

Classic Poetry Series

Sir Edward Dyer
- poems -

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Sir Edward Dyer(1540 - 1607)

English courtier and poet, son of Sir Thomas Dyer, Kt., was born at Sharpham Park, Somersetshire. He was educated, according to Anthony ~ Wood, either at Balliol College or at Broadgates Hall, Oxford. He left the university without taking a degree, and after some time spent abroad appeared at Queen. Elizabeth's court. His first patron was the earl of Leicester, who seems to have thought of putting him forward as a rival to Sir Christopher Hatton in the queen's favour.

Author of two of the most famous Elizabethan lyrics, 'My Mind to Me a Kingdom is' and 'The Lowest Trees have Tops', Dyer cut a figure of some significance at Elizabeth's Court and became Chancellor of the Order of the Garter.

Philip Sidney and he were companions in everything (he was 'Coridens' [Cosn Dier] in Sidney's verse) and with Fulke Greville Dyer was bequeathed Sidney's books. He wrote an elegy lamenting Sidney's death. His other friends included Robert Earl of Essex, Gilbert Talbot Earl of Shrewsbury, Walter Raleigh, Robert Sidney, Robert Cecil, Thomas Sackville Lord Buckhurst, Sir Christopher Hatton, the Countess of Pembroke and John Dee.

An alchemist himself, it was largely on the basis of Dyer's reports of the success of Edward Kelley, Dee's scyer, that influenced Elizabeth and Burghley to take Kelley's claims seriously. Dyer worked with Kelley in his laboratory in Bohemia for about six months in 1590.

His contemporaries praised his skill as a poet: '...in a manner oure onlye English poett...' and his 'written devises farr excell most of the sonets, and cantos in print' (Gabriel Harvey); 'Maister Edward Dyar for Elegie moste sweete, solempne and of high conceit' (Puttenham); Nashe stated that Dyer was the first 'that repurified Poetrie from Arts pedantisime, and that instructed it to speake courtly'.

His modern biographer, Ralph Sargent (The Life and Lyrics of Sir Edward Dyer, 1968, concludes that as 'the earliest of the Elizabethan "courtly makers", Dyer brought forth possibly the first fine lyrics of the Renaissance in England...[and] amongst the swelling chorus of all Elizabeth's poets, he strikes a rich, lingering minor chord.'

He was buried at St Saviour's, Southwark, on the 11th of May 1607.

A Fancy

Hee that his mirth hath loste,
Whose comfort is dismaid,
Whose hope is vaine, whose faith is scorned,
Whose trust is all betraid,

If he have held them deare,
And cannot cease to moane,
Come, let him take his place by me;
He shall not rue alone.

But if the smalest sweete
Be mixt with all his sowre;
If in the day, the moneth, the yeare,
He finde one lightsome hower,

Then rest he by himself;
He is noe mate for me,
Whose hope is falen, whose succor voyde,
Whose hart his death must be.

Yet not the wishèd death,
That hathe noe plainte nor lacke,
Which, making free the better parte,
Is onely nature's sacke.

Oh me! that wer too well,
My death is of the minde,
Which alwayes yeeldès extreame paines,
Yet keeps the worst behind.

As one that lives in shewe
But inwardly doth die,
Whose knowledge is a bloody field

Where all hope slaine doth lie;

Whose harte the aulter is,
Whose spirit, the sacrificize
Unto the Powers whome to appease
Noe sorrowes can sufize.

Whose fancies are like thornes,
On which I goe by night,
Whose arguments are like a hoste,
That force hath put to flight.

Whose sense is passion's spye,
Whose thoughtes, like ruins old
Of Carthage, or the famous towne
That Sinon bought and sold.

Which still before my face,
My mortall foe doth lay,
Whome love and fortune once advanced
And nowe hath cast away.

O thoughtes! noe thoughtes but woundes,
Sometimes the seate of Joy
Sometimes the chaire of quiet rest
But nowe of all annoy.

I sowed the feild of peace,
My blisse was in the Springe;
And day by day I ate the fruit
That my Live's tree did bring.

To nettels nowe my corne,
My feild is turnd to flint,
Where sitting in the cipres shade,

I reade the hiacint.

The joy, the rest, the life
That I enjoyed of yore
Came to my lot that by my losse,
My smarte might smarte the more.

Thus to unhappie men
The best frames to the worste;
O tyme, O places. O woordes, O lookes,
Deere then but nowe accurst!

In 'was' stood my delight,
In 'is' and 'shall' my woe;
My horrors fastned in the 'yea,'
My hope hangs in the 'noe.'

I looke for noe delight,
Releefe will come too late;
Too late I finde, I finde too well,
Too well stoode my Estate.

Behold, heere is the end,
And nothing heere is sure:
Ah nothinge ells but plaints and cares
Doth to the world enduer.

Forsaken first was I,
Then utterly foregotten;
And he that came not to my faith,
Lo! my reward hath gotten.

Nowe Love, where are thy lawes
That make thy torments sweete?
What is the cause that some through thee

Have thought their death but meet?

Thy stately chaste disdain,
Thy secret thankfulness,
Thy grace reserved, thy common light
That shines in worthines.

O that it were not soe
Or that I could excuse!
O that the wrath of Jealousie
My judgement might abuse!

O fraile unconstant kind,
And safe in truste to noe man!
Noe woemen angells are, yet loe!
My mistress is a woman!

Yet hate I but the false,
And not the faultie one;
Nor can I rid me of the bonds
Wherein I lie alone.

Alone I lie, whose like
By love was never yet;
Nor rich, nor poore, nor younge, nor old,
Nor fond, nor full of witt.

Hers still remaine must I,
By wronge, by death, by shame;
I cannot blot out of my minde
That love wrought in her name.

I cannot set at naught
That I have held soe deare,
I cannot make it seem so farre

That is indeede soe neare.

Nor that I meane, henceforth
This strange will to professe:
I never will betray such trust
And fall to ficklenesse.

Nor shall it ever faile
That my word bare in hand:
I gave my word, my worde gave me,
Both worde and gaift shall stand.

Syth then it must be thus
And this is all to ill,
I yeelde me captiue to my curse,
My harde fate to fulfill.

The solitarie woodes,
My Cittie shall become;
The darkest den shalbe my lodge
Whereto noe light shall come.

Of heban blacke my boorde;
The wormes my meate shalbe,
Wherewith my carcasse shalbe fed
Till thes doe feede on me.

My wine, of Niobe,
My bed the cragie rocke,
My harmony, the serpent's hisse,
The shreiking owle, my cocke.

Mine exercise naught ells
But raginge agonies;
My bookes, of spightfull fortune's foiles

And drerye tragedies.

My walkes the pathes of plaint,
My prospect into Hell,
With Sisiphus and all his pheres
In endles paines to dwell.

And though I seeme to use
The poet's fainèd stile,
To figure forth my wofull plight,
My fall and my exile.

Yet is my greeffe not faind,
Wherein I starve and pine,
Whoe feeleth most shall finde it least
Comparinge his with mine.

My songe,--if anie aske
Whose grievous case is such?
Dy er thou let'st his name be knowne,--
His follye showes too much.

But best, were thee to hide
And never come to light;
For in the worle can none but thee
These accents sound aright.

And soe a end: my tale is tould:
His life is but disdained,
Whose sorrowes present paine him soe,
His pleasures are full faind.

Finis.

Sir Edward Dyer

A Lady Forsaken Complayneth

If pleasures be in painfulness, in pleasures doth my body rest,
If joyes accord with carefulness, a joyful hart is in my brest:
If prison strong be liberty, in liberty long have I been,
If joyes accord with misery, who can compare a lyfe to myne:
Who can unbind that is sore bound? who can make free yet is sore thrall,
Or how can any means be found to comfort such a wretch withall?
None can but he yet hath my hart, convert my pains to comfort then,
Yet since his servant I became, most like a bondman have I been:
Since first in bondage I became, my word and deed was ever such,
That never once he could me blame, except for loving him too much.
Which I can judge no just offence, nor cause that I deserved disdayne,
Except he mean through false pretense, through forgèd love to make a trayne.
Nay, nay, alas, my fainèd thoughts my freded and my fainèd ruth,
My pleasures past, my present plaints, shew well I mean but to much truth:
But since I can not him attain, against my will I let him goe,
And lest he glorie at my pain, I wyl attempt to cloke my woe.
Youth learne by me but do not prove, for I have provèd to my pain,
What greeuous greefes do grow by love, and what it is to love in vaine.

Sir Edward Dyer

Coridon To His Phillis

Alas my hart, mine eye hath wrongèd thee,
Presumptuous eye, to gaze on Phillis face:
Whose heavenly eye no mortall man may see
But he must die, or purchase Phillis grace.
Poor Coridon, the Nimph whose eye doth moove thee,
Dooth love to draw, but is not drawne to love thee.

Her beautie, Nature's pride, and shepherds praise,
Her eye, the heavenly Planet of my life:
Her matchlesse wit and grace, her fame displaies,
As if that love had made her for his wife.
Onely, her eyes shoote fierie darts to kill,
Yet is her hart as cold as Caucase hill.

My wings too weake to flye against the Sunne,
Mine eyes unable to sustaine her light,
My hart doth yeeld that I am quite undone,
Thus hath faire Phillis slaine me with her sight.
My bud is blasted, withred is my leafe
And all my corne is rotted in the sheafe.

Phillis, the golden fetter of my minde,
My fancie's Idoll, and my vitall power:
Goddesse of Nimphs, and honour of thy kinde,
This Age's Phoenix, Beautie's richest bower.
Poore Coridon for love of thee must die:
Thy beautie's thrall and conquest of thine eye.

Leave Coridon to plough the barren field,
Thy buds of hope are blasted with disgrace:
For Phillis' lookes no harty love doo yeeld,
Nor can she love, for all her lovely face.
Die Coridon, the spoile of Phillis' eye:
She cannot love, and therefore thou must die.

Finis.

Sir Edward Dyer

I Would And I Would Not

I woulde it were not as it is
Or that I cared not yea or no;
I woulde I thoughte it not amiss,
Or that amiss mighte blamles goo;
I woulde I were, yet woulde I not,
I mighte be gladd yet coulde I not.

I coulde desire to know the meane
Or that the meane desyre soughte;
I woulde I coulde my fancye weane
From suche sweet joyes as Love hathe wroughte;
Onlye my wishe is leaste of all
A badge whereby to know a thrall.

O happy man whiche doste aspire
To that whiche semeleye thou dost crave!
Thrise happy man, if thy desyre
Maye winn with hope good happ to have;
But woe to me unhappy man
Whom hope nor happ acquiet cann.

The buds of hope are starvde with feare
And still his foe presents his face;
My state, if hope the palme shoulde beare
Unto my happ woulde be disgrace.
As diamond in woode were set
Or Irus raggs in goulde I frett.

For loe my tyrèd shoulders beare
Desyre's weery beatinge winges;
And at my feet a clogg I weare
Tyde one wth selfe disdayning stringes.
My wings to mounte aloft make hast.
My clog doth sinke me downe as faste.

This is our state, loe thus we stande
They ryse to fall that climbe to hye;
The boye that fled kynge Minos lande
Maye learne the wise more love to flye.
What gaynde his poynte agaynste the sonne
He drownde in seas himself, that wonne.

Yet Icarus more happy was,
By present deathe his cares to ende
Than I, pore mann, on whom alas
Tenn thousande deathes their paynes do sende.
Now greife, now hope, now loue, now spyghte
Longe sorrows mixte withe shorte delyghte.

The pheere and fellowe of thy smarte
Prometheus I am indeede;
Upon whose ever livinge harte
The greedy gryphes do daylye feede;
But he that lyfts his harte so hye
Muste be contente to pine and dye.

Finis.

Sir Edward Dyer

Love-Contradictions

As rare to heare as seldome to be seene,
It cannot be nor never yet hathe bene
That fire should burne with perfecte heate and flame
Without some matter for to yealde the same.

A straunger case yet true by profe I knowe
A man in joy that livethe still in woe:
A harder happ who hathe his love at lyste
Yet lives in love as he all love had miste:

Whoe hathe enougehe, yet thinkes he lives wthout,
Lackinge no love yet still he standes in doubte.
What discontente to live in suche desyre,
To have his will yet ever to requyre.

Mr. Dier.

Sir Edward Dyer

Love-Despondency

Devyde my tymes and rate my wretched howres
From days to months, fro months to many yeers,
And than compare my sweetest to my sowres then
And see wich more in equall vewe appeares;
And judge that from my dayes and yeers of care
I have but howrs of comforte to compare.

Just and not mucche it were, in thes extreams
To have a touche and torment of ye thought:
For any myghte that any ryght esteems
To yealde so small delyght so deerly bought;
But he that lyues unto his owne despyghte
Is not to fynde his fortune by his ryghte.

The lyfe that styll runs forth his weary wayes
With sowre to sawce the dayntyes of delyght,
And care to choak the pleasures of his dayes
And not regarde the many wronges to quyte;
No blame to houlde such irksome tymes in hate,
As but to lose prolongs a wretched state.

And still I loathe eve to behoulde the lyghte
That shynes without all pleasure to myne eyes
Wth greedy wishe I wayte for wearye nyghte
Yet neither this I fynde that maye suffyse:
Not that I hould the daye for more delyghte
But that alyke I loathe both daye and nyghte.

The daye I se yeelds but increase of cares,
The nyght that should by nature serve for reste,
Agaynst his kynde denyes suche ease to spare
As pytty woulde afforde the soule opprest:
And broken sleeps oft tymes presents in syght
A dreaminge wishe beguylde with false delyghte.

This sleepe, or else what so for sweet appeers,
Is unto me but pleasures in despyghte.
The flower of age, the name of younger yeeres,
Do but usurpe the tytle of delyghte.
But careful thoughts, and Sorrowe sundry ways
Consumes my youthe before my agèd dayes.

The touch, the styng, the torments of desyre,
To stryue beyond the compase of restraynte,
Kepte from the reache whereto it would aspyre
Geues cause (God knowes) too iust, to my coplainte:
Besydes the wronge wch worketh my distress
My meaninge is, with sylence to suppress.

Oft wth myselfe I enter in deuyse
To reconsylle these wearye thoughtes to peace;
I treate for truce, I flatter and entyce
My wranglyng wytt to work for theyr release;
But all in vayne I seek the means to fynde
That myght appease the discorde of my mynde.

For when I force a faynèd mirth to showe
And would forgett and so beguyll my greefe;
I cannot rydd my selfe of sorrowe so,
Althoughe I feed upon a false beleefe:
For inward touche of discontented mynde
Retournes my cares by course unto theyr kynde.

Wean'd from my will, and thus by tryall taughte
Howe farr to hould all fortune in regarde;
Though here I boaste of knowledge deerely boughte
Yet thys poore gayne I reape for my rewarde;
I knowe hereby to harde and prepare
A ready mynde for all assaults of care.

Whereto as one eve from the cradle borne

And not to look for better to ensue,
I yeald my selfe and wish these tymes outworne
That but remayne my torments to renewe:
And leaue to those these dayes of my despyghte
Whose better hap may lyue to more delyghte.

Finis.

Sir Edward Dyer

My Mind To Me A Kingdom Is

My mind to me a kingdom is;
Such perfect joy therein I find
That it excels all other bliss
Which God or nature hath assign'd.
Though much I want that most would have,
Yet still my mind forbids to crave.

No princely port, nor wealthy store,
No force to win a victory,
No wily wit to salve a sore,
No shape to win a loving eye;
To none of these I yield as thrall,--
For why? my mind despise them all.

I see that plenty surfeit oft,
And hasty climbers soonest fall;
I see that such as are aloft
Mishap doth threaten most of all.
These get with toil and keep with fear;
Such cares my mind can never bear.

I press to bear no haughty sway,
I wish no more than may suffice,
I do no more than well I may,
Look, what I want my mind supplies.
Lo ! thus I triumph like a king,
My mind content with anything.

I laugh not at another's loss,
Nor grudge not at another's gain;
No worldly waves my mind can toss;
I brook that is another's bane.
I fear no foe, nor fawn on friend,
I loathe not life, nor dread mine end.

My wealth is health and perfect ease,
And conscience clear my chief defence;
I never seek by bribes to please,
Nor by desert to give offence.

Thus do I live, thus will I die,--
Would all did so as well as I!

Sir Edward Dyer

The Faire Amarillis

Amarillis was full fayre:
The goodlyest mayde was she
From the east unto the west
That heaven's eye could se.

To Diana at her birthe
Her parents did her geve,
All untouchte a mayden's lyfe
Durynge her dayes to lyue:

Whose behest she constant kepte
And whollye was enclynde
To be free to get great prayse
And win eche worthye mynde.

As there was good cause enoughe
So was she honored most.
They that had her seene abroad
At home would make their boaste.

Twoe ther were that her behelde
Who woulde have done so ever,
Happye theye (ye happye thryse)
If they had done so never

Coridon and Caramell:
Who longe with deere accorde
Ledd their lyues, and neyther wisht
Of other to be lorde:

Good and sure their freendshipp was
Tyll Amarillis fyne
Had the powre, perhapps the will

The bande for to untwyne:

All the goods that eche possest
Of bodye, goodes, or mynde
Were employde to other's use
As eche by profe did fynde:

They had no cause to enuye ought
The aunicyent worlde's prayse
Of Damo and of Pytheas
And others in those dayes:

But the boye, that blynded god
In great despights complaynde:
That one earthe alone they were
That his darte quyte disdaynde:

Whereupon his strongest bowe
And sharpest arrowes hente
And in Amarillis eyes
He lyghtely pighte his tente:

Where he lay, to watche both tyme
And place for his avayll:
For the wightes that wiste not yet
What foe should them assayll:

One of his two shafts was dipte
In bitter sauce as gaulle,
The other in a pleasant wyne
And poyson myxte withall

As the smacke of dyuers sauce,
So dyuerslye they wroughte:
By despayre the one to deathe

By vague hope the other broughte.

With the first was Coridon
Throughe piercèd to the herte;
Caramell wh' in his brest
Felte of the other's smarte.

Butt with gould both headed were
And both wth lyke desyre,
Faygne they would wth'in therre brest
Hyde cloase their kyndled fyre:

But wthout it must appeere
That burnte so hot wthin:
Harde it is the flame to hyde
That it no issue win.

And in tyme strange lookes began
That spronge of Jelosye;
Full of care, eche laye in wayghte
For his felowe to descrye:

In the end all freendly lookes
Betweene these freendes decayde;
Bothe were bente to please theselues
Theire freende's case nothyng wayde.

Amarillis' love was soughte
With all they could deuyse,
Yea wth all the power of man
And prayer to the skyes:

All she sawe, and herde their moane
As Aspys dothe the charme;
By and by she bayed them both

As guyltye of theyre harme.

Now to the one she would give eare
Now put the other of,
Allurynge him by courteseye,
And tauntynge him by scoff.

But that trust by tryalls paste
Made them their doome suspende;
And indeed she usèd there
Where passione did offend.

He had neede of store of tyme
That would his pen prepare,
To sett forth their agonyes
Their dredd hope and feare.

Butt in vayne they spent their tyme,
Their labor all was lost:
She was farthest from their need
Where they foreweenèd most.

Coridon waxte pall and leane
His younger heares torned hore;
Feates of armes, the horse and hauke
He left and used no more.

He had founde that Amarill
Soughte glorye more than love;
That she forcèd not his harmes
Her bewtye's power to prove.

Yet he could not leave to love
Butt yeeldynge to despayre,
Rente his hearte, his corpes fell downe

His goaste fledd to the ayre:

Caramell, thoughte women kynde,
Was apte to change and bowe;
And beleueed, to please him selfe
What fancye did allowe.

Butt beleefe ne makes the cause
Nor weauynge, workes the webb;
In the tyde his trauayll came
He tornèd in the ebb:

Att the last his vayne hope, him
No longer coulde sustayne;
In his longynge he consumde,
Lyfe coulde not him attayne.

Amaryllis herde of this
And pyttye moude wth all,
Muche to rue so harde a happ
One such faythe should befall.

To Diana strayghte she hyghes
Whome wayted one she founde,
With a trayne of all the dames
Whose chaste names Fame did sounde:

Unto her in humble wyse
She sayde she came to sue
For that these to lyuyng thynges
Myghte be transformde a newe;

In her armes the goddess mylde
Her darlynge softe did strayne:
What is that that thou (qth she)

Of me mayste not obtayne?

There withall Sr Caramel
A yellow flowre became:
Sweete of sente and mucche esteemde
And Harte's ease caulde by name.

Amarillis pluckte the flowre
And ware it in her heade:
Sometymes she layde it in her lapp,
Sometymes upone her bedd.

Caramell, O happye flowre!
O most unhappy man!
In thy lyfe thou hadst thy deathe,
In thy deathe thy lyfe began.

Coridon turnde to an owlle
Fledd to the wildernes:
Never flockes, butt leades his lyfe
In solytarynes:

Nor his eyes can yet behould
The deare lyghte of the sun:
Butt aloofe he stealles his flyghte
And in the darke dothe run.

Amaryllis to the woode
Att sometyme will repayre,
And delyghte to here the laye
And tune of his despayre.

Well I wot what here is ment
And thoughe a talle yt seeme,
Shadowes haue their substance bye

And so of this, esteeme.

Ye that chaunce this for to heer
And do not prayse their speede
Give them thankes, for you by them
Are warnde to take heede.

Finis.

Sir Edward Dyer

The Lowest Trees Have Tops

The lowest trees have tops, the ant her gall,
The fly her spleen, the little spark his heat,
And slender hairs cast shadows though but small,
And bees have stings although they be not great.
Seas have their source, and so have shallow springs,
And love is love in beggars and in kings.

Where waters smoothest run, deep are the fords,
The dial stirs, yet none perceives it move:
The firmest faith is in the fewest words,
The turtles cannot sing, and yet they love,
True hearts have eyes and ears no tongues to speak:
They hear, and see, and sigh, and then they break.

Sir Edward Dyer

The Man Of Woe

The mann whose thoughtes agaynste him do conspyre,
One whom Mishapp her storye dothe depaynt,
The mann of woe, the matter of desier,
Free of the dead, that lives in endles plaint,
His spirit am I, whiche in this deserte lye,
To rue his case, whose cause I cannot flye.

Despayre my name, whoe never findes releife,
Frended of none, but to my selfe a foe;
An idle care, mayntaynde by firme beleife
That prayse of faythe shall throughe my torments growe,
And counte those hopes, that others hartes do ease,
Butt base conceites the common sense to please.

For sure I am I never shall attayne
The happy good from whence my joys aryse;
Nor haue I powre my sorrows to refrayne
But wayle the wante, when noughte ellse maye suffyse;
Whereby my lyfe the shape of deathe muste beare,
That deathe which feeles the worst that lyfe doth feare.

But what auayles withe tragicall complaynte,
Not hopinge healpe, the Furyes to awake?
Or why shoulde I the happy mynds aquaynte
With doleful tunnes, their settled peace to shake?
All ye that here behoulde Infortune's feare,
May judge noe woe may withe my gref compare.

Finis.

Sir Edward Dyer

The Shepherd's Conceit Of Prometheus

Prometheus when firste frome heaven hye
He broughte downe fyre, 'ere then on earthe not seene,
Fond of Delight, a Satyre standing bye
Gave it a kyss, as it lyke Sweete had bene.

Feelinge forthewithe the other's burninge powre,
Wood withe the smarte, with shoutes and shreakinge shrill,
He soughte his ease in river, feilde and bowre,
But for the tyme his grieffe wente with him still.

So seelye I, with that unwonted syghte
In humane shape, an angell from above,
Feedinge mine eyes, th'impressione there did lyghte,
That since I reste and runn as pleaseth Love.

The difference is, the Satyre's lypps, my harte,--
He for a tyme, I evermore,--have smarte.

Finis.

Sir Edward Dyer

To Phillis The Faire Sheeperdesse

My Phillis hath the morninge Sunne,
at first to looke upon her:
And Phillis hath morne-waking birds,
her risinge still to honour.
My Phillis hath prime-featherd flowres,
that smile when she treads on them:
And Phillis hath a gallant flocke,
that leapes since she dooth owne them.
But Phillis hath too hard a hart,
alas, that she should have it:
It yeelds no mercie to desert,
nor grace to those that crave it.
Sweete Sunne, when thou look'st on,
pray her regard my moane!
Sweete birds, when you sing to her,
to yeeld some pittie, woo her!
Sweet flowers that she treads on,
tell her, her beauty deads one.
And if in life her love she nill agree me,
Pray her before I die, she will come see me.

Finis.

Sir Edward Dyer