

TIME'S  
LAUGHING  
STOCKS

BY  
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# Time's Laughingstocks

## THE REVISITATION

As I lay awake at nighttime  
In an ancient country barrack known to ancient cannoneers,  
And recalled the hopes that heralded each seeming brave and bright time  
Of my primal purple years,  
Much it haunted me that, nigh there,  
I had borne my bitterest loss when One who went, came not again;  
In a joyless hour of discord, in a joyless hued July there  
A July just such as then.  
And as thus I brooded longer,  
With my faint eyes on the feeble square of wanlit window frame,  
A quick conviction sprung within me, grew, and grew yet stronger,  
That the monthnight was the same,  
Too, as that which saw her leave me  
On the rugged ridge of Waterstone, the peewits plaining round;  
And a lapsing twenty years had ruled that as it were to grieve me  
I should near the once loved ground.  
Though but now a warworn stranger

Chance had quartered here, I rose up and descended to the yard.  
All was soundless, save the troopers' horses tossing at the manger,  
And the sentry keeping guard.  
Through the gateway I betook me  
Down the High Street and beyond the lamps, across the battered bridge,  
Till the country darkness clasped me and the friendly shine forsook me,  
And I bore towards the Ridge,  
With a dim unowned emotion  
Saying softly: "Small my reason, now at midnight, to be here . . .  
Yet a sleepless swain of fifty with a brief romantic notion  
May retrace a track so dear."  
Thus I walked with thoughts halfuttered

Up the lane I knew so well, the grey, gaunt, lonely Lane of Slyre;  
And at whiles behind me, far at sea, a sullen thunder muttered  
As I mounted high and higher.  
Till, the upper roadway quitting,  
I adventured on the open drouthy downland thinly grassed,  
While the spry white scuts of conies flashed before me, earthward flitting,

And an arid wind went past.  
Round about me bulged the barrows  
As before, in antique silenceimmemorial funeral piles  
Where the sleek herds trampled daily the remains of flinttipt arrows  
Mid the thyme and chamomiles;  
And the Sarsen stone there, dateless,  
On whose breast we had sat and told the zephyrs many a tender vow,  
Held the heat of yester sun, as sank thereon one fated mateless

From those far fond hours till now.  
Maybe flustered by my presence  
Rose the peewits, just as all those years back, wailing soft and loud,  
And revealing their pale pinions like a fitful phosphorescence  
Up against the cope of cloud,  
Where their dolesome exclamations  
Seemed the voicings of the selfsame throats I had heard when life was  
green,  
Though since that day uncounted frail forgotten generations

Of their kind had flecked the scene.  
And so, living long and longer  
In a past that lived no more, my eyes discerned there, suddenly,  
That a figure broke the skylinefirst in vague contour, then stronger,  
And was crossing near to me.  
Some longmissed familiar gesture,  
Something wonted, struck me in the figure's pause to list and heed,  
Till I fancied from its handling of its loosely wrapping vesture

That it might be She indeed.  
'Twas not reasonless: below there  
In the vale, had been her home; the nook might hold her even yet,  
And the downlands were her father's fief; she still might come and go there;

So I rose, and said, "Agnette!"  
With a little leap, halffrightened,  
She withdrew some steps; then letting intuition smother fear  
In a place so longaccustomed, and as one whom thought enlightened,

She replied: "WhatTHAT voice?here!"  
"Yes, Agnette!And did the occasion  
Of our marching hither make you think I MIGHT walk where we two'

"O, I often come," she murmured with a moment's coy evasion,  
    "('Tis not far), and think of you."  
    Then I took her hand, and led her  
To the ancient people's stone whereon I had sat. There now sat we;  
    And together talked, until the first reluctant shyness fled her,  
    And she spoke confidingly.  
    "It is JUST as ere we parted!"  
Said she, brimming high with joy. "And when, then, came you here, and why?"  
    "Dear, I could not sleep for thinking of our trystings when twinhearted."

    She responded, "Nor could I.  
    "There are few things I would rather  
Than be wandering at this spirithourlonelived, my kindred dead  
    On this wold of wellknown feature I inherit from my father:  
    Night or day, I have no dread . . .  
    "O I wonder, wonder whether  
    Any heartstring bore a signalthrill between us twain or no?  
Some such influence can, at times, they say, draw severed souls together."

    I said, "Dear, we'll dream it so."  
    Each one's hand the other's grasping,  
    And a mutual forgiveness won, we sank to silent thought,  
A large content in us that seemed our rended lives reclasping,  
    And contracting years to nought.

    Till I, maybe overweary  
From the lateness, and a wayfaring so full of strain and stress  
    For one no longer buoyant, to a peak so steep and eery,  
    Sank to slow unconsciousness . . .  
    How long I slept I knew not,  
But the brief warm summer night had slid when, to my swift surprise,  
    A red upedging sun, of glory chambered mortals view not,  
    Was blazing on my eyes,  
    From the Milton Woods to Dole Hill  
    All the spacious landscape lighting, and around about my feet  
Flinging tall thin tapering shadows from the meanest mound and molehill,  
    And on trails the ewes had beat.

    She was sitting still beside me,  
    Dozing likewise; and I turned to her, to take her hanging hand;  
When, the more regarding, that which like a spectre shook and tried me

In her image then I scanned;  
That which Time's transforming chisel  
Had been tooling night and day for twenty years, and tooled too well,  
In its rendering of crease where curve was, where was raven, grizzle  
Pits, where peonies once did dwell.

She had wakened, and perceiving  
(I surmise) my sigh and shock, my quite involuntary dismay,  
Up she started, and her wasted figure all throughout it heaving  
Said, "Ah, yes: I am THUS by day!  
"Can you really wince and wonder  
That the sunlight should reveal you such a thing of skin and bone,  
As if unaware a Death's head must of need lie not far under  
Flesh whose years outcount your own?

"Yes: that movement was a warning  
Of the worth of man's devotion! Yes, Sir, I am OLD," said she,  
"And the thing which should increase love turns it quickly into scorning  
And your newwon heart from me!"  
Then she went, ere I could call her,  
With the too proud temper ruling that had parted us before,  
And I saw her form descend the slopes, and smaller grow and smaller,  
Till I caught its course no more . . .  
True; I might have dogged her downward;  
But it MAY be (though I know not) that this trick on us of Time  
Disconcerted and confused me. Soon I bent my footsteps townward,

Like to one who had watched a crime.  
Well I knew my native weakness,  
Well I know it still. I cherished her reproach like physicwine,  
For I saw in that emaciate shape of bitterness and bleakness  
A nobler soul than mine.  
Did I not return, then, ever?  
Did we meet again? mend all? Alas, what greyhead perseveres!  
Soon I got the Route elsewhither. Since that hour I have seen her never:  
Love is lame at fifty years.

## **A TRAMPWOMAN'S TRAGEDY**

### **I**

From Wynyard's Gap the livelong day,  
The livelong day,  
We beat afoot the northward way  
We had travelled times before.  
The sunblaze burning on our backs,  
Our shoulders sticking to our packs,  
By fosseway, fields, and turnpike tracks  
We skirted sad SedgeMoor.

### **II**

Full twenty miles we jaunted on,  
We jaunted on,  
My fancyman, and jeering John,  
And Mother Lee, and I.  
And, as the sun drew down to west,  
We climbed the toilsome Poldon crest,  
And saw, of landskip sights the best,  
The inn that beamed thereby.

### **III**

For months we had padded side by side,  
Ay, side by side  
Through the Great Forest, Blackmoor wide,  
And where the Parret ran.  
We'd faced the gusts on Mendip ridge,  
Had crossed the Yeo unhelped by bridge,  
Been stung by every Marshwood midge,  
I and my fancyman.

### **IV**

Lone inns we loved, my man and I,  
My man and I;  
"King's Stag," "Windwhistle" high and dry,  
"The Horse" on Hintock Green,

The cosy house at Wynyard's Gap,  
"The Hut" renowned on Bredy Knap,  
And many another wayside tap  
Where folk might sit unseen.

## V

Now as we trudged O deadly day,  
O deadly day!  
I teased my fancyman in play  
And wanton idleness.  
I walked alongside jeering John,  
I laid his hand my waist upon;  
I would not bend my glances on  
My lover's dark distress.

## VI

Thus Poldon top at last we won,  
At last we won,  
And gained the inn at sink of sun  
Farfamed as "Marshal's Elm."  
Beneath us figured tor and lea,  
From Mendip to the western sea  
I doubt if finer sight there be  
Within this royal realm.

## VII

Inside the settle all arow  
All four arow  
We sat, I next to John, to show  
That he had wooed and won.  
And then he took me on his knee,  
And swore it was his turn to be  
My favoured mate, and Mother Lee  
Passed to my former one.

## VIII

Then in a voice I had never heard,  
I had never heard,  
My only Love to me: "One word,  
My lady, if you please!  
Whose is the child you are like to bear?  
HIS? After all my months o' care?"  
God knows 'twas not! But, O despair!  
I nodded still to tease.

## IX

Then up he sprung, and with his knife  
And with his knife  
He let out jeering Johnny's life,  
Yes; there, at set of sun.  
The slant ray through the window nigh  
Gilded John's blood and glazing eye,  
Ere scarcely Mother Lee and I  
Knew that the deed was done.

## X

The taverns tell the gloomy tale,  
The gloomy tale,  
How that at Ivelchester jail  
My Love, my sweetheart swung;  
Though stained till now by no misdeed  
Save one horse ta'en in time o' need;  
(Blue Jimmy stole right many a steed  
Ere his last fling he flung.)

## XI

Thereaft I walked the world alone,  
Alone, alone!  
On his deathday I gave my groan  
And dropt his deadborn child.  
'Twas nigh the jail, beneath a tree,  
None tending me; for Mother Lee



Had died at Glaston, leaving me  
Unfriended on the wild.

## XII

And in the night as I lay weak,  
As I lay weak,  
The leaves afalling on my cheek,  
The red moon low declined  
The ghost of him I'd die to kiss  
Rose up and said: "Ah, tell me this!  
Was the child mine, or was it his?  
Speak, that I rest may find!"

## XIII

O doubt not but I told him then,  
I told him then,  
That I had kept me from all men  
Since we joined lips and swore.  
Whereat he smiled, and thinned away  
As the wind stirred to call up day . . .  
'Tis past! And here alone I stray  
Haunting the Western Moor.

NOTES. "Windwhistle" (Stanza iv.). The highness and dryness of Windwhistle Inn was impressed upon the writer two or three years ago, when, after climbing on a hot afternoon to the beautiful spot near which it stands and entering the inn for tea, he was informed by the landlady that none could be had, unless he would fetch water from a valley half a mile off, the house containing not a drop, owing to its situation. However, a tantalizing row of full barrels behind her back testified to a wetness of a certain sort, which was not at that time desired.

"Marshal's Elm" (Stanza vi.) so picturesquely situated, is no longer an inn, though the house, or part of it, still remains. It used to exhibit a fine old swinging sign.

"Blue Jimmy" (Stanza x.) was a notorious horsestealer of Wessex in those days, who appropriated more than a hundred horses before he was caught, among others one belonging to a neighbour of the writer's grandfather. He was hanged at the now demolished Ivelchester or Ilchester jail above mentioned that building formerly of so many sinister associations in the minds of the local peasantry, and the continual haunt

of fever, which at last led to its condemnation. Its site is now an innocentlooking green meadow.

April 1902.

## **THE TWO ROSALINDS**

### **I**

The dubious daylight ended,  
And I walked the Town alone, unminding whither bound and why,  
As from each gaunt street and gaping square a mist of light ascended  
And dispersed upon the sky.

### **II**

Files of evanescent faces  
Passed each other without heeding, in their travail, teen, or joy,  
Some in void unvisioned listlessness inwrought with pallid traces  
Of keen penury's annoy.

### **III**

Nebulous flames in crystal cages  
Leered as if with discontent at city movement, murk, and grime,  
And as waiting some procession of great ghosts from bygone ages  
To exalt the ignoble time.

### **IV**

In a colonnade highlighted,  
By a thoroughfare where stern utilitarian traffic dinned,  
On a red and white emblazonment of players and parts, I sighted  
The name of "Rosalind,"

### **V**

And her famous mates of "Arden,"  
Who observed no stricter customs than "the seasons' difference" bade,  
Who lived with running brooks for books in Nature's wildwood garden,  
And called idleness their trade . . .

## VI

Now the poster stirred an ember  
Still remaining from my ardours of some forty years before,  
When the selfsame portal on an eve it thrilled me to remember  
A like announcement bore;

## VII

And expectantly I had entered,  
And had first beheld in human mould a Rosalind woo and plead,  
On whose transcendent figuring my speedy soul had centred  
As it had been she indeed . . .

## VIII

So; all other plans discarding,  
I resolved on entrance, bent on seeing what I once had seen,  
And approached the gangway of my earlier knowledge, disregarding  
The tract of time between.

## IX

"The words, sir?" cried a creature  
Hovering mid the shine and shade as 'twixt the live world and the tomb;  
But the wellknown numbers needed not for me a text or teacher  
To revive and reillumine.

## X

Then the play . . . But how unfitted  
Was THIS Rosalind! a mammet quite to me, in memories nurst,  
And with chilling disappointment soon I sought the street I had quitted,  
To reponder on the first.

## XI

The hag still hawked, I met her  
Just without the colonnade. "So you don't like her, sir?" said she.  
"Ah! I was once that Rosalind! I acted her none better  
Yes in eighteen sixtythree.

## **XII**

"Thus I won Orlando to me  
In my then triumphant days when I had charm and maidenhood,  
Now some forty years ago. I used to say, COME WOO ME, WOO ME!"  
And she struck the attitude.

## **XIII**

It was when I had gone there nightly;  
And the voice though raucous now was yet the old one. Clear as noon  
My Rosalind was here . . . Thereon the band within side lightly  
Beat up a merry tune.

## **A SUNDAY MORNING TRAGEDY**

I bore a daughter flowerfair,  
In Pydel Vale, alas for me;  
I joyed to mother one so rare,  
But dead and gone I now would be.  
Men looked and loved her as she grew,  
And she was won, alas for me;  
She told me nothing, but I knew,  
And saw that sorrow was to be.  
I knew that one had made her thrall,  
A thrall to him, alas for me;  
And then, at last, she told me all,  
And wondered what her end would be.  
She owned that she had loved too well,  
Had loved too well, unhappy she,  
And bore a secret time would tell,  
  
Though in her shroud she'd sooner be.  
I plodded to her sweetheart's door  
In Pydel Vale, alas for me:  
I pleaded with him, pleaded sore,  
To save her from her misery.  
He frowned, and swore he could not wed,  
Seven times he swore it could not be;  
"Poverty's worse than shame," he said,  
Till all my hope went out of me.

"I've packed my traps to sail the main"  
Roughly he spake, alas did he  
"Wessex beholds me not again,  
"Tis worse than any jail would be!"

There was a shepherd whom I knew,  
A subtle man, alas for me:  
I sought him all the pastures through,  
Though better I had ceased to be.  
I traced him by his lantern light,  
And gave him hint, alas for me,  
Of how she found her in the plight

That is so scorned in Christendie.  
"Is there an herb . . . ?" I asked. "Or none?"  
Yes, thus I asked him desperately.  
"There is," he said; "a certain one . . . "  
Would he had sworn that none knew he!  
"Tomorrow I will walk your way,"  
He hinted low, alas for me.  
Fieldwards I gazed throughout next day;  
Now fields I never more would see!

The sunsetshine, as curfew strook,  
As curfew strook beyond the lea,  
Lit his white smock and gleaming crook,  
While slowly he drew near to me.  
He pulled from underneath his smock  
The herb I sought, my curse to be

"At times I use it in my flock,"  
He said, and hope waxed strong in me.  
"'Tis meant to balk illmotherings"  
(Illmotherings! Why should they be?)  
"If not, would God have sent such things?"

So spoke the shepherd unto me.  
That night I watched the poppling brew,  
With bended back and hand on knee:  
I stirred it till the dawnlight grew,  
And the wind whiffled wailfully.

"This scandal shall be slain," said I,  
"That lours upon her innocency:  
I'll give all whispering tongues the lie;"  
But worse than whispers was to be.  
"Here's physic for untimely fruit,"  
I said to her, alas for me,  
Early that morn in fond salute;  
And in my grave I now would be.  
Next Sunday came, with sweet church chimes  
In Pydel Vale, alas for me:  
I went into her room betimes;  
No more may such a Sunday be!

"Mother, instead of rescue nigh,"  
She faintly breathed, alas for me,  
"I feel as I were like to die,  
And underground soon, soon should be."  
From church that noon the people walked  
In twos and threes, alas for me,  
Showed their new raiments smiled and talked,  
Though sackclothclad I longed to be.  
Came to my door her lover's friends,  
And cheerly cried, alas for me,

"Right glad are we he makes amends,  
For never a sweeter bride can be."  
My mouth dried, as 'twere scorched within,  
Dried at their words, alas for me:  
More and more neighbours crowded in,  
(O why should mothers ever be!)  
"Haha! Such wellkept news!" laughed they,  
Yesso they laughed, alas for me.

"Whose banns were called in church today?"  
Christ, how I wished my soul could flee!  
"Where is she? O the stealthy miss,"  
Still bantered they, alas for me,  
"To keep a wedding close as this . . ."  
Ay, Fortune worked thus wantonly!  
"But you are pale you did not know?"  
They archly asked, alas for me,

I stammered, "Yessome daysago,"  
While confined clay I wished to be.  
""Twas done to please her, we surmise?"  
(They spoke quite lightly in their glee)  
"Done by him as a fond surprise?"  
I thought their words would madden me.  
Her lover entered. "Where's my bird?  
My birdmy flowermy picotee?  
First time of asking, soon the third!"

Ah, in my grave I well may be.  
To me he whispered: "Since your call"  
So spoke he then, alas for me  
"I've felt for her, and righted all."  
I think of it to agony.  
"She's faint todaytirednothing more"  
Thus did I lie, alas for me . . .  
I called her at her chamber door  
As one who scarce had strength to be.  
No voice replied. I went within  
O women! scourged the worst are we . . .  
I shrieked. The others hastened in  
And saw the stroke there dealt on me.

There she laysilent, breathless, dead,  
Stone dead she laywronged, sinless she!  
Ghostwhite the cheeks once rosyred:  
Death had took her. Death took not me.  
I kissed her colding face and hair,  
I kissed her corpsethe bride to be!  
My punishment I cannot bear,  
But pray God NOT to pity me.  
January 1904.

### **THE HOUSE OF HOSPITALITIES**

Here we broached the Christmas barrel,  
Pushed up the charred logends;  
Here we sang the Christmas carol,  
And called in friends.  
Time has tired me since we met here

When the folk now dead were young,  
Since the viands were outset here  
And quaint songs sung.  
And the worm has bored the viol  
That used to lead the tune,  
Rust eaten out the dial

That struck night's noon.  
Now no Christmas brings in neighbours,  
And the New Year comes unlit;  
Where we sang the mole now labours,  
And spiders knit.  
Yet at midnight if here walking,  
When the moon sheets wall and tree,  
I see forms of old time talking,  
Who smile on me.

### **BEREFT**

In the black winter morning  
No light will be struck near my eyes  
While the clock in the stairway is warning  
For five, when he used to rise.  
Leave the door unbarred,  
The clock unwound,  
Make my lone bed hard  
Would 'twere underground!

When the summer dawns clearly,  
And the appletreetops seem alight,  
Who will undraw the curtain and cheerly  
Call out that the morning is bright?  
When I tarry at market  
No form will cross Durnover Lea  
In the gathering darkness, to hark at

Grey's Bridge for the pitpat o' me.  
When the supper crock's steaming,  
And the time is the time of his tread,  
I shall sit by the fire and wait dreaming  
In a silence as of the dead.



Leave the door unbarred,  
The clock unwound,  
Make my lone bed hard  
Would 'twere underground!

## **JOHN AND JANE**

### **I**

He sees the world as a boisterous place  
Where all things bear a laughing face,  
And humorous scenes go hourly on,  
Does John.

### **II**

They find the world a pleasant place  
Where all is ecstasy and grace,  
Where a light has risen that cannot wane,  
Do John and Jane.

### **III**

They see as a palace their cottageplace,  
Containing a pearl of the human race,  
A hero, maybe, hereafter styled,  
Do John and Jane with a babychild.

### **IV**

They rate the world as a gruesome place,  
Where fair looks fade to a skull's grimace,  
As a pilgrimage they would fain get done  
Do John and Jane with their worthless son.

## **THE CURATE'S KINDNESS A WORKHOUSE IRONY**

### **I**

I thought they'd be strangers aroun' me,  
But she's to be there!

Let me jump out o' waggon and go back and drown me  
At Pummery or TenHatches Weir.

## II

I thought: "Well, I've come to the Union  
The workhouse at last  
After honest hard work all the week, and Communion  
O' Zundays, these fifty years past.

## III

"'Tis hard; but," I thought, "never mind it:  
There's gain in the end:  
And when I get used to the place I shall find it  
A home, and may find there a friend.

## IV

"Life there will be better than t'other.  
For peace is assured.

## THE MEN IN ONE WING AND THEIR WIVES IN ANOTHER

Is strictly the rule of the Board."

## V

Just then one young Pa'son arriving  
Steps up out of breath  
To the side o' the waggon wherein we were driving  
To Union; and calls out and saith:

## VI

"Old folks, that harsh order is altered,  
Be not sick of heart!  
The Guardians they poohed and they pished and they paltered  
When urged not to keep you apart.

## VII

"'It is wrong,' I maintained, 'to divide them,  
Near forty years wed.'  
'Very well, sir. We promise, then, they shall abide them  
In one wing together,' they said."

## VIII

Then I sankknew 'twas quite a foredone thing  
That misery should be  
To the end! . . . To get freed of her there was the one thing  
Had made the change welcome to me.

## IX

To go there was ending but badly;  
'Twas shame and 'twas pain;  
"But anyhow," thought I, "thereby I shall gladly  
Get free of this forty years' chain."

## X

I thought they'd be strangers aroun' me,  
But she's to be there!  
Let me jump out o' waggon and go back and drown me  
At Pummery or TenHatches Weir.

## THE FLIRT'S TRAGEDY

Here alone by the logs in my chamber,  
Deserted, decrepit  
Spent flames limning ghosts on the wainscot  
Of friends I once knew  
My drama and hers begins weirdly  
Its dumb reenactment,  
Each scene, sigh, and circumstance passing  
In spectral review.  
Wealth was mine beyond wish when I met her  
The pride of the lowland  
Embowered in Tintinhull Valley

By laurel and yew;  
And love lit my soul, notwithstanding  
My features' ill favour,  
Too obvious beside her perfections  
Of line and of hue.  
But it pleased her to play on my passion,  
And whet me to pleadings  
That won from her mirthful negations  
And scornings undue.  
Then I fled her disdains and derisions

To cities of pleasure,  
And made me the crony of idlers  
In every purlieu.  
Of those who lent ear to my story,  
A needy Adonis  
Gave hint how to grizzle her garden  
From roses to rue,

Could his price but be paid for so purging  
My scorner of scornings:  
Thus tempted, the lust to avenge me  
Germed inly and grew.  
I clothed him in sumptuous apparel,  
Consigned to him coursers,  
Meet equipage, liveried attendants  
In full retinue.  
So dowered, with letters of credit  
He wayfared to England,  
And spied out the manor she goddessed,  
And handy thereto,  
Set to hire him a tenantless mansion  
As coignstone of vantage  
For testing what gross adulation  
Of beauty could do.

He laboured through mornings and evens,  
On new moons and sabbaths,  
By wiles to enmesh her attention  
In park, path, and pew;  
And having afar played upon her,

Advanced his lines nearer,  
And boldly outleaping conventions,  
Bent briskly to woo.  
His gay godlike face, his rare seeming  
Anon worked to win her,  
And later, at noontides and nighttides  
They held rendezvous.  
His tarriance full spent, he departed  
And met me in Venice,  
And lines from her told that my jilter  
Was stooping to sue.

Not long could be further concealment,  
She pled to him humbly:  
"By our love and our sin, O protect me;  
I fly unto you!"  
A mighty remorse overgat me,  
I heard her low anguish,  
And there in the gloom of the calle  
My steel ran him through.  
A swift push engulphed his hot carrion  
Within the canal there  
That still street of waters dividing  
The city in two.  
I wandered awhile all unable

To smother my torment,  
My brain racked by yells as from Tophet  
Of Satan's whole crew.  
A month of unrest brought me hovering  
At home in her precincts,  
To whose hidinghole local story  
Afforded a clue.  
Exposed, and expelled by her people,  
Afar off in London  
I found her alone, in a sombre  
And soulstifling mew.  
Still burning to make reparation  
I pleaded to wive her,  
And father her child, and thus faintly  
My mischief undo.

She yielded, and spells of calm weather  
Succeeded the tempest;  
And one sprung of him stood as scion  
Of my bone and thew . . .  
But Time unveils sorrows and secrets,  
And so it befell now:  
By inches the curtain was twitched at,  
And slowly undrew.

As we lay, she and I, in the nighttime,  
We heard the boy moaning:  
"O misery mine! My false father  
Has murdered my true!"  
She gasped: yea, she heard; understood it.  
Next day the child fled us;  
And nevermore sighted was even  
A print of his shoe.  
Thenceforward she shunned me, and languished;  
Till one day the parkpool  
Embraced her fair form, and extinguished

Her eyes' living blue.  
So; ask not what blast may account for  
This aspect of pallor,  
These bones that just prison within them  
Life's poor residue;  
But pass by, and leave unregarded  
A Cain to his suffering,  
For vengeance too dark on the woman  
Whose lover he slew.

### **THE REJECTED MEMBER'S WIFE**

We shall see her no more  
On the balcony,  
Smiling, while hurt, at the roar  
As of surging sea  
From the stormy sturdy band  
Who have doomed her lord's cause,  
Though she waves her little hand  
As it were applause.

Here will be candidates yet,  
And candidates' wives,  
Fervid with zeal to set  
Their ideals on our lives:  
Here will come marketmen  
On the marketdays,  
Here will clash now and then  
More such party assays.  
And the balcony will fill

When such times are renewed,  
And the throng in the street will thrill  
With today's mettled mood;  
But she will no more stand  
In the sunshine there,  
With that wave of her whitegloved hand,  
And that chestnut hair.  
January 1906.

## **THE FARMWOMAN'S WINTER**

### **I**

If seasons all were summers,  
And leaves would never fall,  
And hopping casementcomers  
Were foodless not at all,  
And fragile folk might be here  
That white winds bid depart;  
Then one I used to see here  
Would warm my wasted heart!

### **II**

One frail, who, bravely tilling  
Long hours in gripping gusts,  
Was mastered by their chilling,  
And now his ploughshare rusts.  
So savage winter catches  
The breath of limber things,  
And what I love he snatches,

And what I love not, brings.

### **AUTUMN IN KING'S HINTOCK PARK**

Here by the baring bough  
Raking up leaves,  
Often I ponder how  
Springtime deceives,  
I, an old woman now,  
Raking up leaves.  
Here in the avenue  
Raking up leaves,  
Lords' ladies pass in view,  
Until one heaves  
Sighs at life's russet hue,  
Raking up leaves!

Just as my shape you see  
Raking up leaves,  
I saw, when fresh and free,  
Those memory weaves  
Into grey ghosts by me,  
Raking up leaves.  
Yet, Dear, though one may sigh,  
Raking up leaves,  
New leaves will dance on high  
Earth never grieves!  
Will not, when missed am I  
Raking up leaves.  
1901.

### **SHUT OUT THAT MOON**

Close up the casement, draw the blind,  
Shut out that stealing moon,  
She wears too much the guise she wore  
Before our lutes were strewn  
With yearsdeep dust, and names we read  
On a white stone were hewn.  
Step not out on the dewdashed lawn  
To view the Lady's Chair,



Immense Orion's glittering form,  
The Less and Greater Bear:  
Stay in; to such sights we were drawn  
When faded ones were fair.  
Brush not the bough for midnight scents  
That come forth lingeringly,  
And wake the same sweet sentiments  
They breathed to you and me  
When living seemed a laugh, and love  
All it was said to be.  
Within the common lamplit room  
Prison my eyes and thought;  
Let dingy details crudely loom,  
Mechanic speech be wrought:  
Too fragrant was Life's early bloom,  
Too tart the fruit it brought!

1904.

## REMINISCENCES OF A DANCING MAN

### I

Who now remembers Almack's balls  
Willis's sometime named  
In those two smoothfloored upper halls  
For faded ones so famed?  
Where as we trod to trilling sound  
The fancied phantoms stood around,  
Or joined us in the maze,  
Of the powdered Dears from Georgian years,  
Whose dust lay in sightless sealedup biers,  
The fairest of former days.

### II

Who now remembers gay Cremorne,  
And all its jaunty jills,  
And those wild whirling figures born  
Of Jullien's grand quadrilles?  
With hats on head and morning coats  
There footed to his prancing notes

Our partnergirls and we;  
And the gasjets winked, and the lustres clinked,  
And the platform throbbed as with arms enlinked  
We moved to the minstrelsy.

### III

Who now recalls those crowded rooms  
Of old yclept "The Argyle,"  
Where to the deep Drumpolka's booms  
We hopped in standard style?  
Whither have danced those damsels now!  
Is Death the partner who doth moue  
Their wormy chaps and bare?  
Do their spectres spin like sparks within  
The smoky halls of the Prince of Sin  
To a thunderous Jullien air?

### THE DEAD MAN WALKING

They hail me as one living,  
But don't they know  
That I have died of late years,  
Untombed although?  
I am but a shape that stands here,  
A pulseless mould,  
A pale past picture, screening  
Ashes gone cold.  
Not at a minute's warning,  
Not in a loud hour,  
For me ceased Time's enchantments  
In hall and bower.  
There was no tragic transit,  
No catch of breath,  
When silent seasons inched me  
On to this death . . .

A Troubadour youth I rambled  
With Life for lyre,  
The beats of being raging  
In me like fire.

But when I practised eyeing  
The goal of men,  
It iced me, and I perished  
A little then.  
When passed my friend, my kinsfolk  
Through the Last Door,  
And left me standing bleakly,  
I died yet more;  
And when my Love's heart kindled  
In hate of me,  
Wherefore I knew not, died I  
One more degree.  
And if when I died fully  
I cannot say,  
And changed into the corpse thing  
I am today;

Yet is it that, though whiling  
The time somehow  
In walking, talking, smiling,  
I live not now.

### **MORE LOVE LYRICS**

In fivescore summers! All new eyes,  
New minds, new modes, new fools, new wise;  
New woes to weep, new joys to prize;  
With nothing left of me and you  
In that live century's vivid view  
Beyond a pinch of dust or two;  
A century which, if not sublime,  
Will show, I doubt not, at its prime,  
A scope above this blinkered time.  
Yet what to me how far above?  
For I would only ask thereof  
That thy worm should be my worm, Love!

### **HER DEFINITION**

I lingered through the night to break of day,  
Nor once did sleep extend a wing to me,

Intently busied with a vast array  
Of epithets that should outfigure thee.  
Fullfeatured termsall fitless hastened by,  
And this sole speech remained: "That maiden mine!"  
Debarred from due description then did I  
Perceive the indefinite phrase could yet define.  
As common chests encasing wares of price  
Are borne with tenderness through halls of state,  
For what they cover, so the poor device

Of homely wording I could tolerate,  
Knowing its unadornment held as freight  
The sweetest image outside Paradise.

### **THE DIVISION**

Rain on the windows, creaking doors,  
With blasts that besom the green,  
And I am here, and you are there,  
And a hundred miles between!  
O were it but the weather, Dear,  
O were it but the miles  
That summed up all our severance,  
There might be room for smiles.  
But that thwart thing betwixt us twain,  
Which nothing cleaves or clears,  
Is more than distance, Dear, or rain,  
And longer than the years!

### **ON THE DEPARTURE PLATFORM**

We kissed at the barrier; and passing through  
She left me, and moment by moment got  
Smaller and smaller, until to my view  
She was but a spot;  
A wee white spot of muslin fluff  
That down the diminishing platform bore  
Through hustling crowds of gentle and rough  
To the carriage door.

Under the lamplight's fitful glowers,

Behind dark groups from far and near,  
Whose interests were apart from ours,  
    She would disappear,  
    Then show again, till I ceased to see  
That flexible form, that nebulous white;  
And she who was more than my life to me  
    Had vanished quite . . .  
We have penned new plans since that fair fond day,  
    And in season she will appear again  
    Perhaps in the same soft white array  
    But never as then!

"And why, young man, must eternally fly  
A joy you'll repeat, if you love her well?"  
O friend, nought happens twice thus; why,  
    I cannot tell!

### **IN A CATHEDRAL CITY**

These people have not heard your name;  
    No loungers in this placid place  
Have helped to bruit your beauty's fame.  
The grey Cathedral, towards whose face  
    Bend eyes untold, has met not yours;  
    Your shade has never swept its base,  
    Your form has never darked its doors,  
Nor have your faultless feet once thrown  
    A pensive pitpat on its floors.  
Along the street to maids well known

Blithe lovers hum their tender airs,  
    But in your praise voice not a tone.  
Since nought bespeaks you here, or bears,  
As I, your imprint through and through,  
    Here might I rest, till my heart shares  
    The spot's unconsciousness of you!

### **"I SAY I'LL SEEK HER"**

I say, "I'll seek her side  
Ere hindrance interposes;"

But eve in midnight closes,  
And here I still abide.  
When darkness wears I see  
Her sad eyes in a vision;  
They ask, "What indecision  
Detains you, Love, from me?  
"The creaking hinge is oiled,

I have unbarred the backway,  
But you tread not the trackway;  
And shall the thing be spoiled?  
"Far cockcrows echo shrill,  
The shadows are abating,  
And I am waiting, waiting;  
But O, you tarry still!"

### **HER FATHER**

I met her, as we had privily planned,  
Where passing feet beat busily:  
She whispered: "Father is at hand!  
He wished to walk with me."  
His presence as he joined us there  
Banished our words of warmth away;  
We felt, with cloudings of despair,  
What Love must lose that day.

Her crimson lips remained unkissed,  
Our fingers kept no tender hold,  
His lack of feeling made the tryst  
Embarrassed, stiff, and cold.  
A cynic ghost then rose and said,  
"But is his love for her so small  
That, nigh to yours, it may be read  
As of no worth at all?  
"You love her for her pink and white;  
But what when their fresh splendours close?  
His love will last her in despite  
Of Time, and wrack, and foes."

## WEYMOUTH.

### AT WAKING

When night was lifting,  
And dawn had crept under its shade,  
Amid cold clouds drifting  
Deadwhite as a corpse outlaid,  
With a sudden scare  
I seemed to behold  
My Love in bare  
Hard lines unfold.

Yea, in a moment,  
An insight that would not die  
Killed her old endowment  
Of charm that had capped all nigh,  
Which vanished to none  
Like the gilt of a cloud,  
And showed her but one  
Of the common crowd.  
She seemed but a sample  
Of earth's poor average kind,  
Lit up by no ample  
Enrichments of mien or mind.

I covered my eyes  
As to cover the thought,  
And unrecognize  
What the morn had taught.  
O vision appalling  
When the one believed in thing  
Is seen falling, falling,  
With all to which hope can cling.  
Off: it is not true;  
For it cannot be  
That the prize I drew  
Is a blank to me!  
WEYMOUTH, 1869.

## FOUR FOOTPRINTS

Here are the tracks upon the sand  
Where stood last evening she and I  
Pressed heart to heart and hand to hand;  
The morning sun has baked them dry.  
I kissed her wet face wet with rain,  
For arid grief had burnt up tears,  
While reached us as in sleeping pain  
The distant gurgling of the weirs.  
"I have married him yes; feel that ring;  
'Tis a week ago that he put it on . . .  
A dutiful daughter does this thing,  
And resignation succeeds anon!

"But that I body and soul was yours  
Ere he'd possession, he'll never know.  
He's a confident man. 'The husband scores,'  
He says, 'in the long run' . . . Now, Dear, go!"  
I went. And today I pass the spot;  
It is only a smart the more to endure;  
And she whom I held is as though she were not,  
For they have resumed their honeymoon tour.

## IN THE VAULTED WAY

In the vaulted way, where the passage turned  
To the shadowy corner that none could see,  
You paused for our parting, plaintively;  
Though overnight had come words that burned  
My fond frail happiness out of me.  
And then I kissed you, despite my thought  
That our spell must end when reflection came  
On what you had deemed me, whose one long aim  
Had been to serve you; that what I sought  
Lay not in a heart that could breathe such blame.

But yet I kissed you; whereon you again  
As of old kissed me. Why, why was it so?  
Do you cleave to me after that lighttongued blow?  
If you scorned me at eventide, how love then?



The thing is dark, Dear. I do not know.

### **IN THE MIND'S EYE**

That was once her casement,  
And the taper nigh,  
Shining from within there,  
Beckoned, "Here am I!"  
Now, as then, I see her  
Moving at the pane;  
Ah; 'tis but her phantom  
Borne within my brain!  
Foremost in my vision

Everywhere goes she;  
Change dissolves the landscapes,  
She abides with me.  
Shape so sweet and shy, Dear,  
Who can say thee nay?  
Never once do I, Dear,  
Wish thy ghost away.

### **THE END OF THE EPISODE**

Indulge no more may we  
In this sweetbitter pastime:  
The lovelight shines the last time  
Between you, Dear, and me.  
There shall remain no trace  
Of what so closely tied us,  
And blank as ere love eyed us

Will be our meetingplace.  
The flowers and thymy air,  
Will they now miss our coming?  
The dumbles thin their humming  
To find we haunt not there?  
Though fervent was our vow,  
Though ruddily ran our pleasure,  
Bliss has fulfilled its measure,  
And sees its sentence now.

Ache deep; but make no moans:  
Smile out; but stillly suffer:  
The paths of love are rougher  
Than thoroughfares of stones.

### THE SIGH

Little head against my shoulder,  
Shy at first, then somewhat bolder,  
And upeyed;  
Till she, with a timid quaver,  
Yielded to the kiss I gave her;  
But, she sighed.  
That there mingled with her feeling  
Some sad thought she was concealing  
It implied.  
Not that she had ceased to love me,  
None on earth she set above me;  
But she sighed.

She could not disguise a passion,  
Dread, or doubt, in weakest fashion  
If she tried:  
Nothing seemed to hold us sundered,  
Hearts were victors; so I wondered  
Why she sighed.  
Afterwards I knew her thoroughly,  
And she loved me staunchly, truly,  
Till she died;  
But she never made confession  
Why, at that first sweet concession,  
She had sighed.  
It was in our May, remember;  
And though now I near November,  
And abide  
Till my appointed change, unfretting,  
Sometimes I sit half regretting  
That she sighed.

## **"IN THE NIGHT SHE CAME"**

I told her when I left one day  
That whatsoever weight of care  
Might strain our love, Time's mere assault  
Would work no changes there.  
And in the night she came to me,  
Toothless, and wan, and old,  
With leaden concaves round her eyes,  
And wrinkles manifold.

I tremblingly exclaimed to her,  
"O wherefore do you ghost me thus!  
I have said that dull defacing Time  
Will bring no dreads to us."  
"And is that true of YOU?" she cried  
In voice of troubled tune.  
I faltered: "Well . . . I did not think  
You would test me quite so soon!"  
She vanished with a curious smile,

Which told me, plainlier than by word,  
That my staunch pledge could scarce beguile  
The fear she had averred.  
Her doubts then wrought their shape in me,  
And when next day I paid  
My due caress, we seemed to be  
Divided by some shade.

## **THE CONFORMERS**

Yes; we'll wed, my little fay,  
And you shall write you mine,  
And in a villa chastely gray  
We'll house, and sleep, and dine.  
But those nightscreened, divine,

Stolen trysts of heretofore,  
We of choice ecstasies and fine  
Shall know no more.  
The formal faced cohue

Will then no more upbraid  
With smiting smiles and whisperings two  
Who have thrown less loves in shade.  
We shall no more evade  
The searching light of the sun,  
Our game of passion will be played,  
Our dreaming done.  
We shall not go in stealth  
To rendezvous unknown,  
But friends will ask me of your health,  
And you about my own.

When we abide alone,  
No leapings each to each,  
But syllables in frigid tone  
Of household speech.  
When down to dust we glide  
Men will not say askance,  
As now: "How all the country side  
Rings with their mad romance!"  
But as they graveward glance  
Remark: "In them we lose  
A worthy pair, who helped advance  
Sound parish views."

### **THE DAWN AFTER THE DANCE**

Here is your parents' dwelling with its curtained windows telling  
Of no thought of us within it or of our arrival here;  
Their slumbers have been normal after one day more of formal  
Matrimonial commonplace and household life's mechanic gear.  
I would be candid willingly, but dawn draws on so chillingly  
As to render further cheerlessness intolerable now,  
So I will not stand endeavouring to declare a day for severing,

But will clasp you just as always just the olden love avow.  
Through serene and surly weather we have walked the ways together,  
And this long night's dance this year's end eve now finishes the spell;  
Yet we dreamt us but beginning a sweet sempiternal spinning  
Of a cord we have spun to breaking too intemperately, too well.  
Yes; last night we danced I know, Dear, as we did that year ago, Dear,

When a new strange bond between our days was formed, and felt, and heard;  
Would that dancing were the worst thing from the latest to the first thing  
That the faded year can charge us with; but what avails a word!  
That which makes man's love the lighter and the woman's burn no brighter  
Came to pass with us inevitably while slipped the shortening year . . .  
And there stands your father's dwelling with its blind bleak windows telling  
That the vows of man and maid are frail as filmy gossamere.  
WEYMOUTH, 1869.

### **THE SUN ON THE LETTER**

I drew the letter out, while gleamed  
The sloping sun from under a roof  
Of cloud whose verge rose visibly.  
The burning ball flung rays that seemed  
Stretched like a warp without a woof  
Across the levels of the lea  
To where I stood, and where they beamed  
As brightly on the page of proof  
That she had shown her false to me

As if it had shown her true had teemed  
With passionate thought for my behoof  
Expressed with their own ardency!

### **THE NIGHT OF THE DANCE**

The cold moon hangs to the sky by its horn,  
And centres its gaze on me;  
The stars, like eyes in reverie,  
Their westering as for a while forborne,  
Quiz downward curiously.  
Old Robert draws the backbrand in,  
The green logs steam and spit;  
The halfawakened sparrows flit

From the riddled thatch; and owls begin  
To whoo from the gables lit.  
Yes; far and nigh things seem to know  
Sweet scenes are impending here;  
That all is prepared; that the hour is near

For welcomes, fellowships, and flow  
Of sally, song, and cheer;  
That spigots are pulled and viols strung;  
That soon will arise the sound  
Of measures trod to tunes renowned;  
That She will return in Love's low tongue  
My vows as we wheel around.

### **MISCONCEPTION**

I busied myself to find a sure  
Snug hermitage  
That should preserve my Love secure  
From the world's rage;  
Where no unseemly saturnals,  
Or strident trafficroars,  
Or hum of intervolved cabals  
Should echo at her doors.

I laboured that the diurnal spin  
Of vanities  
Should not contrive to suck her in  
By dark degrees,  
And cunningly operate to blur  
Sweet teachings I had begun;  
And then I went fullheart to her  
To expound the glad deeds done.  
She looked at me, and said thereto

With a pitying smile,  
"And THIS is what has busied you  
So long a while?  
O poor exhausted one, I see  
You have worn you old and thin  
For naught! Those moils you fear for me  
I find most pleasure in!"

## THE VOICE OF THE THORN

### I

When the thorn on the down  
Quivers naked and cold,  
And the midaged and old  
Pace the path there to town,  
In these words dry and drear  
It seems to them sighing:  
"O winter is trying  
To sojourners here!"

### II

When it stands fully tressed  
On a hot summer day,  
And the ewes there astray  
Find its shade a sweet rest,  
By the breath of the breeze  
It inquires of each farer:  
"Who would not be sharer  
Of shadow with these?"

### III

But by day or by night,  
And in winter or summer,  
Should I be the comer  
Along that lone height,  
In its voicing to me  
Only one speech is spoken:  
"Here once was nigh broken  
A heart, and by thee."

## FROM HER IN THE COUNTRY

I thought and thought of thy crass clanging town  
To folly, till convinced such dreams were ill,  
I held my heart in bond, and tethered down  
Fancy to where I was, by force of will.

I said: How beautiful are these flowers, this wood,  
One little bud is far more sweet to me  
Than all man's urban shows; and then I stood

Urging new zest for bird, and bush, and tree;  
And strove to feel my nature brought it forth  
Of instinct, or no rural maid was I;  
But it was vain; for I could not see worth  
Enough around to charm a midge or fly,  
And mused again on city din and sin,  
Longing to madness I might move therein!  
16 W. P. V., 1866.

### **HER CONFESSION**

As some bland soul, to whom a debtor says  
"I'll now repay the amount I owe to you,"  
In inward gladness feigns forgetfulness  
That such a payment ever was his due  
(His long thought notwithstanding), so did I  
At our last meeting waive your proffered kiss  
With quick divergent talk of scenery nigh,  
By such suspension to enhance my bliss.  
And as his looks in consternation fall  
When, gathering that the debt is lightly deemed,  
The debtor makes as not to pay at all,  
So faltered I, when your intention seemed  
Converted by my false uneagerness  
To putting off for ever the caress.  
W. P. V., 186567.

### **TO AN IMPERSONATOR OF ROSALIND**

Did he who drew her in the years ago  
Till now conceived creator of her grace  
With telescopic sight high natures know,  
Discern remote in Time's untravelled space  
Your soft sweet mien, your gestures, as do we,  
And with a copyist's hand but set them down,  
Glowing yet more to dream our ecstasy  
When his Original should be forthshown?



For, kindled by that animated eye,  
Where to all fairnesses about thee brim,  
And by thy tender tones, what wight can fly  
The wild conviction welling up in him  
That he at length beholds woo, parley, plead,  
The "very, very Rosalind" indeed!  
ADELPHI TERRACE, 21st April 1867.

### **TO AN ACTRESS**

I read your name when you were strange to me,  
Where it stood blazoned bold with many more;  
I passed it vacantly, and did not see  
Any great glory in the shape it wore.  
O cruelty, the insight barred me then!  
Why did I not possess me with its sound,  
And in its cadence catch and catch again  
Your nature's essence floating therearound?  
Could THAT man be this I, unknowing you,  
When now the knowing you is all of me,  
And the old world of then is now a new,  
And purpose no more what it used to be  
A thing of formal journeywork, but due  
To springs that then were sealed up utterly?  
1867.

### **THE MINUTE BEFORE MEETING**

The grey gaunt days dividing us in twain  
Seemed hopeless hills my strength must faint to climb,  
But they are gone; and now I would detain  
The few clockbeats that part us; rein back Time,  
And live in close expectance never closed  
In change for far expectance closed at last,  
So harshly has expectance been imposed  
On my long need while these slow blank months passed.  
And knowing that what is now about to be  
Will all HAVE BEEN in O, so short a space!  
I read beyond it my despondency  
When more dividing months shall take its place,  
Thereby denying to this hour of grace

A fullup measure of felicity.  
1871.

### **HE ABJURES LOVE**

At last I put off love,  
For twice ten years  
The daysman of my thought,  
And hope, and doing;  
Being ashamed thereof,  
And faint of fears  
And desolations, wrought  
In his pursuing,  
Since first in youthtime those  
Disquietings

That heartenslavement brings  
To hale and hoary,  
Became my housefellows,  
And, fool and blind,  
I turned from kith and kind

To give him glory.  
I was as children be  
Who have no care;  
I did not shrink or sigh,  
I did not sicken;  
But lo, Love beckoned me,  
And I was bare,  
And poor, and starved, and dry,  
And feverstricken.  
Too many times ablaze  
With fatuous fires,  
Enkindled by his wiles

To new embraces,  
Did I, by wilful ways  
And baseless ires,  
Return the anxious smiles  
Of friendly faces.  
No more will now rate I

The common rare,  
The midnight drizzle dew,  
The gray hour golden,  
The wind a yearning cry,  
The faulty fair,  
Things dreamt, of comelier hue  
Than things beholden! . . .  
I speak as one who plumbs  
Life's dim profound,  
One who at length can sound

Clear views and certain.  
But after love what comes?  
A scene that lours,  
A few sad vacant hours,  
And then, the Curtain.  
1883.