# **Classic Poetry Series**

# **Sydney Thompson Dobell**

- poems -

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#### **A Chanted Calendar**

FIRST came the primrose, On the bank high, Like a maiden looking forth From the window of a tower When the battle rolls below, So look'd she, And saw the storms go by.

Then came the wind-flower In the valley left behind, As a wounded maiden, pale With purple streaks of woe, When the battle has roll'd by Wanders to and fro, So totter'd she, Dishevell'd in the wind.

Then came the daisies,
On the first of May,
Like a banner'd show's advance
While the crowd runs by the way,
With ten thousand flowers about them
they came trooping through the fields.

As a happy people come, So came they, As a happy people come When the war has roll'd away, With dance and tabor, pipe and drum, And all make holiday.

Then came the cowslip,
Like a dancer in the fair,
She spread her little mat of green,
And on it danced she.
With a fillet bound about her brow,
A fillet round her happy brow,
A golden fillet round her brow,
And rubies in her hair.

# A Nupial Eve (excerpt)

The murmur of the mourning ghost
That keeps the shadowy kine,
"Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line!"

Ravelston, Ravelston,
The merry path that leads
Down the golden morning hill,
And thro' the silver meads;

Ravelston, Ravelston,
The stile beneath the tree,
The maid that kept her mother's kine,
The song that sang she!

She sang her song, she kept her kine, She sat beneath the thorn, When Andrew Keith of Ravelston Rode thro' the Monday morn.

His henchmen sing, his hawk-bells ring, His belted jewels shine! Oh, Keith of Ravelston, The sorrows of thy line!

Year after year, where Andrew came, Comes evening down the glade, And still there sits a moonshine ghost Where sat the sunshine maid.

Her misty hair is faint and fair, She keeps the shadowy kine; Oh, Keith of Ravelston, The sorrows of thy line!

I lay my hand upon the stile, The stile is lone and cold, The burnie that goes babbling by Says nought that can be told.

Yet, stranger! here, from year to year, She keeps her shadowy kine; Oh, Keith of Ravelston, The sorrows of thy line!

Step out three steps, where Andrew stood--Why blanch thy cheeks for fear? The ancient stile is not alone, 'Tis not the burn I hear!

She makes her immemorial moan, She keeps her shadowy kine; Oh, Keith of Ravelston, The sorrows of thy line! Sydney Thompson Dobell

#### **America**

NOR force nor fraud shall sunder us! O ye
Who north or south, on east or western land,
Native to noble sounds, say truth for truth,
Freedom for freedom, love for love, and God
For God; O ye who in eternal youth
Speak with a living and creative flood
This universal English, and do stand
Its breathing book; live worthy of that grand
Heroic utterance—parted, yet a whole,
Far yet unsever'd,—children brave and free
Of the great Mother-tongue, and ye shall be
Lords of an empire wide as Shakespeare's soul,
Sublime as Milton's immemorial theme,
And rich as Chaucer's speech, and fair as Spenser's dream.

## Dante, Shakespeare, Milton - From

Doctor. Ah! thou, too, Sad Alighieri, like a waning moon Setting in storm behind a grove of bays! Balder. Yes, the great Florentine, who wove his web And thrust it into hell, and drew it forth Immortal, having burn'd all that could burn, And leaving only what shall still be found Untouch'd, nor with the small of fire upon it, Under the final ashes of this world. Doctor. Shakespeare and Milton! Switzerland and home. Balder. I ne'er see Milton, but I see the Alps, As once, sole standing on a peak supreme, To the extremest verge summit and gulf I saw, height after depth, Alp beyond Alp, O'er which the rising and the sinking soul Sails into distance, heaving as a ship O'er a great sea that sets to strands unseen. And as the mounting and descending bark, Borne on exulting by the under deep, Gains of the wild wave something not the wave, Catches a joy of going, and a will Resistless, and upon the last lee foam Leaps into air beyond it, so the soul upon the Alpine ocean mountain-toss'd, Incessant carried up to heaven, and plunged To darkness, and still wet with drops of death Held into light eternal, and again Cast down, to be again uplift in vast And infinite succession, cannot stay The mad momentum, but in frenzied sight Of horizontal clouds and mists and skies And the untried Inane, springs on the surge Of things, and passing matter by a force Material, thro' vacuity careers, Rising and falling. And my Shakespeare! Call Doctor. Milton your Alps, and which is he among The tops of Andes? Keep your Paradise, And Eves, and Adams, but give me the Earth That Shakespeare drew, and make it grave and gay With Shakespeare's men and women; let me laugh Or weep with them, and you—a wager,—aye, A wager by my faith—either his muse Was the recording angel, or that hand Cherubic, which fills up the Book of Life, Caught what the last relaxing gripe let fall By a death-bed at Stratford, and hence-forth Holds Shakespeare's pen. Now strain your sinews, poet, And top your Pelion,—Milton Switzerland, And English Shakespeare-This dear English land! Balder.

This happy England, loud with brooks and birds, Shining with harvests, cool with dewy trees, And bloom'd from hill to dell; but whose best flowers Are daughters, and Ophelia still more fair Than any rose she weaves; whose noblest floods The pulsing torrent of a nation's heart: Whose forests stronger than her native oaks Are living men; and whose unfathom'd lakes Forever calm the unforgotten dead In quiet graveyards willow'd seemly round, O'er which To-day bends sad, and sees his face. Whose rocks are rights, consolidate of old Thro' unremember'd years, around whose base The ever-surging peoples roll and roar Perpetual, as around her cliffs the seas That only wash them whiter; and whose mountains, Souls that from this mere footing of the earth Lift their great virtues thro' all clouds of Fate Up to the very heavens, and make them rise To keep the gods above us!

# **Epigram On The Death Of Edward Forbes**

NATURE, a jealous mistress, laid him low. He woo'd and won her; and, by love made bold, She show'd him more than mortal man should know, Then slew him lest her secret should be told.

## Fragment Of A Sleep-Song

SISTER Simplicitie, Sing, sing a song to me, Sing me to sleep. Some legend low and long, Slow as the summer song Of the dull Deep.

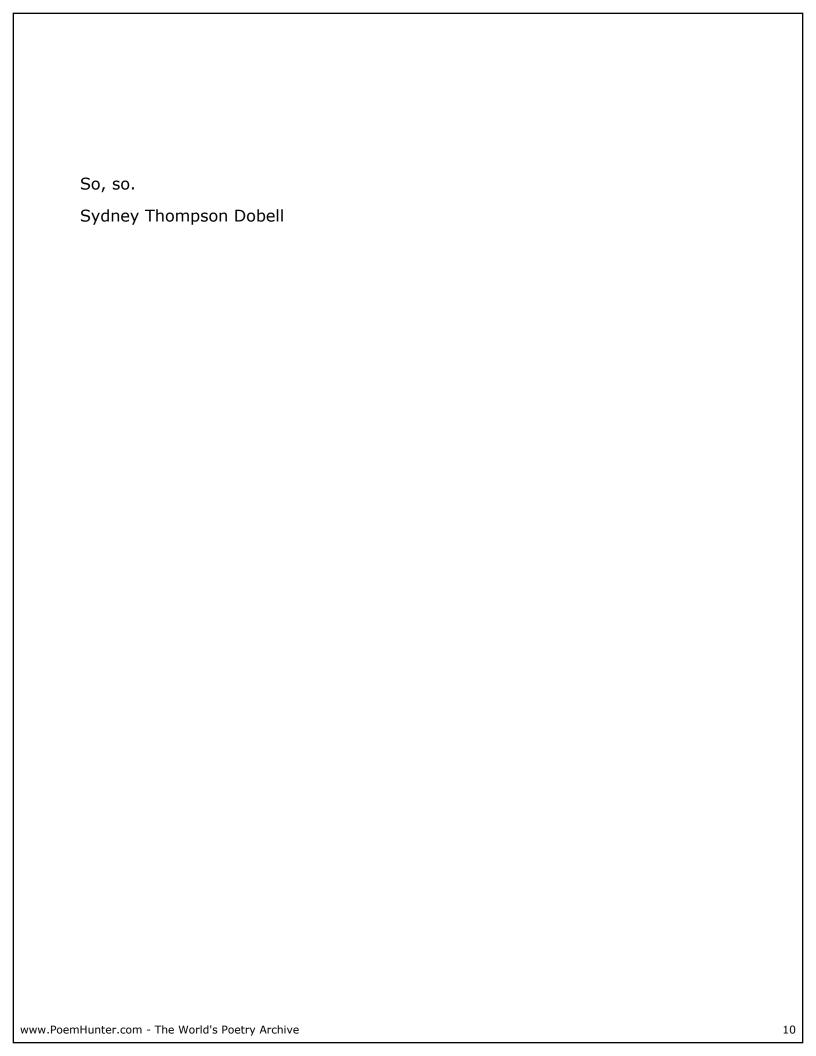
Some legend long and low, Whose equal ebb and flow To and fro creep On the dim marge of gray 'Tween the soul's night and day, Washing "awake" away Into "asleep."

Some legend low and long, Never so weak or strong As to let go While it can hold this heart Withouten sigh or smart, Or as to hold this heart When it sighs "No."

Some long low swaying song, As the sway'd shadow long Sways to and fro Where, thro' the crowing cocks, And by the swinging clocks, Some weary mother rocks Some weary woe.

Sing up and down to me Like a dream-boat at sea, So, and still so, Float through the "then" and "when," Rising from when to then, Sinking from then to when While the waves go.

Low and high, high and low,
Now and then, then and now,
Mow, now;
And when the now is then, and when the then is now,
And when the low is high, and when the high is low,
Low, low;
Let me float, let the boat
Go, go;
Let me glide, let me slide
Slow, slow;
Gliding boat, sliding boat,
Slow, slow;
Glide away, slide away



#### **Home In War-Time**

SHE turn'd the fair page with her fairer hand—
More fair and frail than it was wont to be—
O'er each remember'd thing he lov'd to see
She linger'd, and as with a fairy's wand
Enchanted it to order. Oft she fann'd
New motes into the sun; and as a bee
Sings thro' a brake of bells, so murmur'd she,
And so her patient love did understand
The reliquary room. Upon the sill
She fed his favorite bird. "Ah, Robin, sing!
He loves thee." Then she touches a sweet string
Of soft recall, and towards the Eastern hill
Smiles all her soul—for him who cannot hear
The raven croaking at his carrion ear.

## How's My Boy?

"HO, Sailor of the sea!
How's my boy—my boy?"
"What's your boy's name, good wife,
And in what good ship sail'd he?"
"My boy John— He that went to sea—
What care I for the ship, sailor?
My boy's my boy to me.
"You come back from sea,
And not know my John?
I might as well have ask'd some landsman
Yonder down in the town.
There 's not an ass in all the parish
But he knows my John.

"How's my boy—my boy?
And unless you let me know
I'll swear you are no sailor,
Blue jacket or no,
Brass buttons or no, sailor,
Anchor and crown or no!
Sure his ship was the 'Jolly Briton'"—
"Speak low, woman, speak low!"
"And why should I speak low, sailor,
About my own boy John?
If I was loud as I am proud
I'd sing him over the town!
Why should I speak low, sailor?"
"That good ship went down."

"How's my boy—my boy?
What care I for the ship, sailor?
I was never aboard her.
Be she afloat or be she aground,
Sinking or swimming, I'll be bound,
Her owners can afford her!
I say, how's my John?"
"Every man on board went down,
Every man aboard her."
"How's my boy—my boy?
What care I for the men, sailor?
I'm not their mother—
How's my boy—my boy?
Tell me of him and no other!
How 's my boy—my boy?"

#### **Laus Deo**

IN the hall the coffin waits, and the idle armourer stands. At his belt the coffin nails, and the hammer in his hands. The bed of state is hung with crape--the grand old bed where she was wed--

And like an upright corpse she sitteth gazing dumbly at the bed. Hour by hour her serving-men enter by the curtain'd door, And with steps of muffled woe pass breathless o'er the silent floor, And marshal mutely round, and look from each to each with eyelids red;

'Touch him not,' she shriek'd and cried, 'he is but newly dead!'
'O my own dear mistress,' the ancient Nurse did say,
'Seven long days and seven long nights you have watch'd him where he lay.'

'Seven long days and seven long nights,' the hoary Steward said; 'Seven long days and seven long nights,' groan'd the Warrener gray; 'Seven,' said the old Henchman, and bow'd his aged head; 'On your lives!' she shriek'd and cried, 'he is but newly dead!'

Then a father Priest they sought,
The Priest that taught her all she knew,
And they told him of her loss.
'For she is mild and sweet of will,
She loved him, and his words are peace,
And he shall heal her ill.'
But her watch she did not cease.
He bless'd her where she sat distraught,
And show'd her holy cross,-The cross she kiss'd from year to year-But she neither saw nor heard;
And said he in her deaf ear

All she had been fond to hear, Missall'd prayer, and solemn speech, But she answer'd not a word.

All he had been wont to teach,

Only when he turn'd to speak with those who wept about the bed, 'On your lives!' she shriek'd and cried, 'he is but newly dead!'
Then how sadly he turn'd from her, it were wonderful to tell,
And he stood beside the death-bed as by one who slumbers well,
And he lean'd o'er him who lay there, and in cautious whisper low,

'He is not dead, but sleepeth,' said the Priest, and smooth'd his brow.

'Sleepeth?' said she, looking up, and the sun rose in her face! 'He must be better than I thought, for the sleep is very sound.' 'He is better,' said the Priest, and call'd her maidens round. With them came that ancient dame who nursed her when a child; O Nurse!' she sigh'd, 'O Nurse!' she cried 'O Nurse!' and then she smiled,

And then she wept; with that they drew About her, as of old; Her dying eyes were sweet and blue, Her trembling touch was cold; But she said, 'My maidens true, No more weeping and well-away;

Let them kill the feast. I would be happy in my soul. "He is better," saith the Priest; He did but sleep the weary day, And will waken whole. Carry me to his dear side, And let the halls be trim; Whistly, whistly,' said she, 'I am wan with watching and wail, He must not wake to see me pale, Let me sleep with him. See you keep the tryst for me, I would rest till he awake And rise up like a bride. But whistly, whistly!' said she. 'Yet rejoice your Lord doth live; And for His dear sake Say Laus, Domine. Silent they cast down their eyes, And every breast a sob did rive, She lifted her in wild surprise And they dared not disobey. 'Laus Deo,' said the Steward, hoary when her days were new; 'Laus Deo,' said the Warrener, whiter than the warren snows; 'Laus Deo,' the bald Henchman, who had nursed her on his knee. The old Nurse moved her lips in vain, And she stood among the train Like a dead tree shaking dew. Then the Priest he softly stept Midway in the little band, And he took the Lady's hand. 'Laus Deo,' he said aloud, 'Laus Deo,' they said again, Yet again, and yet again, Humbly cross'd and lowly bow'd, Till in wont and fear it rose To the Sabbath strain. But she neither turn'd her head Nor 'Whistly, whistly,' said she. Her hands were folded as in grace, We laid her with her ancient race And all the village wept.

## On the Death of Mrs. Browning

WHICH of the Angels sang so well in Heaven
That the approving Archon of the quire
Cried, "Come up hither!" and he, going higher,
Carried a note out of the choral seven;
Whereat that cherub to whom choice is given
Among the singers that on earth aspire
Beckon'd thee from us, and thou, and thy lyre
Sudden ascended out of sight? Yet even
In Heaven thou weepest! Well, true wife, to weep!
Thy voice doth so betray that sweet offence
That no new call should more exalt thee hence
But for thy harp. Ah, lend it, and such grace
Shall still advance thy neighbor that thou keep
Thy seat, and at thy side a vacant place!

#### Return!

RETURN, return! all night my lamp is burning, All night, like it, my wide eyes watch and burn; Like it, I fade and pale, when day returning Bears witness that the absent can return, Return, return.

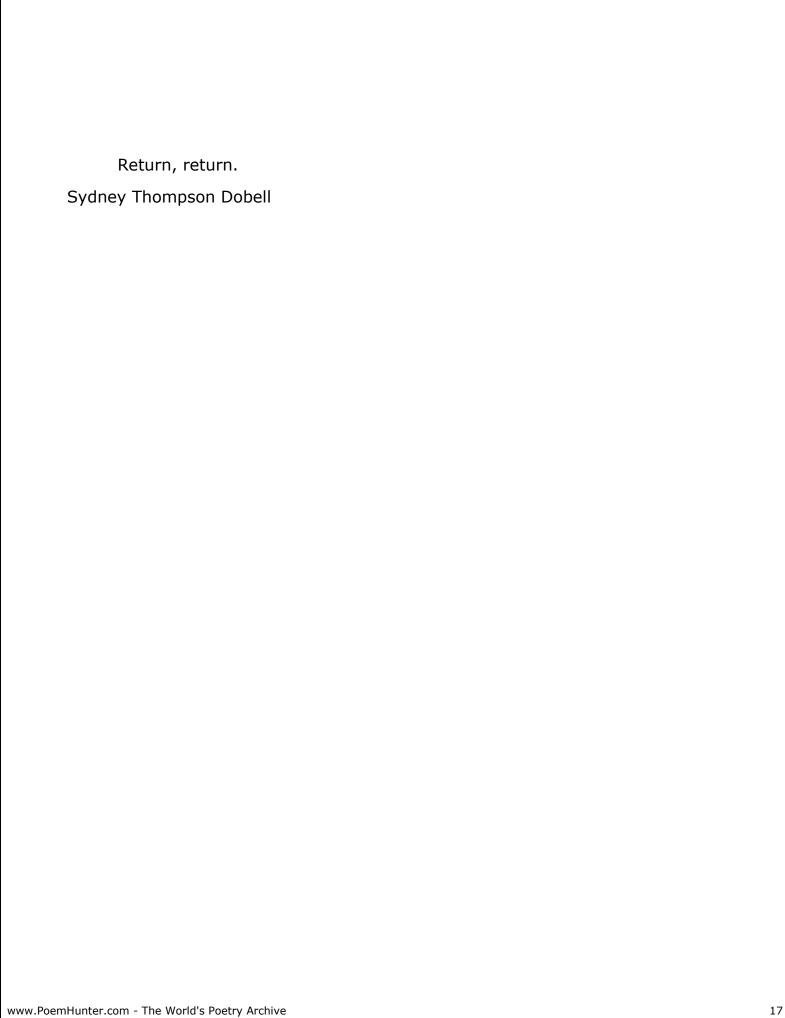
Like it, I lessen with a lengthening sadness, Like it, I burn to waste and waste to burn, Like it, I spend the golden oil of gladness To feed the sorrowy signal for return, Return, return.

Like it, like it, whene'er the east wind sings,
I bend and shake; like it, I quake and yearn,
When Hope's late butterflies, with whispering wings,
Fly in out of the dark, to fall and burn-Burn in the watchfire of return,
Return, return.

Like it, the very flame whereby I pine
Consumes me to its nature. While I mourn
My soul becomes a better soul than mine,
And from its brightening beacon I discern
My starry love go forth from me, and shine
Across the seas a path for thy return,
Return, return.

Return, return! all night I see it burn,
All night it prays like me, and lifts a twin
Of palmed praying hands that meet and yearnYearn to the impleaded skies for thy return.
Day, like a golden fetter, locks them in,
And wans the light that withers, tho' it burn
As warmly still for thy return;
Still thro' the splendid load uplifts the thin
Pale, paler, palest patience that can learn
Naught but that votive sign for thy returnThat single suppliant sign for thy return,
Return, return.

Return, return! lest haply, love, or e'er
Thou touch the lamp the light have ceased to burn,
And thou, who thro' the window didst discern
The wonted flame, shalt reach the topmost stair
To find no wide eyes watching there,
No wither'd welcome waiting thy return!
A passing ghost, a smoke-wreath in the air,
The flameless ashes, and the soulless urn,
Warm with the famish'd fire that lived to burn-Burn out its lingering life for thy return,
Its last of lingering life to light thy late return,



#### Sea Ballad - From

"HOW many?" said our good Captain. "Twenty sáil and more. We were homeward bound, Scudding in a gale with our jib towards the Nore. Right athwart our tack, The foe came thick and black, Like Hell-birds and foul weather—you might count them by the score. The Betsy Jane did slack To see the game in view. They knew the Union-Jack, And the tyrant's flag we knew!
Our Captain shouted "Clear the decks!" and the Bo'sun's whistle blew. Then our gallant Captain, With his hand he seiz'd the wheel, And pointed with his stump to the middle of the foe. "Hurray, lads, in we go!" (You should hear the British cheer, Fore and aft.) "There are twenty sail," sang he, "But little Betsy Jane bobs to nothing on the sea!" (You should hear the British cheer, Fore and aft.) "See you ugly craft With the pennon at her main! Hurrah, my merry boys, There goes the Betsy Jane!" (You should hear the British cheer, Fore and aft.) The foe, he beats to quarters, and the Russian bugles sound; And the little Betsy Jane she leaps upon the sea. "Port and starboard!" cried our Captain; "Pay it in, my hearts!" sang he. "We 're old England's sons,

"We 're old England's sons,
And we 'll fight for her to-day!"
(You should hear the British cheer.
Fore and aft.)
 "Fire away!"
In she runs,
And her guns
Thunder round.

## **Tommy's Dead**

YOU may give over plough, boys, You may take the gear to the stead, All the sweat o' your brow, boys, Will never get beer and bread. The seed's waste, I know, boys, There's not a blade will grow, boys, 'Tis cropped out, I trow, boys, And Tommy's dead.

Send the colt to fair, boys, He's going blind, as I said, My old eyes can't bear, boys, To see him in the shed; The cow's dry and spare, boys, She's neither here nor there, boys, I doubt she's badly bread; Stop the mill to-morn, boys, There'll be no more corn, boys, Neither white nor red; There's no sign of grass, boys, You may sell the goat and the ass, boys, The land's not what it was, boys, And the beasts must be fed: You may turn Peg away, boys, You may pay off old Ned, We've had a dull day, boys, And Tommy's dead.

Move my chair on the floor, boys, Let me turn my head: She's standing there in the door, boys, Your sister Winifred! Take her away from me, boys, Your sister Winifred! Move me round in my place, boys, Let me turn my head, Take her away from me, boys, As she lay on here death-bed, The bones of her thin face, boys, As she lay on her death-bed! I don't know how it be, boys, When all's done and said, But I see her looking at me, boys, Whenever I turn my head; Out of the big oak tree, boys, Out of the garden-bed, And the lily as pale as she, boys, And the rose that used to be red.

There's something not right, boys, But I think it's not in my head, I've kept my precious sight, boys, -- The Lord be hallowed! Outside and in The ground is cold to my tread, The hills are wizen and thin, The sky is shrivelled and shred, The hedges down by the loan I can count them bone by bone, The leaves are open and spread, But I see the teeth of the land, And hands like a dead man's hand, And the eyes of a dead man's head. There's nothing but cinders and sand, The rat and the mouse have fed, And the summer's empty and cold; Over valley and wold Wherever I turn my head There's a mildew and a mould, The sun's going out overhead, And I'm very old, And Tommy's dead.

What am I staying for, boys, You're all born and bred, 'Tis fifty years and more, boys, Since wife and I were wed, And she'd gone before, boys, And Tommy's dead.

She was always sweet, boys, Upon his curly head, She knew she'd never see't, boys, And she stole off to bed; I've been siting up alone, boys, For he'd come home, he said, But it's time I was gone boys, For Tommy's dead.

Put the shutters up, boys, Bring out the beer and bread, Make haste and sup, boys, For my eyes are heavy as lead: There's something wrong i' the cup, boys, There's something ill wi' the bread, I don't care to sup, boys, And Tommy's dead.

I'm not right, I doubt, boys, I've such a sleepy head, I shall nevermore be stout, boys, You may carry me to bed. What are you about, boys? The prayers are all said,

The fire's raked out, boys, And Tommy's dead.

The stairs are too steep, boys, You may carry me to the head, The night's dark and deep, boys, Your mother's long in bed, 'Tis time to go to sleep, boys, And Tommy's dead.

I'm not used to a kiss, boys, You may shake my hand instead. All things go amiss, boys, You may lay me where she is, boys, And I'll rest my old head: 'Tis a poor world, this, boys, And Tommy's dead.