon's throat,  
Deep in a fragrant closet,

Piled with a dapper Dresden world,—  
Beaux, beauties, prayers, and poses,—  
Bonzes with squat legs undercurled,  
And great jars filled with roses.

Ah, heart that wrote! Ah, lips that kissed!  
You had no thought or presage  
Into what keeping you dismissed  
Your simple old-world message!

A reverent one. Though we to-day  
Distrust beliefs and powers,  
The artless, ageless things you say  
Are fresh as May's own flowers,

Starring some pure primeval spring,  
Ere Gold had grown despotic,—  
Ere Life was yet a selfish thing,  
Or Love a mere exotic!

I need not search too much to find  
Whose lot it was to send it,  
That feel upon me yet the kind,  
Soft hand of her who penned it;

And see, through twoscore years of smoke,  
In by-gone, quaint apparel,  
Shine from yon time-black Norway oak  
The face of Patience Caryl,—

The pale, smooth forehead, silver-tressed;  
The gray gown, primly flowered;  
The spotless, stately coif whose crest  
Like Hector's horse-plume towered;

And still the sweet half-solemn look  
Where some past thought was clinging,  
As when one shuts a serious book  
To hear the thrushes singing.

I kneel to you! Of those you were,  
Whose kind old hearts grow mellow,—  
Whose fair old faces grow more fair  
As Point and Flanders yellow;

Whom some old store of garnered grief,  
Their placid temples shading,  
Crowns like a wreath of autumn leaf  
With tender tints of fading.

Peace to your soul! You died unwed—  
Despite this loving letter.  
And what of John? The less that 's said  
Of John, I think, the better.

Henry Austin Dobson

## A Familiar Epistle

DEAR COSMOPOLITAN,—I know  
I should address you a Rondeau,  
Or else announce what I 've to say  
At least en Ballade fratriséé  
But No: for once I leave Gymnasticks,  
And take to simple Hudibrasticks,  
Why should I choose another Way,  
When this was good enough for GAY?

You love, my FRIEND, with me I think,  
That Age of Lustre and of Link;  
Of Chelsea China and long "s"es,  
Of Bag-wigs and of flowered Dresses;  
That Age of Folly and of Cards,  
Of Hackney Chairs and Hackney Bards;  
—No H-LTS, no K-G-N P-LS were then  
Dispensing Competence to Men;  
The gentle Trade was left to Churls,  
Your frowsy TONSONS and your CURLLS;  
Mere Wolves in Ambush to attack  
The AUTHOR in a Sheep-skin Back;  
Then SAVAGE and his Brother-Sinners  
In Porridge Island div'd for Dinners;  
Or doz'd on Covent Garden Bulks,  
And liken'd Letters to the Hulks;—  
You know that by-gone Time, I say,  
That aimless easy-moral'd Day,  
When rosy Morn found MADAM still  
Wrangling at Ombre or Quadrille,  
When good SIR JOHN reel'd Home to Bed,  
From Pontack's or the Shakespeare's's Head;  
When TRIP convey'd his Master's Cloaths,  
And took his Titles and his Oaths;  
While BETTY, in a cast Brocade,  
Ogled MY LORD at Masquerade;  
When GARRICK play'd the guilty Richard,  
Or mouth'd Macbeth with Mrs. PRITCHARD;  
When FOOTE grimaced his snarling Wit;  
When CHURCHILL bullied in the Pit;  
When the CUZZONI sang—  
But there!  
The further Catalogue I spare,  
Having no Purpose to eclipse  
That tedious Tale of HOMER'S Ships;—  
This is the MAN that drew it all  
From Pannier Alley to the Mall,  
Then turn'd and drew it once again  
From Bird-Cage-Walk to Lewknor's Lane;—  
Its Rakes and Fools, its Rogues and Sots;  
Its brawling Quacks, its starveling Scots;  
Its Ups and Downs, its Rags and Garters,  
Its HENLEYS, LOVATS, MALCOLMS, CHARTRES,

Its Splendor, Squalor, Shame, Disease;  
Its quicquid agunt Homines;—  
Nor yet omitted to pourtray  
Furens quid possit Foemina;—  
In short, held up to ev'ry Class  
NATURE'S unflatt'ring looking-Glass;  
And, from his Canvas, spoke to All  
The Message of a JUVENAL.

Take Him. His Merits most aver:  
His weak Point is—his Chronicler!

Henry Austin Dobson

## A Gage D'Amour

Charles,—for it seems you wish to know,—  
You wonder what could scare me so,  
And why, in this long-locked bureau,  
With trembling fingers,—  
With tragic air, I now replace  
This ancient web of yellow lace,  
Among whose faded folds the trace  
Of perfume lingers.

Friend of my youth, severe as true,  
I guess the train your thoughts pursue;  
But this my state is nowise due  
To indigestion;  
I had forgotten it was there,  
A scarf that Some-one used to wear.  
Hinc illæ lacrimæ,—so spare  
Your cynic question.

Some-one who is not girlish now,  
And wed long since. We meet and bow;  
I don't suppose our broken vow  
Affects us keenly;  
Yet, trifling though my act appears,  
Your Sternes would make it ground for tears;—  
One can't disturb the dust of years,  
And smile serenely.

"My golden locks" are gray and chill,  
For hers,—let them be sacred still;  
But yet, I own, a boyish thrill  
Went dancing through me,  
Charles, when I held yon yellow lace;  
For, from its dusty hiding-place,  
Peeped out an arch, ingenuous face  
That beckoned to me.

We shut our heart up nowadays,  
Like some old music-box that plays  
Unfashionable airs that raise  
Derisive pity;  
Alas,—a nothing starts the spring;  
And lo, the sentimental thing  
At once commences quavering  
Its lover's ditty.

Laugh, if you like. The boy in me,—  
The boy that was,—revived to see  
The fresh young smile that shone when she,  
Of old, was tender.  
Once more we trod the Golden Way,—  
That mother you saw yesterday,  
And I, whom none can well portray

As young, or slender.

She twirled the flimsy scarf about  
Her pretty head, and stepping out,  
Slipped arm in mine, with half a pout  
Of childish pleasure.

Where we were bound no mortal knows,  
For then you plunged in Ireland's woes,  
And brought me blankly back to prose  
And Gladstone's measure.

Well, well, the wisest bend to Fate.  
My brown old books around me wait,  
My pipe still holds, unconfiscate,  
Its wonted station.  
Pass me the wine. To Those that keep  
The bachelor's secluded sleep  
Peaceful, inviolate, and deep,  
I pour libation.

Henry Austin Dobson

## A Garden Song

HERE in this sequester'd close  
Bloom the hyacinth and rose,  
Here beside the modest stock  
Flaunts the flaring hollyhock;  
Here, without a pang, one sees  
Ranks, conditions, and degrees.

All the seasons run their race  
In this quiet resting-place;  
Peach and apricot and fig  
Here will ripen and grow big;  
Here is store and overplus,--  
More had not Alcinoüs!

Here, in alleys cool and green,  
Far ahead the thrush is seen;  
Here along the southern wall  
Keeps the bee his festival;  
All is quiet else--afar  
Sounds of toil and turmoil are.

Here be shadows large and long;  
Here be spaces meet for song;  
Grant, O garden-god, that I,  
Now that none profane is nigh,--  
Now that mood and moment please,--  
Find the fair Pierides!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **A Kiss**

Rose kissed me to-day.  
Will she kiss me tomorrow?  
Let it be as it may,  
Rose kissed me today.  
But the pleasure gives way  
To a savour of sorrow;-  
Rose kissed me to-day,-  
Will she kiss me tomorrow?

Henry Austin Dobson

## A Miltonic Exercise

(TERCENTENARY, 1608-1908)

What need of votive Verse  
To strew thy Laureat Herse  
With that mix'd Flora of th<sup>r</sup> Aonian Hill?  
Or Mincian vocall Reed,  
That Cam and Isis breed,  
When thine own Words are burning in us still?

Bard, Prophet, Archimage!  
In this Cash-cradled Age,  
We grate our scrannel Musick, and we dote:  
Where is the Strain unknown,  
Through Bronze or Silver blown,  
That thrill'd the Welkin with thy woven Note?

Yes,--'we are selfish Men':  
Yet would we once again  
Might see Sabrina braid her amber Tire;

Or watch the Comus Crew  
Sweep down the Glade; or view  
Strange-streamer'd Craft from Javan or Gadire!

Or could we catch once more,  
High up, the Clang and Roar  
Of Angel Conflict,--Angel Overthrow;  
Or, with a World begun,  
Behold the young-ray'd Sun  
Flame in the Groves where the Four Rivers go!

Ay me, I fondly dream!  
Only the Storm-bird's Scream  
Foretells of Tempest in the Days to come;  
Nowhere is heard up-climb  
The lofty lyric Rhyme,  
And the 'God-gifted Organ-voice' is dumb.

Henry Austin Dobson

## A Pepys' 'Diary'

To One who asked why he wrote it.

You ask me what was his intent?  
In truth, I'm not a German;  
'Tis plain though that he neither meant  
A Lecture nor a Sermon.

But there it is,--the thing's a Fact.  
I find no other reason  
But that some scribbling itch attacked  
Him in and out of season,

To write what no one else should read,  
With this for second meaning,  
To 'cleans his bosom' (and indeed  
It sometimes wanted cleaning);

To speak, as 'twere, his private mind,  
Unhindered by repression,  
To make his motley life a kind,  
Of Midas' ears confession;

And thus outgrew this work \_per se\_,--  
This queer, kaleidoscopic,  
Delightful, blabbing, vivid, free  
Hotch-pot of daily topic.

So artless in its vanity,  
So fleeting, so eternal,  
So packed with 'poor Humanity'--  
We know as Pepys' his journal.

Henry Austin Dobson

## A Persian Apologue

Melek the sultan, tired and wan,  
Nodded at noon on the divan.

Beside the fountain lingered near  
Jamil the bard, and the vizier ---

Old Yusuf, cross and hard to please;  
Then Jamil sang, in words like these:

Slim is Butheina -- slim is she  
As boughs of the Araka-tree!

'Nay,' quoth the other, teeth between,  
'Learn, if you will -- I call her lean.'

Sweet is Butheina -- sweet as wine,  
With smiles that like red bubbles shine!

'True. -- by the Prophet!' Yusuf said.  
'She makes men wander in the head!'

Dear is Butheina -- ah! more dear  
Than all the maidens of Kashmeer!

'Dear,' came the answer, quick as thought,  
'Dear . . and yet always to be bought.'

So Jamil ceased. But still Life's page  
Shows diverse unto Youth and Age:

And, be the song of Ghouls or Gods,  
Time, like the Sultan, sits . . and nods.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **A Pleasant Invective Against Printing**

The Press is too much with us, small and great:  
We are undone of chatter and on dit,  
Report, retort, rejoinder, repartee,  
Mole-hill and mare's nest, fiction up-to-date,  
Babble of booklets, bicker of debate,  
Aspect of A., and attitude of B.—  
A waste of words that drive us like a sea,  
Mere derelict of Ourselves, and helpless freight!

'O for a lodge in some vast wilderness!  
Some region unapproachable of Print,  
Where never cablegram could gain access,  
And telephones were not, nor any hint  
Of tidings new or old, but Man might pipe  
His soul to Nature,— careless of the Type!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **A Rondeau to Ethel**

"IN teacup-times"! The style of dress  
Would suit your beauty, I confess;  
BELINDA-like, the patch you 'd wear;  
I picture you with powdered hair,—  
You 'd make a charming Shepherdess!  
And I—no doubt—could well express  
SIR PLUME'S complete conceitedness,—  
Could poise a clouded cane with care  
"In teacup-times"!

The parts would fit precisely—yes:  
We should achieve a huge success!  
You should disdain, and I despair,  
With quite the true Augustan air;  
But ... could I love you more, or less,—  
"In teacup-times"?

Henry Austin Dobson

## **A Song Of The Four Seasons**

When Spring comes laughing  
By vale and hill,  
By wind-flower walking  
And daffodil,-  
Sing stars of morning,  
Sing morning skies,  
Sing blue of speedwell,-  
And my Love's eyes.

When comes the Summer,  
Full-leaved and strong,  
And gay birds gossip  
The orchard long,-  
Sing hid, sweet honey  
That no bee sips;  
Sing red, red roses,-  
And my Love's lips.

When Autumn scatters  
The leaves again,  
And piled sheaves bury  
The broad-wheeled wain,-  
Sing flutes of harvest  
Where men rejoice;  
Sing rounds of reapers,-  
And my Love's voice.

But when comes Winter  
With hail and storm,  
And red fire roaring  
And ingle warm,-  
Sing first sad going  
Of friends that part;  
Then sing glad meeting,-  
And my Love's heart.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **A Song Of The Greenaway Child**

As I went a-walking on \_Lavender Hill\_,  
O, I met a Darling in frock and frill;  
And she looked at me shyly, with eyes of blue,  
'Are you going a-walking? Then take me too!'

So we strolled to the field where the cowslips grow,  
And we played--and we played, for an hour or so;  
Then we climbed to the top of the old park wall,  
And the Darling she threaded a cowslip ball.

Then we played again, till I said--'My Dear,  
This pain in my side, it has grown severe;  
I ought to have mentioned I'm past three-score,  
And I fear that I scarcely can play any more!'

But the Darling she answered, -'O no! O no!  
You must play--you must play.--I sha'n't let you go!'

--And I woke with a start and a sigh of despair,  
And I found myself safe in my Grandfather's-chair!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **A Welcome From The 'Johnson Club'**

To William John Courthope, \_March 12, 1903\_

When Pope came back from Trojan wars once more,  
He found a Bard, to meet him on the shore,  
And hail his advent with a strain as clear  
As e'er was sung by BYRON or by FRERE.

You, SIR, have travelled from no distant clime,  
Yet would JOHN GAY could welcome you in rhyme;  
And by some fable not too coldly penned,  
Teach how with judgment one may praise a Friend.

There is no need that I should tell in words  
Your prowess from \_The Paradise of Birds\_;  
No need to show how surely you have traced  
The Life in Poetry, the Law in Taste;  
Or mark with what unwearied strength you wear  
The weight that WARTON found too great to bear.  
There Is no need for this or that. My plan  
Is less to laud the Matter than the Man.

This is my brief. We recognise in you  
The mind judicial, the untroubled view;  
The critic who, without pedantic pose,  
Takes his firm foothold on the thing he knows;  
Who, free alike from passion or pretence,  
Holds the good rule of calm and common sense;  
And be the subject or perplexed or plain,--  
Clear or confusing,--is throughout urbane,  
Patient, persuasive, logical, precise,  
And only hard to vanity and vice.

More I could add, but brevity is best;--  
These are our claims to honour you as Guest.

Henry Austin Dobson

## An Epistle To An Editor

'A new Review!' You make me tremble  
(Though as to that, I can dissemble  
Till I hear more). But is it 'new'?  
And will it be a real Review?--  
I mean, a Court wherein the scales  
Weigh equally both him that fails,  
And him that hits the mark?--a place  
Where the accus'd can plead his case,  
If wrong'd? All this I need to know  
Before I (arrogant!) say 'Go.'

'We, that are very old' (the phrase  
Is STEELE'S, not mine!), in former days,  
Have seen so many 'new Reviews'  
Arise, arraign, absolve, abuse;--  
Proclaim their mission to the top  
(Where there's still room!), then slowly drop,

Shrink down, fade out, and sans preferment,  
Depart to their obscure interment;--  
We should be pardon'd if we doubt  
That a new venture can hold out.

It will, you say. Then don't be 'new';  
Be 'old.' The Old is still the True.  
Nature (said GAUTIER) never tries  
To alter her accustom'd dyes;  
And all your novelties at best  
Are ancient puppets, newly drest.  
What you must do, is not to shrink  
From speaking out the thing you think;  
And blaming where 'tis right to blame,  
Despite tradition and a Name.  
Yet don't expand a trifling blot,  
Or ban the book for what it's not  
(That is the poor device of those  
Who cavil where they can't oppose!);  
Moreover (this is very old!),  
Be courteous--even when you scold!

Blame I put first, but not at heart.  
You must give Praise the foremost part;--  
Praise that to those who write is breath  
Of Life, if just; if unjust, Death.  
Praise then the things that men revere;  
Praise what they love, not what they fear;  
Praise too the young; praise those who try;  
Praise those who fail, but by and by  
May do good work. Those who succeed,  
You'll praise perforce,--so there's no need  
To speak of that. And as to each,  
See you keep measure in your speech;--

See that your praise be so exprest  
That the best man shall get the best;  
Nor fail of the fit word you meant  
Because your epithets are spent.  
Remember that our language gives  
No limitless superlatives;  
And SHAKESPEARE, HOMER, \_should\_ have more  
Than the last knocker at the door!

'We, that are very old!'--May this  
Excuse the hint you find amiss.  
My thoughts, I feel, are what to-day  
Men call \_vieux jeu\_. Well!--'let them say.'  
The Old, at least, we know: the New  
(A changing Shape that all pursue!)  
Has been,--may be, a fraud.  
--But there!  
Wind to your sail! \_Vogue la galère!\_

Henry Austin Dobson

## Ars Victrix

YES; when the ways oppose—  
When the hard means rebel,  
Fairer the work out-grows,—  
More potent far the spell.

O Poet, then, forbear  
The loosely-sandalled verse,  
Choose rather thou to wear  
The buskin—strait and terse;

Leave to the tiro's hand  
The limp and shapeless style;  
See that thy form demand  
The labor of the file.

Sculptor, do thou discard  
The yielding clay,—consign  
To Paros marble hard  
The beauty of thy line;—

Model thy Satyr's face  
For bronze of Syracuse;  
In the veined agate trace  
The profile of thy Muse.

Painter, that still must mix  
But transient tints anew,  
Thou in the furnace fix  
The firm enamel's hue;

Let the smooth tile receive  
Thy dove-drawn Erycine;  
Thy Sirens blue at eve  
Coiled in a wash of wine.

All passes. Art alone  
Enduring stays to us;  
The Bust outlasts the throne,—  
The Coin, Tiberius;

Even the gods must go;  
Only the lofty Rhyme  
Not countless years o'erthrow,—  
Not long array of time.

Paint, chisel, then, or write;  
But, that the work surpass,  
With the hard fashion fight,—  
With the resisting mass.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **Ballad Of The Armada**

King Philip had vaunted his claims;  
He had sworn for a year he would sack us;  
With an army of heathenish names  
He was coming to fagot and stack us;  
Like the thieves of the sea he would track us,  
And shatter our ships on the main;  
But we had bold Neptune to back us--  
And where are the galleons of Spain?

His carackes were christened of dames  
To the kirtles whereof he would tack us;  
With his saints and his gilded stern-frames  
He had thought like an egg shell to crack us;  
Now Howard may get to his Flaccus,  
And Drake to his Devon again,  
And Hawkins bowl rubbers to Bacchus--  
For where are the galleons of Spain?

Let his Majesty hang to St. James  
The axe that he whetted to hack us;  
He must play at some lustier games  
Or at sea he can hope to out-thwack us;  
To his mines of Peru he would pack us  
To tug at his bullet and chain;  
Alas! that his Greatness should lack us!--  
But where are the galleons of Spain?

Henry Austin Dobson

## Before Sedan

Here is this leafy place  
Quiet he lies,  
Cold, with his sightless face  
Turn'd to the skies:  
'Tis but another dead:  
All you can say is said.

Carry his body hence !  
Kings must have slaves:  
Kings climb to eminence  
Over men's graves:  
So this man's eye is dim; ---  
Throw the earth over him !

What was the white you touch'd,  
There, at his side?  
Paper his hand had clutch'd  
Tight ere he died:  
Message or wish, may be:  
Smooth the folds out and see !

Hardly the worst of us  
Here could have smiled !  
Only the tremulous  
Words of a child:  
Prattle that has for stops  
Just a few ruddy drops.

Look ! --- 'She is sad to miss,  
Morning and night,  
His ( her dead father's ) kiss;  
Tries to be bright,  
Good to Mamma, and sweet: '  
(That is all ) --- 'Marguerite.'

Ah ! If beside the dead  
Slumber'd the pain;  
Ah ! If the hearts that bled  
Slept with the slain;  
If the grief died: --- but no !  
Death will not have it so.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **Fame Is A Food That Dead Men Eat**

Fame is a food that dead men eat,-  
I have no stomach for such meat.  
In little light and narrow room,  
They eat it in the silent tomb,  
With no kind voice of comrade near  
To bid the banquet be of cheer.

But Friendship is a nobler thing,-  
Of Friendship it is good to sing.  
For truly, when a man shall end,  
He lives in memory of his friend,  
Who doth his better part recall,  
And of his faults make funeral.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **For A Copy Of Theocritus**

O SINGER of the field and fold,  
Theocritus! Pan's pipe was thine,—  
Thine was the happier Age of Gold.

For thee the scent of new-turned mould,  
The bee-hives, and the murmuring pine,  
O Singer of the field and fold!

Thou sang'st the simple feasts of old,—  
The beechen bowl made glad with wine...  
Thine was the happier Age of Gold.

Thou bad'st the rustic loves be told,—  
Thou bad'st the tuneful reeds combine,  
O Singer of the field and fold!

And round thee, ever-laughing, rolled  
The blithe and blue Sicilian brine...  
Thine was the happier Age of Gold.

Alas for us! Our songs are cold;  
Our Northern suns too sadly shine:—  
O Singer of the field and fold,  
Thine was the happier Age of Gold!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **In After Days**

Rondeau

IN after days when grasses high  
O'er-top the stone where I shall lie,  
    Though ill or well the world adjust  
    My slender claim to honour'd dust,  
I shall not question nor reply.

I shall not see the morning sky;  
I shall not hear the night-wind sigh;  
    I shall be mute, as all men must  
In after days!

But yet, now living, fain would I  
That some one then should testify,  
    Saying--'He held his pen in trust  
    To Art, not serving shame or lust.'  
Will none?--Then let my memory die  
In after days!

Henry Austin Dobson

## Incognita

Just for a space I met her –  
Just for a day in the train!  
It began when she feared it would wet her,  
That tiniest spurtle of rain:  
So we tucked a great rug in the sashes,  
And carefully padded the pane;  
And I sorrow in sackcloth and ashes,  
Longing to do it again!

Then it grew when she begged me to reach her  
A dressing-case under the seat;  
She was "really so tiny a creature,  
That she needed a stool for her feet!"  
Which was promptly arranged to her order  
With a care that was even minute,  
And a glimpse – of an open- worked border,  
And a glance – of the fairiest boot.

Then it drooped, and revived at some hovels –  
"Were they houses for men or for pigs?"  
Then it shifted to muscular novels,  
With a little digression on prigs:  
She thought "Wives and Daughters" "so jolly";  
"Had I read it?" She knew when I had,  
Like the rest, I should dote upon "Molly";  
And "poor Mrs Gaskell – how sad!"

"Like Browning?" "But so-so." His proof lay  
"Too deep for her frivolous mood,  
That preferred your mere metrical soufflé  
To the stronger poetical food;  
Yet at times he was good – "as a tonic";  
Was Tennyson writing just now?  
And was this new poet Byronic,  
And clever, and naughty, or how?"

Then we trifled with concerts and croquet,  
Then she daintily dusted her face;  
Then she sprinkled herself with "Ess Bouquet",  
Fished out from the foregoing case;  
And we chattered of Gassier and Grisi,  
And voted Aunt Sally a bore;  
Discussed if the tight rope were easy,  
Or Chopin much harder than Spohr.

And oh! The odd things that she quoted,  
With the prettiest possible look,  
And the price of two buns that she noted  
In the prettiest possible book;  
While her talk like a musical rillet  
Flashed on with the hours that flew,  
And the carriage, her smile seemed to fill it

With just enough summer – for Two.

Till at last in her corner, peeping  
From a nest of rugs and of furs,  
With the white shut eyelids sleeping  
On those dangerous looks of hers,  
She seemed like a snowdropp breaking,  
Not wholly alive nor dead,  
But with one blind impulse making  
To the sounds of the spring overhead;

And I watched in the lamplights's swerving  
The shade of the down-dropped lid,  
And the lip-line's delicate curving,  
Where a slumbering smile lay hid,  
Till I longed that, rather than sever,  
The train should shriek into space,  
And carry us onward – for ever –  
Me and that beautiful face.

But she suddenly woke in a fidget,  
With fears she was "nearly at home",  
And talk of a certain Aunt Bridget,  
Whom I mentally wished – well at Rome;  
Got out at the very next station,  
Looking back with a merry bon soir,  
Adding, too, to my utter vexation,  
A surplus, unkind Au Revoir.

So left me to muse on her graces,  
To doze and to muse, till I dreamed  
That we sailed through the sunniest places  
In a glorified galley, it seemed;  
But the cabin was made of a carriage,  
And the ocean was Eau-de-Cologne,  
And we split on a rock labelled MARRIAGE,  
And I woke, - as cold as a stone.

And that's how I lost her – a jewel,  
Incognita – one in a crowd,  
Not prudent enough to be cruel,  
Not worldly enough to be proud.  
It was just a shut lid and its lashes,  
Just a few hours in a train,  
And I sorrow in sackcloth and ashes,  
Longing to see her again

Henry Austin Dobson

## Knickerbocker

Shade of Herrick, Muse of Locker,  
Help me sing of Knickerbocker!  
Boughton, had you bid me chant  
Hymns to Peter Stuyvesant,  
Had you bid me sing of Wouter,  
He, the onion head, the doubter!  
But to rhyme of this one—Mocker!  
Who shall rhyme to Knickerbocker?  
Nay, but where my hand must fail,  
There the more shall yours avail;  
You shall take your brush and paint  
All that ring of figures quaint,—  
All those Rip Van Winkle jokers,  
All those solid-looking smokers,  
Pulling at their pipes of amber,  
In the dark-beamed Council Chamber.

Only art like yours can touch  
Shapes so dignified—and Dutch;  
Only art like yours can show  
How the pine logs gleam and glow,  
Till the firelight laughs and passes  
'Twi'xt the tankards and the glasses,  
Touching with responsive graces  
All those grave Batavian faces,  
Making bland and beatific  
All that session soporific.

Then I come and write beneath:  
Boughton, he deserves the wreath;  
He can give us form and hue—  
This the Muse can never do!

Henry Austin Dobson

## More Poets Yet!

'More Poets yet!'-I hear him say,  
Arming his heavy hand to slay;-  
'Despite my skill and 'swashing blow,'  
They seem to sprout where'er I go;-  
I killed a host but yesterday!

Slash on, O Hercules! You may.  
Your task's, at best, a Hydra-fray;  
And though you cut, not less will grow  
More Poets yet!

Too arrogant! For who shall stay  
The first blind motions of the May?  
Who shall out-blot the morning glow?-  
Or stem the full heart's overflow?  
Who? There will rise, till Time decay,  
More Poets yet!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **My Little Boy That Died**

Look at his pretty face for just one minute !  
His braided frock and dainty buttoned shoes,  
His firm-shut hand, the favorite plaything in it,  
Then, tell me, mothers, was it not hard to lose  
And miss him from my side,—  
My little boy that died?

How many another boy, as dear and charming,  
His father's hope, his mother's one delight,  
Slips through strange sicknesses, all fear disarming, And lives a long, long life in  
parents' sight  
Mine was so short a pride:  
And then—my poor boy died.

I see him rocking on his wooden charger;  
I hear him pattering through the house all day;  
I watch his great blue eyes grow large and larger, Listening to stories, whether grave  
or gay  
Told at the bright fireside—  
So dark now, since he died.

But yet I often think my boy is living,  
As living as my other children are.  
When good-night kisses I all round am giving  
I keep one for him, though he is so far.  
Can a mere grave divide  
Me from him—though he died?

So, while I come and plant it o'er with daisies  
(Nothing but childish daisies all year round)  
Continually God's hand the curtain raises,  
And I can hear his merry voice's sound,  
And I feel him at my side—  
My little boy that died.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **O Fons Bandusae**

O BABBLING Spring, than glass more clear,  
Worthy of wreath and cup sincere,  
To-morrow shall a kid be thine  
With swelled and sprouting brows for sign,—  
Sure sign!—of loves and battles near.

Child of the race that butt and rear!  
Not less, alas! his life-blood dear  
Must tinge thy cold wave crystalline,  
O babbling Spring!

Thee Sirius knows not. Thou dost cheer  
With pleasant cool the plough-worn steer,—  
The wandering flock. This verse of mine  
Will rank thee one with founts divine;  
Men shall thy rock and tree revere,  
O babbling Spring!

Henry Austin Dobson

## On a Fan That Belonged to the Marquise de Pompadour

Chicken-skin, delicate, white,  
Painted by Carlo Vanloo,  
Loves in a riot of light,  
Roses and vaporous blue;  
Hark to the dainty frou-frou!  
Picture above, if you can,  
Eyes that could melt as the dew,—  
This was the Pompadour's fan!

See how they rise at the sight,  
Thronging the CEil de Boeuf through,  
Courtiers as butterflies bright,  
Beauties that Fragonard drew,  
Talon-rouge, falbala, queue,  
Cardinal, Duke,—to a man,  
Eager to sigh or to sue,—  
This was the Pompadour's fan!

Ah, but things more than polite  
Hung on this toy, voyez-vous!  
Matters of state and of might,  
Things that great ministers do;  
Things that, may be, overthrew  
Those in whose brains they began;  
Here was the sign and the cue,—  
This was the Pompadour's fan!

### ENVOY

Where are the secrets it knew?  
Weavings of plot and of plan?  
—But where is the Pompadour, too?  
This was the Pompadour's Fan!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **On A Nankin Plate**

'Ah, me, but it might have been!  
Was there ever so dismal a fate?' -  
Quoth the little blue mandarin.

'Such a maid as was never seen!  
She passed, though I cried to her 'Wait' -  
Ah me, but it might have been!

'I cried, 'O my Flower, my Queen,  
Be mine!' 'Twas precipitate' -  
Quoth the little blue mandarin -

'But then . . . she was just sixteen,  
Long-eyed - as a lily straight -  
Ah me, but it might have been!

'As it was, from her palankeen,  
She laughed - 'You're a week too late!' '  
(Quoth the little blue mandarin.)

'That is why, in a mist of spleen,  
I mourn on this Nankin Plate.  
Ah me, but it might of been!' -  
Quoth the little blue mandarin.

Henry Austin Dobson

## On The Future Of Poetry

Bards of the Future! you that come  
With striding march, and roll of drum,  
What will your newest challenge be  
To our prose-bound community?  
What magic will you find to stir  
The limp and languid listener?  
Will it be daring and dramatic?  
Will it be frankly democratic?  
Will Pegasus return again  
In guise of modern aeroplane,  
Descending from a cloudless blue  
To drop on us a bomb or two?  
I know not. Far be it from me  
To darken dark futurity;  
Still less to render more perplexed  
The last vagary, or the next.  
Leave Pindus Hill to those who list,  
Iconoclast or anarchist -  
So be it. 'They that break shall pay.'  
I stand upon the ancient way.  
I hold it for a certain thing,  
That, blank or rhyming, song must sing;  
And more, that what is good for verse,  
Need not, by dint of rhyme, grow worse.  
I hold that they who deal in rhyme  
Must take the standpoint of the time -  
But not to catch the public ear,  
As mountebank or pulpiteer;  
That the old notes are still the new,  
If the musician's touch be true -  
Nor can the hand that knows its trade  
Achieve the trite and ready-made;  
That your first theme is Human Life,  
Its hopes and fears, its love and strife -  
A theme no custom can efface,  
Common, but never commonplace;  
For this, beyond all doubt, is plain:  
The Truth that pleased will please again,  
And move men as in bygone years  
When Hector's wife smiled through her tears.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **On The Hurry Of This Time**

With slower pen men used to write,  
Of old, when 'letters' were 'polite';  
In Anna's, or in George's days,  
They could afford to turn a phrase,  
Or trim a stragglng theme aright.

They knew not steam; electric light  
Not yet had dazed their calmer sight; -  
They meted out both blame and praise  
With slower pen.

Too swiftly now the hours take flight!  
What's read at morn is dead at night;  
Scant space have we for Art's delays,  
Whose breathless thought so briefly stays,  
We may not work - ah! would we might! -  
With slower pen.

Henry Austin Dobson

## Rondeau

In after days when grasses high  
O'er-top the stone where I shall lie,  
Though ill or well the world adjust  
My slender claim to honour'd dust,  
I shall not question nor reply.

I shall not see the morning sky;  
I shall not hear the night-wind sigh;  
I shall be mute, as all men must  
In after days!

But yet, now living, fain would I  
That some one then should testify,  
Saying - 'He held his pen in trust  
To Art, not serving shame or lust.'  
Will none? - Then let my memory die  
In after days!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **Rose Leaves**

I intended an Ode,  
And it turned to a Sonnet.  
It began à la mode,  
I intended an Ode;  
But Rose cross'd the road  
In her latest new bonnet; I intended an Ode;  
And it turned to a Sonnet.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **The Ballad[e] Of Imitation**

If they hint, O Musician, the piece that you played  
Is nought but a copy of Chopin or Spohr;  
That the ballad you sing is but merely 'conveyed'  
From the stock of the Arnes and the Purcells of yore;  
That there's nothing, in short, in the words or the score  
That is not as out-worn as the 'Wandering Jew,'  
Make answer-Beethoven could scarcely do more-  
That the man who plants cabbages imitates, too!

If they tell you, Sir Artist, your light and your shade  
Are simply 'adapted' from other men's lore;  
That-plainly to speak of a 'spade' as a 'spade'-  
You've 'stolen' your grouping from three or from four;  
That (however the writer the truth may deplore),  
'Twas Gainsborough painted your 'Little Boy Blue';  
Smile only serenely-though cut to the core-  
For the man who plants cabbages imitates, too!

And you too, my Poet, be never dismayed  
If they whisper your Epic-'Sir Eperon d'Or'-  
Is nothing but Tennyson thinly arrayed  
In a tissue that's taken from Morris's store;  
That no one, in fact, but a child could ignore  
That you 'lift' or 'accommodate' all that you do;  
Take heart-though your Pegasus' withers be sore-  
For the man who plants cabbages imitates, too!

POSTSCRIPTUM-And you, whom we all so adore,  
Dear Critics, whose verdicts are always so new!-  
One word in your ear. There were Critics before . . .  
And the man who plants cabbages imitates, too!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **The Ballad[e] Of The Bore**

I see him come from far,  
And, sick with hopelessness,  
Invoke some kindly star,-  
I see him come, no less.  
Is there no sure recess  
Where hunted men may lie?  
Ye gods, it is too hard!  
I feel his glittering eye,-  
Defend us from The Bard!

He knows nor let nor bar:  
With ever-nearing stress,  
Like Juggernaut his car,  
I see him onward press;  
He waves a huge MS.;  
He puts evasion by,  
He stands-as one on guard,  
And reads-how volubly!-  
Defend us from The Bard!

He reads-of Fates that mar,  
Of Woes beyond redress,  
Of all the Moons that are,  
Of Maids that never bless,  
(As one, indeed, might guess);  
Of Vows, of Hopes too high,  
Of Dolours by the yard  
That none believe (nor buy),-  
Defend us from The Bard!

### **ENVOY**

Prince Phoebus, all must die,  
Or well- or evil-starred,  
Or whole of heart or scarred;  
But why in this way-why?  
Defend us from The Bard!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **The Cradle**

HOW steadfastly she worked at it!  
How lovingly had drest  
With all her would-be-mother's wit  
That little rosy nest!

How longingly she 'd hung on it!—  
It sometimes seemed, she said,  
There lay beneath its coverlet  
A little sleeping head.

He came at last, the tiny guest,  
Ere bleak December fled;  
That rosy nest he never prest...  
Her coffin was his bed.

Henry Austin Dobson

## The Dance Of Death

He is the despots' Despot. All must bide,  
Later or soon, the message of his might;  
Princes and potentates their heads must hide,  
Touched by the awful sigil of his right;  
Beside the Kaiser he at eve doth wait  
And pours a potion in his cup of state;  
The stately Queen his bidding must obey;  
No keen-eyed Cardinal shall him affray;  
And to the Dame that wantoneth he saith-  
'Let be, Sweet-heart, to junket and to play.'  
There is no King more terrible than Death.

The lusty Lord, rejoicing in his pride,  
He draweth down; before the armed Knight  
With jingling bridle-rein he still doth ride;  
He crosseth the strong Captain in the fight;  
The Burgher grave he beckons from debate;  
He hales the Abbot by his shaven pate,  
Nor for the Abbess' wailing will delay;  
No bawling Mendicant shall say him nay;  
E'en to the pyx the Priest he followeth,  
Nor can the Leech\* his chilling finger stay . . . [doctor]  
There is no King more terrible than Death.

All things must bow to him. And woe betide  
The Wine-bibber,-the Roisterer by night;  
Him the feast-master, many bouts defied,  
Him 'twixt the pledging and the cup shall smite;  
Woe to the Lender at usurious rate,  
The hard Rich Man, the hireling Advocate;  
Woe to the Judge that selleth Law for pay;  
Woe to the Thief that like a beast of prey  
With creeping tread the traveller harryeth:-  
These, in their sin, the sudden sword shall slay . . .  
There is no King more terrible than Death.

He hath no pity, - nor will be denied.  
When the low hearth is garnished and bright,  
Grimly he flingeth the dim portal wide,  
And steals the Infant in the Mother's sight;  
He hath no pity for the scorned of fate:-  
He spares not Lazarus lying at the gate,  
Nay, nor the Blind that stumbleth as he may;  
Nay, the tired Ploughman,-at the sinking ray,-  
In the last furrow,-feels an icy breath,  
And knows a hand hath turned the team astray . . .  
There is no King more terrible than Death.

He hath no pity. For the new-made Bride,  
Blithe with the promise of her life's delight,  
That wanders gladly by her Husband's side,  
He with the clatter of his drum doth fright.

He scares the Virgin at the convent grate;  
The Maid half-won, the Lover passionate;  
He hath no grace for weakness and decay:  
The tender Wife, the Widow bent and gray,  
The feeble Sire whose footstep faltereth,-  
All these he leadeth by the lonely way . . .  
There is no King more terrible than Death.

ENVOY

Youth, for whose ear and monishing of late,  
I sang of Prodigals and lost estate,  
Have thou thy joy of living and be gay;  
But know not less that there must come a day,-  
Aye, and perchance e'en now it hasteneth,-  
When thine own heart shall speak to thee and say,-  
There is no King more terrible than Death.

Henry Austin Dobson

## The Forgotten Grave

OUT from the City's dust and roar,  
You wandered through the open door;  
Paused at a plaything pail and spade  
Across a tiny hillock laid;  
Then noted on your dexter side  
Some moneyed mourner's "love or pride;"  
And so,—beyond a hawthorn-tree,  
Showering its rain of rosy bloom  
Alike on low and lofty tomb,—  
You came upon it—suddenly.

How strange! The very grasses' growth  
Around it seemed forlorn and loath;  
The very ivy seemed to turn  
Askance that wreathed the neighbor urn.  
The slab had sunk; the head declined,  
And left the rails a wreck behind.  
No name; you traced a "6,"—a "7,"—  
Part of "affliction" and of "Heaven;"  
And then, in letters sharp and clear,  
You read—O Irony austere!—  
"Tho' lost to Sight, to Mem'ry dear."

Henry Austin Dobson

## **The Friend Of Humanity And The Rhymer**

F. OF H. I want a verse. It gives you little pains;--  
You just sit down, and draw upon your brains.

Come, now, be amiable.

R. To hear you talk,  
You'd make it easier to fly than walk.  
You seem to think that rhyming is a thing  
You can produce if you but touch a spring;

That fancy, fervour, passion--and what not,

Are just a case of 'penny in the slot.'  
You should reflect that no evasive bird  
Is half so shy as is your fittest word;  
And even similes, however wrought,  
Like hares, before you cook them, must be caught;--

Impromptus, too, require elaboration,  
And (unlike eggs) grow fresh by incubation;  
Then,--as to epigrams,..

F. of H. Nay, nay, I've done.  
I did but make petition. You make fun.

R. Stay. I am grave. Forgive me if I ramble:  
But, then, a negative needs some preamble  
To break the blow. I feel with you, in truth,  
These complex miseries of Age and Youth;  
I feel with you--and none can feel it more  
Than I--this burning Problem of the Poor;  
The Want that grinds, the Mystery of Pain,  
The Hearts that sink, and never rise again;--  
How shall I set this to some careless screech,  
Or jiggling stave, when Help is what you need,  
Help, Help,--more Help?

F. of H. I fancied that with ease  
You'd scribble off some verses that might please,  
And so give help to us.

R. Why then--TAKE THESE!

Henry Austin Dobson

## The Happy Printer

The Printer's is a happy lot:  
Alone of all professions,  
No fateful smudges ever blot  
His earliest 'impressions.'

The outgrowth of his youthful ken  
No cold obstruction fetters;  
He quickly learns the 'types' of men,  
And all the world of 'letters.'

With 'forms' he scorns to compromise;  
For him no 'rule' has terrors;  
The 'slips' he makes he can 'revise'--  
They are but 'printers' errors.'

From doubtful questions of the 'Press'  
He wisely holds aloof;  
In all polemics, more or less,  
His argument is 'proof.'

Save in their 'case,' with High and Low,  
Small need has he to grapple!  
Without dissent he still can go  
To his accustomed 'Chapel,'

From ills that others scape or shirk,  
He rarely fails to rally;  
For him, his most 'composing' work  
Is labour of the 'galley.'

Though ways be foul, and days are dim,  
He makes no lamentation;  
The primal 'fount' of woe to him  
Is--want of occupation:

And when, at last, Time finds him grey  
With over-close attention,  
He solves the problem of the day,  
And gets an Old Age pension.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **The Ladies Of St. James's**

THE LADIES of St. James's  
Go swinging to the play;  
Their footmen run before them,  
With a "Stand by! Clear the way!"  
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!  
She takes her buckled shoon,  
When we go out a-courting  
Beneath the harvest moon.

The ladies of St. James's  
Wear satin on their backs;  
They sit all night at Ombre,  
With candles all of wax:  
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!  
She dons her russet gown,  
And runs to gather May dew  
Before the world is down.

The ladies of St. James's!  
They are so fine and fair,  
You 'd think a box of essences  
Was broken in the air:  
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!  
The breath of heath and furze,  
When breezes blow at morning,  
Is not so fresh as hers.

The ladies of St. James's!  
They 're painted to the eyes;  
Their white it stays for ever,  
Their red it never dies:  
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!  
Her color comes and goes;  
It trembles to a lily,—  
It wavers to a rose.

The ladies of St. James's!  
You scarce can understand  
The half of all their speeches,  
Their phrases are so grand:  
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!  
Her shy and simple words  
Are clear as after rain-drops  
The music of the birds.

The ladies of St. James's!  
They have their fits and freaks;  
They smile on you—for seconds,  
They frown on you—for weeks:  
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!  
Come either storm or shine,  
From Shrove-tide unto Shrove-tide,

Is always true—and mine.

My Phyllida! my Phyllida!  
I care not though they heap  
The hearts of all St. James's,  
And give me all to keep;  
I care not whose the beauties  
Of all the world may be,  
For Phyllida—for Phyllida  
Is all the world to me!

Henry Austin Dobson

## The Last Proof

### An Epilogue To Any Book

'FINIS at last--the end, the End, the END!  
No more of paragraphs to prune or mend;  
No more blue pencil, with its ruthless line,  
To blot the phrase 'particularly fine';  
No more of 'slips,' and 'galleys,' and 'revises,'  
Of words 'transmogrified,' and 'wild surmises';  
No more of \_n\_'s that masquerade as \_u\_'s,  
No nice perplexities of \_p\_'s and \_q\_'s;  
No more mishaps of \_ante\_ and of \_post\_,  
That most mislead when they should help the most;  
No more of 'friend' as 'fiend,' and 'warm' as 'worm';  
No more negations where we would affirm;  
No more of those mysterious freaks of fate  
That make us bless when we should execrate;  
No more of those last blunders that remain  
Where we no more can set them right again;

No more apologies for doubtful data;  
No more fresh facts that figure as Errata;  
No more, in short, O TYPE, of wayward lore  
From thy most \_un\_-Pierian fount--NO MORE!

So spoke PAPYRIUS. Yet his hand meanwhile  
Went vaguely seeking for the vacant file,  
Late stored with long array of notes, but now  
Bare-wired and barren as a leafless bough;--  
And even as he spoke, his mind began  
Again to scheme, to purpose and to plan.

There is no end to Labour 'neath the sun;  
There is no end of labouring--but One;  
And though we 'twitch (or not) our Mantle blue,'  
'To-morrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.'

Henry Austin Dobson

## The Paradox Of Time

Time goes, you say? Ah no!  
Alas, Time stays, we go;  
Or else, were this not so,  
What need to chain the hours,  
For Youth were always ours?  
Time goes, you say?-ah no!

Ours is the eyes' deceit  
Of men whose flying feet  
Lead through some landscape low;  
We pass, and think we see  
The earth's fixed surface flee:-  
Alas, Time stays,-we go!

Once in the days of old,  
Your locks were curling gold,  
And mine had shamed the crow.  
Now, in the self-same stage,  
We've reached the silver age;  
Time goes, you say?-ah no!

Once, when my voice was strong,  
I filled the woods with song  
To praise your 'rose' and 'snow';  
My bird, that sang, is dead;  
Where are your roses fled?  
Alas, Time stays,-we go!

See, in what traversed ways,  
What backward Fate delays  
The hopes we used to know;  
Where are our old desires?-  
Ah, where those vanished fires?  
Time goes, you say?-ah no!

How far, how far, O Sweet,  
The past behind our feet  
Lies in the even-glow!  
Now, on the forward way,  
Let us fold hands, and pray;  
Alas, Time stays,-we go!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **The Passionate Printer To His Love**

Come live with me and be my Dear;  
And till that happy bond shall lapse,  
I'll set your Poutings in Brevier,  
Your praises in the largest CAPS.

There's Diamond-'tis for your Eyes;  
There's Ruby-that will match your Lips;  
Pearl, for your Teeth; and Minion-size  
To suit your dainty Finger-tips.

In Nonpareil I'll put your Face;  
In Rubric shall your Blushes rise;  
There is no Bourgeois in your Case;  
Your Form can never need 'Revise.'

Your Cheek seems 'Ready for the Press';  
Your laugh as Clarendon is clear;  
There's more distinction in your Dress  
Than in the oldest Elzevir.

So with me live, and with me die;  
And may no 'Finis' e'er intrude  
To break into mere 'Printer's Pie'  
The Type of our Beatitude!

(Erratum.-If my suit you flout,  
And choose some happier Youth to wed,  
'Tis but to cross 'Amanda' out,  
And read another name instead.)  
Amandus Typographicus

Henry Austin Dobson

## The Rondeau

You bid me try, Blue Eyes, to write  
A Rondeau. What! Forthwith!--Tonight?  
Reflect. Some skill I have, 'tis true;  
But thirteen lines!--and rhymed on two!--  
'Refrain,' as well. Ah, hapless plight!

Still, there are five lines--ranged aright.  
These Gallic bonds, I feared, would fright  
My easy Muse. They did, till you--  
You bid me try!

That makes them eight.--The port's in sight:  
'Tis all because your eyes are bright!  
Now just a pair to end in 'oo,'--  
When maids command, what can't we do!  
Behold!--the Rondeau, tasteful, light,  
You bid me try!

Henry Austin Dobson



Swinging a beaver with a swaling plume,  
A ribboned love-lock rippling from his head.

Blue-eyed, frank-faced, with clear and open brow,  
Scar-seamed a little, as the women love;  
So kindly fronted that you marvelled how  
The frequent sword-hilt had so frayed his glove;

Who switched at Psyche plunging in the sun;  
Uncrowned three lilies with a backward swinge;  
And standing somewhat widely, like to one  
More used to 'Boot and Saddle' than to cringe

As courtiers do, but gentleman withal,  
Took out the note;--held it as one who feared  
The fragile thing he held would slip and fall;  
Read and re-read, pulling his tawny beard;

Kissed it, I think, and hid it in his breast;  
Laughed softly in a flattered, happy way,  
Arranged the broidered baldrick on his crest,  
And sauntered past, singing a roundelay.

\* \* \* \* \*

The shade crept forward through the dying glow;  
There came no more nor dame nor cavalier;  
But for a little time the brass will show  
A small gray spot,--the record of a tear.

Henry Austin Dobson

## To A Greek Girl

WITH breath of thyme and bees that hum,  
Across the years you seem to come,—  
Across the years with nymph-like head,  
And wind-blown brows unfilleted;  
A girlish shape that slips the bud  
In lines of unspoiled symmetry;  
A girlish shape that stirs the blood  
With pulse of Spring, Autonoe!

Where'er you pass,—where'er you go,  
I hear the pebbly rillet flow;  
Where'er you go,—where'er you pass,  
There comes a gladness on the grass;  
You bring blithe airs where'er you tread,—  
Blithe airs that blow from down and sea;  
You wake in me a Pan not dead,—  
Not wholly dead!—Autonoe!

How sweet with you on some green sod  
To wreath the rustic garden-god;  
How sweet beneath the chestnut's shade  
With you to weave a basket-braid;  
To watch across the stricken chords  
Your rosy-twinkling fingers flee;  
To woo you in soft woodland words,  
With woodland pipe, Autonoe!

In vain,—in vain! The years divide:  
Where Thames rolls a murky tide,  
I sit and fill my painful reams,  
And see you only in my dreams;—  
A vision, like Alcestis, brought  
From under-lands of Memory,—  
A dream of Form in days of Thought,—  
A dream,—a dream, Autonoe!

Henry Austin Dobson

## To Richard Watson Gilder

Old friends are best! And so to you  
Again I send, in closer throng,  
No unfamiliar shapes of song,  
But those that once you liked and knew.  
You surely will not do them wrong;  
For are you not an old friend, too? -  
Old friends are best.  
Old books, old wine, old Nankin blue; -  
All things, in short, to which belong  
The charm, the grace that Time makes strong, -  
All these I prize, but (entre nous)  
Old friends are best.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **Urceus Exit**

Triolet

I INTENDED an Ode,  
    And it turn'd to a Sonnet  
It began a la mode,  
I intended an Ode;  
But Rose cross'd the road  
    In her latest new bonnet;  
I intended an Ode;  
    And it turn'd to a Sonnet.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **When Burbadge Played**

When Burbadge played, the stage was bare  
Of fount and temple, tower and stair;  
Two backwords eked a battle out;  
Two supers made a rabble rout;  
The throne of Denmark was a chair!

And yet, no less, the audience there  
Thrilled, through all changes of Despair,  
Hope, Anger, Fear, Delight, and Doubt  
When Burbadge played!

This is the Actor's gift: to share  
All moods, all passions, nor to care  
One whit for scene, so he without  
Can lead men's minds the roundabout  
Stirred as of old those hearers were,  
When Burbadge played!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **When There Is Peace**

“When there is Peace our land no more  
Will be the land we knew of yore.”  
Thus do our facile seers foretell  
The truth that none can buy or sell  
And e’en the wisest must ignore.

When we have bled at every pore,  
Shall we still strive for gear and store?  
Will it be Heaven? Will it be Hell,  
When there is Peace?

This let us pray for, this implore:  
That all base dreams thrust out at door,  
We may in loftier aims excel  
And, like men waking from a spell,  
Grow stronger, nobler, than before,  
When there is Peace.

Henry Austin Dobson

## **When This Old World Was New**

When this old world was new,  
Before the towns were made,  
Love was a shepherd too.

Clear-eyed as flowers men grew,  
Of evil unafraid,  
When this old world was new.

No skill had they to woo,  
Who but their hearts obey'd—  
Love was a shepherd too.

What need to feign or sue?  
Not thus was life delay'd  
When this old world was new.

Under the cloudless blue  
They kiss'd their shepherd-maid—  
Love was a shepherd too.

They knew but joy; they knew  
No pang of Love decay'd:  
When this old world was new,  
Love was a shepherd too.

Henry Austin Dobson

## 'With Pipe and Flute'

(To E. G.)

WITH pipe and flute the rustic Pan  
Of old made music sweet for man;  
And wonder hushed the warbling bird,  
And closer drew the calm-eyed herd,--  
The rolling river slower ran.  
Ah! would,--ah! would, a little span,  
Some air of Arcady could fan  
This age of ours, too seldom stirred,  
    With pipe and flute!  
But now for gold we plot and plan;  
And from Beersheba unto Dan,  
Apollo's self might pass unheard,  
Or find the night-jar's note preferred;--  
Not so it fared, when time began,  
    With pipe and flute!

Henry Austin Dobson

## **You Bid Me Try**

You bid me try, blue-eyes, to write  
A Rondeau. What! - forthwith? - tonight?  
Reflect. Some skill I have, 'tis true; But thirteen lines! - and rimed on two! 'Refrain' as well. Ah, Hapless plight!

Still, there are five lines - ranged aright.  
These Gallic bonds, I feared, would fright  
My easy Muse. They did, till you - You bid me try!

That makes them eight. The port's in sight -  
'Tis all because your eyes are bright!  
Now just a pair to end in 'oo' - When maids command, what can't we do? Behold! - the  
rondeau, tasteful, light,  
You bid me try!

Henry Austin Dobson