Classic Poetry Series

Thomas Lovell Beddoes - poems -

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Thomas Lovell Beddoes(1803-1818)

A Clock Striking Midnight

Hark to the echo of Time's footsteps; gone
Thise moments are into the unseen grave
Of ages. Thy have vanished nameless. None,
While they are deep under the eddying wave
Of the chaotic past, shall placea stone
Sacred to these, the nurses of the brave,
The mighty, and the good. Futurity
Broods on the ocean, hatching 'neath her wing
Invisible to man the century,
That on its hundered feet, a sluggish thing
Gnawing away the world, shall totter by
And sweep dead mortals with it. As I sing
Time, the colossus of the world, that strides
With each foot plunged in darkness silent glides,

And puffs death's cloud upon us. It is vain
To struggle with the tide; we all must sink
Still grasping the thin air, with frantic pain
Grappling with Fame to buoy us. Can we think
Eternity, by whom swift Time is slain,
And dragged along to dark destruction's brink,
Shall be the echo of man's puny words?
Or that our grovelling thoughts shall e'er be writ
In never fading stars; or like proud birds
Undazzled in their cloud-built eyrie sit
Clutching the lightning, or in darting herds
Diving amid the sea's vast treasury flit?
Sink, painted clay, back to thy parent earth
While the glad spirit seeks a brighter birth.

A Crocodile

Hard by the lilied Nile I saw
A duskish river-dragon stretched along,
The brown habergeon of his limbs enamelled
With sanguine almandines and rainy pearl:
And on his back there lay a young one sleeping,
No bigger than a mouse; with eyes like beads,
And a small fragment of its speckled egg
Remaining on its harmless, pulpy snout;
A thing to laugh at, as it gaped to catch
The baulking merry flies. In the iron jaws
Of the great devil-beast, like a pale soul
Fluttering in rocky hell, lightsomely flew
A snowy trochilus, with roseate beak
Tearing the hairy leeches from his throat.

A Cypress-Bough, And A Rose-Wreath Sweet (Song)

Act IV, scene iii

A cypress-bough and a rose-wreath sweet,
A wedding robe, and a winding-sheet,
A bridal bed and a bier.
Thine be the kisses, maid,
And smiling Love's alarms;
And thou, pale youth, be laid
In the grave's cold arms.
Each in his own charms,
Death and Hymen both are here;
So up with scythe and torch,
And to the old church porch,
While all the bells ring clear:
And rosy, rosy the bed shall bloom,
And earthy, earthy heap up the tomb.

Now tremble dimples on your cheek,
Sweet be your lips to taste and speak,
For he who kisses is near:
For her the bride-groom fair,
In youthful power and force;
For him the grizard bare,
Pale knight on a pale horse,
To woo him to a corpse.
Death and Hymen both are here,
So up with scythe and torch,
And to the old church porch,
While all the bells ring clear:
And rosy, rosy the bed shall bloom,
And earthy, earthy heap up the tomb.

A Ho! A Ho! (Song)

Act II Scene ii, lines 26-55

A ho! A ho!
Love's horn doth blow,
And he will out a-hawking go.
His shafts are light as beauty's sighs,
And bright as midnight's brightest eyes,
And round his starry way
The swan-winged horses of the skies,
With summer's music in their manes,
Curve their fair necks to zephyr's reins,
And urge their graceful play.

A ho! A ho!
Love's horn doth blow,
And he will out a-hawking go.
The sparrows flutter round his wrist.
The feathery thieves that Venus kissed
And taught their morning song,
The linnets seek the airy list,
And swallows too, small pets of Spring,
Beat back the gale with swifter wing,
And dart and wheel along.

A ho! A ho!
Love's horn doth blow,
And he will out a-hawking go.
Now woe to every gnat that skips
To filch the fruit of ladies' lips,
His felon blood is shed;
And woe to flies, whose airy ships
On beauty cast their anchoring bite,
And bandit wasp, that naughty wight,
Whose sting is slaughter-red.

A Rivulet

It is a lovely stream; its wavelets purl
As if they echoed to the fall and rise
Of the capricious breeze; each upward curl
That splashes pearl, mirrors the fairy eyes
Of viewless passer, and the billows hurl
Their sparkles on her lap, as over she flies.
And see, where onward whirls, within a ring
Of smoothest dimples, a dark foxglove bell
Half stifled by the gush encircling;
Perchance some tiny sprite crawled to that shell
To sleep away the noon, and winds did swing
Him into rest; for the warm sun was well
Shaded off by the long and silky down;
So I will save it, lest the elf should drown.

Another

Tis a moon-tinted primrose, with a well
Of trembling dew; in its soft atmosphere,
A tiny whirlwind of sweet smells, doth swell
A lady bird; and when no sound is near
That elfin hermit fans the fairy bell
With glazen wings, (mirrors on which appear
Atoms of colours that flizz by unseen
And struts about his darling flower with pride.
But, if some buzzing gnat with pettish spleen
Come whining by, the insect 'gins to hide
And folds its flimsy drapery between
His speckled buckler and soft silken side.
So poets fly the critics snappish heat,
And sheath their minds in scorn and self-conceit

Ballad Of Human Life

WHEN we were girl and boy together,
We toss'd about the flowers
And wreath'd the blushing hours
Into a posy green and sweet.
I sought the youngest, best,
And never was at rest
Till I had laid them at thy fairy feet.
But the days of childhood they were fleet,
And the blooming sweet-briar-breath'd weather,
When we were boy and girl together.

Then we were lad and lass together,
And sought the kiss of night
Before we felt aright,
Sitting and singing soft and sweet.
The dearest thought of heart
With thee 't was joy to part,
And the greater half was thine, as meet.
Still my eyelid's dewy, my veins they beat
At the starry summer-evening weather,
When we were lad and lass together.

And we are man and wife together,
Although thy breast, once bold
With song, be clos'd and cold
Beneath flowers' roots and birds' light feet.
Yet sit I by thy tomb,
And dissipate the gloom
With songs of loving faith and sorrow sweet.
And fate and darkling grave kind dreams do cheat,
That, while fair life, young hope, despair and death are,
We 're boy and girl, and lass and lad, and man and wife together.

Dirge

We do lie beneath the grass
In the moonlight, in the shade
Of the yew-tree. They that pass
Hear us not. We are afraid
They would envy our delight,
In our graves by glow-worm night.
Come follow us, and smile as we;
We sail to the rock in the ancient waves,
Where the snow falls by thousands into the sea,
And the drown'd and the shipwreck'd have happy graves.

Dream-Pedlary

IF there were dreams to sell, What would you buy? Some cost a passing bell; Some a light sigh, That shakes from Life's fresh crown Only a rose-leaf down. If there were dreams to sell, Merry and sad to tell, And the crier rang the bell, What would you buy?

A cottage lone and still, With bowers nigh, Shadowy, my woes to still, Until I die. Such pearl from Life's fresh crown Fain would I shake me down. Were dreams to have at will, This would best heal my ill, This would I buy.

Dream-Pedlary (Excerpt)

If there were dreams to sell,
What would you buy?
Some cost a passing bell;
Some a light sigh,
That shakes from Life's fresh crown
Only a rose-leaf down.
If there were dreams to sell,
Merry and sad to tell,
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A cottage lone and still,
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Shadowy, my woes to still,
Until I die.
Such pearl from Life's fresh crown
Fain would I shake me down.
Were dreams to have at will,
This would best heal my ill,
This would I buy.

From "torrismond" - In A Garden By Moonlight

Veronica. COME then, a song; a winding gentle song, To lead me into sleep. Let it be low As zephyr, telling secrets to his rose, For I would hear the murmuring of my thoughts; And more of voice than of that other music That grows around the strings of quivering lutes; But most of thought; for with my mind I listen, And when the leaves of sound are shed upon it, If there 's no seed remembrance grows not there. So life, so death; a song, and then a dream! Begin before another dewdrop fall From the soft hold of these disturbed flowers, For sleep is filling up my senses fast, And from these words I sink.

SONG

How many times do I love thee, dear?
Tell me how many thoughts there be
In the atmosphere
Of a new-fall'n year,
Whose white and sable hours appear
The latest flake of Eternity:
So many times do I love thee, dear.

How many times do I love again?
Tell me how many beads there are
In a silver chain
Of evening rain,
Unravell'd from the tumbling main,
And threading the eye of a yellow star:
So many times do I love again.

Elvira. She sees no longer: leave her then alone, Encompass'd by this round and moony night. A rose-leaf for thy lips, and then goodnight: So life, so death; a song, and then a dream!

If Thou Wilt Ease Thine Heart

IF thou wilt ease thine heart
Of love, and all its smart,Then sleep, dear, sleep!
And not a sorrow
Hang any tear on your eyelashes;
Lie still and deep,
Sad soul, until the sea-wave washes
The rim o' the sun to-morrow,
In eastern sky,

But wilt thou cure thine heart
Of love, and all its smart,Then die, dear, die!
'T is deeper, sweeter,
Than on a rose bank to lie dreaming
With folded eye;
And then alone, amid the beaming
Of love's stars, thou'lt meet her
In eastern sky.

Let Dew The Flowers Fill

LET dew the flowers fill;
No need of fell despair,
Though to the grave you bear
One still of soul-but now too still,
One fair-but now too fair.
For, beneath your feet, the mound,
And the waves, that play around,
Have meaning in their grassy, and their watery, smiles;
And, with a thousand sunny wiles,
Each says, as he reproves,
Death's arrow oft is Love's.

Lines Written In A Blank Leaf Of The 'prometheus Unbound'

Write it in gold - a Spirit of the sun, An Intellect ablaze with heavenly thoughts, A soul with all the dews of pathos shining, Odorous with love, and sweet to silent woe With the dark glories of concentrate song, Was sphered in mortal earth. Angelic sounds Alive with panting thoughts sunned the dim world. The bright creations of an human heart Wrought magic in the bosoms of mankind. A flooding summer burst on Poetry; Of which the crowning sun, the night of beauty, The dancing showers, the birds, whose anthems wild Note after note unbind the enchanted leaves Of breaking buds, eve, and the flow of dawn, Were centred and condensed in his one name As in a providence - and that was SHELLEY.

Oxford 1822

Old Adam, The Carrion Crow

Old Adam, the carrion crow,
The old crow of Cairo;
He sat in the shower, and let it flow
Under his tail and over his crest;
And through every feather
Leak'd the wet weather;
And the bough swung under his nest;
For his beak it was heavy with marrow.
Is that the wind dying? O no;
It's only two devils, that blow,
Through a murderer's bones, to and fro,
In the ghosts' moonshine.

Ho! Eve, my grey carrion wife,
When we have supped on king's marrow,
Where shall we drink and make merry our life?
Our nest it is queen Cleopatra's skull,
'Tis cloven and crack'd,
And batter'd and hack'd,
But with tears of blue eyes it is full:
Let us drink then, my raven of Cairo!
Is that the wind dying? O no;
It's only two devils, that blow
Through a murderer's bones, to and fro,
In the ghosts' moonshine.

Poor Old Pilgrim Misery (Song)

Act I, scene 1, lines 141-60

Poor old pilgrim Misery,
Beneath the silent moon he sate,
A-listening to the screech owl's cry,
And the cold wind's goblin prate;
Beside him lay his staff of yew
With withered willow twined,
His scant grey hair all wet with dew,
His cheeks with grief ybrined;
And his cry it was ever, alack!
Alack, and woe is me.

Anon a wanton imp astray
His piteous moaning hears,
And from his bosom steals away
His rosary of tears:
With his plunder fled that urchin elf,
And hid it in your eyes,
Then tell me back the stolen pelf,
Give up the lawless prize;
Or your cry shall be ever, alack!
Alack, and woe is me.

Resurrection Song.

Thread the nerves through the right holes;
Get out of my bones, you wormy souls.
Shut up my stomach, the ribs are full;
Muscles be steady and ready to pull.
Heart and artery merrily shake,
And eyelid go up, for we're going to wake. His eye must be brighter -one more rub!
And pull up the nostrils! his nose was a snub.

Song

HOW many times do I love thee, dear?
 Tell me how many thoughts there be
 In the atmosphere
 Of a new-fall'n year,
Whose white and sable hours appear
 The latest flake of Eternity:
So many times do I love thee, dear.

How many times do I love again? Tell me how many beads there are In a silver chain Of evening rain, Unravell'd from the tumbling main, And threading the eye of a yellow star: So many times do I love again.

Song From The Second Brother

STREW not earth with empty stars,
Strew it not with roses,
Nor feathers from the crest of Mars,
Nor summer's idle posies.
'Tis not the primrose-sandalled moon,
Nor cold and silent morn,
Nor he that climbs the dusty noon,
Nor mower war with scythe that drops,
Stuck with helmed and turbaned tops
Of enemies new shorn.

Ye cups, ye lyres, ye trumpets know, Pour your music, let it flow, 'Tis Bacchus' son who walks below.

Song From The Ship

To sea, to sea! The calm is o'er;
The wanton water leaps in sport,
And rattles down the pebbly shore;
The dolphin wheels, the sea-cows snort,
And unseen Mermaids' pearly song
Comes bubbling up, the weeds among.
Fling broad the sail, dip deep the oar:
To sea, to sea! the calm is o'er.

To sea, to sea! our wide-winged bark
Shall billowy cleave its sunny way,
And with its shadow, fleet and dark,
Break the caved Tritons' azure day,
Like mighty eagle soaring light
O'er antelopes on Alpine height.
The anchor heaves, the ship swings free,
The sails swell full. To sea, to sea!

Song From The Waters

Act I, scene iv, lines 259-72

The swallow leaves her nest,
The soul my weary breast;
But therefore let the rain
On my grave
Fall pure; for why complain
Since both will come again
O'er the wave.

The wind dead leaves and snow
Doth hurry to and fro;
And, once, a day shall break
O'er the wave,
When a storm of ghosts shall shake
The dead, until they wake
In the grave.

Song From Torrismond

How many times do I love thee, dear?
Tell me how many thoughts there be
In the atmosphere
Of a new-fall'n year,
Whose white and sable hours appear
The latest flake of Eternity:
So many times do I love thee, dear.

How many times do I love again?
Tell me how many beads there are
In a silver chain
Of evening rain,
Unravelled from the tumbling main,
And threading the eye of a yellow star:
So many times do I love again.

Song Of The Stygian Naiades

Proserpine may pull her flowers, Wet with dew or wet with tears, Red with anger, pale with fears; Is it any fault of ours, If Pluto be an amorous king And come home nightly, laden Under his broad bat-wing With a gentle earthly maiden? Is it so, Wind, is it so? All that I and you do know Is that we saw fly and fix 'Mongst the flowers and reeds of Styx, Yesterday, Where the Furies made their hay For a bed of tiger cubs, A great fly of Beelzebub's, The bee of hearts, which mortals name Cupid, Love, and Fie for shame.

Proserpine may weep in rage, But ere I and you have done Kissing, bathing in the sun, What I have in yonder cage, She shall guess and ask in vain, Bird or serpent, wild or tame; But if Pluto does 't again, It shall sing out loud his shame. What hast caught then? What hast caught? Nothing but a poet's thought, Which so light did fall and fix 'Mongst the flowers and reeds of Styx, Yesterday, Where the Furies made their hay For a bed of tiger cubs, A great fly of Beelzebub's, The bee of hearts, which mortals name Cupid, Love, and Fie for shame.

Song On The Water.

As mad sexton's bell, tolling
For earth's loveliest daughter
Night's dumbness breaks rolling
Ghostily:
So our boat breaks the water
Witchingly.

As her look the dream troubles Of her tearful-eyed lover, So our sails in the bubbles Ghostily Are mirrored, and hover Moonily.

Song: Yes, Mary Ann

Yes, Mary Ann, I freely grant, The charms of Henry's eyes I see; But while I gaze, I something want, I want those eyes -- to gaze on me.

And I allow, in Henry's heart

Not Envy's self a fault can see:
Yet still I must one wish impart,
I wish that heart -- to sigh for me.

Songs From "death's Jest-Book" Ii - Dirge

IF thou wilt ease thine heart
Of love and all its smart,
Then sleep, dear, sleep;
And not a sorrow
Hang any tear on your eye-lashes;
Lie still and deep,
Sad soul, until the sea-wave washes
The rim o' the sun to-morrow,
In eastern sky.

But wilt thou cure thine heart
Of love and all its smart,
Then die, dear, die;
'T is deeper, sweeter,
Than on a rose bank to lie dreaming
With folded eye;
And then alone, amid the beaming
Of love's stars, thou 'It meet her
In eastern sky.

Sonnet - To Tartar, A Terrier Beauty

Snowdrop of dogs, with ear of brownest dye,
Like the last orphan leaf of naked tree
Which shudders in black autumn; though by thee,
Of hearing careless and untutored eye,
Not understood articulate speech of men
Nor marked the artificial mind of books,
-The mortal's voice eternized by the pen,Yet hast thou thought and language all unknown
To Babel's scholars; oft intensest looks,
Long scrutiny over some dark-veined stone
Dost thou bestow, learning dead mysteries
Of the world's birth-day, oft in eager tone
With quick-tailed fellows bandiest prompt replies,
Solicitudes canine, four-footed amities.

The Last Man

By heaven and hell, and all the fools between them,
I will not die, nor sleep, nor wink my eyes,
But think myself into a god; old Death
Shall dream he has slain me, and I'll creep behind him,
Thrust off the bony tyrant from his throne
And beat him into dust. Or I will burst
Damnation's iron egg, my tomb, and come
Half damned, ere they make lightning of my soul,
And creep into thy carcase as thou sleepest
Between two crimson fevers. I'll dethrone
The empty skeleton, and be thy death,
A death of grinding madness. -- Fear me now;
I am a devil, not a human soul --

The Old Ghost

Over the water an old ghost strode
To a churchyard on the shore,
And over him the waters had flowed
A thousand years or more,
And pale and wan and weary
Looked never a sprite as he;
For it's lonely and it's dreary
The ghost of a body to be
That has mouldered away in the sea.

Over the billows the old ghost stepped,
And the winds in mockery sung;
For the bodiless ghost would fain have wept
Over the maiden that lay so young
'Mong the thistles and toadstools so hoary;
And he begged of the waves a tear,
But they shook upwards their moonlight glory,
And the shark looked on with a sneer
At his yearning desire and agony.

The Phantom-Wooer

A ghost, that loved a lady fair,
Ever in the starry air
Of midnight at her pillow stood;
And, with a sweetness skies above
The luring words of human love,
Her soul the phantom wooed.
Sweet and sweet is their poisoned note,
The little snakes of silver throat,
In mossy skulls that nest and lie,
Ever singing "die, oh! die."

Young soul, put off your flesh, and come With me into the quiet tomb,
Our bed is lovely, dark, and sweet;
The earth will swing us, as she goes,
Beneath our coverlid of snows,
And the warm leaden sheet.
Dear and dear is their poisoned note,
The little snakes' of silver throat,
In mossy skulls that nest and lie,
Ever singing "die, oh! die."

The Rosy Hour

And in that rosy rosy hour, When bird sang out and scented flower, Came words to me from heaven above: 'Awake, young heart, awake and love!'

The Swallow Leaves Her Nest

THE swallow leaves her nest,
The soul my weary breast;
But therefore let the rain
On my grave
Fall pure; for why complain?
Since both will come again
O'er the wave.

The wind dead leaves and snow
Doth hurry to and fro;
And, once, a day shall break
O'er the wave,
When a storm of ghosts shall shake
The dead, until they wake
In the grave.

Thoughts

Sweet are the thoughts that haunt the poet's brain Like rainbow-fringed clouds, through which some star Peeps in bright glory on a shepherd swain; They sweep along and trance him; sweeter far Than incense trailing up an out-stretched chain From rocking censer; sweeter too they are Than the thin mist which rises in the gale From out the slender cowslip's bee-scarred breast. Their delicate pinions buoy up a tale Like brittle wings, which curtain in the vest Of cobweb-limbed ephemera, that sail In gauzy mantle of dun twilight dressed, Borne on the wind's soft sighings, when the spring Listens all evening to its whispering.

To Night

So thou art come again, old black-winged night,
Like an huge bird, between us and the sun,
Hiding, with out-stretched form, the genial light;
And still, beneath thine icy bosom's dun
And cloudy plumage, hatching fog-breathed blight
And embryo storms, and crabbéd frosts, that shun
Day's warm caress. The owls from ivied loop
Are shrieking homage, as thou cowerest high;
Like sable crow pausing in eager stoop
On the dim world thou gluttest thy clouded eye,
Silently waiting latest time's fell whoop,
When thou shalt quit thine eyrie in the sky,
To pounce upon the world with eager claw,
And tomb time, death, and substance in thy maw.

To Sea! To Sea!

TO sea, to sea! The calm is o'er;
The wanton water leaps in sport,
And rattles down the pebbly shore;
The dolphin wheels, the sea-cow snorts,
And unseen mermaids' pearly song
Comes bubbling up, the weeds among.
Fling broad the sail, dip deep the oar:
To sea, to sea! The calm is o'er.

To sea, to sea! our wide-winged bark
Shall billowy cleave its sunny way,
And with its shadow, fleet and dark,
Break the caved Tritons' azure day,
Like mighty eagle soaring light
O'er antelopes on Alpine height.
The anchor heaves, the ship swings free,
The sails swell full. To sea, to sea!