

Classic Poetry Series

Robert Seymour Bridges

- poems -

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A Passer-by

Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
That fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?
Ah! soon, when Winter has all our vales opprest,
When skies are cold and misty, and hail is hurling,
Wilt thou glide on the blue Pacific, or rest
In a summer haven asleep, thy white sails furling.

I there before thee, in the country that well thou knowest,
Already arrived am inhaling the odorous air:
I watch thee enter unerringly where thou goest,
And anchor queen of the strange shipping there,
Thy sails for awnings spread, thy masts bare:
Nor is aught from the foaming reef to the snow-capp'd grandest
Peak, that is over the feathery palms, more fair
Than thou, so upright, so stately and still thou standest.

And yet, O splendid ship, unhail'd and nameless,
I know not if, aiming a fancy, I rightly divine
That thou hast a purpose joyful, a courage blameless,
Thy port assured in a happier land than mine.
But for all I have given thee, beauty enough is thine,
As thou, aslant with trim tackle and shrouding,
From the proud nostril curve of a prow's line
In the offing scatterest foam, thy white sails crowding.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Absence

When my love was away,
Full three days were not sped,
I caught my fancy astray
Thinking if she were dead,

And I alone, alone:
It seem'd in my misery
In all the world was none
Ever so lone as I.

I wept; but it did not shame
Nor comfort my heart: away
I rode as I might, and came
To my love at close of day.

The sight of her still'd my fears,
My fairest-hearted love:
And yet in her eyes were tears:
Which when I question'd of,

'O now thou art come,' she cried,
"Tis fled: but I thought to-day
I never could here abide,
If thou wert longer away.'

Robert Seymour Bridges

Awake, My Heart

Awake, my heart, to be loved, awake, awake!

The darkness silvers away, the morn doth break,
It leaps in the sky: unrisen lustres slake
The o'ertaken moon. Awake, O heart, awake!

She too that loveth awaketh and hopes for thee:
Her eyes already have sped the shades that flee,
Already they watch the path thy feet shall take:
Awake, O heart, to be loved, awake, awake!

And if thou tarry from her, - if this could be, -
She cometh herself, O heart, to be loved, to thee;
For thee would unashamed herself forsake:
Awake, to be loved, my heart, awake, awake!

Awake! The land is scattered with light, and see,
Uncanopied sleep is flying from field and tree;
And blossoming boughs of April in laughter shake:
Awake, O heart, to be loved, awake, awake!

Lo, all things wake and tarry and look for thee:
She looketh and saith, "O sun, now bring him to me.
Come, more adored, O adored, for his coming's sake,
And awake, my heart, to be loved, awake, awake!"

Robert Seymour Bridges

From 'The Testament of Beauty'

'Twas at that hour of beauty when the setting sun
squandereth his cloudy bed with rosy hues, to flood
his lov'd works as in turn he biddeth them Good-night;
and all the towers and temples and mansions of men
face him in bright farewell, ere they creep from their pomp
naked beneath the darkness;- while to mortal eyes
'tis given, ifso they close not of fatigue, nor strain
at lamplit tasks-'tis given, as for a royal boon
to beggarly outcasts in homeless vigil, to watch
where uncurtain's behind the great windows of space
Heav'n's jewel'd company circleth unapproachably-
'Twas at sunset that I, fleeing to hide my soul
in refuge of beauty from a mortal distress,
walk'd alone with the Muse in her garden of thought,
discoursing at liberty with the mazy dreams
that came wavering pertinaciously about me; as when
the small bats, issued from their hangings, flutter o'erhead
thru' the summer twilight, with thin cries to and fro
hunting in muffled flight atween the stars and flowers.
Then fell I in strange delusion, illusion strange to tell;
for as a man who lyeth fast asleep in his bed
may dream he waketh, and that he walketh upright
pursuing some endeavour in full conscience-so 'twas
with me; but contrawise; for being in truth awake
methought I slept and dreamt; and in thatt dream methought
I was telling a dream; nor telling was I as one
who, truly awaked from a true sleep, thinketh to tell
his dream to a friend, but for his scant remembrances
findeth no token of speech-it was not so with me;
for my tale was my dream and my dream the telling,
and I remember wondring the while I told it
how I told it so tellingly. And yet now 'twould seem
that Reason inveighed me with her old orderings;
as once when she took thought to adjust theology,
peopling the inane that vex'd her between God and man
with a hierarchy of angels; like those asteroids
wherewith she later fill'd the gap 'twixt Jove and Mars.
Verily by Beauty it is that we come as WISDOM,
yet not by Reason at Beauty; and now with many words
pleasing myself betimes I am fearing lest in the end
I play the tedious orator who maundereth on
for lack of heart to make an end of his nothings.
Wherefor as when a runner who hath run his round
handeth his staff away, and is glad of his rest,
here break I off, knowing the goal was not for me
the while I ran on telling of what cannot be told.

For not the Muse herself can tell of Goddess love;
which cometh to the child from the Mother's embrace,
an Idea spacious as the starry firmament's
inescapable infinity of radiant gaze,
that fadeth only as it outpasseth mortal sight:

and this direct contact is 't with eternities,
 this springtide miracle of the soul's nativity
 that oft hath set philosophers adrift in dream;
 which thing Christ taught, when he set up a little child
 to teach his first Apostles and to accuse their pride,
 saying, 'Unless ye shall receive it as a child,
 ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.'
 So thru'out all his young mental apprenticeship
 the child of very simplicity, and in the grace
 and beauteous attitude of infantine wonder,
 is apt to absorb Ideas in primal purity,
 and by the assimilation of thatt immortal food
 may build immortal life; but ever with the growth
 of understanding, as the sensible images
 are more and more corrupt, troubled by questioning thought,
 or with vainglory alloy'd, 'tis like enought the boy
 in prospect of his manhood wil hav cast to th' winds
 his Baptism with his Babyhood; nor might he escape
 the fall of Ev'ryman, did not a second call
 of nature's Love await him to confirm his Faith
 or to revoke him if he is whollylapsed therefrom.
 And so mighty is this second vision, which cometh
 in puberty of body and adolescence of mind
 that, forgetting his Mother, he calleth it 'first Love';
 for it mocketh at suasion or stubbornness of heart,
 as the oceantide of the omnipotent Pleasur of God,
 flushing all avenues of life, and unawares
 by thousandfold approach forestalling its full flood
 with divination of the secret contacts of Love,--
 of faintest ecstasies aslumber in Nature's calm,
 like thought in a closed book, where some poet long since
 sang his throbbing passion to immortal sleep-with coy
 tenderness delicat as the shifting hues
 that sanctify the silent dawn with wonder-gleams,
 whose evanescence is the seal of their glory,
 consumed in self-becoming of eternity;
 til every moment as it flyeth, cryeth 'Seize!
 Seize me ere I die! I am the Life of Life.'
 'Tis thus by near approach to an eternal presence
 man's heart with divine furor kindled and possess'd
 falleth in blind surrender; and finding therewithal
 in fullest devotion the full reconcilment
 betwixt his animal and spiritual desires,
 such welcome hour of bliss standeth for certain pledge
 of happiness perdurable: and coud he sustain
 this great enthusiasm, then the unbounded promise
 would keep fulfilment; since the marriage of true minds
 is thatt once fabled garden, amidst of which was set
 the single Tree that bore such med'cinable fruit
 that if man ate thereof he should liv for ever.
 Friendship is in loving rather than in being lov'd,
 which is its mutual benediction and recompense;

and tho' this be, and tho' love is from lovers learn'd,
 it springeth none the less from the old essence of self.
 No friendless man ('twas well said) can be truly himself;
 what a man looketh for in his friend and findeth,
 and loving self best, loveth better than himself,
 is his own better self, his live lovable idea,
 flowering by expansion in the loves of his life.
 And in the nobility of our earthly friendships
 we hav al grades of attainment, and the best may claim
 perfection of kind; and so, since ther be many bonds
 other than breed (friendships of lesser motiv, found
 even in the brutes) and since our politick is based
 on actual association of living men, 'twil come
 that the spiritual idea of Friendship, the huge
 vastidity of its essence, is fritter'd away
 in observation of the usual habits of men;
 as happ'd with the great moralist, where his book saith
 that ther can be no friendship betwixt God and man
 because of their unlimited disparity.
 From this dilemma of pagan thought, this poison of faith,
 Man-soul made glad escape in the worship of Christ;
 for his humanity is God's Personality,
 and communion with him is the life of the soul.
 Of which living ideas (when in the struggle of thought
 harden'd by language they became symbols of faith)
 Reason builded her maze, wherefrom none should escape,
 wandering intent to map and learn her tortuous clews,
 chanting their clerkly creed to the high-echoing stones
 of their hand-fashion'd temple: but the Wind of heav'n
 bloweth where it listeth, and Christ yet walketh the earth,
 and talketh still as with those two disciples once
 on the road to Emmaus-where they walk and are sad;
 whose vision of him then was his victory over death,
 thatt resurrection which all his lovers should share,
 who in loving him had learn'd the Ethick of happiness;
 whereby they too should come where he was ascended
 to reign over men's hearts in the Kingdom of God.
 Our happiest earthly comradships hold a foretaste
 of the feast of salvation and by thatt virtue in them
 provoke desire beyond them to out-reach and surmount
 their humanity in some superhumanity
 and ultimat perfection: which, howe'ever 'tis found
 or strangeley imagin'd, answereth to the need of each
 and pulleth him instinctivly as to a final cause.
 Thus unto all who hav found their high ideal in Christ,
 Christ is to them the essence discern'd or undeiscern'd
 of all their human friendships; and each lover of him
 and of his beauty must be as a bud on the Vine
 and hav participation in him; for Goddes love
 is unescapable as nature's environment,
 which if a man ignore or think to thrust it off
 he is the ill-natured fool that runneth blindly on death.

This Individualism is man's true Socialism.
This is the rife Idea whose spiritual beauty
multiplieth in communion to transcendant might.
This is thatt excelent way whereon if we wil walk
all things shall be added unto us-thatt Love which inspired
the wayward Visionary in his doctrinal ode
to the three christian Graces, the Church's first hymn
and only deathless athanasian creed,--the which
'except a man believe he cannot be saved.'
This is the endearing bond whereby Christ's company
yet holdeth together on the truth of his promise
that he spake of his grat pity and trust in man's love,
'Lo, I am with you always ev'n to the end of the world.'
Truly the Soul returneth the body's loving
where it hath won it...and God so loveth the world...
and in the fellowship of the friendship of Christ
God is seen as the very self-essence of love,
Creator and mover of all as activ Lover of all,
self-express'd in not-self, mind and body, mother and child,
'twixt lover and loved, God and man: but ONE ETERNAL
in the love of Beauty and in the selfhood of Love.

Robert Seymour Bridges

I Will Not Let Thee Go

I will not let thee go.
Ends all our month-long love in this?
Can it be summed up so,
Quit in a single kiss?
I will not let thee go.

I will not let thee go.
If thy words' breath could scare thy deeds,
As the soft south can blow
And toss the feathered seeds,
Then might I let thee go.

I will not let thee go.
Had not the great sun seen, I might;
Or were he reckoned slow
To bring the false to light,
Then might I let thee go.

I will not let thee go.
The stars that crowd the summer skies
Have watched us so below
With all their million eyes,
I dare not let thee go.

I will not let thee go.
Have we chid the changeful moon,
Now rising late, and now
Because she set too soon,
And shall I let thee go?

I will not let thee go.
Have not the young flowers been content,
Plucked ere their buds could blow,
To seal our sacrament?
I cannot let thee go.

I will not let thee go.
I hold thee by too many bands:
Thou sayest farewell, and lo!
I have thee by the hands,
And will not let thee go.

Robert Seymour Bridges

In autumn moonlight, when the white air wan

In autumn moonlight, when the white air wan
Is fragrant in the wake of summer hence,
'Tis sweet to sit entranced, and muse thereon
In melancholy and godlike indolence:
When the proud spirit, lull'd by mortal prime
To fond pretence of immortality,
Vieweth all moments from the birth of time,
All things whate'er have been or yet shall be.
And like the garden, where the year is spent,
The ruin of old life is full of yearning,
Mingling poetic rapture of lament
With flowers and sunshine of spring's sure returning;
Only in visions of the white air wan
By godlike fancy seized and dwelt upon.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Lord Kitchner

Unflinching hero, watchful to foresee
And face thy country's peril wheresoe'er,
Directing war and peace with equal care,
Till by long toil ennobled thou wert he
Whom England call'd and bade "Set my arm free
To obey my will and save my honour fair," --
What day the foe presumed on her despair
And she herself had trust in none but thee:

Among Herculean deeds the miracle
That mass'd the labour of ten years in one
Shall be thy monument. Thy work was done
Ere we could thank thee; and the high sea swell
Surgeth unheeding where thy proud ship fell
By the lone Orkneys, at the set of sun.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Low Barometer

The south-wind strengthens to a gale,
Across the moon the clouds fly fast,
The house is smitten as with a flail,
The chimney shudders to the blast.

On such a night, when Air has loosed
Its guardian grasp on blood and brain,
Old terrors then of god or ghost
Creep from their caves to life again;

And Reason kens he herits in
A haunted house. Tenants unknown
Assert their squalid lease of sin
With earlier title than his own.

Unbodied presences, the packed
Pollution and remorse of Time,
Slipped from oblivion re-enact
The horrors of unhousehold crime.

Some men would quell the thing with prayer
Whose sightless footsteps pad the floor,
Whose fearful trespass mounts the stair
Or burst the locked forbidden door.

Some have seen corpses long interred
Escape from hallowing control,
Pale charnel forms - nay even have heard
The shrilling of a troubled soul,

That wanders till the dawn has crossed
The dolorous dark, or Earth has wound
Closer her storm-spread cloak, and thrust
The baleful phantoms underground.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Melancholia

The sickness of desire, that in dark days
Looks on the imagination of despair,
Forgetteth man, and stinteth God his praise;
Nor but in sleep findeth a cure for care.
Uncertainty that once gave scope to dream
Of laughing enterprise and glory untold,
Is now a blackness that no stars redeem,
A wall of terror in a night of cold.
Fool! thou that hast impossibly desired
And now impatiently despair'st, see
How nought is changed: Joy's wisdom is attired
Splendid for others' eyes if not for thee:
Not love or beauty or youth from earth is fled:
If they delite thee not, 'tis thou art dead.

Robert Seymour Bridges

My Delight and Thy Delight

My delight and thy delight
Walking, like two angels white,
In the gardens of the night:

My desire and thy desire
Twining to a tongue of fire,
Leaping live, and laughing higher:

Thro' the everlasting strife
In the mystery of life.

Love, from whom the world begun,
Hath the secret of the sun.

Love can tell, and love alone,
Whence the million stars were strewn,
Why each atom knows its own,
How, in spite of woe and death,
Gay is life, and sweet is breath:

This he taught us, this we knew,
Happy in his science true,
Hand in hand as we stood
'Neath the shadows of the wood,
Heart to heart as we lay
In the dawning of the day.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Nightingales

Beautiful must be the mountains whence ye come,
And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams, wherefrom
Ye learn your song:
Where are those starry woods? O might I wander there,
Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air
Bloom the year long!

Nay, barren are those mountains and spent the streams:
Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our dreams,
A throe of the heart,
Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound,
For all our art.

Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men
We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,
As night is withdrawn
From these sweet-springing meads and bursting boughs of May,
Dream, while the innumerable choir of day
Welcome the dawn.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Nimium Fortunatus

I have lain in the sun
I have toil'd as I might,
I have thought as I would,
And now it is night.

My bed full of sleep,
My heart full of content
For friends that I met
The way that I went.

I welcome fatigue
While frenzy and care
Like thin summer clouds
Go melting in air.

To dream as I may
And awake when I will
With the song of the birds
And the sun on the hill.

Or death - were it death -
To what would I wake
Who loved in my home
All life for its sake?

What good have I wrought?
I laugh to have learned
That joy cannot come
Unless it be earned;

For a happier lot
Than God giveth me
It never hath been
Nor ever shall be.

Robert Seymour Bridges

On a Dead Child

Perfect little body, without fault or stain on thee,
With promise of strength and manhood full and fair!
Though cold and stark and bare,
The bloom and the charm of life doth awhile remain on thee.

Thy mother's treasure wert thou;—alas! no longer
To visit her heart with wondrous joy; to be
Thy father's pride:—ah, he
Must gather his faith together, and his strength make stronger.

To me, as I move thee now in the last duty,
Dost thou with a turn or gesture anon respond;
Startling my fancy fond
With a chance attitude of the head, a freak of beauty.

Thy hand clasps, as 'twas wont, my finger, and holds it:
But the grasp is the clasp of Death, heartbreaking and stiff;
Yet feels to my hand as if
'Twas still thy will, thy pleasure and trust that enfolds it.

So I lay thee there, thy sunken eyelids closing,—
Go lie thou there in thy coffin, thy last little bed!—
Propping thy wise, sad head,
Thy firm, pale hands across thy chest disposing.

So quiet! doth the change content thee?—Death, whither hath he taken thee?
To a world, do I think, that rights the disaster of this?
The vision of which I miss,
Who weep for the body, and wish but to warm thee and awaken thee?

Ah! little at best can all our hopes avail us
To lift this sorrow, or cheer us, when in the dark,
Unwilling, alone we embark,
And the things we have seen and have known and have heard of, fail us.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Pater Filio

Sense with keenest edge unused,
Yet unsteel'd by scathing fire;
Lovely feet as yet unbruised
On the ways of dark desire;
Sweetest hope that lookest smiling
O'er the wilderness defiling!

Why such beauty, to be blighted
By the swarm of foul destruction?
Why such innocence delighted,
When sin stalks to thy seduction?
All the litanies e'er chaunted
Shall not keep thy faith undaunted.

I have pray'd the sainted Morning
To unclasp her hands to hold thee;
From resignful Eve's adorning
Stol'n a robe of peace to enfold thee;
With all charms of man's contriving
Arm'd thee for thy lonely striving.

Me too once unthinking Nature,
—Whence Love's timeless mockery took me,—
Fashion'd so divine a creature,
Yea, and like a beast forsook me.
I forgave, but tell the measure
Of her crime in thee, my treasure.

Robert Seymour Bridges

So sweet love seemed that April morn

So sweet love seemed that April morn,
When first we kissed beside the thorn,
So strangely sweet, it was not strange
We thought that love could never change.

But I can tell--let truth be told--
That love will change in growing old;
Though day by day is naught to see,
So delicate his motions be.

And in the end 'twill come to pass
Quite to forget what once he was,
Nor even in fancy to recall
The pleasure that was all in all.

His little spring, that sweet we found,
So deep in summer floods is drowned,
I wonder, bathed in joy complete,
How love so young could be so sweet.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Spirits

Angel spirits of sleep,
White-robed, with silver hair,
In your meadows fair,
Where the willows weep,
And the sad moonbeam
On the gliding stream
Writes her scatter'd dream:

Angel spirits of sleep,
Dancing to the weir
In the hollow roar
Of its waters deep;
Know ye how men say
That ye haunt no more
Isle and grassy shore
With your moonlit play;
That ye dance not here,
White-robed spirits of sleep,
All the summer night
Threading dances light?

Robert Seymour Bridges

The Growth of Love

1

They that in play can do the thing they would,
Having an instinct throned in reason's place,
--And every perfect action hath the grace
Of indolence or thoughtless hardihood--
These are the best: yet be there workmen good
Who lose in earnestness control of face,
Or reckon means, and rapt in effort base
Reach to their end by steps well understood.
Me whom thou sawest of late strive with the pains
Of one who spends his strength to rule his nerve,
--Even as a painter breathlessly who stains
His scarcely moving hand lest it should swerve--
Behold me, now that I have cast my chains,
Master of the art which for thy sake I serve.

2

For thou art mine: and now I am ashamed
To have used means to win so pure acquist,
And of my trembling fear that might have misst
Thro' very care the gold at which I aim'd;
And am as happy but to hear thee named,
As are those gentle souls by angels kisst
In pictures seen leaving their marble cist
To go before the throne of grace unblamed.
Nor surer am I water hath the skill
To quench my thirst, or that my strength is freed
In delicate ordination as I will,
Than that to be myself is all I need
For thee to be most mine: so I stand still,
And save to taste my joy no more take heed.

3

The whole world now is but the minister
Of thee to me: I see no other scheme
But universal love, from timeless dream
Waking to thee his joy's interpreter.
I walk around and in the fields confer
Of love at large with tree and flower and stream,
And list the lark descant upon my theme,
Heaven's musical accepted worshipper.
Thy smile outfaceth ill: and that old feud
'Twixt things and me is quash'd in our new truce;
And nature now dearly with thee endued
No more in shame ponders her old excuse,
But quite forgets her frowns and antics rude,
So kindly hath she grown to her new use.

4

The very names of things belov'd are dear,
And sounds will gather beauty from their sense,

As many a face thro' love's long residence
Groweth to fair instead of plain and sere:
But when I say thy name it hath no peer,
And I suppose fortune determined thence
Her dower, that such beauty's excellence
Should have a perfect title for the ear.
Thus may I think the adopting Muses chose
Their sons by name, knowing none would be heard
Or writ so oft in all the world as those,--
Dan Chaucer, mighty Shakespeare, then for third
The classic Milton, and to us arose
Shelley with liquid music in the world.

5

The poets were good teachers, for they taught
Earth had this joy; but that 'twould ever be
That fortune should be perfected in me,
My heart of hope dared not engage the thought.
So I stood low, and now but to be caught
By any self-styled lords of the age with thee
Vexes my modesty, lest they should see
I hold them owls and peacocks, things of nought.
And when we sit alone, and as I please
I taste thy love's full smile, and can enstate
The pleasure of my kingly heart at ease,
My thought swims like a ship, that with the weight
Of her rich burden sleeps on the infinite seas
Becalm'd, and cannot stir her golden freight.

6

While yet we wait for spring, and from the dry
And blackening east that so embitters March,
Well-housed must watch grey fields and meadows parch,
And driven dust and withering snowflake fly;
Already in glimpses of the tarnish'd sky
The sun is warm and beckons to the larch,
And where the covert hazels interarch
Their tassell'd twigs, fair beds of primrose lie.
Beneath the crisp and wintry carpet hid
A million buds but stay their blossoming;
And trustful birds have built their nests amid
The shuddering boughs, and only wait to sing
Till one soft shower from the south shall bid,
And hither tempt the pilgrim steps of spring.

7

In thee my spring of life hath bid the while
A rose unfold beyond the summer's best,
The mystery of joy made manifest
In love's self-answering and awakening smile;
Whereby the lips in wonder reconcile
Passion with peace, and show desire at rest,--

A grace of silence by the Greek unguess't,
That bloom'd to immortalize the Tuscan style
When first the angel-song that faith hath ken'd
Fancy pourtray'd, above recorded oath
Of Israel's God, or light of poem pen'd;
The very countenance of plighted troth
'Twixt heaven and earth, where in one moment blend
The hope of one and happiness of both.

8

For beauty being the best of all we know
Sums up the unsearchable and secret aims
Of nature, and on joys whose earthly names
Were never told can form and sense bestow;
And man hath sped his instinct to outgo
The step of science; and against her shames
Imagination stakes out heavenly claims,
Building a tower above the head of woe.
Nor is there fairer work for beauty found
Than that she win in nature her release
From all the woes that in the world abound:
Nay with his sorrow may his love increase,
If from man's greater need beauty redound,
And claim his tears for homage of his peace.

9

Thus to thy beauty doth my fond heart look,
That late dismay'd her faithless faith forbore;
And wins again her love lost in the lore
Of schools and script of many a learned book:
For thou what ruthless death untimely took
Shalt now in better brotherhood restore,
And save my batter'd ship that far from shore
High on the dismal deep in tempest shook.

So in despite of sorrow lately learn'd
I still hold true to truth since thou art true,
Nor wail the woe which thou to joy hast turn'd
Nor come the heavenly sun and bathing blue
To my life's need more splendid and unearn'd
Than hath thy gift outmatch'd desire and due.

10

Winter was not unkind because uncouth;
His prison'd time made me a closer guest,
And gave thy graciousness a warmer zest,
Biting all else with keen and angry tooth
And bravelier the triumphant blood of youth
Mantling thy cheek its happy home possess,
And sterner sport by day put strength to test,
And custom's feast at night gave tongue to truth
Or say hath flaunting summer a device

To match our midnight revelry, that rang
With steel and flame along the snow-girt ice?
Or when we hark't to nightingales that sang
On dewy eyes in spring, did they entice
To gentler love than winter's icy fang?

11

There's many a would-be poet at this hour,
Rhymes of a love that he hath never woo'd,
And o'er his lamplit desk in solitude
Deems that he sitteth in the Muses' bower:
And some the flames of earthly love devour,
Who have taken no kiss of Nature, nor renew'd
In the world's wilderness with heavenly food
The sickly body of their perishing power.

So none of all our company, I boast,
But now would mock my penning, could they see
How down the right it maps a jagged coast;
Seeing they hold the manlier praise to be
Strong hand and will, and the heart best when most
'Tis sober, simple, true, and fancy-free.

12

How could I quarrel or blame you, most dear,
Who all thy virtues gavest and kept back none;
Kindness and gentleness, truth without peer,
And beauty that my fancy fed upon?
Now not my life's contrition for my fault
Can blot that day, nor work me recompence,
Tho' I might worthily thy worth exalt,
Making thee long amends for short offence.
For surely nowhere, love, if not in thee
Are grace and truth and beauty to be found;
And all my praise of these can only be
A praise of thee, howe'er by thee disown'd:
While still thou must be mine tho' far removed,
And I for one offence no more beloved.

13

Now since to me altho' by thee refused
The world is left, I shall find pleasure still;
The art that most I have loved but little used
Will yield a world of fancies at my will:
And tho' where'er thou goest it is from me,
I where I go thee in my heart must bear;
And what thou wert that wilt thou ever be,
My choice, my best, my loved, and only fair.
Farewell, yet think not such farewell a change
From tenderness, tho' once to meet or part
But on short absence so could sense derange
That tears have graced the greeting of my heart;

They were proud drops and had my leave to fall,
Not on thy pity for my pain to call.

14

When sometimes in an ancient house where state
From noble ancestry is handed on,
We see but desolation thro' the gate,
And richest heirlooms all to ruin gone;
Because maybe some fancied shame or fear,
Bred of disease or melancholy fate,
Hath driven the owner from his rightful sphere
To wander nameless save to pity or hate:
What is the wreck of all he hath in fief
When he that hath is wrecking? nought is fine
Unto the sick, nor doth it burden grief
That the house perish when the soul doth pine.
Thus I my state despise, slain by a sting
So slight 'twould not have hurt a meaner thing.

15

Who builds a ship must first lay down the keel
Of health, whereto the ribs of mirth are wed:
And knit, with beams and knees of strength, a bed
For decks of purity, her floor and ceil.
Upon her masts, Adventure, Pride, and Zeal,
To fortune's wind the sails of purpose spread:
And at the prow make figured maidenhead
O'erride the seas and answer to the wheel.
And let him deep in memory's hold have stor'd
Water of Helicon: and let him fit
The needle that doth true with heaven accord:
Then bid her crew, love, diligence and wit
With justice, courage, temperance come aboard,
And at her helm the master reason sit.

16

This world is unto God a work of art,
Of which the unaccomplish'd heavenly plan
Is hid in life within the creature's heart,
And for perfection looketh unto man.
Ah me! those thousand ages: with what slow
Pains and persistence were his idols made,
Destroy'd and made, ere ever he could know
The mighty mother must be so obey'd.
For lack of knowledge and thro' little skill
His childish mimicry outwent his aim;
His effort shaped the genius of his will;
Till thro' distinction and revolt he came,
True to his simple terms of good and ill,
Seeking the face of Beauty without blame.

17

Say who be these light-bearded, sunburnt faces
In negligent and travel-stain'd array,
That in the city of Dante come to-day,
Haughtily visiting her holy places?
O these be noble men that hide their graces,
True England's blood, her ancient glory's stay,
By tales of fame diverted on their way
Home from the rule of oriental races.
Life-trifling lions these, of gentle eyes
And motion delicate, but swift to fire
For honour, passionate where duty lies,
Most loved and loving: and they quickly tire
Of Florence, that she one day more denies
The embrace of wife and son, of sister or sire.

18

Where San Miniato's convent from the sun
At forenoon overlooks the city of flowers
I sat, and gazing on her domes and towers
Call'd up her famous children one by one:
And three who all the rest had far outdone,
Mild Giotto first, who stole the morning hours,
I saw, and god-like Buonarroti's powers,
And Dante, gravest poet, her much-wrong'd son.

Is all this glory, I said, another's praise?
Are these heroic triumphs things of old,
And do I dead upon the living gaze?
Or rather doth the mind, that can behold
The wondrous beauty of the works and days,
Create the image that her thoughts enfold?

19

Rejoice, ye dead, where'er your spirits dwell,
Rejoice that yet on earth your fame is bright;
And that your names, remember'd day and night,
Live on the lips of those that love you well.
'Tis ye that conquer'd have the powers of hell,
Each with the special grace of your delight:
Ye are the world's creators, and thro' might
Of everlasting love ye did excel.
Now ye are starry names, above the storm
And war of Time and nature's endless wrong
Ye flit, in pictured truth and peaceful form,
Wing'd with bright music and melodious song,--
The flaming flowers of heaven, making May-dance
In dear Imagination's rich pleasance.

20

The world still goeth about to shew and hide,
Befool'd of all opinion, fond of fame:
But he that can do well taketh no pride,

And see'th his error, undisturb'd by shame:
So poor's the best that longest life can do,
The most so little, diligently done;
So mighty is the beauty that doth woo,
So vast the joy that love from love hath won.
God's love to win is easy, for He loveth
Desire's fair attitude, nor strictly weighs
The broken thing, but all alike approveth
Which love hath aim'd at Him: that is heaven's praise:
And if we look for any praise on earth,
'Tis in man's love: all else is nothing worth.

21

O flesh and blood, comrade to tragic pain
And clownish merriment whose sense could wake
Sermons in stones, and count death but an ache,
All things as vanity, yet nothing vain:
The world, set in thy heart, thy passionate strain
Reveal'd anew; but thou for man didst make
Nature twice natural, only to shake
Her kingdom with the creatures of thy brain.
Lo, Shakespeare, since thy time nature is loth
To yield to art her fair supremacy;
In conquering one thou hast so enrichèd both.
What shall I say? for God--whose wise decree
Confirmeth all He did by all He doth--
Doubled His whole creation making thee.

22

I would be a bird, and straight on wings I arise,
And carry purpose up to the ends of the air
In calm and storm my sails I feather, and where
By freezing cliffs the unransom'd wreckage lies:
Or, strutting on hot meridian banks, surprise
The silence: over plains in the moonlight bare
I chase my shadow, and perch where no bird dare
In treetops torn by fiercest winds of the skies.
Poor simple birds, foolish birds! then I cry,
Ye pretty pictures of delight, unstir'd
By the only joy of knowing that ye fly;
Ye are not what ye are, but rather, sum'd in a word,
The alphabet of a god's idea, and I
Who master it, I am the only bird.

23

O weary pilgrims, chanting of your woe,
That turn your eyes to all the peaks that shine,
Hailing in each the citadel divine
The which ye thought to have enter'd long ago;
Until at length your feeble steps and slow
Falter upon the threshold of the shrine,
And your hearts overhurden'd doubt in fine

Whether it be Jerusalem or no:
Dishearten'd pilgrims, I am one of you;
For, having worshipp'd many a barren face,
I scarce now greet the goal I journey'd to:
I stand a pagan in the holy place;
Beneath the lamp of truth I am found untrue,
And question with the God that I embrace.

24

Spring hath her own bright days of calm and peace;
Her melting air, at every breath we draw,
Floods heart with love to praise God's gracious law:
But suddenly--so short is pleasure's lease--
The cold returns, the buds from growing cease,
And nature's conquer'd face is full of awe;
As now the trait'rous north with icy flaw
Freezes the dew upon the sick lamb's fleece,
And 'neath the mock sun searching everywhere
Rattles the crispèd leaves with shivering din:
So that the birds are silent with despair
Within the thickets; nor their armour thin
Will gaudy flies adventure in the air,
Nor any lizard sun his spotted skin.

25

Nothing is joy without thee: I can find
No rapture in the first relays of spring,
In songs of birds, in young buds opening,
Nothing inspiriting and nothing kind;
For lack of thee, who once wert throned behind
All beauty, like a strength where graces cling,--
The jewel and heart of light, which everything
Wrestled in rivalry to hold enshrined.
Ah! since thou'rt fled, and I in each fair sight
The sweet occasion of my joy deplore,
Where shall I seek thee best, or whom invite
Within thy sacred temples and adore?
Who shall fill thought and truth with old delight,
And lead my soul in life as heretofore?

26

The work is done, and from the fingers fall
The bloodwarm tools that brought the labour thro':
The tasking eye that overrunneth all
Rests, and affirms there is no more to do.
Now the third joy of making, the sweet flower
Of blessed work, bloometh in godlike spirit;
Which whoso plucketh holdeth for an hour
The shrivelling vanity of mortal merit.
And thou, my perfect work, thou'rt of to-day;
To-morrow a poor and alien thing wilt be,
True only should the swift life stand at stay:

Therefore farewell, nor look to bide with me.
Go find thy friends, if there be one to love thee:
Casting thee forth, my child, I rise above thee.

27

The fabled sea-snake, old Leviathan,
Or else what grisly beast of scaly chine
That champ'd the ocean-wrack and swash'd the brine,
Before the new and milder days of man,
Had never rib nor bray nor swindging fan
Like his iron swimmer of the Clyde or Tyne,
Late-born of golden seed to breed a line
Of offspring swifter and more huge of plan.
Straight is her going, for upon the sun
When once she hath look'd, her path and place are plain;
With tireless speed she smiteth one by one
The shuddering seas and foams along the main;
And her eased breath, when her wild race is run,
Roars thro' her nostrils like a hurricane.

28

A thousand times hath in my heart's behoof
My tongue been set his passion to impart;
A thousand times hath my too coward heart
My mouth reclosed and fix'd it to the roof;
Then with such cunning hath it held aloof,
A thousand times kept silence with such art
That words could do no more: yet on thy part
Hath silence given a thousand times reproof.
I should be bolder, seeing I commend
Love, that my dilatory purpose primes,
But fear lest with my fears my hope should end:
Nay, I would truth deny and burn my rhymes,
Renew my sorrows rather than offend,
A thousand times, and yet a thousand times.

29

I travel to thee with the sun's first rays,
That lift the dark west and unwrap the night;
I dwell beside thee when he walks the height,
And fondly toward thee at his setting gaze.
I wait upon thy coming, but always--
Dancing to meet my thoughts if they invite--
Thou hast outrun their longing with delight,
And in my solitude dost mock my praise.
Now doth my drop of time transcend the whole:
I see no fame in Khufu's pyramid,
No history where loveless Nile doth roll.
--This is eternal life, which doth forbid
Mortal detraction to the exalted soul,
And from her inward eye all fate hath hid.

30

My lady pleases me and I please her;
This know we both, and I besides know well
Wherefore I love her, and I love to tell
My love, as all my loving songs aver.
But what on her part could the passion stir,
Tho' 'tis more difficult for love to spell,
Yet can I dare divine how this befel,
Nor will her lips deny it if I err.
She loves me first because I love her, then
Loves me for knowing why she should be loved,
And that I love to praise her, loves again.
So from her beauty both our loves are moved,
And by her beauty are sustain'd; nor when
The earth falls from the sun is this disproved.

31

In all things beautiful, I cannot see
Her sit or stand, but love is stir'd anew:
'Tis joy to watch the folds fall as they do,
And all that comes is past expectancy.
If she be silent, silence let it be;
He who would bid her speak might sit and sue
The deep-brow'd Phidian Jove to be untrue
To his two thousand years' solemnity.
Ah, but her launchèd passion, when she sings,
Wins on the hearing like a shapen prow
Borne by the mastery of its urgent wings:
Or if she deign her wisdom, she doth show
She hath the intelligence of heavenly things,
Un sullied by man's mortal overthrow.

32

Thus to be humbled: 'tis that ranging pride
No refuge hath; that in his castle strong
Brave reason sits beleaguer'd, who so long
Kept field, but now must starve where he doth hide;
That industry, who once the foe defied,
Lies slaughter'd in the trenches; that the throng
Of idle fancies pipe their foolish song,
Where late the puissant captains fought and died.
Thus to be humbled: 'tis to be undone;
A forest fell'd; a city razed to ground;
A cloak unsewn, unwoven and unspun
Till not a thread remains that can be wound.
And yet, O lover, thee, the ruin'd one,
Love who hath humbled thus hath also crown'd.

33

I care not if I live, tho' life and breath
Have never been to me so dear and sweet.
I care not if I die, for I could meet--

Being so happy--happily my death.
I care not if I love; to-day she saith
She loveth, and love's history is complete.
Nor care I if she love me; at her feet
My spirit bows entranced and worshipping.
I have no care for what was most my care,
But all around me see fresh beauty born,
And common sights grown lovelier than they were:
I dream of love, and in the light of morn
Tremble, beholding all things very fair
And strong with strength that puts my strength to scorn.

34

O my goddess divine sometimes I say
Now let this word for ever and all suffice;
Thou art insatiable, and yet not twice
Can even thy lover give his soul away:
And for my acts, that at thy feet I lay;
For never any other, by device
Of wisdom, love or beauty, could entice
My homage to the measure of this day.
I have no more to give thee: lo, I have sold
My life, have emptied out my heart, and spent
Whate'er I had; till like a beggar, bold
With nought to lose, I laugh and am content.
A beggar kisses thee; nay, love, behold,
I fear not: thou too art in beggarment.

35

All earthly beauty hath one cause and proof,
To lead the pilgrim soul to beauty above:
Yet lieth the greater bliss so far aloof,
That few there be are wean'd from earthly love.
Joy's ladder it is, reaching from home to home,
The best of all the work that all was good;
Whereof 'twas writ the angels aye upclomb,
Down sped, and at the top the Lord God stood.
But I my time abuse, my eyes by day
Center'd on thee, by night my heart on fire--
Letting my number'd moments run away--
Nor e'en 'twixt night and day to heaven aspire:
So true it is that what the eye seeth not
But slow is loved, and loved is soon forgot.

36

O my life's mischief, once my love's delight,
That drew'st a mortgage on my heart's estate,
Whose baneful clause is never out of date,
Nor can avenging time restore my right:
Whom first to lose sounded that note of spite,
Whereto my doleful days were tuned by fate:
That art the well-loved cause of all my hate,

The sun whose wandering makes my hopeless night:
Thou being in all my lacking all I lack,
It is thy goodness turns my grace to crime,
Thy fleetness from my goal which holds me back;
Wherefore my feet go out of step with time,
My very grasp of life is old and slack,
And even my passion falters in my rhyme.

37

At times with hurried hoofs and scattering dust
I race by field or highway, and my horse
Spare not, but urge direct in headlong course
Unto some fair far hill that gain I must:
But near arrived the vision soon mistrust,
Rein in, and stand as one who sees the source
Of strong illusion, shaming thought to force
From off his mind the soil of passion's gust.

My brow I bare then, and with slacken'd speed
Can view the country pleasant on all sides,
And to kind salutation give good heed:
I ride as one who for his pleasure rides,
And stroke the neck of my delighted steed,
And seek what cheer the village inn provides.

38

An idle June day on the sunny Thames,
Floating or rowing as our fancy led,
Now in the high beams basking as we sped,
Now in green shade gliding by mirror'd stems;
By lock and weir and isle, and many a spot
Of memoried pleasure, glad with strength and skill,
Friendship, good wine, and mirth, that serve not ill
The heavenly Muse, tho' she requite them not:
I would have life--thou saidst--all as this day,
Simple enjoyment calm in its excess,
With not a grief to cloud, and not a ray
Of passion overhot my peace to oppress;
With no ambition to reproach delay,
Nor rapture to disturb its happiness.

39

A man that sees by chance his picture, made
As once a child he was, handling some toy,
Will gaze to find his spirit within the boy,
Yet hath no secret with the soul pourtray'd:
He cannot think the simple thought which play'd
Upon those features then so frank and coy;
'Tis his, yet oh! not his: and o'er the joy
His fatherly pity bends in tears dismay'd.
Proud of his prime maybe he stand at best,
And lightly wear his strength, or aim it high,

In knowledge, skill and courage self-possess:--
Yet in the pictured face a charm doth lie,
The one thing lost more worth than all the rest,
Which seeing, he fears to say This child was I.

40

Tears of love, tears of joy and tears of care,
Comforting tears that fell uncomforted,
Tears o'er the new-born, tears beside the dead,
Tears of hope, pride and pity, trust and prayer,
Tears of contrition; all tears whatsoe'er
Of tenderness or kindness had she shed
Who here is pictured, ere upon her head
The fine gold might be turn'd to silver there.
The smile that charm'd the father hath given place
Unto the furrow'd care wrought by the son;
But virtue hath transform'd all change to grace:
So that I praise the artist, who hath done
A portrait, for my worship, of the face
Won by the heart my father's heart that won.

41

If I could but forget and not recall
So well my time of pleasure and of play,
When ancient nature was all new and gay,
Light as the fashion that doth last enthrall,--
Ah mighty nature, when my heart was small,
Nor dream'd what fearful searchings underlay
The flowers and leafy ecstasy of May,
The breathing summer sloth, the scented fall:
Could I forget, then were the fight not hard,
Press'd in the mêlée of accursed things,
Having such help in love and such reward:
But that 'tis I who once--'tis this that stings--
Once dwelt within the gate that angels guard,
Where yet I'd be had I but heavenly wings.

42

When I see childhood on the threshold seize
The prize of life from age and likelihood,
I mourn time's change that will not be withstood,
Thinking how Christ said Be like one of these.
For in the forest among many trees
Scarce one in all is found that hath made good
The virgin pattern of its slender wood,
That courtesied in joy to every breeze;
But scath'd, but knotted trunks that raise on high
Their arms in stiff contortion, strain'd and bare
Whose patriarchal crowns in sorrow sigh.
So, little children, ye--nay nay, ye ne'er
From me shall learn how sure the change and nigh,
When ye shall share our strength and mourn to share.

43

When parch'd with thirst, astray on sultry sand
The traveller faints, upon his closing ear
Steals a fantastic music: he may hear
The babbling fountain of his native land.
Before his eyes the vision seems to stand,
Where at its terraced brink the maids appear,
Who fill their deep urns at its waters clear,
And not refuse the help of lover's hand.
O cruel jest--he cries, as some one flings
The sparkling drops in sport or shew of ire--
O shameless, O contempt of holy things.
But never of their wanton play they tire,
As not athirst they sit beside the springs,
While he must quench in death his lost desire.

44

The image of thy love, rising on dark
And desperate days over my sullen sea,
Wakens again fresh hope and peace in me,
Gleaming above upon my groaning bark.
Whate'er my sorrow be, I then may hark
A loving voice: whate'er my terror be,
This heavenly comfort still I win from thee,
To shine my lodestar that wert once my mark.
Prodigal nature makes us but to taste
One perfect joy, which given she niggard grows;
And lest her precious gift should run to waste,
Adds to its loss a thousand lesser woes:
So to the memory of the gift that graced
Her hand, her graceless hand more grace bestows.

45

In this neglected, ruin'd edifice
Of works unperfected and broken schemes,
Where is the promise of my early dreams,
The smile of beauty and the pearl of price?
No charm is left now that could once entice
Wind-wavering fortune from her golden streams,
And full in flight decrepit purpose seems,
Trailing the banner of his old device.
Within the house a frore and numbing air
Has chill'd endeavour: sickly memories reign
In every room, and ghosts are on the stair:
And hope behind the dusty window-pane
Watches the days go by, and bow'd with care
Forecasts her last reproach and mortal stain.

46

Once I would say, before thy vision came,
My joy, my life, my love, and with some kind

Of knowledge speak, and think I knew my mind
Of heaven and hope, and each word hit its aim.
Whate'er their sounds be, now all mean the same,
Denoting each the fair that none can find;
Or if I say them, 'tis as one long blind
Forgets the sights that he was used to name.
Now if men speak of love, 'tis not my love;
Nor are their hopes nor joys mine, nor their life
Of praise the life that I think honour of:
Nay tho' they turn from house and child and wife
And self, and in the thought of heaven above
Hold, as do I, all mortal things at strife.

47

Since then 'tis only pity looking back,
Fear looking forward, and the busy mind
Will in one woeful moment more upwind
Than lifelong years unroll of bitter or black;
What is man's privilege, his hoarding knack
Of memory with foreboding so combined,
Whereby he comes to dream he hath of kind
The perpetuity which all things lack?

Which but to hope is doubtful joy, to have
Being a continuance of what, alas,
We mourn, and scarcely hear with to the grave;
Or something so unknown that it o'erpass
The thought of comfort, and the sense that gave
Cannot consider it thro' any glass.

48

Come gentle sleep, I woo thee: come and take
Not now the child into thine arms, from fright
Composed by drowsy tune and shaded light,
Whom ignorant of thee thou didst nurse and make;
Nor now the boy, who scorn'd thee for the sake
Of growing knowledge or mysterious night,
Tho' with fatigue thou didst his limbs invite,
And heavily weigh the eyes that would not wake;
No, nor the man severe, who from his best
Failing, alert fled to thee, that his breath,
Blood, force and fire should come at morn redrest;
But me; from whom thy comfort tarrieth,
For all my wakeful prayer sent without rest
To thee, O shew and shadow of my death.

49

The spirit's eager sense for sad or gay
Filleth with what he will our vessel full:
Be joy his bent, he waiteth not joy's day
But like a child at any toy will pull:
If sorrow, he will weep for fancy's sake,

And spoil heaven's plenty with forbidden care.
What fortune most denies we slave to take;
Nor can fate load us more than we can bear.
Since pleasure with the having disappeareth,
He who hath least in hand hath most at heart,
While he keep hope: as he who alway feareth
A grief that never comes hath yet the smart;
And heavier far is our self-wrought distress,
For when God sendeth sorrow, it doth bless.

50

The world comes not to an end: her city-hives
Swarm with the tokens of a changeless trade,
With rolling wheel, driver and flagging jade,
Rich men and beggars, children, priests and wives.
New homes on old are set, as lives on lives;
Invention with invention overlaid:
But still or tool or toy or book or blade
Shaped for the hand, that holds and toils and strives.
The men to-day toil as their fathers taught,
With little better'd means; for works depend
On works and overlap, and thought on thought:
And thro' all change the smiles of hope amend
The weariest face, the same love changed in nought:
In this thing too the world comes not to an end.

51

O my uncared-for songs, what are ye worth,
That in my secret book with so much care
I write you, this one here and that one there,
Marking the time and order of your birth?
How, with a fancy so unkind to mirth,
A sense so hard, a style so worn and bare,
Look ye for any welcome anywhere
From any shelf or heart-home on the earth?
Should others ask you this, say then I yearn'd
To write you such as once, when I was young,
Finding I should have loved and thereto turn'd.
'Twere something yet to live again among
The gentle youth beloved, and where I learn'd
My art, be there remember'd for my song.

52

Who takes the census of the living dead,
Ere the day come when memory shall o'ercrowd
The kingdom of their fame, and for that proud
And airy people find no room nor stead?
Ere hoarding Time, that ever thrusteth back
The fairest treasures of his ancient store,
Better with best confound, so he may pack
His greedy gatherings closer, more and more?
Let the true Muse rewrite her sullied page,

And purge her story of the men of hate,
That they go dirgeless down to Satan's rage
With all else foul, deform'd and miscreate:
She hath full toil to keep the names of love
Honour'd on earth, as they are bright above.

53

I heard great Hector sounding war's alarms,
Where thro' the listless ghosts chiding he strode,
As tho' the Greeks besieged his last abode,
And he his Troy's hope still, her king-at-arms.
But on those gentle meads, which Lethe charms
With weary oblivion, his passion glow'd
Like the cold night-worm's candle, and only show'd
Such mimic flame as neither heats nor harms.
'Twas plain to read, even by those shadows quaint,
How rude catastrophe had dim'd his day,
And blighted all his cheer with stern complaint:
To arms! to arms! what more the voice would say
Was swallow'd in the valleys, and grew faint
Upon the thin air, as he pass'd away.

54

Since not the enamour'd sun with glance more fond
Kisses the foliage of his sacred tree,
Than doth my waking thought arise on thee,
Loving none near thee, like thee nor beyond;
Nay, since I am sworn thy slave, and in the bond
Is writ my promise of eternity
Since to such high hope thou'st encouraged me,
That if thou look but from me I despond;
Since thou'rt my all in all, O think of this:
Think of the dedication of my youth:
Think of my loyalty, my joy, my bliss:
Think of my sorrow, my despair and ruth,
My sheer annihilation if I miss:
Think--if thou shouldst be false--think of thy truth.

55

These meagre rhymes, which a returning mood
Sometimes o'errateth, I as oft despise;
And knowing them illnated, stiff and rude,
See them as others with contemptuous eyes.
Nay, and I wonder less at God's respect
For man, a minim jot in time and space,
Than at the soaring faith of His elect,
That gift of gifts, the comfort of His grace.
O truth unsearchable, O heavenly love,
Most infinitely tender, so to touch
The work that we can meanly reckon of:
Surely--I say--we are favour'd overmuch.
But of this wonder, what doth most amaze

Is that we know our love is held for praise.

56

Beauty sat with me all the summer day,
Awaiting the sure triumph of her eye;
Nor mark'd I till we parted, how, hard by,
Love in her train stood ready for his prey.
She, as too proud to join herself the fray,
Trusting too much to her divine ally,
When she saw victory tarry, chid him--"Why
Dost thou not at one stroke this rebel slay?"
Then generous Love, who holds my heart in fee,
Told of our ancient truce: so from the fight
We straight withdrew our forces, all the three.
Baffled but not dishearten'd she took flight
Scheming new tactics: Love came home with me,
And prompts my measured verses as I write.

57

In autumn moonlight, when the white air wan
Is fragrant in the wake of summer hence,
'Tis sweet to sit entranced, and muse thereon
In melancholy and godlike indolence:
When the proud spirit, lull'd by mortal prime
To fond pretence of immortality,
Vieweth all moments from the birth of time,
All things whate'er have been or yet shall be.
And like the garden, where the year is spent,
The ruin of old life is full of yearning,
Mingling poetic rapture of lament
With flowers and sunshine of spring's sure returning;
Only in visions of the white air wan
By godlike fancy seized and dwelt upon.

58

When first I saw thee, dearest, if I say
The spells that conjure back the hour and place,
And evermore I look upon thy face,
As in the spring of years long pass'd away;
No fading of thy beauty's rich array,
No detriment of age on thee I trace,
But time's defeat written in spoils of grace,
From rivals robb'd, whom thou didst pity and slay.
So hath thy growth been, thus thy faith is true,
Unchanged in change, still to my growing sense,
To life's desire the same, and nothing new:
But as thou wert in dream and prescience
At love's arising, now thou stand'st to view
In the broad noon of his magnificence.

59

'Twas on the very day winter took leave

Of those fair fields I love, when to the skies
The fragrant Earth was smiling in surprise
At that her heaven-descended, quick reprieve,
I wander'd forth my sorrow to relieve
Yet walk'd amid sweet pleasure in such wise
As Adam went alone in Paradise,
Before God of His pity fashion'd Eve.
And out of tune with all the joy around
I laid me down beneath a flowering tree,
And o'er my senses crept a sleep profound;
In which it seem'd that thou wert given to me,
Rending my body, where with hurried sound
I feel my heart beat, when I think of thee.

60

Love that I know, love I am wise in, love,
My strength, my pride, my grace, my skill untaught,
My faith here upon earth, my hope above,
My contemplation and perpetual thought:
The pleasure of my fancy, my heart's fire,
My joy, my peace, my praise, my happy theme,
The aim of all my doing, my desire
Of being, my life by day, by night my dream:
Love, my sweet melancholy, my distress,
My pain, my doubt, my trouble, my despair,
My only folly and unhappiness,
And in my careless moments still my care:
O love, sweet love, earthly love, love divine,
Say'st thou to-day, O love, that thou art mine?

61

The dark and serious angel, who so long
Vex'd his immortal strength in charge of me,
Hath smiled for joy and fled in liberty
To take his pastime with the peerless throng.
Oft had I done his noble keeping wrong,
Wounding his heart to wonder what might be
God's purpose in a soul of such degree;
And there he had left me but for mandate strong.
But seeing thee with me now, his task at close
He knoweth, and wherefore he was bid to stay,
And work confusion of so many foes:
The thanks that he doth look for, here I pay,
Yet fear some heavenly envy, as he goes
Unto what great reward I cannot say.

62

I will be what God made me, nor protest
Against the bent of genius in my time,
That science of my friends robs all the best,
While I love beauty, and was born to rhyme.
Be they our mighty men, and let me dwell

In shadow among the mighty shades of old,
With love's forsaken palace for my cell;
Whence I look forth and all the world behold,
And say, These better days, in best things worse,
This bastardy of time's magnificence,
Will mend in fashion and throw off the curse,
To crown new love with higher excellence.
Curs'd tho' I be to live my life alone,
My toil is for man's joy, his joy my own.

63

I live on hope and that I think do all
Who come into this world, and since I see
Myself in swim with such good company,
I take my comfort whatsoever befall.
I abide and abide, as if more stout and tall
My spirit would grow by waiting like a tree
And, clear of others' toil, it pleaseth me
In dreams their quick ambition to forestall
And if thro' careless eagerness I slide
To some accomplishment, I give my voice
Still to desire, and in desire abide.
I have no stake abroad; if I rejoice
In what is done or doing, I confide
Neither to friend nor foe my secret choice.

64

Ye blessed saints, that now in heaven enjoy
The purchase of those tears, the world's disdain,
Doth Love still with his war your peace annoy,
Or hath Death freed you from his ancient pain?
Have ye no springtide, and no burst of May
In flowers and leafy trees, when solemn night
Pants with love-music, and the holy day
Breaks on the ear with songs of heavenly light?
What make ye and what strive for? keep ye thought
Of us, or in new excellence divine
Is old forgot? or do ye count for nought
What the Greek did and what the Florentine?
We keep your memories well : O in your store
Live not our best joys treasured evermore?

65

Ah heavenly joy But who hath ever heard,
Who hath seen joy, or who shall ever find
Joy's language? There is neither speech nor word
Nought but itself to teach it to mankind.
Scarce in our twenty thousand painful days
We may touch something: but there lives--beyond
The best of art, or nature's kindest phase--
The hope whereof our spirit is fain and fond:
The cause of beauty given to man's desires

Writ in the expectancy of starry skies,
The faith which gloweth in our fleeting fires,
The aim of all the good that here we prize;
Which but to love, pursue and pray for well
Maketh earth heaven, and to forget it, hell.

66

My wearied heart, whenever, after all,
Its loves and yearnings shall be told complete,
When gentle death shall bid it cease to beat,
And from all dear illusions disentrall:
However then thou shalt appear to call
My fearful heart, since down at others' feet
It bade me kneel so oft, I'll not retreat
From thee, nor fear before thy feet to fall.
And I shall say, "Receive this loving heart
Which err'd in sorrow only; and in sin
Took no delight; but being forced apart
From thee, without thee hoping thee to win,
Most prized what most thou madest as thou art
On earth, till heaven were open to enter in."

67

Dreary was winter, wet with changeful sting
Of clinging snowfall and fast-flying frost;
And bitterer northwinds then withheld the spring,
That dallied with her promise till 'twas lost.
A sunless and half-hearted summer drown'd
The flowers in needful and unwelcom'd rain;
And Autumn with a sad smile fled uncrown'd
From fruitless orchards and unripen'd grain.
But could the skies of this most desolate year
In its last month learn with our love to glow,
Men yet should rank its cloudless atmosphere
Above the sunsets of five years ago:
Of my great praise too part should be its own,
Now reckon'd peerless for thy love alone

68

Away now, lovely Muse, roam and be free:
Our commerce ends for aye, thy task is done:
Tho' to win thee I left all else unwon,
Thou, whom I most have won, art not for me.
My first desire, thou too forgone must be,
Thou too, O much lamented now, tho' none
Will turn to pity thy forsaken son,
Nor thy divine sisters will weep for thee.
None will weep for thee : thou return, O Muse,
To thy Sicilian fields I once have been
On thy loved hills, and where thou first didst use
Thy sweetly balanced rhyme, O thankless queen,
Have pluck'd and wreath'd thy flowers; but do thou choose

Some happier brow to wear thy garlands green.

69

Eternal Father, who didst all create,
In whom we live, and to whose bosom move,
To all men be Thy name known, which is Love,
Till its loud praises sound at heaven's high gate.
Perfect Thy kingdom in our passing state,
That here on earth Thou may'st as well approve
Our service, as Thou ownest theirs above,
Whose joy we echo and in pain await.

Grant body and soul each day their daily bread
And should in spite of grace fresh woe begin,
Even as our anger soon is past and dead
Be Thy remembrance mortal of our sin:
By Thee in paths of peace Thy sheep be led,
And in the vale of terror comforted.

Robert Seymour Bridges

To Joseph Joachim

Belov'd of all to whom that Muse is dear
Who hid her spirit of rapture from the Greek,
Whereby our art excelleth the antique,
Perfecting formal beauty to the ear;
Thou that hast been in England many a year
The interpreter who left us nought to seek,
Making Beethoven's inmost passion speak,
Bringing the soul of great Sebastian near.
Their music liveth ever, and 'tis just
That thou, good Joachim, so high thy skill,
Rank (as thou shalt upon the heavenly hill)
Laurel'd with them, for thy ennobling trust
Remember'd when thy loving hand is still
And every ear that heard thee stopt with dust.

Robert Seymour Bridges

To the President of Magdalen College, Oxford

Since now from woodland mist and flooded clay
I am fled beside the steep Devonian shore,
Nor stand for welcome at your gothic door,
'Neath the fair tower of Magdalen and May,
Such tribute, Warren, as fond poets pay
For generous esteem, I write, not more
Enhearten'd than my need is, reckoning o'er
My life-long wanderings on the heavenly way:
But well-befriended we become good friends,
Well-honour'd honourable; and all attain
Somewhat by fathering what fortune sends.
I bid your presidency a long reign,
True friend; and may your praise to greater ends
Aid better men than I, nor me in vain.

Robert Seymour Bridges

To the United States of America

Brothers in blood! They who this wrong began
To wreck our commonwealth, will rue the day
When first they challenged freeman to the fray,
And with the Briton dared the American.
Now are we pledged to win the Rights of man:
Labour and Justice now shall have their way,
And in a League of Peace -- God grant we may --
Transform the earth, not patch up the old plan.

Sure is our hope since he who led your nation
Spoke for mankind, and ye arose in awe
Of that high call to work the world's salvation;
Clearing your minds of all estrangling blindness
In the vision of Beauty and the Spirit's law,
Freedom and Honour and sweet Lovingkindness.

Robert Seymour Bridges

To Thos. Floyd

How fares it, friend, since I by Fate annoy'd
Left the old home in need of livelier play
For body and mind? How fare, this many a day,
The stubborn thews and ageless heart of Floyd?
If not too well with country sport employ'd,
Visit my flock, the breezy hill that they
Choose for their fold; and see, for thence you may,
From rising walls all roofless yet and void,
The lovely city, thronging tower and spire,
The mind of the wide landscape, dreaming deep,
Grey-silvery in the vale; a shrine where keep
Memorian hopes their pale celestial fire:
Like man's immortal conscience of desire,
The spirit that watcheth in me ev'n in my sleep.

Robert Seymour Bridges

When Death to Either shall come

When Death to either shall come,—
I pray it be first to me,—
Be happy as ever at home,
If so, as I wish, it be.

Possess thy heart, my own;
And sing to the child on thy knee,
Or read to thyself alone
The songs that I made for thee.

Robert Seymour Bridges

While yet we wait for spring, and from the dry

While yet we wait for spring, and from the dry
And blackening east that so embitters March,
Well-housed must watch grey fields and meadows parch,
And driven dust and withering snowflake fly;
Already in glimpses of the tarnish'd sky
The sun is warm and beckons to the larch,
And where the covert hazels interarch
Their tassell'd twigs, fair beds of primrose lie.
Beneath the crisp and wintry carpet hid
A million buds but stay their blossoming;
And trustful birds have built their nests amid
The shuddering boughs, and only wait to sing
Till one soft shower from the south shall bid,
And hither tempt the pilgrim steps of spring.

Robert Seymour Bridges

Winter Nightfall

The day begins to droop,--
Its course is done:
But nothing tells the place
Of the setting sun.
The hazy darkness deepens,
And up the lane
You may hear, but cannot see,
The homing wain.
An engine pants and hums
In the farm hard by:
Its lowering smoke is lost
In the lowering sky.
The soaking branches drip,
And all night through
The dropping will not cease
In the avenue.
A tall man there in the house
Must keep his chair:
He knows he will never again
Breathe the spring air:
His heart is worn with work;
He is giddy and sick
If he rise to go as far
As the nearest rick:
He thinks of his morn of life,
His hale, strong years;
And braves as he may the night
Of darkness and tears.

Robert Seymour Bridges