Classic Poetry Series

William Henry Davies

- poems -

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A Fleeting Passion

Thou shalt not laugh, thou shalt not romp,
Let's grimly kiss with bated breath;
As quietly and solemnly
As Life when it is kissing Death.
Now in the silence of the grave,
My hand is squeezing that soft breast;
While thou dost in such passion lie,
It mocks me with its look of rest.

But when the morning comes at last,
And we must part, our passions cold,
You'll think of some new feather, scarf
To buy with my small piece of gold;
And I'll be dreaming of green lanes,
Where little things with beating hearts
Hold shining eyes between the leaves,
Till men with horses pass, and carts.

William Henry Davies

A Great Time

Sweet Chance, that led my steps abroad,
Beyond the town, where wild flowers grow --
A rainbow and a cuckoo, Lord,
How rich and great the times are now!
Know, all ye sheep
And cows, that keep
On staring that I stand so long
In grass that's wet from heavy rain --
A rainbow and a cuckoo's song
May never come together again;
May never come
This side the tomb.

William Henry Davies

A Greeting

Good morning, Life--and all
Things glad and beautiful.
My pockets nothing hold,
But he that owns the gold,
The Sun, is my great friend--
His spending has no end.

Hail to the morning sky,
Which bright clouds measure high;
Hail to you birds whose throats
Would number leaves by notes;
Hail to you shady bowers,
And you green field of flowers.

Hail to you women fair,
That make a show so rare
In cloth as white as milk--
Be't calico or silk:
Good morning, Life--and all
Things glad and beautiful.

William Henry Davies

A Plain Life

No idle gold -- since this fine sun, my friend,
Is no mean miser, but doth freely spend.

No prescious stones -- since these green mornings show,
Without a charge, their pearls where'er I go.

No lifeless books -- since birds with their sweet tongues
Will read aloud to me their happier songs.

No painted scenes -- since clouds can change their skies
A hundred times a day to please my eyes.

No headstrong wine -- since, when I drink, the spring
Into my eager ears will softly sing.

No surplus clothes -- since every simple beast
Can teach me to be happy with the least.

William Henry Davies

Ale

Now do I hear thee weep and groan,
Who hath a comrade sunk at sea?
Then quaff thee of my good old ale,
And it will raise him up for thee;
Thoul't think as little of him then
As when he moved with living men.

If thou hast hopes to move the world,
And every effort it doth fail,
Then to thy side call Jack and Jim,
And bid them drink with thee good ale;
So may the world, that would not hear,
Perish in hell with all your care.

One quart of good ale, and I
Feel then what life immortal is:
The brain is empty of all thought,
The heart is brimming o'er with bliss;
Time's first child, Life, doth live; but Death,
The second, hath not yet his breath.

Give me a quart of good old ale,
Am I a homeless man on earth?
Nay, I want not your roof and quilt,
I'll lie warm at the moon's cold hearth;
No grumbling ghost to grudge my bed,
His grave, ha! ha! holds up my head.

William Henry Davies

All in June

A week ago I had a fire
To warm my feet, my hands and face;
Cold winds, that never make a friend,
Crept in and out of every place.

Today the fields are rich in grass,
And buttercups in thousands grow;
I'll show the world where I have been--
With gold-dust seen on either shoe.

Till to my garden back I come,
Where bumble-bees for hours and hours
Sit on their soft, fat, velvet bums,
To wriggle out of hollow flowers.

William Henry Davies

April's Charms

When April scatters charms of primrose gold
Among the copper leaves in thickets old,
And singing skylarks from the meadows rise,
To twinkle like black stars in sunny skies;

When I can hear the small woodpecker ring
Time on a tree for all the birds that sing;
And hear the pleasant cuckoo, loud and long --
The simple bird that thinks two notes a song;

When I can hear the woodland brook, that could
Not drown a babe, with all his threatening mood;
Upon these banks the violets make their home,
And let a few small strawberry vlossoms come:

When I go forth on such a pleasant day,
One breath outdoors takes all my cares away;
It goes like heavy smoke, when flames take hold
Of wood that's green and fill a grate with gold.

William Henry Davies

Charms

She walks as lightly as the fly
Skates on the water in July.

To hear her moving petticoat
For me is music's highest note.

Stones are not heard, when her feet pass,
No more than tumps of moss or grass.

When she sits still, she's like the flower
To be a butterfly next hour.

The brook laughs not more sweet, when he
Trips over pebbles suddenly.
My Love, like him, can whisper low --
When he comes where green cresses grow.

She rises like the lark, that hour
He goes halfway to meet a shower.

A fresher drink is in her looks
Than Nature gives me, or old books.

When I in my Love's shadow sit,
I do not miss the sun one bit.

When she is near, my arms can hold
All that's worth having in this world.

And when I know not where she is,
Nothing can come but comes amiss.

William Henry Davies

Come, Let Us Find

Come, let us find a cottage, love,
That's green for half a mile around;
To laugh at every grumbling bee,
Whose sweetest blossom's not yet found.
Where many a bird shall sing for you,
And in your garden build its nest:
They'll sing for you as though their eggs
Were lying in your breast,
My love--
Were lying warm in your soft breast.

'Tis strange how men find time to hate,
When life is all too short for love;
But we, away from our own kind,
A different life can live and prove.
And early on a summer's morn,
As I go walking out with you,
We'll help the sun with our warm breath
To clear away the dew,
My love,
To clear away the morning dew.

William Henry Davies

Days Too Short

When primroses are out in Spring,
And small, blue violets come between;
When merry birds sing on boughs green,
And rills, as soon as born, must sing;

When butterflies will make side-leaps,
As though escaped from Nature's hand
Ere perfect quite; and bees will stand
Upon their heads in fragrant deeps;

When small clouds are so silvery white
Each seems a broken rimmed moon--
When such things are, this world too soon,
For me, doth wear the veil of night.

William Henry Davies

In May

Yes, I will spend the livelong day
With Nature in this month of May;
And sit beneath the trees, and share
My bread with birds whose homes are there;
While cows lie down to eat, and sheep
Stand to their necks in grass so deep;
While birds do sing with all their might,
As though they felt the earth in flight.
This is the hour I dreamed of, when
I sat surrounded by poor men;
And thought of how the Arab sat
Alone at evening, gazing at
The stars that bubbled in clear skies;

And of young dreamers, when their eyes
Enjoyed methought a precious boon
In the adventures of the Moon
Whose light, behind the Clouds' dark bars,
Searched for her stolen flocks of stars.
When I, hemmed in by wrecks of men,
Thought of some lonely cottage then
Full of sweet books; and miles of sea,
With passing ships, in front of me;
And having, on the other hand,
A flowery, green, bird-singing land.

William Henry Davies

In the Country

This life is sweetest; in this wood
I hear no children cry for food;
I see no woman, white with care;
No man, with muscled wasting here.

No doubt it is a selfish thing
To fly from human suffering;
No doubt he is a selfish man,
Who shuns poor creatures, sad and wan.

But 'tis a wretched life to face
Hunger in almost every place;
Cursed with a hand that's empty, when
The heart is full to help all men.

Can I admire the statue great,
When living men starve at its feet!
Can I admire the park's green tree,
A roof for homeless misery!

William Henry Davies

Joy and Pleasure

Now, joy is born of parents poor,
And pleasure of our richer kind;
Though pleasure's free, she cannot sing
As sweet a song as joy confined.

Pleasure's a Moth, that sleeps by day
And dances by false glare at night;
But Joy's a Butterfly, that loves
To spread its wings in Nature's light.

Joy's like a Bee that gently sucks
Away on blossoms its sweet hour;
But pleasure's like a greedy Wasp,
That plums and cherries would devour.

Joy's like a Lark that lives alone,
Whose ties are very strong, though few;
But Pleasure like a Cuckoo roams,
Makes much acquaintance, no friends true.

Joy from her heart doth sing at home,
With little care if others hear;
But pleasure then is cold and dumb,
And sings and laughs with strangers near.

William Henry Davies

Laughing Rose

If I were gusty April now,
How I would blow at laughing Rose;
I'd make her ribbons slip their knots,
And all her hair come loose.

If I were merry April now,
How I would pelt her cheeks with showers;
I'd make carnations, rich and warm,
Of her vermillion flowers.

Since she will laugh in April's face
No matter how he rains or blows --
Then O that I wild April were,
To play with laughing Rose.

William Henry Davies

Leisure

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this is if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

William Henry Davies

Money

When I had money, money, O!
I knew no joy till I went poor;
For many a false man as a friend
Came knocking all day at my door.
Then felt I like a child that holds
A trumpet that he must not blow
Because a man is dead; I dared
Not speak to let this false world know.
Much have I thought of life, and seen
How poor men's hearts are ever light;
And how their wives do hum like bees
About their work from morn till night.
So, when I hear these poor ones laugh,
And see the rich ones coldly frown—
Poor men, think I, need not go up
So much as rich men should come down.
When I had money, money, O!
My many friends proved all untrue;
But now I have no money, O!
My friends are real, though very few.

William Henry Davies

Nell Barnes

They lived apart for three long years,
Bill Barnes and Nell his wife;
He took his joy from other girls,
She led a wicked life.

Yet ofttimes she would pass his shop,
With some strange man awhile;
And, looking, meet her husband's frown
With her malicious smile.

Until one day, when passing there,
She saw her man had gone;
And when she saw the empty shop,
She fell down with a moan.

And when she heard that he had gone
Five thousand miles away;
And that she's see his face no more,
She sickened from that day.

To see his face was health and life,
And when it was denied,
She could not eat, and broke her heart --
It was for love she died.

William Henry Davies

No Master

Indeed this is the sweet life! my hand
Is under no proud man's command;
There is no voice to break my rest
Before a bird has left its nest;
There is no man to change my mood,
When I go nutting in the wood;
No man to pluck my sleeve and say --
I want thy labour for this day;
No man to keep me out of sight,
When that dear Sun is shining bright.
None but my friends shall have command
Upon my time, my heart and hand;
I'll rise from sleep to help a friend,
But let no stranger orders send,
Or hear my curses fast and thick,
Which in his purse-proud throat would stick
Like burrs. If I cannot be free
To do such work as pleases me,
Near woodland pools and under trees,
You'll get no work at all, for I
Would rather live this life and die
A beggar or a thief, than be
A working slave with no days free.

William Henry Davies

Rich Days

Welcome to you rich Autumn days,
Ere comes the cold, leaf-picking wind;
When golden stocks are seen in fields,
All standing arm-in-arm entwined;
And gallons of sweet cider seen
On trees in apples red and green.

With mellow pears that cheat our teeth,
Which melt that tongues may suck them in;
With blue-black damsons, yellow plums,
Now sweet and soft from stone to skin;
And woodnuts rich, to make us go
Into the loneliest lanes we know.

William Henry Davies

Rich or Poor

With thy true love I have more wealth
Than Charon's piled-up bank doth hold;
Where he makes kings lay down their crowns
And life-long misers leave their gold.

Without thy love I've no more wealth
Than seen upon that other shore;
That cold, bare bank he rows them to -
Those kings and misers made so poor.

William Henry Davies

Sadness and Joy

I pray you, Sadness, leave me soon,
In sweet invention thou art poor!
Thy sister, Joy can make ten songs
While thou art making four.

One hour with thee is sweet enough;
But when we find the whole day gone
And no created thing is left --
We mourn the evil done.

Thou art too slow to shape thy thoughts
In stone, on canvas, or in song;
But Joy, being full of active heat,
Must do some deed ere long.

Thy sighs are gentle, sweet thy tears;
But if thou canst not help a man
To prove in substance what he feels --
Then givve me Joy, who can.

Therefore sweet Sadness, leave me soon,
Let thy bright sister, Joy, come more;
For she can make ten lovely songs
While thou art making four.

William Henry Davies

Seeking Beauty

Cold winds can never freeze, nor thunder sour
The cup of cheer that Beauty draws for me
Out of those Azure heavens and this green earth --
I drink and drink, and thirst the more I see.

To see the dewdrops thrill the blades of grass,
Makes my whole body shake; for here's my choice
Of either sun or shade, and both are green --
A Chaffinch laughs in his melodious voice.

The banks are stormed by Speedwell, that blue flower
So like a little heaven with one star out;
I see an amber lake of buttercups,
And Hawthorn foams the hedges round about.

The old Oak tree looks now so green and young,
That even swallows perch awhile and sing:
This is that time of year, so sweet and warm,
When bats wait not for stars ere they take wing.

As long as I love Beauty I am young,
Am young or old as I love more or less;
When Beauty is not heeded or seems stale,
My life's a cheat, let Death end my distress.

William Henry Davies

Songs of Joy

Sing out, my soul, thy songs of joy;
Sing as a happy bird will sing
Beneath a rainbow's lovely arch
In the spring.

Think not of death in thy young days;
Why shouldst thou that grim tyrant fear?
And fear him not when thou art old,
And he is near.

Strive not for gold, for greedy fools
Measure themselves by poor men never;
Their standard still being richer men,
Makes them poor ever.

Train up thy mind to feel content,
What matters then how low thy store?
What we enjoy, and not possess,
Makes rich or poor.

Filled with sweet thought, then happy I
Take not my state from other's eyes;
What's in my mind -- not on my flesh
Or theirs -- I prize.

Sing, happy soul, thy songs of joy;
Such as a Brook sings in the wood,
That all night has been strengthened by
Heaven's purer flood.

William Henry Davies

Sweet Stay-at-Home

Sweet Stay-at-Home, sweet Well-content,
Thou knowest of no strange continent;
Thou hast not felt thy bosom keep
A gentle motion with the deep;
Thou hast not sailed in Indian seas,
Where scent comes forth in every breeze.
Thou hast not seen the rich grape grow
For miles, as far as eyes can go:
Thou hast not seen a summer's night
When maids could sew by a worm's light;
Nor the North Sea in spring send out
Bright hues that like birds flit about
In solid cages of white ice --
Sweet Stay-at-Home, sweet Love-one-place,
Thou hast not seen black fingers pick
White cotton when the bloom is thick,
Nor heard black throats in harmony;
Nor hast thou sat on stones that lie
Flat on the earth, that once did rise
To hide proud kings from common eyes.
Thou hast not seen plains full of bloom
Where green things had such little room
They pleased the eye like fairer flowers --
Sweet Stay-at-Home, all these long hours.
Sweet Well-content, sweet Love-one-place,
Sweet, simple maid, bless thy dear face;
For thou hast made more homely stuff
Nurture thy gentle self enough;
I love thee for a heart that's kind --
Not for the knowledge in thy mind.

William Henry Davies

The Best Friend

Now shall I walk
Or shall I ride?
"Ride", Pleasure said;
"Walk", Joy replied.

Now what shall I --
Stay home or roam?
"Roam", Pleasure said;
And Joy -- "stay home."

Now shall I dance,
Or sit for dreams?
"Sit," answers Joy;
"Dance," Pleasure screams.

Which of ye two
Will kindest be?
Pleasure laughed sweet,
But Joy kissed me.

William Henry Davies

The Bird of Paradise

Here comes Kate Summers, who, for gold,
Takes any man to bed:
"You knew my friend, Nell Barnes," she said;
"You knew Nell Barnes -- she's dead.

"Nell Barnes was bad on all you men,
Unclean, a thief as well;
Yet all my life I have not found
A better friend than Nell.

"So I sat at her side at last,
For hours, till she was dead;
And yet she had no sense at all
Of any word I said.

"For all her cry but came to this --
'Not for the world! Take care:
Don't touch that bird of paradise,
Perched on the bed-post there!'

"I asked her would she like some grapes,
Som damsons ripe and sweet;
A custard made with new-laid eggs,
Or tender fowl to eat.

"I promised I would follow her,
To see her in her grave;
And buy a wreath with borrowed pence,
If nothing I could save.

"Yet still her cry but came to this --
'Not for the world! Take care:
Don't touch that bird of paradise,
Perched on the bed-post there!' "

William Henry Davies

The Boy

Go, little boy,
Fill thee with joy;
For Time gives thee
Unlicensed hours,
To run in fields,
And roll in flowers.

A little boy
Can life enjoy;
If but to see
The horses pass,
When shut indoors
Behind the glass.

Go, little boy,
Fill thee with joy;
Fear not, like man,
The kick of wrath,
That you do lie
In some one's path.

Time is to thee
Eternity,
As to a bird
Or butterfly;
And in that faith
True joy doth lie.

William Henry Davies

The Child and the Mariner

A dear old couple my grandparents were,
And kind to all dumb things; they saw in Heaven
The lamb that Jesus petted when a child;
Their faith was never draped by Doubt: to them
Death was a rainbow in Eternity,
That promised everlasting brightness soon.
An old seafaring man was he; a rough
Old man, but kind; and hairy, like the nut
Full of sweet milk. All day on shore he watched
The winds for sailors' wives, and told what ships
Enjoyed fair weather, and what ships had storms;
He watched the sky, and he could tell for sure
What afternoons would follow stormy morns,
If quiet nights would end wild afternoons.
He leapt away from scandal with a roar,
And if a whisper still possessed his mind,
He walked about and cursed it for a plague.
He took offence at Heaven when beggars passed,
And sternly called them back to give them help.
In this old captain's house I lived, and things
That house contained were in ships' cabins once:
Sea-shells and charts and pebbles, model ships;
Green weeds, dried fishes stuffed, and coral stalks;
Old wooden trunks with handles of spliced rope,
With copper saucers full of monies strange,
That seemed the savings of dead men, not touched
To keep them warm since their real owners died;
Strings of red beads, methought were dipped in blood,
And swinging lamps, as though the house might move;
An ivory lighthouse built on ivory rocks,
The bones of fishes and three bottled ships.
And many a thing was there which sailors make
In idle hours, when on long voyages,
Of marvellous patience, to no lovely end.
And on those charts I saw the small black dots
That were called islands, and I knew they had
Turtles and palms, and pirates' buried gold.
There came a stranger to my granddad's house,
The old man's nephew, a seafarer too;
A big, strong able man who could have walked
Twm Barlum's hill all clad in iron mail
So strong he could have made one man his club
To knock down others -- Henry was his name,
No other name was uttered by his kin.
And here he was, sooth illclad, but oh,
Thought I, what secrets of the sea are his!
This man knows coral islands in the sea,
And dusky girls heartbroken for white men;
More rich than Spain, when the Phoenicians shipped
Silver for common ballast, and they saw
Horses at silver mangers eating grain;
This man has seen the wind blow up a mermaid's hair

Which, like a golden serpent, reared and stretched
To feel the air away beyond her head.
He begged my pennies, which I gave with joy --
He will most certainly return some time
A self-made king of some new land, and rich.
Alas that he, the hero of my dreams,
Should be his people's scorn; for they had rose
To proud command of ships, whilst he had toiled
Before the mast for years, and well content;
Him they despised, and only Death could bring
A likeness in his face to show like them.
For he drank all his pay, nor went to sea
As long as ale was easy got on shore.
Now, in his last long voyage he had sailed
From Plymouth Sound to where sweet odours fan
The Cingalese at work, and then back home --
But came not near my kin till pay was spent.
He was not old, yet seemed so; for his face
Looked like the drowned man's in the morgue, when it
Has struck the wooden wharves and keels of ships.
And all his flesh was pricked with Indian ink,
His body marked as rare and delicate
As dead men struck by lightning under trees
And pictured with fine twigs and curlèd ferns;
Chains on his neck and anchors on his arms;
Rings on his fingers, bracelets on his wrist;
And on his breast the Jane of Appledore
Was schooner rigged, and in full sail at sea.
He could not whisper with his strong hoarse voice,
No more than could a horse creep quietly;
He laughed to scorn the men that muffled close
For fear of wind, till all their neck was hid,
Like Indian corn wrapped up in long green leaves;
He knew no flowers but seaweeds brown and green,
He knew no birds but those that followed ships.
Full well he knew the water-world; he heard
A grander music there than we on land,
When organ shakes a church; swore he would make
The sea his home, though it was always roused
By such wild storms as never leave Cape Horn;
Happy to hear the tempest grunt and squeal
Like pigs heard dying in a slaughterhouse.
A true-born mariner, and this his hope --
His coffin would be what his cradle was,
A boat to drown in and be sunk at sea;
Salted and iced in Neptune's larder deep.
This man despised small coasters, fishing-smacks;
He scorned those sailors who at night and morn
Can see the coast, when in their little boats
They go a six days' voyage and are back
Home with their wives for every Sabbath day.
Much did he talk of tankards of old beer,

And bottled stuff he drank in other lands,
Which was a liquid fire like Hell to gulp,
But Paradise to sip.

And so he talked;
Nor did those people listen with more awe
To Lazurus -- whom they had seen stone dead --
Than did we urchins to that seaman's voice.
He many a tale of wonder told: of where,
At Argostoli, Cephalonia's sea
Ran over the earth's lip in heavy floods;
And then again of how the strange Chinese
Conversed much as our homely Blackbirds sing.
He told us how he sailed in one old ship
Near that volcano Martinique, whose power
Shook like dry leaves the whole Caribbean seas;
And made the sun set in a sea of fire
Which only half was his; and dust was thick
On deck, and stones were pelted at the mast.
Into my greedy ears such words that sleep
Stood at my pillow half the night perplexed.
He told how isles sprang up and sank again,
Between short voyages, to his amaze;
How they did come and go, and cheated charts;
Told how a crew was cursed when one man killed
A bird that perched upon a moving barque;
And how the sea's sharp needles, firm and strong,
Ripped open the bellies of big, iron ships;
Of mighty icebergs in the Northern seas,
That haunt the far hirizon like white ghosts.
He told of waves that lift a ship so high
That birds could pass from starboard unto port
Under her dripping keel.

Oh, it was sweet
To hear that seaman tell such wondrous tales:
How deep the sea in parts, that drownèd men
Must go a long way to their graves and sink
Day after day, and wander with the tides.
He spake of his own deeds; of how he sailed
One summer's night along the Bosphorus,
And he -- who knew no music like the wash
Of waves against a ship, or wind in shrouds --
Heard then the music on that woody shore
Of nightingales,and feared to leave the deck,
He thought 'twas sailing into Paradise.
To hear these stories all we urchins placed
Our pennies in that seaman's ready hand;
Until one morn he signed on for a long cruise,
And sailed away -- we never saw him more.
Could such a man sink in the sea unknown?
Nay, he had found a land with something rich,

That kept his eyes turned inland for his life.
'A damn bad sailor and a landshark too,
No good in port or out' -- my granddad said.

William Henry Davies

The Dark Hour

And now, when merry winds do blow,
And rain makes trees look fresh,
An overpowering staleness holds
This mortal flesh.

Though well I love to feel the rain,
And be by winds well blown --
The mystery of mortal life
Doth press me down.

And, In this mood, come now what will,
Shine Rainbow, Cuckoo call;
There is no thing in Heaven or Earth
Can lift my soul.

I know not where this state comes from --
No cause for grief I know;
The Earth around is fresh and green,
Flowers near me grow.

I sit between two fair rose trees;
Red roses on my right,
And on my left side roses are
A lovely white.

The little birds are full of joy,
Lambs bleating all the day;
The colt runs after the old mare,
And children play.

And still there comes this dark, dark hour --
Which is not borne of Care;
Into my heart it creeps before
I am aware.

William Henry Davies

The Example

Here's an example from
A Butterfly;
That on a rough, hard rock
Happy can lie;
Friendless and all alone
On this unsweetened stone.

Now let my bed be hard
No care take I;
I'll make my joy like this
Small Butterfly;
Whose happy heart has power
To make a stone a flower.

William Henry Davies

The Flood

I thought my true love slept;
Behind her chair I crept
And pulled out a long pin;
The golden flood came out,
She shook it all about,
With both our faces in.

Ah! little wren, I know
Your mossy, small nest now
A windy, cold place is;
No eye can see my face,
Howe'er it watch the place
Where I half drown in bliss.

When I am drowned hald dead,
She laughs and shakes her head;
Flogged by her hair-waves, I
Withdraw my face from there;
But never once, I swear,
She heard a mercy cry.

William Henry Davies

The Happy Child

I saw this day sweet flowers grow thick --
But not one like the child did pick.

I heard the packhounds in green park --
But no dog like the child heard bark.

I heard this day bird after bird --
But not one like the child has heard.

A hundred butterflies saw I --
But not one like the child saw fly.

I saw the horses roll in grass --
But no horse like the child saw pass.

My world this day has lovely been --
But not like what the child has seen.

William Henry Davies

The Hawk

Thou dost not fly, thou art not perched,
The air is all around:
What is it that can keep thee set,
From falling to the ground?
The concentration of thy mind
Supports thee in the air;
As thou dost watch the small young birgs,
With such a deadly care.

My mind has such a hawk as thou,
It is an evil mood;
It comes when there's no cause for grief,
And on my joys doth brood.
Then do I see my life in parts;
The earth receives my bones,
The common air absorbs my mind---
It knows not flowers from stones.

William Henry Davies

The Heap of Rags

One night when I went down
Thames' side, in London Town,
A heap of rags saw I,
And sat me down close by.
That thing could shout and bawl,
But showed no face at all;
When any steamer passed
And blew a loud shrill blast,
That heap of rags would sit
And make a sound like it;
When struck the clock's deep bell,
It made those peals as well.
When winds did moan around,
It mocked them with that sound;
When all was quiet, it
Fell into a strange fit;
Would sigh, and moan, and roar,
It laughed, and blessed, and swore.
Yet that poor thing, I know,
Had neither friend nor foe;
Its blessin or its curse
Made no one better or worse.
I left it in that place --
The thing that showed no face,
Was it a man that had
Suffered till he went mad?
So many showers and not
One rainbow in the lot?
Too many bitter fears
To make a pearl from tears?

William Henry Davies

The Hermit

WHAT moves that lonely man is not the boom
Of waves that break agains the cliff so strong;
Nor roar of thunder, when that travelling voice
Is caught by rocks that carry far along.

'Tis not the groan of oak tree i its prime,
When lightning strikes its solid heart to dust;
Nor frozen pond when, melted by the sun,
It suddenly doth break its sparkling crust.

What moves that man is when the blind bat taps
His window when he sits alone at night;
Or when the small bird sounds like some great beast
Among the dead, dry leaves so fraiil and light.

Or when the moths on his night-pillow beat
Such heavy blows he fears they'll break his bones;
Or when a mouse inside the papered walls,
Comes like a tiger crunching through the stones.

William Henry Davies

The Kingfisher

It was the Rainbow gave thee birth,
And left thee all her lovely hues;
And, as her mother’s name was Tears,
So runs it in my blood to choose
For haunts the lonely pools, and keep
In company with trees that weep.
Go you and, with such glorious hues,
Live with proud peacocks in green parks;
On lawns as smooth as shining glass,
Let every feather show its marks;
Get thee on boughs and clap thy wings
Before the windows of proud kings.
Nay, lovely Bird, thou art not vain;
Thou hast no proud, ambitious mind;
I also love a quiet place
That’s green, away from all mankind;
A lonely pool, and let a tree
Sigh with her bosom over me.

William Henry Davies

The Likeness

When I came forth this morn I saw
Quite twenty cloudlets in the air;
And then I saw a flock of sheep,
Which told me how these clouds came there.

That flock of sheep, on that green grass,
Well might it lie so still and proud!
Its likeness had been drawn in heaven,
On a blue sky, in silvery cloud.

I gazed me up, I gazed me down,
And swore, though good the likeness was,
'Twas a long way from justice done
To such white wool, such sparkling grass.

William Henry Davies

The Mind's Liberty

The mind, with its own eyes and ears,
May for these others have no care;
No matter where this body is,
The mind is free to go elsewhere.
My mind can be a sailor, when
This body's still confined to land;
And turn these mortals into trees,
That walk in Fleet Street or the Strand.

So, when I'm passing Charing Cross,
Where porters work both night and day,
I ofttimes hear sweet Malpas Brook,
That flows thrice fifty miles away.
And when I'm passing near St Paul's
I see beyond the dome and crowd,
Twm Barlum, that green pap in Gwent,
With its dark nipple in a cloud.

William Henry Davies

The Moon

Thy beauty haunts me heart and soul,
Oh, thou fair Moon, so close and bright;
Thy beauty makes me like the child
That cries aloud to own thy light:
The little child that lifts each arm
To press thee to her bosom warm.

Though there are birds that sing this night
With thy white beams across their throats,
Let my deep silence speak for me
More than for them their sweetest notes:
Who worships thee till music fails,
Is greater than thy nightingales.

William Henry Davies

The Rain

I hear leaves drinking rain;
I hear rich leaves on top
Giving the poor beneath
Drop after drop;
'Tis a sweet noise to hear
These green leaves drinking near.

And when the Sun comes out,
After this Rain shall stop,
A wondrous Light will fill
Each dark, round drop;
I hope the Sun shines bright;
'Twill be a lovely sight.

William Henry Davies

The Sleepers

As I walked down the waterside
This silent morning, wet and dark;
Before the cocks in farmyards crowed,
Before the dogs began to bark;
Before the hour of five was struck
By old Westminster's mighty clock:

As I walked down the waterside
This morning, in the cold damp air,
I was a hundred women and men
Huddled in rags and sleeping there:
These people have no work, thought I,
And long before their time they die.

That moment, on the waterside,
A lighted car came at a bound;
I looked inside, and saw a score
Of pale and weary men that frowned;
Each man sat in a huddled heap,
Carried to work while fast asleep.

Ten cars rushed down the waterside
Like lighted coffins in the dark;
With twenty dead men in each car,
That must be brought alive by work:
These people work too hard, thought I,
And long before their time they die.

William Henry Davies

The Sluggard

A jar of cider and my pipe,
In summer, under shady tree;
A book by one that made his mind
Live by its sweet simplicity:
Then must I laugh at kings who sit
In richest chambers, signing scrolls;
And princes cheered in public ways,
And stared at by a thousand fools.

Let me be free to wear my dreams,
Like weeds in some mad maiden's hair,
When she believes the earth has not
Another maid so rich and fair;
And proudly smiles on rich and poor,
The queen of all fair women then:
So I, dressen in my idle dreams,
Will think myself the king of men.

William Henry Davies

The Villain

While joy gave clouds the light of stars,
That beamed wher'er they looked;
And calves and lambs had tottering knees,
Excited, while they sucked;
While every bird enjoyed his song,
Without one thought of harm or wrong--
I turned my head and saw the wind,
Not far from where I stood,
Dragging the corn by her golden hair,
Into a dark and lonely wood.

William Henry Davies

This Night

This night, as I sit here alone,
And brood on what is dead and gone,
The owl that's in this Highgate Wood,
Has found his fellow in my mood;
To every star, as it doth rise -
Oh-o-o! Oh-o-o! he shivering cries.

And, looking at the Moon this night,
There's that dark shadow in her light.
Ah! Life and death, my fairest one,
Thy lover is a skeleton!
"And why is that?" I question - "why?"
Oh-o-o! Oh-o-o! the owl doth cry.

William Henry Davies

Thunderstorms

My mind has thunderstorms,
That brood for heavy hours:
Until they rain me words,
My thoughts are drooping flowers
And sulking, silent birds.

Yet come, dark thunderstorms,
And brood your heavy hours;
For when you rain me words,
My thoughts are dancing flowers
And joyful singing birds.

William Henry Davies

Truly Great

My walls outside must have some flowers,
My walls within must have some books;
A house that's small; a garden large,
And in it leafy nooks.

A little gold that's sure each week;
That comes not from my living kind,
But from a dead man in his grave,
Who cannot change his mind.

A lovely wife, and gentle too;
Contented that no eyes but mine
Can see her many charms, nor voice
To call her beauty fine.

Where she would in that stone cage live,
A self-made prisoner, with me;
While many a wild bird sang around,
On gate, on bush, on tree.

And she sometimes to answer them,
In her far sweeter voice than all;
Till birds, that loved to look on leaves,
Will doat on a stone wall.

With this small house, this garden large,
This little gold, this lovely mate,
With health in body, peace in heart--
Show me a man more great.

William Henry Davies

When on a Summer's Morn

When on a summer's morn I wake,
And open my two eyes,
Out to the clear, born-singing rills
My bird-like spirit flies.

To hear the Blackbird, Cuckoo, Thrush,
Or any bird in song;
And common leaves that hum all day
Without a throat or tongue.

And when Time strikes the hour for sleep,
Back in my room alone,
My heart has many a sweet bird's song --
And one that's all my own.

William Henry Davies

Where We Differ

To think my thoughts are hers,
Not one of hers is mine;
She laughs -- while I must sigh;
She sighs -- while I must whine.

She eats -- while I must fast;
She reads -- while I am blind;
She sleeps -- while I must wake;
Free -- I no freedom find.

To think the world for me
Contains but her alone,
And that her eyes prefer
Some ribbon, scarf, or stone.

William Henry Davies