

Classic Poetry Series

George Herbert
- poems -

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George Herbert(3 April 1593 – 1 March 1633)

George Herbert was a Welsh born English poet, orator and Anglican priest.

Being born into an artistic and wealthy family, he received a good education that led to his holding prominent positions at Cambridge University and Parliament. As a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, Herbert excelled in languages and music. He went to college with the intention of becoming a priest, but his scholarship attracted the attention of King James I/VI. Herbert served in Parliament for two years. After the death of King James and at the urging of a friend, Herbert's interest in ordained ministry was renewed.

In 1630, in his late thirties he gave up his secular ambitions and took holy orders in the Church of England, spending the rest of his life as a rector of the little parish of Fugglestone St Peter with Bemerton St Andrew, near Salisbury. He was noted for unflinching care for his parishioners, bringing the sacraments to them when they were ill, and providing food and clothing for those in need. Henry Vaughan said of him "a most glorious saint and seer".

Throughout his life, he wrote religious poems characterized by a precision of language, a metrical versatility, and an ingenious use of imagery or conceits that was favoured by the metaphysical school of poets. [Charles Cotton](http://www.poemhunter.com/charles-cotton/) described him as a "soul composed of harmonies". Herbert himself, in a letter to Nicholas Ferrar, said of his writings, "they are a picture of spiritual conflicts between God and my soul before I could subject my will to Jesus, my Master". Some of Herbert's poems have endured as hymns, including "King of Glory, King of Peace" (Praise), "Let All the World in Every Corner Sing" (Antiphon) and "Teach me, my God and King" (The Elixir). His first biographer, Izaak Walton, described Herbert on his death-bed as "composing such hymns and anthems as he and the angels now sing in heaven". A distant relative was the modern Polish poet [Zbigniew Herbert](http://www.poemhunter.com/zbigniew-herbert/)

Early Life

Herbert was born in Montgomery in Wales. His family was wealthy, eminent, intellectual and fond of the arts. His mother Magdalen was a patron and friend of [John Donne](http://www.poemhunter.com/john-donne/) and other poets; his older brother Edward, later [Lord](http://www.poemhunter.com/lord-edward-herbert-of-cherbury/)

Herbert of Cherbury, was an important poet and philosopher, often referred to as "the father of English deism". Herbert's father Richard Herbert, Lord of Cherbury died when George was three, leaving a widow and ten children.

Herbert entered Westminster School at or around the age of 12 where he became a day student. Though sometime after he was elevated to the level of scholar. Herbert later was admitted on scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1609 where he graduated first with a Bachelors and then with a masters degree in 1613 at the age of 20. After graduating from Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge (where he achieved degrees with distinction), Herbert was elected a major fellow of his college. In 1618 he was appointed Reader in Rhetoric at Cambridge and in 1620 he was elected to the post of Cambridge University orator, whose duties would be served by poetic skill. He held this position until 1628.

In 1624 he became a Member of Parliament, representing Montgomery. While these positions were suited to a career at court, and James I had shown him favour, circumstances worked against him: the King died in 1625, and two influential patrons of Herbert died later in the decade. However George Herbert's only service to parliament may have already ended in 1624 or since, although a Mr Herbert is mentioned as a committee member, there is no record in the Commons Journal for 1625 of Mr. George Herbert (a distinction carefully made in the records of the preceding parliament).

Priesthood

He took up his duties in Bemerton, a rural parish in Wiltshire, about 75 miles southwest of London in 1630. Here he preached and wrote poetry; also helping to rebuild the church out of his own funds.

In 1633 Herbert finished a collection of poems entitled *The Temple*, which imitates the architectural style of churches through both the meaning of the words and their visual layout. The themes of God and love are treated by Herbert as much as psychological forces as metaphysical phenomena.

Suffering from poor health, Herbert died of tuberculosis only three years after taking holy orders. On his deathbed, he reportedly gave the manuscript of *The Temple* to Nicholas Ferrar, the founder of a semi-monastic Anglican religious community at Little Gidding (a name best known today through the poem *Little Gidding* by [T.S. Eliot](http://www.poemhunter.com/thomas-stearns-eliot/)), telling him to publish the poems if he thought they might "turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul", and otherwise, to burn them.

Works

In 1633, all of Herbert's poems were published in *The Temple: Sacred poems and private ejaculations*, edited by Nicholas Ferrar. The book went through eight editions by 1690.

Barnabas Oley edited in 1652 Herbert's *Remains, or sundry pieces of that Sweet Singer, Mr. George Herbert, containing A Priest to the Temple, or the country parson, Jacula Prudentum, &c.* Prefixed was an unsigned preface by Oley. The second edition appeared in 1671 as *A Priest to the Temple or the Country Parson*, with a new preface, signed Barnabas Oley. These pieces were reprinted in later editions of Herbert's Works. The manuscript of *The Country Parson* was the property of Herbert's friend, Arthur Wodenoth, who gave it to Oley; the prefaces were a source for Izaak Walton's memoir of Herbert.

All of Herbert's English surviving poems are religious, and some have been used as hymns, William Cowper said of them I found in them a strain of piety which I could not but admire. They are characterised by directness of expression and some conceits which can appear quaint. Many of the poems have intricate rhyme schemes, and variations of lines within stanzas described as 'a cascade of form floats through the temple'.

An example of Herbert's religious poetry is "The Altar." A "pattern poem in which the words of the poem itself form a shape suggesting an altar, and this altar becomes his conceit for how one should offer himself as a sacrifice to the Lord. He also makes allusions to scripture, such as Psalm 51:17, where it states that the Lord requires the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

Herbert also wrote *A Priest to the Temple (or The Country Parson)* offering practical advice to clergy. In it, he advises that "things of ordinary use" such as ploughs, leaven, or dances, could be made to "serve for lights even of Heavenly Truths".

His *Jacula Prudentium* (sometimes seen as *Jacula Prudentum*), a collection of pithy proverbs published in 1651, included many sayings still repeated today, for example "His bark is worse than his bite." Similarly oft quoted is his *Outlandish Proverbs* published in 1640.

Richard Baxter said, "Herbert speaks to God like one that really believeth a God, and whose business in the world is most with God. Heart-work and heaven-work make up his books". Dame Helen Gardner adds "head-work" because of his "intellectual vivacity".

Herbert also wrote poems in Greek and in Latin. The latter mainly concern ceremonial controversy with the Puritans, but include a response to Pope Urban VIII's treatment of the ROMA AMOR anagram. He was also a collector of "Outlandish proverbs", some of which are used in his poem *The Sacrifice*. and he wrote in many poetic forms, appropriate to their theme, and invented, as it were, to embody them

Herbert influenced his fellow metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan who, in turn, influenced [William Wordsworth](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-wordsworth/).

Herbert's poetry has been set to music by several composers, including Ralph Vaughan Williams, Lennox Berkeley, Benjamin Britten, Judith Weir, Randall Thompson, William Walton and Patrick Larley.

Commemorations

He is commemorated on 27 February throughout the Anglican Communion and on 1 March of the Calendar of Saints of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Herbert has a window honouring him in Westminster Abbey and a statue in niche 188 on the West Front of Salisbury Cathedral.

A Dialogue-Anthem

Alas, poor Death! Where is thy glory?
Where is thy famous force, thy ancient sting?

Alas, poor mortal, void of story!
Go spell and read how I have killed thy King.

Poor Death! And who was hurt thereby?
Thy curse being laid on Him makes thee accurst.

Let losers talk, yet thou shalt die;
These arms shall crush thee.

Spare not, do thy worst.
I shall be one day better than before;
Thou so much worse, that thou shalt be no more.

George Herbert

A Wreath

A wreathed garland of deserved praise,
Of praise deserved, unto thee I give,
I give to thee, who knowest all my wayes,
My crooked winding wayes, wherein I live,
Wherein I die, not live : for life is straight,
Straight as a line, and ever tends to thee,
To thee, who art more farre above deceit,
Then deceit seems above simplicitie.
Give me simplicitie, that I may live,
So live and like, that I may know thy wayes,
Know them and practise them : then shall I give
For this poore wreath, give thee a crown of praise.

George Herbert

Aaron

Holiness on the head,
Light and perfection on the breast,
Harmonious bells below, raising the dead
To led them unto life and rest.
Thus are true Aarons dressed.

Profaneness in my head,
Defects and darkness in my breast,
A noise of passions ringing me for dead
Unto a place where is no rest.
Poor priest thus am I dressed.

Only another head
I have, another heart and breast,
another music, making live not dead,
without whom I could have no rest:
In him I am well dressed.

Christ is my only head,
My alone only heart and breast,
My only music, striking me even dead;
That to the old man I may rest,
And be in him new dressed.

So holy in my head,
Perfect and light in my dear breast,
My doctrine tuned by Christ, (who is not dead,
But lives in me while I do rest)
Come people; Aaron's dressed.

George Herbert

Affliction

When thou didst entice to thee my heart,
I thought the service brave:
So many joys I writ down for my part,
Besides what I might have
Out of my stock of natural delights,
Augmented with thy gracious benefits.

I looked on thy furniture so fine,
And made it fine to me:
Thy glorious household-stuff did me entwine,
And 'tice me unto thee.
Such stars I counted mine: both heav'n and earth
Paid me my wages in a world of mirth.

What pleasures could I want, whose King I served?
Where joys my fellows were?
Thus argu'd into hopes, my thoughts reserved
No place for grief or fear.
Therefore my sudden soul caught at the place,
And made her youth and fierceness seek thy face.

At first thou gav'st me milk and sweetnesses;
I had my wish and way:
My days were straw'd with flow'rs and happiness;
There was no month but May.
But with my years sorrow did twist and grow,
And made a party unawares for woe.

My flesh began unto my soul in pain,
Sicknesses cleave my bones;
Consuming agues dwell in ev'ry vein,
And tune my breath to groans.
Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce believed,
Till grief did tell me roundly, that I lived.

When I got health, thou took'st away my life,
And more; for my friends die:
My mirth and edge was lost; a blunted knife
Was of more use than I.

Thus thin and lean without a fence or friend,
I was blown through with ev'ry storm and wind.

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
The way that takes the town;
Thou didst betray me to a lingering book,
And wrap me in a gown.
I was entangled in the world of strife,
Before I had the power to change my life.

Yet, for I threatened oft the siege to raise,
Not simpring all mine age,
Thou often didst with Academic praise
Melt and dissolve my rage.
I took thy sweetened pill, till I came where
I could not go away, nor persevere.

Yet lest perchance I should too happy be
In my unhappiness,
Turning my purge to food, thou throwest me
Into more sicknesses.
Thus doth thy power cross-bias me; not making
Thine own gift good, yet me from my ways taking.

Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me
None of my books will show:
I read, and sigh, and wish I were a tree;
For sure I then should grow
To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust
Her household to me, and I should be just.

Yet though thou troublest me, I must be meek;
In weakness must be stout.
Well, I will change the service, and go seek
Some other master out.
Ah my dear God! though I am clean forgot,
Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.

George Herbert

Affliction (Ii)

Kill me not ev'ry day,
Thou Lord of life, since thy one death for me
Is more than all my deaths can be,
Though I in broken pay
Die over each hour of Methusalem's stay.

If all men's tears were let
Into one common sewer, sea, and brine;
What were they all, compar'd to thine?
Wherein if they were set,
They would discolour thy most bloody sweat.

Thou art my grief alone,
Thou Lord conceal it not: and as thou art
All my delight, so all my smart:
Thy cross took up in one,
By way of imprest, all my future moan.

George Herbert

Affliction (Iii)

My heart did heave, and there came forth, 'O God'!
By that I knew that thou wast in the grief,
To guide and govern it to my relief,
Making a sceptre of the rod:
Hadst thou not had thy part,
Sure the unruly sigh had broke my heart.

But since thy breath gave me both life and shape,
Thou know'st my tallies; and when there's assigned
So much breath to a sigh, what's then behind?
Or if some years with it escape,
The sigh then only is
A gale to bring me sooner to my bliss.

Thy life on earth was grief, and thou art still
Constant unto it, making it to be
A point of honour now to grieve in me,
And in thy members suffer ill.
They who lament one cross,
Thou dying daily, praise thee to thy loss.

George Herbert

Affliction (Iv)

Broken in pieces all asunder,
Lord, hunt me not,
A thing forgot,
Once a poor creature, now a wonder,
A wonder tortur'd in the space
Betwixt this world and that of grace.

My thoughts are all a case of knives,
Wounding my heart
With scatter'd smart,
As wat'ring pots give flowers their lives.
Nothing their fury can control,
While they do wound and prick my soul.

All my attendants are at strife,
Quitting their place
Unto my face:
Nothing performs the task of life:
The elements are let loose to fight,
And while I live, try out their right.

Oh help, my God! let not their plot
Kill them and me,
And also thee,
Who art my life: dissolve the knot,
As the sun scatters by his light
All the rebellions of the night.

Then shall those powers, which work for grief,
Enter thy pay,
And day by day
Labour thy praise, and my relief;
With care and courage building me,
Till I reach heav'n, and much more, thee.

George Herbert

Antiphon (I)

Chorus: Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing
'My God and King.'

Verse: The heav'ns are not too high,
His praise may thither fly:
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.

Chorus: Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
'My God and King.'

Verse: The church with psalms must shout
No door can keep them out:
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.

Chorus: Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing,
'My God and King.'

George Herbert

Artillery

As I one ev'ning sat before my cell,
Me thoughts a star did shoot into my lap.
I rose, and shook my clothes, as knowing well,
That from small fires comes oft no small mishap.
When suddenly I heard one say,
-Do as thou usest, disobey,
Expell good motions from thy breast,
Which have the face of fire, but end in rest-.

I, who had heard of music in the spheres,
But not of speech in stars, began to muse:
But turning to my God, whose ministers
The stars and all things are; if I refuse,
Dread Lord, said I , so oft my good;
Then I refuse not ev'n with blood
To wash away my stubborn thought:
For I will do, or suffer what I ought.

But I have also stars and shooters too,
Born where thy servants both artilleries use.
My tears and prayers night and day do woo,
And work up to thee; yet thou dost refuse.
Not but that I am (I must say still)
Much more oblig'd to do thy will,
Than thou to grant mine: but because
Thy promise now hath ev'n set thee thy laws.

Then we are shooters both, and thou dost deign
To enter combat with us, and contest
With thine own clay. But I would parley fain:
Shun not my arrows, and behold my breast.
Yet if thou shunest, I am thine:
I must be so, if I am mine.
There is no articing with thee:
I am but finite, yet thine infinitely.

George Herbert

Bitter-Sweet

Ah, my dear angry Lord,
Since thou dost love, yet strike;
Cast down, yet help afford;
Sure I will do the like.

I will complain, yet praise;
I will bewail, approve;
And all my sour-sweet days
I will lament and love.

George Herbert

Church Monuments

While that my soul repairs to her devotion,
Here I intomb my flesh, that it betimes
May take acquaintance of this heap of dust;
To which the blast of death's incessant motion,
Fed with the exhalation of our crimes,
Drives all at last. Therefore I gladly trust

My body to this school, that it may learn
To spell his elements, and find his birth
Written in dusty heraldry and lines;
Which dissolution sure doth best discern,
Comparing dust with dust, and earth with earth.
These laugh at jet and marble put for signs,

To sever the good fellowship of dust,
And spoil the meeting. What shall point out them,
When they shall bow, and kneel, and fall down flat
To kiss those heaps, which now they have in trust?
Dear flesh, while I do pray, learn here thy stem
And true descent, that when thou shalt grow fat

And wanton in thy cravings, thou mayst know
That flesh is but the glass which holds the dust
That measures all our time; which also shall
Be crumbled into dust. Mark, here below
How tame these ashes are, how free from lust,
That thou mayst fit thyself against thy fall.

George Herbert

Church Music

Sweetest of sweets, I thank you: when displeasure
Did through my body wound my mind,
You took me thence, and in your house of pleasure
A dainty lodging me assigned.

Now I in you without a body move,
Rising and falling with your wings:
We both together sweetly live and love,
Yet say sometimes, "God help poor Kings".

Comfort, I'll die; for if you post from me
Sure I shall do so, and much more:
But if I travel in your company,
You know the way to heaven's door.

George Herbert

Clasping Of Hands

LORD, Thou art mine, and I am Thine,
If mine I am; and Thine much more
Then I or ought or can be mine.
Yet to be Thine doth me restore,
So that again I now am mine,
And with advantage mine the more,
Since this being mine brings with it Thine,
And Thou with me dost Thee restore:
If I without Thee would be mine,
I neither should be mine nor Thine.

Lord, I am Thine, and Thou art mine;
So mine Thou art, that something more
I may presume Thee mine then Thine,
For Thou didst suffer to restore
Not Thee, but me, and to be mine:
And with advantage mine the more,
Since Thou in death wast none of Thine,
Yet then as mine didst me restore:
O, be mine still; still make me Thine;
Or rather make no Thine and Mine.

George Herbert

Denial

When my devotions could not pierce
Thy silent ears;
Then was my heart broken, as was my verse:
My breast was full of fears
And disorder:

My bent thoughts, like a brittle bow,
Did fly asunder:
Each took his way; some would to pleasures go,
Some to the wars and thunder
Of alarms.

As good go any where, they say,
As to benumb
Both knees and heart, in crying night and day,
Come, come, my God, O come,
But no hearing.

O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue
To cry to thee,
And then not hear it crying! all day long
My heart was in my knee,
But no hearing.

Therefore my soul lay out of sight,
Untuned, unstrung:
My feeble spirit, unable to look right,
Like a nipped blossom, hung
Discontented.

O cheer and tune my heartless breast,
Defer no time;
That so thy favors granting my request,
They and my mind may chime,
And mend my rime.

George Herbert

George Herbert

Easter

Rise, heart, thy lord is risen. Sing his praise
Without delays,
Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise
With him may'st rise:
That, as his death calcinèd thee to dust,
His life may make thee gold, and, much more, just.

Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part
With all thy art,
The cross taught all wood to resound his name
Who bore the same.
His stretchèd sinews taught all strings what key
Is best to celebrate this most high day.

Consort, both heart and lute, and twist a song
Pleasant and long;
Or, since all music is but three parts vied
And multiplied
Oh let thy blessèd Spirit bear a part,
And make up our defects with his sweet art.

George Herbert

Easter Song

I Got me flowers to straw Thy way,
I got me boughs off many a tree;
But Thou wast up by break of day,
And brought'st Thy sweets along with Thee.

The sunne arising in the East,
Though he give light, and th' East perfume,
If they should offer to contest
With Thy arising, they presume.

Can there be any day but this,
Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?
We count three hundred, but we misse:
There is but one, and that one ever.

George Herbert

Easter Wings

Lord, Who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:

With Thee
O let me rise,
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day Thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne;
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.

With Thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day Thy victorie;
For, if I imp my wing on Thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

George Herbert

Employment (I)

If as a flower doth spread and die,
Thou wouldst extend me to some good,
Before I were by frost's extremity
Nipt in the bud;

The sweetness and the praise were thine;
But the extension and the room,
Which in thy garland I should fill, were mine
At thy great doom.

For as thou dost impart thy grace,
The greater shall our glory be.
The measure of our joys is in this place,
The stuff with thee.

Let me not languish then, and spend
A life as barren to thy praise,
As is the dust, to which that life doth tend,
But with delays.

All things are busy; only I
Neither bring honey with the bees,
Nor flowers to make that, nor the husbandry
To water these.

I am no link of thy great chain,
But all my company is a weed.
Lord place me in thy consort; give one strain
To my poor reed.

George Herbert

Even-Song

Blest be the God of love,
Who gave me eyes, and light, and power this day,
Both to be busy, and to play.
But much more blest be God above,
Who gave me sight alone,
Which to himself he did deny:
For when he sees my ways, I die:
But I have got his son, and he hath none.

What have I brought thee home
For this thy love? have I discharg'd the debt,
Which this day's favour did beget?
I ran; but all I brought, was foam.
Thy diet, care and cost
Do end in bubbles, balls of wind;
Of wind to thee whom I have crost,
But balls of wild-fire to my troubled mind.

Yet still thou goest on,
And now with darkness closest weary eyes,
Saying to man, 'It doth suffice:
Henceforth repose; your work is done.'
Thus in thy Ebony box
Thou dost enclose us, till the day
Put our amendment in our way,
And give new wheels to our disorder'd clocks.

I muse, which shows more love,
The day or night: that is the gale, this th' harbour;
That is the walk, and this the arbour;
Or that is the garden, this the grove.
My God, thou art all love.
Not one poor minute scapes thy breast,
But brings a favour from above;
And in this love, more than in bed, I rest.

George Herbert

Faith

Lord, how couldst thou so much appease
Thy wrath for sin, as when man's sight was dim,
And could see little, to regard his ease,
And bring by Faith all things to him?

Hungry I was, and had no meat:
I did conceit a most delicious feast;
I had it straight, and did as truly eat,
As ever did a welcome guest.

There is a rare outlandish root,
Which when I could not get, I thought it here:
That apprehension cur'd so well my foot,
That I can walk to heav'n well near.

I owed thousands and much more.
I did believe that I did nothing owe,
And liv'd accordingly; my creditor
Believes so too, and lets me go.

Faith makes me any thing, or all
That I believe is in the sacred story:
And where sin placeth me in Adam's fall,
Faith sets me higher in his glory.

If I go lower in the book,
What can be lower than the common manger?
Faith puts me there with him, who sweetly took
Our flesh and frailty, death and danger.

If bliss had lien in art or strength,
None but the wise or strong had gained it:
Where now by Faith all arms are of a length;
One size doth all conditions fit.

A peasant may believe as much
As a great Clerk, and reach the highest stature.
Thus dost thou make proud knowledge bend and crouch
While grace fills up uneven nature.

When creatures had no real light
Inherent in them, thou didst make the sun
Impute a lustre, and allow them bright;
And in this show what Christ hath done.

That which before was darkned clean
With bushy groves, pricking the looker's eye,
Vanisht away, when Faith did change the scene:
And then appear'd a glorious sky.

What though my body run to dust?
Faith cleaves unto it, counting ev'ry grain
With an exact and most particular trust,
Reserving all for flesh again.

George Herbert

Good Friday

O my chief good,
How shall I measure out thy blood?
How shall I count what thee befell,
And each grief tell?

Shall I thy woes
Number according to thy foes?
Or, since one star show'd thy first breath,
Shall all thy death?

Or shall each leaf,
Which falls in Autumn, score a grief?
Or cannot leaves, but fruit be sign
Of the true vine?

Then let each hour
Of my whole life one grief devour:
That thy distress through all may run,
And be my sun.

Or rather let
My several sins their sorrows get;
That as each beast his cure doth know,
Each sin may so.

Since blood is fittest, Lord to write
Thy sorrows in, and bloody fight;
My heart hath store, write there, where in
One box doth lie both ink and sin:

That when sin spies so many foes,
Thy whips, thy nails, thy wounds, thy woes
All come to lodge there, sin may say,
'No room for me', and fly away.

Sin being gone, oh fill the place,
And keep possession with thy grace;
Lest sin take courage and return,
And all the writings blot or burn.

George Herbert

Grace

My stock lies dead and no increase
Doth my dull husbandry improve:
O let thy graces without cease
Drop from above!

If still the sun should hide his face,
Thy house would but a dungeon prove,
Thy works, night's captives: O let grace
Drop from above!

The dew doth ev'ry morning fall;
And shall the dew outstrip thy dove?
The dew, for which grass cannot call,
Drop from above.

Death is still working like a mole,
And digs my grave at each remove:
Let grace work too, and on my soul
Drop from above.

Sin is still hammering my heart
Unto a hardness, void of love:
Let suppling grace, to cross his art,
Drop from above.

O come! for thou dost know the way.
Or if to me thou wilt not move,
Remove me, where I need not say,
'Drop from above.'

George Herbert

Grief

O who will give me tears? Come, all ye springs,
Dwell in my head and eyes; come, clouds
and rain;
My grief hath need of all the watery things
That nature hath produced: let every vein
Suck up a river to supply mine eyes,
My weary weeping eyes, too dry for me,
Unless they get new conduits, new supplies,
To bear them out, and with my state agree.
What are two shallow fords, two little spouts
Of a less world ? the greater is but small,
A narrow cupboard for my griefs and doubts,
Which want provision in the midst of all.
Verses, ye are too fine a thing, too wise
For my rough sorrows ; cease, be dumb and mute,
Give up your feet and running to mine eyes,
And keep your measures for some lover's lute,
Whose grief allows him music and a rhyme ;
For mine excludes both measure, tune, and time :
Alas, my God!

George Herbert

H. Baptism

As he that sees a dark and shady grove,
Stays not, but looks beyond it on the sky;
So when I view my sins, mine eyes remove
More backward still, and to that water fly,
Which is above the heav'ns, whose spring and rest
Is in my dear Redeemer's pierced side.
O blessed streams! either ye do prevent
And stop our sins from growing thick and wide,
Or else give tears to drown them, as they grow.
In you Redemption measures all my time,
And spreads the plaster equal to the crime;
You taught the book of life my name, that so
What ever future sins should me miscall,
Your first acquaintance might discredit all.

George Herbert

H. Baptism Ii

Since, Lord, to thee
A narrow way and little gate
Is all the passage, on my infancy
Thou didst lay hold, and antedate
My faith in me.

O let me still
Write thee great God, and me a child:
Let me be soft and supple to thy will,
Small to my self, to others mild,
Behither ill.

Although by stealth
My flesh get on, yet let her sister
My soul bid nothing, but preserve her wealth:
The growth of flesh is but a blister;
Childhood is health.

George Herbert

Heaven

Oh who will show me those delights on high!

Echo I

Thou Echo, thou art mortal, all men know.

Echo No

Wert thou not born among the trees and leaves?

Echo Leaves

And are there any leaves, that still abide?

Echo Bide

What leaves are they? Impart the matter wholly.

Echo Holy

Are holy leaves the Echo then of blisse?

Echo Yes

Then tell me, what is that supreme delight?

Echo Light

Light to the minde: what shall the will enjoy?

Echo Joy

But are there cares and business with the pleasure?

Echo Leisure

Light, joy and leisure; but shall they persever?

Echo Ever)

George Herbert

Jordan

Who says that fictions only and false hair
Become a verse? Is there in truth no beauty?
Is all good structure in a winding stair?
May no lines pass, except they do their duty
Not to a true, but painted chair?

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves
And sudden arbours shadow coarse-spun lines?
Must purling streams refresh a lover's loves?
Must all be veiled, while he that reads divines,
Catching the sense at two removes?

Shepherds are honest people: let them sing:
Riddle who list, for me, and pull for prime:
I envy no man's nightingale or spring;
Nor let them punish me with loss of rhyme,
Who plainly say, My God, My King.

George Herbert

Jordan (I)

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Become a verse? Is there no truth in beauty?
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Nor let them punish me with loss of rime,
Who plainly say, My God, My King.

George Herbert

Joseph's Coat

Wounded I sing, tormented I indite,
Thrown down I fall into a bed, and rest:
Sorrow hath chang'd its note: such is his will
Who changeth all things, as him pleaseth best.
For well he knows, if but one grief and smart
Among my many had his full career,
Sure it would carry with it ev'n my heart,
And both would run until they found a bier
To fetch the body; both being due to grief.
But he hath spoil'd the race; and giv'n to anguish
One of Joy's coats, 'ticing it with relief
To linger in me, and together languish.
I live to shew his power, who once did bring
My joys to weep, and now my griefs to sing.

George Herbert

Judgement

Almightie Judge, how shall poore wretches brook
 Thy dreadfull look,
Able a heart of iron to appall,
 When thou shalt call
For ev'ry man's peculiar book?

What others mean to do, I know not well;
 Yet I heare tell,
That some will turn thee to some leaves therein
 So void of sinne,
That they in merit shall excell.

But I resolve, when thou shalt call for mine,
 That to decline,
And thrust a Testament into thy hand:
 Let that be scann'd.
There thou shalt finde my faults are thine.

George Herbert

Lent

Welcome dear feast of Lent: who loves not thee,
He loves not Temperance, or Authority,
But is compos'd of passion.
The Scriptures bid us fast; the Church says, now:
Give to thy Mother, what thou wouldst allow
To ev'ry Corporation.

The humble soul compos'd of love and fear
Begins at home, and lays the burden there,
When doctrines disagree,
He says, in things which use hath justly got,
I am a scandal to the Church, and not
The Church is so to me.

True Christians should be glad of an occasion
To use their temperance, seeking no evasion,
When good is seasonable;
Unless Authority, which should increase
The obligation in us, make it less,
And Power itself disable.

Besides the cleanness of sweet abstinence,
Quick thoughts and motions at a small expense,
A face not fearing light:
Whereas in fulness there are sluttish fumes,
Sour exhalations, and dishonest rheums,
Revenging the delight.

Then those same pendant profits, which the spring
And Easter intimate, enlarge the thing,
And goodness of the deed.
Neither ought other men's abuse of Lent
Spoil the good use; lest by that argument
We forfeit all our Creed.

It's true, we cannot reach Christ's forti'eth day;
Yet to go part of that religious way,
Is better than to rest:
We cannot reach our Saviour's purity;

Yet we are bid, 'Be holy ev'n as he, '
In both let's do our best.

Who goeth in the way which Christ hath gone,
Is much more sure to meet with him, than one
That travelleth by-ways:
Perhaps my God, though he be far before,
May turn and take me by the hand, and more:
May strengthen my decays.

Yet Lord instruct us to improve our fast
By starving sin and taking such repast,
As may our faults control:
That ev'ry man may revel at his door,
Not in his parlour; banqueting the poor,
And among those his soul.

George Herbert

Life

I made a posie, while the day ran by:
Here will I smell my remnant out, and tie
My life within this band.
But time did beckon to the flowers, and they
By noon most cunningly did steal away
And wither'd in my hand.

My hand was next to them, and then my heart:
I took, without more thinking, in good part
Times gentle admonition:
Who did so sweetly deaths sad taste convey
Making my minde to smell my fatall day;
Yet sugring the suspicion.

Farewell deare flowers, sweetly your time ye spent,
Fit, while ye liv'd, for smell or ornament,
And after death for cures.
I follow straight without complaints or grief,
Since if my sent be good, I care not, if
It be as short as yours.

George Herbert

Love (I)

Immortal love, authour of this great frame,
Sprung from that beautie which can never fade;
How hath man parcel'd out thy glorious name,
And thrown it on that dust which thou hast made,

While mortall love doth all the title gain!
Which siding with invention, they together
Bear all the sway, possessing heart and brain,
(Thy workmanship) and give thee share in neither.

Wit fancies beautie, beautie raiseth wit:
The world is theirs; they two play out the game,
Thou standing by: and though thy glorious name
Wrought our deliverance from th' infernall pit,

Who sings thy praise? onely a skarf or glove
Doth warm our hands, and make them write of love.

George Herbert

Love (Ii)

Immortal Heat, O let thy greater flame
Attract the lesser to it: let those fires
Which shall consume the world, first make it tame,
And kindle in our hearts such true desires,

As may consume our lusts, and make thee way.
Then shall our hearts pant thee; then shall our brain
All her invention on thine Altar lay,
And there in hymnes send back thy fire again:

Our eies shall see thee, which before saw dust;
Dust blown by wit, till that they both were blinde:
Thou shalt recover all thy goods in kinde,
Who wert disseized by usurping lust:

All knees shall bow to thee; all wits shall rise,
And praise him who did make and mend our eies.

George Herbert

Love (Iii)

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack,
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and tast me meat:
So I did sit and eat.

George Herbert

Man

My God, I heard this day,
That none doth build a stately habitation,
But he that means to dwell therein.
What house more stately hath there been,
Or can be, than is Man? to whose creation
All things are in decay.

For Man is ev'ry thing,
And more:
He is a tree, yet bears no fruit;
A beast, yet is, or should be more:
Reason and speech we only bring.
Parrots may thank us, if they are not mute,
They go upon the score.

Man is all symmetry,
Full of proportions, one limb to another,
And all to all the world besides:
Each part may call the farthest brother:
For head with foot hath private amity,
And both with moons and tides.

Nothing hath got so far,
But Man hath caught and kept it, as his prey.
His eyes dismount the highest star:
He is in little all the sphere.
Herbs gladly cure our flesh; because that they
Find their acquaintance there.

For us the winds do blow,
The earth doth rest, heav'n move, and fountains flow.
Nothing we see, but means our good,
As our delight, or as our treasure:
The whole is, either our cupboard of food,
Or cabinet of pleasure.

The stars have us to bed;
Night draws the curtain, which the sun withdraws;
Music and light attend our head.

All things unto our flesh are kind
In their descent and being; to our mind
In their ascent and cause.

Each thing is full of duty:
Waters united are our navigation;
Distinguished, our habitation;
Below, our drink; above, our meat;
Both are our cleanliness.
Hath one such beauty?
Then how are all things neat?

More servants wait on Man,
Than he'll take notice of: in ev'ry path
He treads down that which doth befriend him,
When sickness makes him pale and wan.
Oh mighty love! Man is one world, and hath
Another to attend him.

Since then, my God, thou hast
So brave a palace built; O dwell in it,
That it may dwell with thee at last!
Till then, afford us so much wit;
That, as the world serves us, we may serve thee,
And both thy servants be.

George Herbert

Man's Medley

Hark, how the birds do sing,
and woods do ring.
All creatures have their joy: and man hath his.
Yet if we rightly measure,
Man's joy and pleasure
Rather hereafter, than in present, is.

To this life things of sense
Make their pretense:
In th'other Angels have a right by birth:
Man ties them both alone,
And makes them one,
With th'one hand touching heav'n, with th'other earth.

In soul he mounts and flies,
In flesh he dies.
He wears a stuff whose thread is coarse and round,
But trimm'd with curious lace
And should take place
After the trimming, not the stuff and ground.

Not that he may not here
Taste of the cheer,
But as birds drink, and straight lift up their head,
So must he sip and think
Of better drink
He may attain to, after he is dead.

But as his joys are double,
So is his trouble.
He hath two winters, other things but one:
Both frosts and thoughts do nip,
And bite his lip;
And he of all things fears two deaths alone.

Yet ev'n the greatest griefs
May be reliefs,
Could he but take them right, and in their ways.
Happy is he, whose heart

Hath found the art
To turn his double pains to double praise.

George Herbert

Mattins

I cannot ope mine eyes,
But thou art ready there to catch
My morning-soul and sacrifice:
Then we must needs for that day make a match.

My God, what is a heart?
Silver, or gold, or precious stone,
Or star, or rainbow, or a part
Of all these things or all of them in one?

My God, what is a heart?
That thou should'st it so eye, and woo,
Pouring upon it all thy art,
As if that thou hadst nothing else to do?

Indeed man's whole estate
Amounts (and richly) to serve thee:
He did not heav'n and earth create,
Yet studies them, not him by whom they be.

Teach me thy love to know;
That this new light, which now I see,
May both the work and workman show:
Then by a sun-beam I will climb to thee.

George Herbert

Mortification

How soon doth man decay!
When clothes are taken from a chest of sweets
To swaddle infants, whose young breath
Scarce knows the way;
Those clouts are little winding-sheets,
Which do consign and send them unto Death.

When boyes go first to bed,
They step into their voluntarie graves;
Sleep binds them fast; onely their breath
Makes them not dead:
Successive nights, like rolling waves,
Convey them quickly who are bound for Death.

When Youth is frank and free,
And calls for musick, while his veins do swell,
All day exchanging mirth and breath
In companie,
That musick summons to the knell
Which shall befriend him at the house of Death.

When man grows staid and wise,
Getting a house and home, where he may move
Within the circle of his breath,
Schooling his eyes,
That dumbe inclosure maketh love
Unto the coffin, that attends his death.

When Age grows low and weak,
Marking his grave, and thawing ev'ry year,
Till all do melt and drown his breath
When he would speak,
A chair or litter shows the biere
Which shall convey him to the house of Death.

Man, ere he is aware,
Hath put together a solemnitie,
And drest his hearse, while he has breath
As yet to spare;

Yet, Lord, instruct us so to die,
That all these dyings may be LIFE in DEATH.

George Herbert

Nature

Full of rebellion, I would die,
Or fight, or travel, or deny
That thou has aught to do with me.
O tame my heart;
It is thy highest art
To captivate strong holds to thee.

If thou shalt let this venom lurk,
And in suggestions fume and work,
My soul will turn to bubbles straight,
And thence by kind
Vanish into a wind,
Making thy workmanship deceit.

O smooth my rugged heart, and there
Engrave thy rev'rend law and fear;
Or make a new one, since the old
Is sapless grown,
And a much fitter stone
To hide my dust, than thee to hold.

George Herbert

Peace

Sweet Peace, where dost thou dwell? I humbly crave,
Let me once know.
I sought thee in a secret cave,
And ask'd, if Peace were there,
A hollow wind did seem to answer, No:
Go seek elsewhere.

I did; and going did a rainbow note:
Surely, thought I,
This is the lace of Peace's coat:
I will search out the matter.
But while I looked the clouds immediately
Did break and scatter.

Then went I to a garden and did spy
A gallant flower,
The crown-imperial: Sure, said I,
Peace at the root must dwell.
But when I digged, I saw a worm devour
What showed so well.

At length I met a rev'rend good old man;
Whom when for Peace

I did demand, he thus began:
There was a Prince of old
At Salem dwelt, who lived with good increase
Of flock and fold.

He sweetly lived; yet sweetness did not save
His life from foes.
But after death out of his grave
There sprang twelve stalks of wheat;
Which many wond'ring at, got some of those
To plant and set.

It prospered strangely, and did soon disperse
Through all the earth:
For they that taste it do rehearse

That virtue lies therein;
A secret virtue, bringing peace and mirth
By flight of sin.

Take of this grain, which in my garden grows,
And grows for you;
Make bread of it: and that repose
And peace, which ev'ry where
With so much earnestness you do pursue,
Is only there.

George Herbert

Praise (I)

To write a verse or two is all the praise
That I can raise:
Mend my estate in any ways,
Thou shalt have more.

I go to Church; help me to wings, and I
Will thither fly;
Or, if I mount unto the sky,
I will do more.

Man is all weakness; there is no such thing
As Prince or King:
His arm is short; yet with a sling
He may do more.

An herb distill'd, and drunk, may dwell next door,
On the same floor,
To a brave soul: Exalt the poor,
They can do more.

O raise me then! poor bees, that work all day,
Sting my delay,
Who have a work, as well as they,
And much, much more.

George Herbert

Prayer (I)

Prayer the Church's banquet, angels' age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;

Engine against th'Almighty, sinner's tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days' world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;

Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The Milky Way, the bird of Paradise,

Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices; something understood.

George Herbert

Providence

O Sacred Providence, who from end to end
Strongly and sweetly movest! shall I write,
And not of thee, through whom my fingers bend
To hold my quill? shall they not do thee right?

Of all the creatures both in sea and land
Onely to Man thou hast made known thy wayes,
And put the penne alone into his hand,
And made him Secretarie of thy praise.

Beasts fain would sing; birds dittie to their notes;
Trees would be tuning on their native lute
To thy renown: but all their hands and throats
Are brought to Man, while they are lame and mute.

Man is the worlds high Priest: he doth present
The sacrifice for all; while they below
Unto the service mutter an assent,
Such as springs use that fall, and windes that blow.

He that to praise and laud thee doth refrain,
Doth not refrain unto himself alone,
But robs a thousand who would praise thee fain,
And doth commit a world of sinne in one.

The beasts say, Eat me: but, if beasts must teach,
The tongue is yours to eat, but mine to praise.
The trees say, Pull me: but the hand you stretch,
Is mine to write, as it is yours to raise.

Wherefore, most sacred Spirit, I here present
For me and all my fellows praise to thee:
And just it is that I should pay the rent,
Because the benefit accrues to me.

We all acknowledge both thy power and love
To be exact, transcendent, and divine;
Who dost so strongly and so sweetly move,
While all things have their will, yet none but thine.

For either thy command, or thy permission
Lay hands on all: they are thy right and left.
The first puts on with speed and expedition;
The other curbs sinnes stealing pace and theft.

Nothing escapes them both; all must appeare,
And be dispos'd, and dress'd, and tun'd by thee,
Who sweetly temper'st all. If we could heare
Thy skill and art, what musick would it be!

Thou art in small things great, not small in any:
Thy even praise can neither rise, nor fall.
Thou art in all things one, in each thing many:
For thou art infinite in one and all.

Tempests are calm to thee; they know thy hand,
And hold it fast, as children do their fathers,
Which crie and follow. Thou hast made poore sand
Check the proud sea, ev'n when it swells and gathers.

Thy cupboard serves the world: the meat is set,
Where all may reach: no beast but knows his feed.
Birds teach us hawking; fishes have their net:
The great prey on the lesse, they on some weed.

Nothing ingendred doth prevent his meat:
Flies have their table spread, ere they appeare.
Some creatures have in winter what to eat;
Others do sleep, and envie not their cheer.

How finely dost thou times and seasons spin.
And make a twist checker'd with night and day!
Which as it lengthens windes, and windes us in,
As bouls go on, but turning all the way.

Each creature hath a wisdom for his good.
The pigeons feed their tender off-spring, crying,
When they are callow; but withdraw their food
When they are fledge, that need may teach them flying.

Bees work for man; and yet they never bruise

Their masters flower, but leave it, having done,
As fair as ever, and as fit to use;
So both the flower doth stay, and hony run.

Sheep eat the grasse, and dung the ground for more:
Trees after bearing drop their leaves for soil:
Springs vent their streams, and by expense get store:
Clouds cool by heat, and baths by cooling boil.

Who hath the vertue to expresse the rare
And curious vertues both of herbs and stones?
Is there a herb for that? O that thy care
Would show a root, that gives expressions!

And if an herb hath power, what have the starres?
A rose, besides his beautie, is a cure.
Doubtlesse our plagues and plentie, peace and warres
Are there much surer then our art is sure.

Thou hast hid metals: man may take them thence;
But at his peril: when he digs the place,
He makes a grave; as if the thing had sense,
And threatned man, that he should fill the space.

Ev'n poysons praise thee. Should a thing be lost?
Should creatures want for want of heed their due?
Since where are poysons, antidots are most:
The help stands close, and keeps the fear in view.

The sea, which seems to stop the traveller,
Is by a ship the speedier passage made.
The windes, who think they rule the mariner,
Are rul'd by him, and taught to serve his trade.

And as thy house is full, so I adore
Thy curious art in marshalling thy goods.
The hills and health abound; the vales with store;
The South with marble; North with fures & woods.

Hard things are glorious; easie things good cheap.
The common all men have; that which is rare,
Men therefore seek to have, and care to keep.

The healthy frosts with summer-fruits compare.

Light without winde is glasse: warm without weight
Is wooll and furre: cool without closenesse, shade:
Speed without pains, a horse: tall without height,
A servile hawk: low without losse, a spade.

All countreys have enough to serve their need:
If they seek fine things, thou dost make them run
For their offence; and then dost turn their speed
To be commerce and trade from sunne to sunne.

Nothing wears clothes, but Man; nothing doth need
But he to wear them. Nothing useth fire,
But Man alone, to show his heav'nly breed:
And onely he hath fuell in desire.

When th'earth was dry, thou mad'st a sea of wet:
When that lay gather'd, thou didst broach the mountains:
When yet some places could no moisture get,
The windes grew gard'ners, and the clouds good fountains.

Rain, do not hurt my flowers; but gently spend
Your hony drops: presse not to smell them here:
When they are ripe, their odour will ascend,
And at your lodging with their thanks appeare.

How harsh are thorns to pears! and yet they make
A better hedge, and need lesse reparation.
How smooth are silks compared with a stake,
Or with a stone! yet make no good foundation.

Sometimes thou dost divide thy gifts to man,
Sometimes unite. The Indian nut alone
Is clothing, meat and trencher, drink and kan,
Boat, cable, sail and needle, all in one.

Most herbs that grow in brooks, are hot and dry.
Cold fruits warm kernells help against the winde.
The lemmons juice and rinde cure mutually.
The whey of milk doth loose, the milk doth binde.

Thy creatures leap not, but expresse a feast,
Where all the guests sit close, and nothing wants.
Frogs marry fish and flesh; bats, bird and beast;
Sponges, non-sense and sense; mines, th'earth & plants.

To show thou art not bound, as if thy lot
Were worse then ours; sometimes thou shiftest hands.
Most things move th'under-jaw; the Crocodile not.
Most things sleep lying; th' Elephant leans or stands.

But who hath praise enough? nay who hath any?
None can expresse thy works, but he that knows them:
And none can know thy works, which are so many,
And so complete, but onely he that owes them.

All things that are, though they have sev'rall wayes,
Yet in their being joyn with one advise
To honour thee: and so I give thee praise
In all my other hymnes, but in this twice.

Each thing that is, although in use and name
It go for one, hath many wayes in store
To honour thee; and so each hymne thy fame
Extolleth many wayes, yet this one more.

George Herbert

Psalm V

Lord, to my words incline thine ear,
My meditation weigh:
My King, my God, vouchsafe to hear
My cry to thee, I pray.

Thou in the morn shalt hear my mone.
For in the morn will I
Direct my prayers to thy Throne,
And thither lift mine eye.

Thou art a God, whose puritie
Cannot in sins delight:
No evil, Lord, shall dwell with thee,
Nor fools stand in thy sight

Thou hat'st those that unjustly do.
Thou slay'st the men that lie;
The bloody man, the false one too,
Shall be abhorr'd by thee.

But in th' abundance of thy grace
Will I to thee draw near.
And toward thy most holy place
Will worship thee in fear.

Lord, lead me in thy righteousness.
Because of all my foes;
And to my dym and sinful eyes
Thy perfect way disclose:

For wickedness their insides are,
Their mouths no truth retain,
Their throat an open sepulchur,
Their flattering tongues do fain.

Destroy them, Lord, and by their own
Bad counsels let them fall
In height of their transgression;
O Lord ! reject them all.

Because against thy Majesty
They vainly have rebell'd ;
But let all those that trust in thee
With perfect joy be fill'd.

Yea, shout for joy for evermore.
Protected still by thee;
Let them that do thy name adore
In that still joyful be.

For God doth righteous men esteem.
And them for ever bless;
His favour shalt encompass them,
A shield in their distress.

George Herbert

Redemption

Having been tenant long to a rich lord,
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
And make a suit unto him, to afford
A new small-rented lease, and cancel the old.
In heaven at his manor I him sought;
They told me there that he was lately gone
About some land, which he had dearly bought
Long since on earth, to take possession.
I straight returned, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
In cities, theaters, gardens, parks, and courts;
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
Of thieves and murderers; there I him espied,
Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, and died.

George Herbert

Repentance

Lord, I confess my sin is great;
Great is my sin. Oh! gently treat
With thy quick flow'r, thy momentary bloom;
Whose life still pressing
Is one undressing,
A steady aiming at a tomb.

Man's age is two hours' work, or three:
Each day doth round about us see.
Thus are we to delights: but we are all
To sorrows old,
If life be told
From what life feeleth, Adam's fall.

O let thy height of mercy then
Compassionate short-breathed men.
Cut me not off for my most foul transgression:
I do confess
My foolishness;
My God, accept of my confession.

Sweeten at length this bitter bowl,
Which thou hast pour'd into my soul;
Thy wormwood turn to health, winds to fair weather:
For if thou stay,
I and this day,
As we did rise, we die together.

When thou for sin rebukest man,
Forthwith he waxeth woe and wan:
Bitterness fills our bowels; all our hearts
Pine, and decay,
And dropp away,
And carry with them th'other parts.

But thou wilt sin and grief destroy;
That so the broken bones may joy,
And tune together in a well-set song,
Full of his praises,

Who dead men raises;
Fractures well cur'd make us more strong.

George Herbert

Sepulchre

O blessed body! Whither are thou thrown?
No lodging for thee, but a cold hard stone?
So many hearts on earth, and yet not one
Receive thee?
Sure there is room within our hearts' good store;
For they can lodge transgressions by the score:
Thousands of toys dwell there, yet out of door
They leave thee.
But that which shows them large, shows them unfit.
What ever sin did this pure rock commit,
Which holds thee now? Who hath indicted it
Of murder?
Where our hard hearts have took up stories to brain thee,
And missing this, most falsely did arraign thee,
And order.
And as of old, the law by heav'nly art
Was writ in stone; so thou, which also art
The letter of the word, find'st no fit heart
To hold thee.
Yet do we still persist as we began,
And so should perish, but that nothing can,
Though it be cold, hard, foul, from loving man
Withhold thee.

George Herbert

Sighs And Groans

O do not use me
After my sins! look not on my dessert,
But on your glory! Then you will reform
And not refuse me: for you only art
The mighty God, but I a silly worm;
O do not bruise me!

O do not urge me!
For what account can your ill steward make?
I have abused your stock, destroyed your woods,
Sucked all your storehouses: my head did ache,
Till it found out how to consume your goods:
O do not scourge me!

O do not blind me!
I have deserved that an Egyptian night
Should thicken all my powers; because my lust
Has still sewed fig-leaves to exclude your light:
But I am frailty, and already dust;
O do not grind me!

O do not fill me
With the turned vial of your bitter wrath!
For you have other vessels full of blood,
A part whereof my Savior emptied hath,
Even unto death: since he died for my good,
O do not kill me!

But O relieve me!
For you have life and death at your command;
You are both Judge and Savior, feast and rod,
Cordial and Corrosive: put not your hand
Into the bitter box; but O my God,
My God, relieve me!

George Herbert

Sin

Lord, with what care hast Thou begirt us round!
Parents first season us; then schoolmasters
Deliver us to laws;—they send us bound
To rules of reason, holy messengers,
Pulpits and Sundays, sorrow dogging sin,
Afflictions sorted, anguish of all sizes,
Fine nets and stratagems to catch us in,
Bibles laid open, millions of surprises,
Blessings beforehand, ties of gratefulness,
The sound of glory ringing in our ears;
Without, our shame; within, our consciences;
Angels and grace, eternal hopes and fears:
Yet all these fences and their whole array
One cunning bosom-sin blows quite away.

George Herbert

Sin (I)

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Parents first season us; then schoolmasters
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George Herbert

Sin (Ii)

O that I could a sin once see!
We paint the devil foul, yet he
Hath some good in him, all agree.
Sin is flat opposite to th' Almighty, seeing
It wants the good of virtue, and of being.

But God more care of us hath had:
If apparitions make us sad,
By sight of sin we should grow mad.
Yet as in sleep we see foul death, and live:
So devils are our sins in perspective.

George Herbert

Sin's Round

Sorry I am, my God, sorry I am,
That my offences course it in a ring.
My thoughts are working like a busy flame,
Until their cockatrice they hatch and bring:
And when they once have perfected their draughts,
My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts.

My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts,
Which spit it forth like the Sicilian hill.
They vent their wares, and pass them with their faults,
And by their breathing ventilate the ill.
But words suffice not, where are lewd intentions:
My hands do join to finish the inventions.

My hands do join to finish the inventions:
And so my sins ascend three stories high,
As Babel grew, before there were dissensions.
Let ill deeds loiter not: for they supply
New thoughts of sinning:
wherefore, to my shame,
Sorry I am, my God, sorry I am.

George Herbert

Sonnet (I)

My God, where is that ancient heat towards thee,
Wherewith whole showls of Martyrs once did burn,
Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry
Wear Venus livery? only serve her turn?
Why are not Sonnets made of thee? and layes
Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise
As well as any she? Cannot thy Dove
Out-strip their Cupid easily in flight?
Or, since thy wayes are deep, and still the fame,
Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name!
Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might
Each breast does feel, no braver fuel choose
Than that, which one day, Worms, may chance refuse?

George Herbert

Sonnet (Ii)

O

Sure Lord, there is enough in thee to dry
Oceans of Ink ; for, as the Deluge did
Cover the Earth, so doth thy Majesty :
Each Cloud distills thy praise, and doth forbid
Poets to turn it to another use.
Roses and Lillies speak thee ; and to make
A pair of Cheeks of them, is thy abuse.
Why should I Womens eyes for Chrystal take?
Such poor invention burns in their low mind,
Whose fire is wild, and doth not upward go
To praise, and on thee Lord, some Ink bestow.
Open the bones, and you shall nothing find
In the best face but filth, when Lord, in thee
The beauty lies, in the discovery

George Herbert

Sunday

O day most calm, most bright
The fruit of this, the next world's bud,
Th'endorsement of supreme delight,
Writ by a friend, and with his blood;
The couch of time; care's balm and bay:
The week were dark, but for thy light:
Thy torch doth show the way.

The other days and thou
Make up one man; whose face thou art,
Knocking at heaven with thy brow:
The worky-days are the back-part;
The burden of the week lies there,
Making the whole to stoop and bow,
Till thy release appear.

Man had straight forward gone
To endless death: but thou dost pull
And turn us round to look on one,
Whom, if we were not very dull,
We could not choose to look on still;
Since there is no place so alone,
The which he doth not fill.

Sundays the pillars are,
On which heav'n's palace arched lies:
The other days fill up the spare
And hollow room with vanities.
They are the fruitful beds and borders
In God's rich garden: that is bare,
Which parts their ranks and orders.

The Sundays of man's life,
Threaded together on time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal glorious King.
On Sunday heaven's gate stands ope;
Blessings are plentiful and rife,
More plentiful than hope.

This day my Saviour rose,
And did enclose this light for his:
That, as each beast his manger knows,
Man might not of his fodder miss.
Christ hath took in this piece of ground,
And made a garden there for those
Who want herbs for their wound.

The rest of our Creation
Our great Redeemer did remove
With the same shake, which at his passion
Did th'earth and all things with it move.
As Samson bore the doors away,
Christ's hands, though nail'd, wrought our salvation,
And did unhinge that day.

The brightness of that day
We sullied by our foul offence:
Wherefore that robe we cast away,
Having a new at his expense,
Whose drops of blood paid the full price,
That was requir'd to make us gay,
And fit for Paradise.

Thou art a day of mirth:
And where the weekdays trail on ground,
Thy flight is higher, as thy birth.
O let me take thee at the bound,
Leaping with thee from sev'n to sev'n,
Till that we both, being toss'd from earth,
Fly hand in hand to heav'n!

George Herbert

The Affliction (I)

When first thou didst entice to thee my heart,
I thought the service brave;
So many joys I writ down for my part,
Besides what I might have
Out of my stock of natural delights,
Augmented with thy gracious benefits.

I looked on thy furniture so fine,
And made it fine to me;
Thy glorious household-stuff did me entwine,
And 'tice me unto thee.
Such stars I counted mine: both heav'n and earth;
Paid me my wages in a world of mirth.

What pleasures could I want, whose King I serv'd,
Where joys my fellows were?
Thus argu'd into hopes, my thoughts reserv'd
No place for grief or fear.
Therefore my sudden soul caught at the place,
And made her youth and fierceness seek thy face.

At first thou gav'st me milk and sweetnesses;
I had my wish and way;
My days were straw'd with flow'rs and happiness;
There was no month but May.
But with my years sorrow did twist and grow,
And made a party unawares for woe.

My flesh began unto my soul in pain,
"Sicknesses cleave my bones;
Consuming agues dwell in ev'ry vein,
And tune my breath to groans."
Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce believ'd,
Till grief did tell me roundly, that I liv'd.

When I got health, thou took'st away my life,
And more, for my friends die;
My mirth and edge was lost, a blunted knife
Was of more use than I.

Thus thin and lean without a fence or friend,
I was blown through with ev'ry storm and wind.

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
The way that takes the town;
Thou didst betray me to a ling'ring book,
And wrap me in a gown.
I was entangled in the world of strife,
Before I had the power to change my life.

Yet, for I threaten'd oft the siege to raise,
Not simp'ring all mine age,
Thou often didst with academic praise
Melt and dissolve my rage.
I took thy sweet'ned pill, till I came where
I could not go away, nor persevere.

Yet lest perchance I should too happy be
In my unhappiness,
Turning my purge to food, thou throwest me
Into more sicknesses.
Thus doth thy power cross-bias me, not making
Thine own gift good, yet me from my ways taking.

Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me
None of my books will show;
I read, and sigh, and wish I were a tree,
For sure then I should grow
To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust
Her household to me, and I should be just.

Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek;
In weakness must be stout;
Well, I will change the service, and go seek
Some other master out.
Ah my dear God! though I am clean forgot,
Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.

George Herbert

The Agony

Philosophers have measur'd mountains,
Fathom'd the depths of the seas, of states, and kings,
Walk'd with a staff to heav'n, and traced fountains:
But there are two vast, spacious things,
The which to measure it doth more behove:
Yet few there are that sound them; Sin and Love.

Who would know SIn, let him repair
Unto mount Olivet; there shall he see
A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
His skin, his garments bloody be.
Sin is that press and vice, which forceth pain
To hunt his cruel food through ev'ry vein.

Who knows not Love, let him assay
And taste that juice, which on the cross a pike
Did set again abroach, then let him say
If ever he did taste the like.
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.

George Herbert

The Altar

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears,
Made of a heart and cemented with tears;
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workman's tool hath touch'd the same.

A HEART alone
Is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy pow'r doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame
To praise thy name.

That if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
Oh, let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,
And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine.

George Herbert

The British Church

I joy, dear mother, when I view
Thy perfect lineaments, and hue
Both sweet and bright.
Beauty in thee takes up her place,
And dates her letters from thy face,
When she doth write.

A fine aspect in fit array,
Neither too mean nor yet too gay,
Shows who is best.
Outlandish looks may not compare,
For all they either painted are,
Or else undress'd.

She on the hills which wantonly
Allureth all, in hope to be
By her preferr'd,
Hath kiss'd so long her painted shrines,
That ev'n her face by kissing shines,
For her reward.

She in the valley is so shy
Of dressing, that her hair doth lie
About her ears;
While she avoids her neighbour's pride,
She wholly goes on th' other side,
And nothing wears.

But, dearest mother, what those miss,
The mean, thy praise and glory is
And long may be.
Blessed be God, whose love it was
To double-moat thee with his grace,
And none but thee.

George Herbert

The Call

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life :
Such a Way, as gives us breath :
Such a Truth, as ends all strife :
And such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength :
Such a Light, as shows a feast :
Such a Feast, as mends in length :
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart :
Such a Joy, as none can move :
Such a Love, as none can part :
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.

George Herbert

The Collar

I struck the board, and cried, "No more!
I will abroad.
What! shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free; free as the road,
Loose as the wind, as large as store.
Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?
Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn
Before my tears did drown it.
Is the year only lost to me?
Have I no bays to crown it?
No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?
All wasted?
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,
And thou hast hands.
Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures; leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit and not; forsake thy cage,
Thy rope of sands,
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
Good cable, to enforce and draw,
And be thy law,
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
Away! take heed;
I will abroad.
Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need
Deserves his load."
But as I rav'd, and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Me thoughts I heard one calling, "Child";
And I replied, "My Lord."

George Herbert

The Dawning

Awake, sad heart, whom sorrow ever drowns ;
Take up thine eyes, which feed on earth ;
Unfold thy forehead, gathered into frowns ;
Thy Saviour comes, and with Him mirth :
Awake, awake,
And with a thankful heart His comforts take.
But thou dost still lament, and pine, and cry,
And feel His death, but not His victory.

Arise, sad heart ; if thou dost not withstand,
Christ's resurrection thine may be ;
Do not by hanging down break from the hand
Which, as it riseth, raiseth thee :
Arise, Arise;
And with His burial linen drie thine eyes.
Christ left His grave-clothes, that we might, when grief
Draws tears or blood, not want a handkerchief.

George Herbert

The Elixir

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.

Not rudely, as a beast,
To run into an action;
But still to make Thee prepossest,
And give it his perfection.

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or it he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav'n espy.

All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with his tincture--"for Thy sake"--
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
Makes that and th' action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.

George Herbert

The Flower

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! ev'n as the flowers in spring;
To which, besides their own demean,
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasures bring.
Grief melts away
Like snow in May,
As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shriv'l'd heart
Could have recover'd greenness? It was gone
Quite under ground; as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown;
Where they together
All the hard weather
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
Killing and quickning, bringing down to hell
And up to heaven in an hour;
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.
We say amiss,
This or that is:
Thy word is all, if we could spell.

O that I once past changing were,
Fast in thy Paradise, where no flower can wither!
Many a spring I shoot up fair,
Off'ring at heav'n, growing and groaning thither:
Nor doth my flower
Want a spring-shower,
My sins and I joining together:

But while I grow in a straight line,
Still upwards bent, as if heav'n were mine own,
Thy anger comes, and I decline:
What frost to that? what pole is not the zone,
Where all things burn,
When thou dost turn,
And the least frown of thine is shown?

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing: O my only light,
It cannot be
That I am her
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
To make us see we are but flowers that glide:
Which when we once can find and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us, where to bide.
Who would be more,
Swelling through store,
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride.

George Herbert

The Forerunners

The harbingers are come. See, see their mark;
White is their colour, and behold my head.
But must they have my brain? must they dispart
Those sparkling notions, which therein were bred?
Must dulnesse turn me to a clod?
Yet have they left me, Thou art still my God.

Good men ye be, to leave me my best room,
Ev'n all my heart, and what is lodged there:
I passe not, I, what of the rest become,
So Thou art still my God, be out of fear.
He will be pleased with that dittie;
And if I please him, I write fine and wittie.

Farewell sweet phrases, lovely metaphors.
But will ye leave me thus? when ye before
Of stews and brothels onely knew the doores,
Then did I wash you with my tears, and more,
Brought you to Church well drest and clad;
My God must have my best, ev'n all I had.

Louely enchanting language, sugar-cane,
Hony of roses, whither wilt thou flie?
Hath some fond lover tic'd thee to thy bane?
And wilt thou leave the Church, and love a stie?
Fie, thou wilt soil thy broider'd coat,
And hurt thy self, and him that sings the note.

Let foolish lovers, if they will love dung,
With canvas, not with arras clothe their shame:
Let follie speak in her own native tongue.
True beautie dwells on high: ours is a flame
But borrow'd thence to light us thither.
Beautie and beauteous words should go together.

Yet if you go, I passe not; take your way:
For, Thou art still my God, is all that ye
Perhaps with more embellishment can say,
Go birds of spring: let winter have his fee,

Let a bleak palenesse chalk the doore,
So all within be livelier then before.

George Herbert

The H. Communion

Not in rich furniture, or fine array,
Nor in a wedge of gold,
Thou, who from me wast sold,
To me dost now thy self convey;
For so thou should'st without me still have been,
Leaving within me sin:

But by the way of nourishment and strength
Thou creep'st into my breast;
Making thy way my rest,
And thy small quantities my length;
Which spread their forces into every part,
Meeting sin's force and art.

Yet can these not get over to my soul,
Leaping the wall that parts
Our souls, and fleshly hearts;
But as th'outworks, they may control
My rebel-flesh, and carrying thy name,
Affright both sin and shame.

Only thy grace, which with these elements comes,
Knoweth the ready way,
And hath the privy key,
Op'ning the soul's most subtle rooms;
While those to spirits refin'd, at door attend
Dispatches from their friend.

Give me my captive soul, or take
My body also thither,
Another lift like this will make
Them both to be together.

Before that sin turn'd flesh into stone,
And all our lump to leaven,
A fervent sigh might well have blown
Our innocent earth to heaven.

For sure when Adam did not know

To sin, or sin to smother;
He might to heav'n from Paradise go,
As from one room t'another.

Thou hast restor'd to us this ease
By this thy heav'nly blood;
Which I can go to, when I please,
And leave th'earth to their food.

George Herbert

The H. Scriptures I

Oh Book! infinite sweetness! let my heart
Suck ev'ry letter, and a honey gain,
Precious for any grief in any part;
To clear the breast, to mollify all pain.
Thou art all health, health thriving, till it make
A full eternity: thou art a mass
Of strange delights, where we may wish and take.
Ladies, look here; this is the thankfull glass,
That mends the looker's eyes: this is the well
That washes what it shows. Who can endear
Thy praise too much? thou art heav'n's Lidger here,
Working against the states of death and hell.
Thou art joy's handsel: heav'n lies flat in thee,
Subject to ev'ry mounter's bended knee.

George Herbert

The Holdfast

I threatened to observe the strict decree
Of my deare God with all my power and might:
But I was told by one, `It could not be;
Yet I might trust in God to be my light.'

`Then will I trust,' said I, `in Him alone.'
`Nay, ev'n to trust in Him, was also His:
We must confesse that nothing is our own.'
`Then I confesse that He my succour is.'

`But to have nought is ours, not to confesse
That we have nought.' I stood amaz'd at this,
Much troubled, till I heard a friend expresse
That all things were more ours by being His:

What Adam had, and forfeited for all,
Christ keepeth now, Who cannot fail or fall.

George Herbert

The Holy Scriptures II

Oh that I knew how all thy lights combine,
And the configurations of their glory!
Seeing not only how each verse doth shine,
But all the constellations of the story.
This verse marks that, and both do make a motion
Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie:
Then as dispersed herbs do watch a poition,
These three make up some Christian's destiny:
Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,
And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing
Thy words do find me out, and parallels bring,
And in another make me understood.
Stars are poor books, and oftentimes do miss:
This book of stars lights to eternal bliss.

George Herbert

The Pearl

The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man,
seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one,
sold all that he had and bought it.—Matthew 13.45

I know the ways of Learning; both the head
And pipes that feed the press, and make it run;
What reason hath from nature borrowed,
Or of itself, like a good huswife, spun
In laws and policy; what the stars conspire,
What willing nature speaks, what forced by fire;
Both th' old discoveries, and the new-found seas,
The stock and surplus, cause and history:
All these stand open, or I have the keys:
Yet I love thee.

I know the ways of Honour, what maintains
The quick returns of courtesy and wit:
In vies of favours whether party gains,
When glory swells the heart, and moldeth it
To all expressions both of hand and eye,
Which on the world a true-love-knot may tie,
And bear the bundle, wheresoe'er it goes:
How many drams of spirit there must be
To sell my life unto my friends or foes:
Yet I love thee.

I know the ways of Pleasure, the sweet strains,
The lullings and the relishes of it;
The propositions of hot blood and brains;
What mirth and music mean; what love and wit
Have done these twenty hundred years, and more:
I know the projects of unbridled store:
My stuff is flesh, not brass; my senses live,
And grumble oft, that they have more in me
Than he that curbs them, being but one to five:
Yet I love thee.

I know all these, and have them in my hand:

Therefore not sealed, but with open eyes
I fly to thee, and fully understand
Both the main sale, and the commodities;
And at what rate and price I have thy love;
With all the circumstances that may move:
Yet through these labyrinths, not my grovelling wit,
But thy silk twist let down from heav'n to me,
Did both conduct and teach me, how by it
To climb to thee.

George Herbert

The Pulley

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by;
Let us (said he) pour on him all we can:
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way;
The beauty flow'd, then wisdom, honour, pleasure:
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone of all his treasure
Rest in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said he)
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness:
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.

George Herbert

The Quip

The merry World did on a day
With his train-bands and mates agree
To meet together where I lay,
And all in sport to jeer at me.

First Beauty crept into a rose,
Which when I pluck'd not, "Sir," said she,
"Tell me, I pray, whose hands are those?"
But Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.

Then Money came, and chinking still,
"What tune is this, poor man?" said he;
"I heard in music you had skill:"
But Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.

Then came brave Glory puffing by
In silks that whistled, who but he?
He scarce allow'd me half an eye:
But Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.

Then came quick Wit and Conversation,
And he would needs a comfort be,
And, to be short, make an oration:
But Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.

Yet when the hour of Thy design
To answer these fine things shall come,
Speak not at large, say, I am Thine;
And then they have their answer home.

George Herbert

The Sacrifice

Oh all ye, who pass by, whose eyes and mind
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blind;
To me, who took eyes that I might you find:
Was ever grief like mine?

The Princes of my people make a head
Against their Maker: they do wish me dead,
Who cannot wish, except I give them bread:
Was ever grief like mine?

Without me each one, who doth now me brave,
Had to this day been an Egyptian slave.
They use that power against me, which I gave:
Was ever grief like mine?

Mine own Apostle, who the bag did bear,
Though he had all I had, did not forebear
To sell me also, and to put me there:
Was ever grief like mine?

For thirty pence he did my death devise,
Who at three hundred did the ointment prize,
Not half so sweet as my sweet sacrifice:
Was ever grief like mine?

Therefore my soul melts, and my heart's dear treasure
Drops blood (the only beads) my words to measure:
O let this cup pass, if it be thy pleasure:
Was ever grief like mine?

These drops being temper'd with a sinner's tears,
A Balsam are for both the Hemispheres:
Curing all wounds but mine; all, but my fears,
Was ever grief like mine?

Yet my Disciples sleep: I cannot gain
One hour of watching; but their drowsy brain
Comforts not me, and doth my doctrine stain:
Was ever grief like mine?

Arise, arise, they come. Look how they run.
Alas! what haste they make to be undone!
How with their lanterns do they seek the sun!
Was ever grief like mine?

With clubs and staves they seek me, as a thief,
Who am the way of truth, the true relief;
Most true to those, who are my greatest grief:
Was ever grief like mine?

Judas, dost thou betray me with a kiss?
Canst thou find hell about my lips? and miss
Of life, just at the gates of life and bliss?
Was ever grief like mine?

See, they lay hold on me, not with the hands
Of faith, but fury: yet at their commands
I suffer binding, who have loos'd their bands:
Was ever grief like mine?

All my Disciples fly; fear puts a bar
Betwixt my friends and me. They leave the star
That brought the wise men of the East from far.
Was ever grief like mine?

Then from one ruler to another bound
They lead me; urging, that it was not sound
What I taught: Comments would the text confound.
Was ever grief like mine?

The Priest and rulers all false witness seek
'Gainst him, who seeks not life, but is the meek
And ready Paschal Lamb of this great week:
Was ever grief like mine?

Then they accuse me of great blasphemy,
That I did thrust into the Deity,
Who never thought that any robbery:
Was ever grief like mine?

Some said, that I the Temple to the floor

In three days raz'd, and raised as before.
Why, he that built the world can do much more:
Was ever grief like mine?

Then they condemn me all with that same breath,
Which I do give them daily, unto death.
Thus Adam my first breathing rendereth:
Was ever grief like mine?

They bind, and lead me unto Herod: he
Sends me to Pilate. This makes them agree;
But yet their friendship is my enmity:
Was ever grief like mine?

Herod and all his bands do set me light,
Who teach all hands to war, fingers to fight,
And only am the Lord of hosts and might:
Was ever grief like mine?

Herod in judgement sits while I do stand;
Examines me with a censorious hand:
I him obey, who all things else command:
Was ever grief like mine?

The Jews accuse me with despitefulness;
And vying malice with my gentleness,
Pick quarrels with their only happiness:
Was ever grief like mine?

I answer nothing, but with patience prove
If stony hearts will melt with gentle love.
But who does hawk at eagles with a dove?
Was ever grief like mine?

My silence rather doth augment their cry;
My dove doth back into my bosom fly;
Because the raging waters still are high:
Was ever grief like mine?

Hark how they cry aloud still, 'Crucify:
It is not fit he live a day, ' they cry,
Who cannot live less than eternally:

Was ever grief like mine?

Pilate a stranger holdeth off; but they,
Mine own dear people, cry, 'Away, away, '
With noises confused frightening the day:
Was ever grief like mine?

Yet still they shout, and cry, and stop their ears,
Putting my life among their sins and fears,
And therefore wish my blood on them and theirs:
Was ever grief like mine?

See how spite cankers things. These words aright
Used, and wished, are the whole world's light:
But honey is their gall, brightness their night:
Was ever grief like mine?

They choose a murderer, and all agree
In him to do themselves a courtesy:
For it was their own cause who killed me:
Was ever grief like mine?

And a seditious murderer he was:
But I the Prince of peace; peace that doth pass
All understanding, more than heav'n doth glass:
Was ever grief like mine?

Why, Caesar is their only King, not I:
He clave the stony rock, when they were dry;
But surely not their hearts, as I well try:
Was ever grief like mine?

Ah! how they scourge me! yet my tenderness
Doubles each lash: and yet their bitterness
Winds up my grief to a mysteriousness.
Was ever grief like mine?

They buffet me, and box me as they list,
Who grasp the earth and heaven with my fist,
And never yet, whom I would punish, miss'd:
Was ever grief like mine?

Behold, they spit on me in scornful wise,
Who by my spittle gave the blind man eyes,
Leaving his blindness to mine enemies:

Was ever grief like mine?

My face they cover, though it be divine.
As Moses' face was veiled, so is mine,
Lest on their double-dark souls either shine:

Was ever grief like mine?

Servants and abjects flout me; they are witty:
'Now prophesy who strikes thee, ' is their ditty.
So they in me deny themselves all pity:

Was ever grief like mine?

And now I am deliver'd unto death,
Which each one calls for so with utmost breath,
That he before me well nigh suffereth:

Was ever grief like mine?

Weep not, dear friends, since I for both have wept
When all my tears were blood, the while you slept:
Your tears for your own fortunes should be kept:

Was ever grief like mine?

The soldiers lead me to the common hall;
There they deride me, they abuse me all:
Yet for twelve heavn'ly legions I could call:

Was ever grief like mine?

Then with a scarlet robe they me array;
Which shows my blood to be the only way.
And cordial left to repair man's decay:

Was ever grief like mine?

Then on my head a crown of thorns I wear:
For these are all the grapes Sion doth bear,
Though I my vine planted and watred there:

Was ever grief like mine?

So sits the earth's great curse in Adam's fall
Upon my head: so I remove it all

From th' earth unto my brows, and bear the thrall:
Was ever grief like mine?

Then with the reed they gave to me before,
They strike my head, the rock from whence all store
Of heavn'ly blessings issue evermore:
Was ever grief like mine?

They bow their knees to me, and cry, 'Hail king':
What ever scoffs or scornfulness can bring,
I am the floor, the sink, where they it fling:
Was ever grief like mine?

Yet since man's sceptres are as frail as reeds,
And thorny all their crowns, bloody their weeds;
I, who am Truth, turn into truth their deeds:
Was ever grief like mine?

The soldiers also spit upon that face,
Which Angels did desire to have the grace,
And Prophets once to see, but found no place:
Was ever grief like mine?

Thus trimmed forth they bring me to the rout,
Who 'Crucify him, ' cry with one strong shout.
God holds his peace at man, and man cries out.
Was ever grief like mine?

They lead me in once more, and putting then
Mine own clothes on, they lead me out again.
Whom devils fly, thus is he toss'd of men:
Was ever grief like mine?

And now weary of sport, glad to engross
All spite in one, counting my life their loss,
They carry me to my most bitter cross:
Was ever grief like mine?

My cross I bear my self, until I faint:
Then Simon bears it for me by constraint,
The decreed burden of each mortal Saint:
Was ever grief like mine?

O all ye who pass by, behold and see;
Man stole the fruit, but I must climb the tree;
The tree of life to all, but only me:
Was ever grief like mine?

Lo, here I hang, charg'd with a world of sin,
The greater world o' th' two; for that came in
By words, but this by sorrow I must win:
Was ever grief like mine?

Such sorrow, as if sinful man could feel,
Or feel his part, he would not cease to kneel,
Till all were melted, though he were all steel:
Was ever grief like mine?

But, O my God, my God! why leav'st thou me,
The son, in whom thou dost delight to be?
My God, my God -
Never was grief like mine.

Shame tears my soul, my body many a wound;
Sharp nails pierce this, but sharper that confound;
Reproaches, which are free, while I am bound.
Was ever grief like mine?

Now heal thy self, Physician; now come down.
Alas! I did so, when I left my crown
And father's smile for you, to feel his frown:
Was ever grief like mine?

In healing not my self, there doth consist
All that salvation, which ye now resist;
Your safety in my sickness doth subsist:
Was ever grief like mine?

Betwixt two thieves I spend my utmost breath,
As he that for some robbery suffereth.
Alas! what have I stolen from you? death:
Was ever grief like mine?

A king my title is, prefixt on high;

Yet by my subjects am condemn'd to die
A servile death in servile company;
Was ever grief like mine?

They gave me vinegar mingled with gall,
But more with malice: yet, when they did call,
With Manna, Angels' food, I fed them all:
Was ever grief like mine?

They part my garments, and by lot dispose
My coat, the type of love, which once cur'd those
Who sought for help, never malicious foes:
Was ever grief like mine?

Nay, after death their spite shall further go;
For they will pierce my side, I full well know;
That as sin came, so Sacraments might flow:
Was ever grief like mine?

But now I die; now all is finished.
My woe, man's weal: and now I bow my head.
Only let others say, when I am dead,
Never was grief like mine.

George Herbert

The Search

Whither, O, whither art thou fled,
My Lord, my Love?
My searches are my daily bread;
Yet never prove.

My knees pierce th'earth, mine eies the skie;
And yet the sphere
And centre both to me denie
That thou art there.

Yet can I mark how herbs below
Grow green and gay,
As if to meet thee they did know,
While I decay.

Yet can I mark how starres above
Simper and shine,
As having keyes unto they love,
While poore I pine.

I sent a sigh to seek thee out,
Deep drawn in pain,
Wing'd like an arrow: but my scout
Returns in vain.

I tun'd another (having store)
Into a grone;
Because the search was dumbe before:
But all was one.

Lord, dost thou some new fabrick mold
Which favour winnes,
And keeps thee present, leaving th' old
Unto their sinnes?

Where is my God? what hidden place
Conceals thee still?
What covert dare eclipse thy face?
Is it thy will?

O let not that of any thing;
Let rather brasse,
Or steel, or mountains be thy ring,
And I will passe.

Thy will such an intrenching is,
As passeth thought:
To it all strength, all subtilties
Are things of nought.

Thy will such a strange distance is,
As that to it
East and West touch, the poles do kisse,
And parallels meet.

Since then my grief must be as large,
As is thy space,
Thy distance from me; see my charge,
Lord, see my case.

O take these barres, these lengths away;
Turn, and restore me:
Be not Almightye, let me say,
Against, but for me.

When thou dost turn, and wilt be neare;
What edge so keen,
What point so piercing can appeare
To come between?

For as thy absence doth excell
All distance known:
So doth thy nearenesse bear the bell,
Making two one.

George Herbert

The Sinner

Lord, how I am all ague, when I seek
What I have treasur'd in my memory!
Since, if my soul make even with the week,
Each seventh note by right is due to thee.
I find there quarries of pil'd vanities,
But shreds of holiness, that dare not venture
To show their face, since cross to thy decrees:
There the circumference earth is, heav'n the centre.
In so much dregs the quintessence is small:
The spirit and good extract of my heart
Comes to about the many hundredth part.
Yet Lord restore thine image, hear my call:
And though my hard heart scarce to thee can groan,
Remember that thou once didst write in stone.

George Herbert

The Storm

If as the winds and waters here below
Do fly and flow,
My sighs and tears as busy were above;
Sure they would move
And much affect thee, as tempestuous times
Amaze poor mortals, and object their crimes.

Stars have their storms, ev'n in a high degree,
As well as we.
A throbbing conscience spurred by remorse
Hath a strange force:
It quits the earth, and mounting more and more,
Dares to assault, and besiege thy door.

There it stands knocking, to thy musick's wrong,
And drowns the song.
Glory and honour are set by till it
An answer get.
Poets have wrong'd poor storms: such days are best;
They purge the air without, within the breast.

George Herbert

The Temper

How should I praise thee, Lord! how should my rhymes
Gladly engrave thy love in steel,
If what my soul doth feel sometimes
My soul might ever feel!

Although there were some forty heav'ns, or more,
Sometimes I peer above them all;
Sometimes I hardly reach a score,
Sometimes to hell I fall.

O rack me not to such a vast extent;
Those distances belong to thee:
The world's too little for thy tent,
A grave too big for me.

Wilt thou meet arms with man, that thou dost stretch
A crum of dust from heav'n to hell?
Will great God measure with a wretch?
Shall he thy stature spell?

O let me, when thy roof my soul hath hid,
O let me roost and nestle there:
Then of a sinner thou art rid,
And I of hope and fear.

Yet take thy way; for sure thy way is best:
Stretch or contract me, thy poor debtor:
This is but tuning of my breast,
To make the music better.

Whether I fly with angels, fall with dust,
Thy hands made both, and I am there:
Thy power and love, my love and trust
Make one place ev'ry where.

George Herbert

The Temper (Ii)

It cannot be. Where is that mighty joy,
Which just now took up all my heart?
Lord, if thou must needs use thy dart,
Save that, and me; or sin for both destroy.

The grosser world stand to thy word and art;
But thy diviner world of grace
Thou suddenly dost raise and race,
And ev'ry day a new Creator art

O fix thy chair of grace, that all my powers
May also fix their reverence:
For when thou dost depart from hence,
They grow unruly, and sit in thy bowers.

Scatter, or bind them all to bend to thee:
Though elements change, and heaven move,
Let not thy higher Court remove,
But keep a standing Majesty in me.

George Herbert

The Thanksgiving

Oh King of grief! (a title strange, yet true,
To thee of all kings only due)
Oh King of wounds! how shall I grieve for thee,
Who in all grief preventest me?
Shall I weep blood? why thou has wept such store
That all thy body was one door.
Shall I be scourged, flouted, boxed, sold?
'Tis but to tell the tale is told.
'My God, my God, why dost thou part from me? '
Was such a grief as cannot be.
Shall I then sing, skipping, thy doleful story,
And side with thy triumphant glory?
Shall thy strokes be my stroking? thorns, my flower?
Thy rod, my posy? cross, my bower?
But how then shall I imitate thee, and
Copy thy fair, though bloody hand?
Surely I will revenge me on thy love,
And try who shall victorious prove.
If thou dost give me wealth, I will restore
All back unto thee by the poor.
If thou dost give me honour, men shall see,
The honour doth belong to thee.
I will not marry; or, if she be mine,
She and her children shall be thine.
My bosom friend, if he blaspheme thy name,
I will tear thence his love and fame.
One half of me being gone, the rest I give
Unto some Chapel, die or live.
As for thy passion - But of that anon,
When with the other I have done.
For thy predestination I'll contrive,
That three years hence, if I survive,
I'll build a spittle, or mend common ways,
But mend mine own without delays.
Then I will use the works of thy creation,
As if I us'd them but for fashion.
The world and I will quarrel; and the year
Shall not perceive, that I am here.
My music shall find thee, and ev'ry string

Shall have his attribute to sing;
That all together may accord in thee,
And prove one God, one harmony.
If thou shalt give me wit, it shall appear;
If thou hast giv'n it me, 'tis here.
Nay, I will read thy book, and never move
Till I have found therein thy love;
Thy art of love, which I'll turn back on thee,
O my dear Saviour, Victory!
Then for thy passion - I will do for that -
Alas, my God, I know not what.

George Herbert

The Windows

Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?
He is a brittle crazie glasse:
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
This glorious and transcendent place,
To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie,
Making thy life to shine within
The holy Preachers ; then the light and glorie
More rev'rend grows, & more doth win:
Which else shows watrish, bleak, & thin.

Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one
When they combine and mingle, bring
A strong regard and aw : but speech alone
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
And in the eare, not conscience ring.

George Herbert

The World

Love built a stately house, where Fortune came,
And spinning fancies, she was heard to say
That her fine cobwebs did support the frame,
Whereas they were supported by the same;
But Wisdom quickly swept them all away.

The Pleasure came, who, liking not the fashion,
Began to make balconies, terraces,
Till she had weakened all by alteration;
But reverend laws, and many a proclamation
Reforméd all at length with menaces.

Then entered Sin, and with that sycamore
Whose leaves first sheltered man from drought and dew,
Working and winding slyly evermore,
The inward walls and summers cleft and tore;
But Grace shored these, and cut that as it grew.

Then Sin combined with death in a firm band,
To raze the building to the very floor;
Which they effected,--none could them withstand;
But Love and Grace took Glory by the hand,
And built a braver palace than before.

George Herbert

Vanity (I)

The fleet astronomer can bore
And thread the spheres with his quick-piercing mind:
He views theirs stations, walks from door to door,
Surveys, as if he had designed
To make a purchase there: he sees their dances,
And knoweth long before,
Both their full-eyed aspects, and secret glances.

The nimble diver with his side
Cuts through the working waves, that he may fetch
His dearly-earned pearl, which God did hide
On purpose from the ventrous wretch;
That he might save his life, and also hers,
Who with excessive pride
Her own destruction and his danger wears.

The subtle chymick can devest
And strip the creature naked, till he find
The callow principles within their nest:
There he imparts to them his mind,
Admitted to their bed-chamber, before
They appear trim and drest
To ordinary suitors at the door.

What hath not man sought out and found,
But his dear God? who yet his glorious law
Embosoms in us, mellowing the ground
With showers and frosts, with love and awe,
So that we need not say, Where's this command?
Poor man, thou searchest round
To find out death, but missest life at hand.

George Herbert

Virtue

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright
The bridal of the earth and sky:
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight,
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue, angry and brave,
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eyes:
Thy root is ever in its grave,
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie:
My music shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like seasoned timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives.

George Herbert

Whitsunday

Listen sweet Dove unto my song,
And spread thy golden wings in me;
Hatching my tender heart so long,
Till it get wing, and fly away with thee.

Where is that fire which once descended
On thy Apostles? thou didst then
Keep open house, richly attended,
Feasting all comers by twelve chosen men.

Such glorious gifts thou didst bestow,
That th'earth did like a heav'n appear;
The stars were coming down to know
If they might mend their wages, and serve here.

The sun which once did shine alone,
Hung down his head, and wisht for night,
When he beheld twelve suns for one
Going about the world, and giving light.

But since those pipes of gold, which brought
That cordial water to our ground,
Were cut and martyr'd by the fault
Of those, who did themselves through their side wound,

Thou shutt'st the door, and keep'st within;
Scarce a good joy creeps through the chink:
And if the braves of conqu'ring sin
Did not excite thee, we should wholly sink.

Lord, though we change, thou art the same;
The same sweet God of love and light:
Restore this day, for thy great name,
Unto his ancient and miraculous right.

George Herbert