



Selected Poems of Oscar Wilde

Wilde, Oscar, 1854-1900

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Selected Poems of Oscar Wilde

by Oscar Wilde

December, 1997 [Etext #1141]

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Selected Poems of Oscar Wilde

It is thought that a selection from Oscar Wilde's early verses may be of interest to a large public at present familiar only with the always popular BALLAD OF READING GAOL, also included in this volume. The poems were first collected by their author when he was twenty-six years old, and though never, until recently, well received by the critics, have survived the test of NINE editions. Readers will be able to make for themselves the obvious and striking contrasts between these first and last phases of Oscar Wilde's literary activity. The intervening period was devoted almost entirely to dramas, prose, fiction, essays, and criticism.

Robert Ross Reform Club, April 5, 1911

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NOTE

At the end of the complete text will be found a shorter version based on the original draft of the poem. This is included for the benefit of reciters and their audiences who have found the entire poem too long for declamation. I have tried to obviate a difficulty, without officiously exercising the ungrateful prerogatives of a literary executor, by falling back on a text which represents the author's first scheme for a poem - never intended of course for recitation.

Robert

Ross

Poem: The Ballad Of Reading Gaol

In memoriam of C. T. W. Sometimes
trooper of The Royal Horse Guards Obiit
H.M. Prison Reading, Berkshire July 7th,
1896

I

He did not wear his scarlet coat, For blood
and wine are red, And blood and wine
were on his hands When they found him
with the dead, The poor dead woman
whom he loved, And murdered in her bed.

He walked amongst the Trial Men In a suit
of shabby grey; A cricket cap was on his
head, And his step seemed light and gay;
But I never saw a man who looked So
wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked With such a
wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue

Which prisoners call the sky, And at every
drifting cloud that went With sails of silver
by.

I walked, with other souls in pain, Within
another ring, And was wondering if the
man had done A great or little thing, When
a voice behind me whispered low, 'THAT
FELLOW'S GOT TO SWING.'

Dear Christ! the very prison walls
Suddenly seemed to reel, And the sky
above my head became Like a casque of
scorching steel; And, though I was a soul in
pain, My pain I could not feel.

I only knew what hunted thought
Quickened his step, and why He looked
upon the garish day With such a wistful
eye; The man had killed the thing he
loved, And so he had to die.

Yet each man kills the thing he loves, By
each let this be heard, Some do it with a
bitter look, Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss, The brave
man with a sword!

Some kill their love when they are young,
And some when they are old; Some
strangle with the hands of Lust, Some with
the hands of Gold: The kindest use a knife,
because The dead so soon grow cold.

Some love too little, some too long, Some
sell, and others buy; Some do the deed
with many tears, And some without a sigh:
For each man kills the thing he loves, Yet
each man does not die.

He does not die a death of shame On a day
of dark disgrace, Nor have a noose about
his neck, Nor a cloth upon his face, Nor
drop feet foremost through the floor Into

an empty space.

He does not sit with silent men Who watch
him night and day; Who watch him when
he tries to weep, And when he tries to
pray; Who watch him lest himself should
rob The prison of its prey.

He does not wake at dawn to see Dread
figures throng his room, The shivering
Chaplain robed in white, The Sheriff stern
with gloom, And the Governor all in shiny
black, With the yellow face of Doom.

He does not rise in piteous haste To put on
convict-clothes, While some
coarse-mouthed Doctor gloats, and notes
Each new and nerve-twitched pose,
Fingering a watch whose little ticks Are
like horrible hammer-blows.

He does not know that sickening thirst That
sands one's throat, before The hangman
with his gardener's gloves Slips through
the padded door, And binds one with
three leathern thongs, That the throat may
thirst no more.

He does not bend his head to hear The
Burial Office read, Nor, while the terror of
his soul Tells him he is not dead, Cross his
own coffin, as he moves Into the hideous
shed.

He does not stare upon the air Through a
little roof of glass: He does not pray with
lips of clay For his agony to pass; Nor feel
upon his shuddering cheek The kiss of
Caiaphas.

Six weeks our guardsman walked the yard,
In the suit of shabby grey: His cricket cap
was on his head, And his step seemed light
and gay, But I never saw a man who looked
So wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked With such a
wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky, And at every
wandering cloud that trailed Its ravelled
fleeces by.

He did not wring his hands, as do Those
witless men who dare To try to rear the
changeling Hope In the cave of black
Despair: He only looked upon the sun, And
drank the morning air.

He did not wring his hands nor weep, Nor
did he peek or pine, But he drank the air
as though it held Some healthful anodyne;

With open mouth he drank the sun As
though it had been wine!

And I and all the souls in pain, Who
tramped the other ring, Forgot if we
ourselves had done A great or little thing,
And watched with gaze of dull amaze The
man who had to swing.

And strange it was to see him pass With a
step so light and gay, And strange it was to
see him look So wistfully at the day, And
strange it was to think that he Had such a
debt to pay.

For oak and elm have pleasant leaves That
in the springtime shoot: But grim to see is
the gallows-tree, With its adder-bitten
root, And, green or dry, a man must die
Before it bears its fruit!

The loftiest place is that seat of grace For

which all worldlings try: But who would
stand in hempen band Upon a scaffold
high, And through a murderer's collar take
His last look at the sky?

It is sweet to dance to violins When Love
and Life are fair: To dance to flutes, to
dance to lutes Is delicate and rare: But it is
not sweet with nimble feet To dance upon
the air!

So with curious eyes and sick surmise We
watched him day by day, And wondered if
each one of us Would end the self-same
way, For none can tell to what red Hell His
sightless soul may stray.

At last the dead man walked no more
Amongst the Trial Men, And I knew that he
was standing up In the black dock's
dreadful pen, And that never would I see
his face In God's sweet world again.

Like two doomed ships that pass in storm
We had crossed each other's way: But we
made no sign, we said no word, We had no
word to say; For we did not meet in the
holy night, But in the shameful day.

A prison wall was round us both, Two
outcast men we were: The world had thrust
us from its heart, And God from out His
care: And the iron gin that waits for Sin
Had caught us in its snare.

III

In Debtors' Yard the stones are hard, And
the dripping wall is high, So it was there he
took the air Beneath the leaden sky, And
by each side a Warder walked, For fear
the man might die.

Or else he sat with those who watched His
anguish night and day; Who watched him
when he rose to weep, And when he
crouched to pray; Who watched him lest
himself should rob Their scaffold of its
prey.

The Governor was strong upon The
Regulations Act: The Doctor said that
Death was but A scientific fact: And twice a
day the Chaplain called, And left a little
tract.

And twice a day he smoked his pipe, And
drank his quart of beer: His soul was
resolute, and held No hiding-place for
fear; He often said that he was glad The
hangman's hands were near.

But why he said so strange a thing No
Warder dared to ask: For he to whom a

watcher's doom Is given as his task, Must
set a lock upon his lips, And make his face
a mask.

Or else he might be moved, and try To
comfort or console: And what should
Human Pity do Pent up in Murderers' Hole?
What word of grace in such a place Could
help a brother's soul?

With slouch and swing around the ring We
trod the Fools' Parade! We did not care:
we knew we were The Devil's Own
Brigade: And shaven head and feet of lead
Make a merry masquerade.

We tore the tarry rope to shreds With
blunt and bleeding nails; We rubbed the
doors, and scrubbed the floors, And
cleaned the shining rails: And, rank by
rank, we soaped the plank, And clattered

with the pails.

We sewed the sacks, we broke the stones,
We turned the dusty drill: We banged the
tins, and bawled the hymns, And sweated
on the mill: But in the heart of every man
Terror was lying still.

So still it lay that every day Crawled like a
weed-clogged wave: And we forgot the
bitter lot That waits for fool and knave, Till
once, as we tramped in from work, We
passed an open grave.

With yawning mouth the yellow hole
Gaped for a living thing; The very mud
cried out for blood To the thirsty asphalte
ring: And we knew that ere one dawn grew
fair Some prisoner had to swing.

Right in we went, with soul intent On Death
and Dread and Doom: The hangman, with

his little bag, Went shuffling through the gloom: And each man trembled as he crept Into his numbered tomb.

That night the empty corridors Were full of forms of Fear, And up and down the iron town Stole feet we could not hear, And through the bars that hide the stars White faces seemed to peer.

He lay as one who lies and dreams In a pleasant meadow-land, The watchers watched him as he slept, And could not understand How one could sleep so sweet a sleep With a hangman close at hand.

But there is no sleep when men must weep Who never yet have wept: So we - the fool, the fraud, the knave - That endless vigil kept, And through each brain on hands of pain Another's terror crept.

Alas! it is a fearful thing To feel another's
guilt! For, right within, the sword of Sin
Pierced to its poisoned hilt, And as molten
lead were the tears we shed For the blood
we had not spilt.

The Warders with their shoes of felt Crept
by each padlocked door, And peeped and
saw, with eyes of awe, Grey figures on the
floor, And wondered why men knelt to
pray Who never prayed before.

All through the night we knelt and prayed,
Mad mourners of a corse! The troubled
plumes of midnight were The plumes upon
a hearse: And bitter wine upon a sponge
Was the savour of Remorse.

The grey cock crew, the red cock crew,
But never came the day: And crooked
shapes of Terror crouched, In the corners

where we lay: And each evil sprite that
walks by night Before us seemed to play.

They glided past, they glided fast, Like
travellers through a mist: They mocked the
moon in a rigadoon Of delicate turn and
twist, And with formal pace and loathsome
grace The phantoms kept their tryst.

With mop and mow, we saw them go, Slim
shadows hand in hand: About, about, in
ghostly rout They trod a saraband: And the
damned grotesques made arabesques,
Like the wind upon the sand!

With the pirouettes of marionettes, They
tripped on pointed tread: But with flutes of
Fear they filled the ear, As their grisly
masque they led, And loud they sang, and
long they sang, For they sang to wake the
dead.

'Oho!' they cried, 'The world is wide, But
fettered limbs go lame! And once, or
twice, to throw the dice Is a gentlemanly
game, But he does not win who plays with
Sin In the secret House of Shame.'

No things of air these antics were, That
frolicked with such glee: To men whose
lives were held in gyves, And whose feet
might not go free, Ah! wounds of Christ!
they were living things, Most terrible to
see.

Around, around, they waltzed and wound;
Some wheeled in smirking pairs; With the
mincing step of a demirep Some sidled up
the stairs: And with subtle sneer, and
fawning leer, Each helped us at our
prayers.

The morning wind began to moan, But still
the night went on: Through its giant loom

the web of gloom Crept till each thread
was spun: And, as we prayed, we grew
afraid Of the Justice of the Sun.

The moaning wind went wandering round
The weeping prison-wall: Till like a wheel
of turning steel We felt the minutes crawl:
O moaning wind! what had we done To
have such a seneschal?

At last I saw the shadowed bars, Like a
lattice wrought in lead, Move right across
the whitewashed wall That faced my
three-plank bed, And I knew that
somewhere in the world God's dreadful
dawn was red.

At six o'clock we cleaned our cells, At
seven all was still, But the sough and swing
of a mighty wing The prison seemed to fill,
For the Lord of Death with icy breath Had
entered in to kill.

He did not pass in purple pomp, Nor ride a moon-white steed. Three yards of cord and a sliding board Are all the gallows' need: So with rope of shame the Herald came To do the secret deed.

We were as men who through a fen Of filthy darkness grope: We did not dare to breathe a prayer, Or to give our anguish scope: Something was dead in each of us, And what was dead was Hope.

For Man's grim Justice goes its way, And will not swerve aside: It slays the weak, it slays the strong, It has a deadly stride: With iron heel it slays the strong, The monstrous parricide!

We waited for the stroke of eight: Each tongue was thick with thirst: For the stroke of eight is the stroke of Fate That makes a

man accursed, And Fate will use a running
noose For the best man and the worst.

We had no other thing to do, Save to wait
for the sign to come: So, like things of
stone in a valley lone, Quiet we sat and
dumb: But each man's heart beat thick and
quick, Like a madman on a drum!

With sudden shock the prison-clock Smote
on the shivering air, And from all the gaol
rose up a wail Of impotent despair, Like
the sound that frightened marshes hear
From some leper in his lair.

And as one sees most fearful things In the
crystal of a dream, We saw the greasy
hempen rope Hooked to the blackened
beam, And heard the prayer the
hangman's snare Strangled into a scream.

And all the woe that moved him so That he

gave that bitter cry, And the wild regrets,
and the bloody sweats, None knew so well
as I: For he who lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die.

IV

There is no chapel on the day On which
they hang a man: The Chaplain's heart is
far too sick, Or his face is far too wan, Or
there is that written in his eyes Which none
should look upon.

So they kept us close till nigh on noon, And
then they rang the bell, And the Warders
with their jingling keys Opened each
listening cell, And down the iron stair we
tramped, Each from his separate Hell.

Out into God's sweet air we went, But not

in wonted way, For this man's face was
white with fear, And that man's face was
grey, And I never saw sad men who
looked So wistfully at the day.

I never saw sad men who looked With such
a wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue
We prisoners called the sky, And at every
careless cloud that passed In happy
freedom by.

But there were those amongst us all Who
walked with downcast head, And knew
that, had each got his due, They should
have died instead: He had but killed a
thing that lived, Whilst they had killed the
dead.

For he who sins a second time Wakes a
dead soul to pain, And draws it from its
spotted shroud, And makes it bleed again,
And makes it bleed great gouts of blood,

And makes it bleed in vain!

Like ape or clown, in monstrous garb With
crooked arrows starred, Silently we went
round and round The slippery asphalte
yard; Silently we went round and round,
And no man spoke a word.

Silently we went round and round, And
through each hollow mind The Memory of
dreadful things Rushed like a dreadful
wind, And Horror stalked before each
man, And Terror crept behind.

The Warders strutted up and down, And
kept their herd of brutes, Their uniforms
were spick and span, And they wore their
Sunday suits, But we knew the work they
had been at, By the quicklime on their
boots.

For where a grave had opened wide,

There was no grave at all: Only a stretch of
mud and sand By the hideous prison-wall,
And a little heap of burning lime, That the
man should have his pall.

For he has a pall, this wretched man, Such
as few men can claim: Deep down below a
prison-yard, Naked for greater shame, He
lies, with fetters on each foot, Wrapt in a
sheet of flame!

And all the while the burning lime Eats
flesh and bone away, It eats the brittle
bone by night, And the soft flesh by day, It
eats the flesh and bone by turns, But it eats
the heart alway.

For three long years they will not sow Or
root or seedling there: For three long
years the unblessed spot Will sterile be
and bare, And look upon the wondering
sky With unreproachful stare.

They think a murderer's heart would taint
Each simple seed they sow. It is not true!
God's kindly earth Is kindlier than men
know, And the red rose would but blow
more red, The white rose whiter blow.

Out of his mouth a red, red rose! Out of his
heart a white! For who can say by what
strange way, Christ brings His will to light,
Since the barren staff the pilgrim bore
Bloomed in the great Pope's sight?

But neither milk-white rose nor red May
bloom in prison-air; The shard, the
pebble, and the flint, Are what they give us
there: For flowers have been known to
heal A common man's despair.

So never will wine-red rose or white, Petal
by petal, fall On that stretch of mud and
sand that lies By the hideous prison-wall,

To tell the men who tramp the yard That
God's Son died for all.

Yet though the hideous prison-wall Still
hems him round and round, And a spirit
may not walk by night That is with fetters
bound, And a spirit may but weep that lies
In such unholy ground,

He is at peace - this wretched man - At
peace, or will be soon: There is no thing to
make him mad, Nor does Terror walk at
noon, For the lampless Earth in which he
lies Has neither Sun nor Moon.

They hanged him as a beast is hanged:
They did not even toll A requiem that
might have brought Rest to his startled
soul, But hurriedly they took him out, And
hid him in a hole.

They stripped him of his canvas clothes,

And gave him to the flies: They mocked
the swollen purple throat, And the stark
and staring eyes: And with laughter loud
they heaped the shroud In which their
convict lies.

The Chaplain would not kneel to pray By
his dishonoured grave: Nor mark it with
that blessed Cross That Christ for sinners
gave, Because the man was one of those
Whom Christ came down to save.

Yet all is well; he has but passed To Life's
appointed bourne: And alien tears will fill
for him Pity's long-broken urn, For his
mourners will be outcast men, And
outcasts always mourn

I know not whether Laws be right, Or
whether Laws be wrong; All that we know
who lie in gaol Is that the wall is strong;
And that each day is like a year, A year
whose days are long.

But this I know, that every Law That men
have made for Man, Since first Man took
his brother's life, And the sad world
began, But straws the wheat and saves the
chaff With a most evil fan.

This too I know - and wise it were If each
could know the same - That every prison
that men build Is built with bricks of
shame, And bound with bars lest Christ
should see How men their brothers maim.

With bars they blur the gracious moon,
And blind the goodly sun: And they do
well to hide their Hell, For in it things are
done That Son of God nor son of Man Ever

should look upon!

The vilest deeds like poison weeds, Bloom
well in prison-air; It is only what is good in
Man That wastes and withers there: Pale
Anguish keeps the heavy gate, And the
Warder is Despair.

For they starve the little frightened child
Till it weeps both night and day: And they
scourge the weak, and flog the fool, And
gibe the old and grey, And some grow
mad, and all grow bad, And none a word
may say.

Each narrow cell in which we dwell Is a
foul and dark latrine, And the fetid breath
of living Death Chokes up each grated
screen, And all, but Lust, is turned to dust
In Humanity's machine.

The brackish water that we drink Creeps

with a loathsome slime, And the bitter
bread they weigh in scales Is full of chalk
and lime, And Sleep will not lie down, but
walks Wild-eyed, and cries to Time.

But though lean Hunger and green Thirst
Like asp with adder fight, We have little
care of prison fare, For what chills and kills
outright Is that every stone one lifts by day
Becomes one's heart by night.

With midnight always in one's heart, And
twilight in one's cell, We turn the crank, or
tear the rope, Each in his separate Hell,
And the silence is more awful far Than the
sound of a brazen bell.

And never a human voice comes near To
speak a gentle word: And the eye that
watches through the door Is pitiless and
hard: And by all forgot, we rot and rot,
With soul and body marred.

And thus we rust Life's iron chain
Degraded and alone: And some men
curse, and some men weep, And some
men make no moan: But God's eternal
Laws are kind And break the heart of
stone.

And every human heart that breaks, In
prison-cell or yard, Is as that broken box
that gave Its treasure to the Lord, And
filled the unclean leper's house With the
scent of costliest nard.

Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
And peace of pardon win! How else may
man make straight his plan And cleanse
his soul from Sin? How else but through a
broken heart May Lord Christ enter in?

And he of the swollen purple throat, And
the stark and staring eyes, Waits for the

holy hands that took The Thief to Paradise;
And a broken and a contrite heart The
Lord will not despise.

The man in red who reads the Law Gave
him three weeks of life, Three little weeks
in which to heal His soul of his soul's strife,
And cleanse from every blot of blood The
hand that held the knife.

And with tears of blood he cleansed the
hand, The hand that held the steel: For
only blood can wipe out blood, And only
tears can heal: And the crimson stain that
was of Cain Became Christ's snow-white
seal.

VI

In Reading gaol by Reading town There is

a pit of shame, And in it lies a wretched
man Eaten by teeth of flame, In a burning
winding-sheet he lies, And his grave has
got no name.

And there, till Christ call forth the dead, In
silence let him lie: No need to waste the
foolish tear, Or heave the windy sigh: The
man had killed the thing he loved, And so
he had to die.

And all men kill the thing they love, By all
let this be heard, Some do it with a bitter
look, Some with a flattering word, The
coward does it with a kiss, The brave man
with a sword!

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL

[A version based on the original draft of the poem]

I

He did not wear his scarlet coat, For blood
and wine are red, And blood and wine
were on his hands When they found him
with the dead, The poor dead woman
whom he loved, And murdered in her bed.

He walked amongst the Trial Men In a suit
of shabby grey; A cricket cap was on his
head, And his step seemed light and gay;
But I never saw a man who looked So
wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked With such a
wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky, And at every
drifting cloud that went With sails of silver

by.

I walked, with other souls in pain, Within
another ring, And was wondering if the
man had done A great or little thing, When
a voice behind me whispered low, 'THAT
FELLOW'S GOT TO SWING.'

Dear Christ! the very prison walls
Suddenly seemed to reel, And the sky
above my head became Like a casque of
scorching steel; And, though I was a soul in
pain, My pain I could not feel.

I only knew what hunted thought
Quickened his step, and why He looked
upon the garish day With such a wistful
eye; The man had killed the thing he
loved, And so he had to die.

Yet each man kills the thing he loves, By
each let this be heard, Some do it with a

bitter look, Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss, The brave
man with a sword!

Some kill their love when they are young,
And some when they are old; Some
strangle with the hands of Lust, Some with
the hands of Gold: The kindest use a knife,
because The dead so soon grow cold.

Some love too little, some too long, Some
sell, and others buy; Some do the deed
with many tears, And some without a sigh:
For each man kills the thing he loves, Yet
each man does not die.

He does not die a death of shame On a day
of dark disgrace, Nor have a noose about
his neck, Nor a cloth upon his face, Nor
drop feet foremost through the floor Into
an empty space.

He does not wake at dawn to see Dread
figures throng his room, The shivering
Chaplain robed in white, The Sheriff stern
with gloom, And the Governor all in shiny
black, With the yellow face of Doom.

He does not rise in piteous haste To put on
convict-clothes, While some
coarse-mouthed Doctor gloats, and notes
Each new and nerve-twitched pose,
Fingering a watch whose little ticks Are
like horrible hammer-blows.

He does not know that sickening thirst That
sands one's throat, before The hangman
with his gardener's gloves Slips through
the padded door, And binds one with
three leathern thongs, That the throat may
thirst no more.

He does not bend his head to hear The
Burial Office read, Nor, while the terror of

his soul Tells him he is not dead, Cross his
own coffin, as he moves Into the hideous
shed.

He does not stare upon the air Through a
little roof of glass: He does not pray with
lips of clay For his agony to pass; Nor feel
upon his shuddering cheek The kiss of
Caiaphas.

II

Six weeks our guardsman walked the yard,
In the suit of shabby grey: His cricket cap
was on his head, And his step seemed light
and gay, But I never saw a man who looked
So wistfully at the day.

He did not wring his hands nor weep, Nor
did he peek or pine, But he drank the air

as though it held Some healthful anodyne;
With open mouth he drank the sun As
though it had been wine!

And I and all the souls in pain, Who
tramped the other ring, Forgot if we
ourselves had done A great or little thing,
And watched with gaze of dull amaze The
man who had to swing.

So with curious eyes and sick surmise We
watched him day by day, And wondered if
each one of us Would end the self-same
way, For none can tell to what red Hell His
sightless soul may stray.

At last the dead man walked no more
Amongst the Trial Men, And I knew that he
was standing up In the black dock's
dreadful pen, And that never would I see
his face In God's sweet world again.

Like two doomed ships that pass in storm
We had crossed each other's way: But we
made no sign, we said no word, We had no
word to say; For we did not meet in the
holy night, But in the shameful day.

A prison wall was round us both, Two
outcast men we were: The world had thrust
us from its heart, And God from out His
care: And the iron gin that waits for Sin
Had caught us in its snare.

III

In Debtors' Yard the stones are hard, And
the dripping wall is high, So it was there he
took the air Beneath the leaden sky, And
by each side a Warder walked, For fear
the man might die.

Or else he sat with those who watched His
anguish night and day; Who watched him
when he rose to weep, And when he
crouched to pray; Who watched him lest
himself should rob Their scaffold of its
prey.

And twice a day he smoked his pipe, And
drank his quart of beer: His soul was
resolute, and held No hiding-place for
fear; He often said that he was glad The
hangman's hands were near.

But why he said so strange a thing No
Warder dared to ask: For he to whom a
watcher's doom Is given as his task, Must
set a lock upon his lips, And make his face
a mask.

With slouch and swing around the ring We
trod the Fools' Parade! We did not care:
we knew we were The Devil's Own

Brigade: And shaven head and feet of lead
Make a merry masquerade.

We tore the tarry rope to shreds With
blunt and bleeding nails; We rubbed the
doors, and scrubbed the floors, And
cleaned the shining rails: And, rank by
rank, we soaped the plank, And clattered
with the pails.

We sewed the sacks, we broke the stones,
We turned the dusty drill: We banged the
tins, and bawled the hymns, And sweated
on the mill: But in the heart of every man
Terror was lying still.

So still it lay that every day Crawled like a
weed-clogged wave: And we forgot the
bitter lot That waits for fool and knave, Till
once, as we tramped in from work, We
passed an open grave.

Right in we went, with soul intent On Death
and Dread and Doom: The hangman, with
his little bag, Went shuffling through the
gloom: And each man trembled as he
crept Into his numbered tomb.

That night the empty corridors Were full of
forms of Fear, And up and down the iron
town Stole feet we could not hear, And
through the bars that hide the stars White
faces seemed to peer.

But there is no sleep when men must weep
Who never yet have wept: So we - the fool,
the fraud, the knave - That endless vigil
kept, And through each brain on hands of
pain Another's terror crept.

Alas! it is a fearful thing To feel another's
guilt! For, right within, the sword of Sin
Pierced to its poisoned hilt, And as molten
lead were the tears we shed For the blood

we had not spilt.

The Warders with their shoes of felt Crept
by each padlocked door, And peeped and
saw, with eyes of awe, Grey figures on the
floor, And wondered why men knelt to
pray Who never prayed before.

The morning wind began to moan, But still
the night went on: Through its giant loom
the web of gloom Crept till each thread
was spun: And, as we prayed, we grew
afraid Of the Justice of the Sun.

At last I saw the shadowed bars, Like a
lattice wrought in lead, Move right across
the whitewashed wall That faced my
three-plank bed, And I knew that
somewhere in the world God's dreadful
dawn was red.

At six o'clock we cleaned our cells, At

seven all was still, But the sough and swing
of a mighty wing The prison seemed to fill,
For the Lord of Death with icy breath Had
entered in to kill.

He did not pass in purple pomp, Nor ride a
moon-white steed. Three yards of cord and
a sliding board Are all the gallows' need:
So with rope of shame the Herald came To
do the secret deed.

We waited for the stroke of eight: Each
tongue was thick with thirst: For the stroke
of eight is the stroke of Fate That makes a
man accursed, And Fate will use a running
noose For the best man and the worst.

We had no other thing to do, Save to wait
for the sign to come: So, like things of
stone in a valley lone, Quiet we sat and
dumb: But each man's heart beat thick and
quick, Like a madman on a drum!

With sudden shock the prison-clock Smote
on the shivering air, And from all the gaol
rose up a wail Of impotent despair, Like
the sound that frightened marshes hear
From some leper in his lair.

And as one sees most fearful things In the
crystal of a dream, We saw the greasy
hempen rope Hooked to the blackened
beam, And heard the prayer the
hangman's snare Strangled into a scream.

And all the woe that moved him so That he
gave that bitter cry, And the wild regrets,
and the bloody sweats, None knew so well
as I: For he who lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die.

There is no chapel on the day On which
they hang a man: The Chaplain's heart is
far too sick, Or his face is far too wan, Or
there is that written in his eyes Which none
should look upon.

So they kept us close till nigh on noon, And
then they rang the bell, And the Warders
with their jingling keys Opened each
listening cell, And down the iron stair we
tramped, Each from his separate Hell.

Out into God's sweet air we went, But not
in wonted way, For this man's face was
white with fear, And that man's face was
grey, And I never saw sad men who
looked So wistfully at the day.

I never saw sad men who looked With such
a wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue
We prisoners called the sky, And at every

careless cloud that passed In happy
freedom by.

But there were those amongst us all Who
walked with downcast head, And knew
that, had each got his due, They should
have died instead: He had but killed a
thing that lived, Whilst they had killed the
dead.

For he who sins a second time Wakes a
dead soul to pain, And draws it from its
spotted shroud, And makes it bleed again,
And makes it bleed great gouts of blood,
And makes it bleed in vain!

Like ape or clown, in monstrous garb With
crooked arrows starred, Silently we went
round and round The slippery asphalte
yard; Silently we went round and round,
And no man spoke a word.

Silently we went round and round, And
through each hollow mind The Memory of
dreadful things Rushed like a dreadful
wind, And Horror stalked before each
man, And Terror crept behind.

The Warders strutted up and down, And
kept their herd of brutes, Their uniforms
were spick and span, And they wore their
Sunday suits, But we knew the work they
had been at, By the quicklime on their
boots.

For where a grave had opened wide,
There was no grave at all: Only a stretch of
mud and sand By the hideous prison-wall,
And a little heap of burning lime, That the
man should have his pall.

For he has a pall, this wretched man, Such
as few men can claim: Deep down below a
prison-yard, Naked for greater shame, He

lies, with fetters on each foot, Wrapt in a sheet of flame!

For three long years they will not sow Or root or seedling there: For three long years the unblessed spot Will sterile be and bare, And look upon the wondering sky With unreproachful stare.

They think a murderer's heart would taint Each simple seed they sow. It is not true! God's kindly earth Is kindlier than men know, And the red rose would but blow more red, The white rose whiter blow.

Out of his mouth a red, red rose! Out of his heart a white! For who can say by what strange way, Christ brings His will to light, Since the barren staff the pilgrim bore Bloomed in the great Pope's sight?

But neither milk-white rose nor red May

bloom in prison-air; The shard, the
pebble, and the flint, Are what they give us
there: For flowers have been known to
heal A common man's despair.

So never will wine-red rose or white, Petal
by petal, fall On that stretch of mud and
sand that lies By the hideous prison-wall,
To tell the men who tramp the yard That
God's Son died for all.

He is at peace - this wretched man - At
peace, or will be soon: There is no thing to
make him mad, Nor does Terror walk at
noon, For the lampless Earth in which he
lies Has neither Sun nor Moon.

The Chaplain would not kneel to pray By
his dishonoured grave: Nor mark it with
that blessed Cross That Christ for sinners
gave, Because the man was one of those
Whom Christ came down to save.

Yet all is well; he has but passed To Life's
appointed bourne: And alien tears will fill
for him Pity's long-broken urn, For his
mourners will be outcast men, And
outcasts always mourn.

Poem:

Ave

Imperatrix

Set in this stormy Northern sea, Queen of
these restless fields of tide, England! what
shall men say of thee, Before whose feet
the worlds divide?

The earth, a brittle globe of glass, Lies in
the hollow of thy hand, And through its
heart of crystal pass, Like shadows through
a twilight land,

The spears of crimson-suited war, The long
white-crested waves of fight, And all the
deadly fires which are The torches of the
lords of Night.

The yellow leopards, strained and lean,
The treacherous Russian knows so well,
With gaping blackened jaws are seen
Leap through the hail of screaming shell.

The strong sea-lion of England's wars Hath
left his sapphire cave of sea, To battle with

the storm that mars The stars of England's
chivalry.

The brazen-throated clarion blows Across
the Pathan's reedy fen, And the high steep
of Indian snows Shake to the tread of
armed men.

And many an Afghan chief, who lies
Beneath his cool pomegranate-trees,
Clutches his sword in fierce surmise When
on the mountain-side he sees

The fleet-foot Marri scout, who comes To
tell how he hath heard afar The measured
roll of English drums Beat at the gates of
Kandahar.

For southern wind and east wind meet
Where, girt and crowned by sword and
fire, England with bare and bloody feet
Climbs the steep road of wide empire.

O lonely Himalayan height, Grey pillar of
the Indian sky, Where saw'st thou last in
clanging flight Our winged dogs of
Victory?

The almond-groves of Samarcand,
Bokhara, where red lilies blow, And Oxus,
by whose yellow sand The grave
white-turbaned merchants go:

And on from thence to Ispahan, The gilded
garden of the sun, Whence the long dusty
caravan Brings cedar wood and vermilion;

And that dread city of Cabool Set at the
mountain's scarp'd feet, Whose marble
tanks are ever full With water for the
noonday heat:

Where through the narrow straight Bazaar
A little maid Circassian Is led, a present

from the Czar Unto some old and bearded
Khan, -

Here have our wild war-eagles flown, And
flapped wide wings in fiery fight; But the
sad dove, that sits alone In England - she
hath no delight.

In vain the laughing girl will lean To greet
her love with love-lit eyes: Down in some
treacherous black ravine, Clutching his
flag, the dead boy lies.

And many a moon and sun will see The
lingering wistful children wait To climb
upon their father's knee; And in each
house made desolate

Pale women who have lost their lord Will
kiss the relics of the slain - Some tarnished
epaulette - some sword - Poor toys to
soothe such anguished pain.

For not in quiet English fields Are these,
our brothers, lain to rest, Where we might
deck their broken shields With all the
flowers the dead love best.

For some are by the Delhi walls, And many
in the Afghan land, And many where the
Ganges falls Through seven mouths of
shifting sand.

And some in Russian waters lie, And others
in the seas which are The portals to the
East, or by The wind-swept heights of
Trafalgar.

O wandering graves! O restless sleep! O
silence of the sunless day! O still ravine! O
stormy deep! Give up your prey! Give up
your prey!

And thou whose wounds are never healed,

Whose weary race is never won, O
Cromwell's England! must thou yield For
every inch of ground a son?

Go! crown with thorns thy gold-crowned
head, Change thy glad song to song of
pain; Wind and wild wave have got thy
dead, And will not yield them back again.

Wave and wild wind and foreign shore
Possess the flower of English land - Lips
that thy lips shall kiss no more, Hands that
shall never clasp thy hand.

What profit now that we have bound The
whole round world with nets of gold, If
hidden in our heart is found The care that
groweth never old?

What profit that our galleys ride,
Pine-forest-like, on every main? Ruin and
wreck are at our side, Grim warders of the

House of Pain.

Where are the brave, the strong, the fleet?
Where is our English chivalry? Wild
grasses are their burial-sheet, And
sobbing waves their threnody.

O loved ones lying far away, What word of
love can dead lips send! O wasted dust! O
senseless clay! Is this the end! is this the
end!

Peace, peace! we wrong the noble dead
To vex their solemn slumber so; Though
childless, and with thorn-crowned head,
Up the steep road must England go,

Yet when this fiery web is spun, Her
watchmen shall descry from far The young
Republic like a sun Rise from these
crimson seas of war.

Poem: To My Wife - With A Copy Of My Poems

I can write no stately proem As a prelude
to my lay; From a poet to a poem I would
dare to say.

For if of these fallen petals One to you
seem fair, Love will waft it till it settles On
your hair.

And when wind and winter harden All the
loveless land, It will whisper of the garden,
You will understand.

Poem:

Magdalen

Walks

[After gaining the Berkeley Gold Medal for Greek at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1874, Oscar Wilde proceeded to Oxford, where he obtained a demyship at Magdalen College. He is the only real poet on the books of that institution.]

The little white clouds are racing over the sky,
And the fields are strewn with the gold of the flower of March,
The daffodil breaks under foot, and the tasselled larch
Sways and swings as the thrush goes hurrying by.

A delicate odour is borne on the wings of the morning breeze,
The odour of deep wet grass, and of brown new-furrowed earth,
The birds are singing for joy of the Spring's glad birth,
Hopping from branch to branch on the rocking trees.

And all the woods are alive with the
murmur and sound of Spring, And the
rose-bud breaks into pink on the climbing
briar, And the crocus-bed is a quivering
moon of fire Girdled round with the belt of
an amethyst ring.

And the plane to the pine-tree is
whispering some tale of love Till it rustles
with laughter and tosses its mantle of
green, And the gloom of the wych-elm's
hollow is lit with the iris sheen Of the
burnished rainbow throat and the silver
breast of a dove.

See! the lark starts up from his bed in the
meadow there, Breaking the gossamer
threads and the nets of dew, And flashing
adown the river, a flame of blue! The
kingfisher flies like an arrow, and wounds
the air.

Poem: Theocritus - A Villanelle

O singer of Persephone! In the dim
meadows desolate Dost thou remember
Sicily?

Still through the ivy flits the bee Where
Amaryllis lies in state; O Singer of
Persephone!

Simaetha calls on Hecate And hears the
wild dogs at the gate; Dost thou remember
Sicily?

Still by the light and laughing sea Poor
Polypheme bemoans his fate; O Singer of
Persephone!

And still in boyish rivalry Young Daphnis
challenges his mate; Dost thou remember
Sicily?

Slim Lacon keeps a goat for thee, For thee
the jocund shepherds wait; O Singer of

Persephone! Dost thou remember Sicily?

Poem:

Greece

The sea was sapphire coloured, and the sky
Burned like a heated opal through the air;
We hoisted sail; the wind was blowing fair
For the blue lands that to the eastward lie.
From the steep prow I marked with quickening eye
Zakynthos, every olive grove and creek,
Ithaca's cliff, Lycaon's snowy peak,
And all the flower-strewn hills of Arcady.
The flapping of the sail against the mast,
The ripple of the water on the side,
The ripple of girls' laughter at the stern,
The only sounds:- when 'gan the West to burn,
And a red sun upon the seas to ride,
I stood upon the soil of Greece at last!

KATAKOLO.

Poem:

Portia

(To Ellen Terry. Written at the Lyceum Theatre)

I marvel not Bassanio was so bold To peril
all he had upon the lead, Or that proud
Aragon bent low his head Or that
Morocco's fiery heart grew cold: For in that
gorgeous dress of beaten gold Which is
more golden than the golden sun No
woman Veronese looked upon Was half so
fair as thou whom I behold. Yet fairer when
with wisdom as your shield The
sober-suited lawyer's gown you donned,
And would not let the laws of Venice yield
Antonio's heart to that accursed Jew - O
Portia! take my heart: it is thy due: I think I
will not quarrel with the Bond.

Poem:	Fabien	Dei	Franchi
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(To my Friend Henry Irving)

The silent room, the heavy creeping
shade, The dead that travel fast, the
opening door, The murdered brother
rising through the floor, The ghost's white
fingers on thy shoulders laid, And then the
lonely duel in the glade, The broken
swords, the stifled scream, the gore, Thy
grand revengeful eyes when all is o'er, -
These things are well enough, - but thou
wert made For more august creation!
frenzied Lear Should at thy bidding
wander on the heath With the shrill fool to
mock him, Romeo For thee should lure his
love, and desperate fear Pluck Richard's
recreant dagger from its sheath - Thou
trumpet set for Shakespeare's lips to blow!

Poem:

Phedre

(To Sarah Bernhardt)

How vain and dull this common world must
seem To such a One as thou, who should'st
have talked At Florence with Mirandola, or
walked Through the cool olives of the
Academe: Thou should'st have gathered
reeds from a green stream For Goat-foot
Pan's shrill piping, and have played With
the white girls in that Phaeacian glade
Where grave Odysseus wakened from his
dream.

Ah! surely once some urn of Attic clay Held
thy wan dust, and thou hast come again
Back to this common world so dull and
vain, For thou wert weary of the sunless
day, The heavy fields of scentless
asphodel, The loveless lips with which
men kiss in Hell.

Poem: Sonnet On Hearing The Dies Irae
Sung In The Sistine Chapel

Nay, Lord, not thus! white lilies in the
spring, Sad olive-groves, or
silver-breasted dove, Teach me more
clearly of Thy life and love Than terrors of
red flame and thundering. The hillside
vines dear memories of Thee bring: A bird
at evening flying to its nest Tells me of One
who had no place of rest: I think it is of
Thee the sparrows sing. Come rather on
some autumn afternoon, When red and
brown are burnished on the leaves, And
the fields echo to the gleaner's song, Come
when the splendid fulness of the moon
Looks down upon the rows of golden
sheaves, And reap Thy harvest: we have
waited long.

Poem: Ave Maria Gratia Plena

Was this His coming! I had hoped to see A
scene of wondrous glory, as was told Of
some great God who in a rain of gold
Broke open bars and fell on Danae: Or a
dread vision as when Semele Sickening for
love and unappeased desire Prayed to see
God's clear body, and the fire Caught her
brown limbs and slew her utterly: With
such glad dreams I sought this holy place,
And now with wondering eyes and heart I
stand Before this supreme mystery of Love:
Some kneeling girl with passionless pale
face, An angel with a lily in his hand, And
over both the white wings of a Dove.

FLORENCE.

Poem: Libertatis Sacra Fames

Albeit nurtured in democracy, And liking
best that state republican Where every
man is Kinglike and no man Is crowned
above his fellows, yet I see, Spite of this
modern fret for Liberty, Better the rule of
One, whom all obey, Than to let clamorous
demagogues betray Our freedom with the
kiss of anarchy. Wherefore I love them not
whose hands profane Plant the red flag
upon the piled-up street For no right
cause, beneath whose ignorant reign Arts,
Culture, Reverence, Honour, all things
fade, Save Treason and the dagger of her
trade, Or Murder with his silent bloody
feet.

Poem:

Roses

And

Rue

(To L. L.)

Could we dig up this long-buried treasure,
Were it worth the pleasure, We never
could learn love's song, We are parted too
long.

Could the passionate past that is fled Call
back its dead, Could we live it all over
again, Were it worth the pain!

I remember we used to meet By an ivied
seat, And you warbled each pretty word
With the air of a bird;

And your voice had a quaver in it, Just like
a linnet, And shook, as the blackbird's
throat With its last big note;

And your eyes, they were green and grey
Like an April day, But lit into amethyst

When I stooped and kissed;

And your mouth, it would never smile For
a long, long while, Then it rippled all over
with laughter Five minutes after.

You were always afraid of a shower, Just
like a flower: I remember you started and
ran When the rain began.

I remember I never could catch you, For
no one could match you, You had
wonderful, luminous, fleet, Little wings to
your feet.

I remember your hair - did I tie it? For it
always ran riot - Like a tangled sunbeam of
gold: These things are old.

I remember so well the room, And the lilac
bloom That beat at the dripping pane In
the warm June rain;

And the colour of your gown, It was
amber-brown, And two yellow satin bows
From your shoulders rose.

And the handkerchief of French lace
Which you held to your face - Had a small
tear left a stain? Or was it the rain?

On your hand as it waved adieu There
were veins of blue; In your voice as it said
good-bye Was a petulant cry,

'You have only wasted your life.' (Ah, that
was the knife!) When I rushed through the
garden gate It was all too late.

Could we live it over again, Were it worth
the pain, Could the passionate past that is
fled Call back its dead!

Well, if my heart must break, Dear love,

for your sake, It will break in music, I
know, Poets' hearts break so.

But strange that I was not told That the
brain can hold In a tiny ivory cell God's
heaven and hell.

Poem: From 'The Garden Of Eros'

[In this poem the author laments the growth of materialism in the nineteenth century. He hails Keats and Shelley and some of the poets and artists who were his contemporaries, although his seniors, as the torch-bearers of the intellectual life. Among these are Swinburne, William Morris, Rossetti, and Brune-Jones.]

Nay, when Keats died the Muses still had
left One silver voice to sing his threnody,
{1} But ah! too soon of it we were bereft
When on that riven night and stormy sea
Panthea claimed her singer as her own,
And slew the mouth that praised her; since
which time we walk alone,

Save for that fiery heart, that morning star
{2} Of re-arisen England, whose clear eye
Saw from our tottering throne and waste of
war The grand Greek limbs of young

Democracy Rise mightily like Hesperus
and bring The great Republic! him at least
thy love hath taught to sing,

And he hath been with thee at Thessaly,
And seen white Atalanta fleet of foot In
passionless and fierce virginity Hunting
the tusked boar, his honied lute Hath
pierced the cavern of the hollow hill, And
Venus laughs to know one knee will bow
before her still.

And he hath kissed the lips of Proserpine,
And sung the Galilaean's requiem, That
wounded forehead dashed with blood and
wine He hath discrowned, the Ancient
Gods in him Have found their last, most
ardent worshipper, And the new Sign
grows grey and dim before its conqueror.

Spirit of Beauty! tarry with us still, It is not
quenched the torch of poesy, The star that

shook above the Eastern hill Holds
unassailed its argent armoury From all the
gathering gloom and fretful fight - O tarry
with us still! for through the long and
common night,

Morris, our sweet and simple Chaucer's
child, Dear heritor of Spenser's tuneful
reed, With soft and sylvan pipe has oft
beguiled The weary soul of man in
troublous need, And from the far and
flowerless fields of ice Has brought fair
flowers to make an earthly paradise.

We know them all, Gudrun the strong
men's bride, Aslaug and Olafson we know
them all, How giant Grettir fought and
Sigurd died, And what enchantment held
the king in thrall When lonely Brynhild
wrestled with the powers That war against
all passion, ah! how oft through summer
hours,

Long listless summer hours when the noon
Being enamoured of a damask rose
Forgets to journey westward, till the moon
The pale usurper of its tribute grows From
a thin sickle to a silver shield And chides
its loitering car - how oft, in some cool
grassy field

Far from the cricket-ground and noisy
eight, At Bagley, where the rustling
bluebells come Almost before the
blackbird finds a mate And overstay the
swallow, and the hum Of many murmuring
bees flits through the leaves, Have I lain
poring on the dreamy tales his fancy
weaves,

And through their unreal woes and mimic
pain Wept for myself, and so was purified,
And in their simple mirth grew glad again;
For as I sailed upon that pictured tide The

strength and splendour of the storm was
mine Without the storm's red ruin, for the
singer is divine;

The little laugh of water falling down Is not
so musical, the clammy gold Close
hoarded in the tiny waxen town Has less of
sweetness in it, and the old Half-withered
reeds that waved in Arcady Touched by
his lips break forth again to fresher
harmony.

Spirit of Beauty, tarry yet awhile! Although
the cheating merchants of the mart With
iron roads profane our lovely isle, And
break on whirling wheels the limbs of Art,
Ay! though the crowded factories beget
The blindworm Ignorance that slays the
soul, O tarry yet!

For One at least there is, - He bears his

name From Dante and the seraph Gabriel,
{3} - Whose double laurels burn with
deathless flame To light thine altar; He {4}
too loves thee well, Who saw old Merlin
lured in Vivien's snare, And the white feet
of angels coming down the golden stair,

Loves thee so well, that all the World for
him A gorgeous-coloured vestiture must
wear, And Sorrow take a purple diadem,
Or else be no more Sorrow, and Despair
Gild its own thorns, and Pain, like Adon,
be Even in anguish beautiful; - such is the
emperry

Which Painters hold, and such the heritage
This gentle solemn Spirit doth possess,
Being a better mirror of his age In all his
pity, love, and weariness, Than those who
can but copy common things, And leave
the Soul unpainted with its mighty
questionings.

But they are few, and all romance has
flown, And men can prophesy about the
sun, And lecture on his arrows - how,
alone, Through a waste void the soulless
atoms run, How from each tree its weeping
nymph has fled, And that no more 'mid
English reeds a Naiad shows her head.

Poem: The Harlot's House

We caught the tread of dancing feet, We
loitered down the moonlit street, And
stopped beneath the harlot's house.

Inside, above the din and fray, We heard
the loud musicians play The 'Treues Liebes
Herz' of Strauss.

Like strange mechanical grotesques,
Making fantastic arabesques, The shadows
raced across the blind.

We watched the ghostly dancers spin To
sound of horn and violin, Like black leaves
wheeling in the wind.

Like wire-pulled automatons, Slim
silhouetted skeletons Went sidling through
the slow quadrille,

Then took each other by the hand, And
danced a stately saraband; Their laughter

echoed thin and shrill.

Sometimes a clockwork puppet pressed A
phantom lover to her breast, Sometimes
they seemed to try to sing.

Sometimes a horrible marionette Came
out, and smoked its cigarette Upon the
steps like a live thing.

Then, turning to my love, I said, 'The dead
are dancing with the dead, The dust is
whirling with the dust.'

But she - she heard the violin, And left my
side, and entered in: Love passed into the
house of lust.

Then suddenly the tune went false, The
dancers wearied of the waltz, The shadows
ceased to wheel and whirl.

And down the long and silent street, The
dawn, with silver-sandalled feet, Crept
like a frightened girl.

Poem: From 'The Burden Of Itys'

This English Thames is holier far than
Rome, Those harebells like a sudden flush
of sea Breaking across the woodland, with
the foam Of meadow-sweet and white
anemone To fleck their blue waves, - God
is likelier there Than hidden in that
crystal-hearted star the pale monks bear!

Those violet-gleaming butterflies that take
Yon creamy lily for their pavilion Are
monsignores, and where the rushes shake
A lazy pike lies basking in the sun, His
eyes half shut, - he is some mitred old
Bishop in PARTIBUS! look at those gaudy
scales all green and gold.

The wind the restless prisoner of the trees
Does well for Palaestrina, one would say
The mighty master's hands were on the
keys Of the Maria organ, which they play
When early on some sapphire Easter morn
In a high litter red as blood or sin the Pope

is borne

From his dark House out to the Balcony
Above the bronze gates and the crowded
square, Whose very fountains seem for
ecstasy To toss their silver lances in the
air, And stretching out weak hands to East
and West In vain sends peace to peaceless
lands, to restless nations rest.

Is not yon lingering orange after-glow That
stays to vex the moon more fair than all
Rome's lordliest pageants! strange, a year
ago I knelt before some crimson Cardinal
Who bare the Host across the Esquiline,
And now - those common poppies in the
wheat seem twice as fine.

The blue-green beanfields yonder,
tremulous With the last shower, sweeter
perfume bring Through this cool evening
than the odorous Flame-jewelled censers

the young deacons swing, When the grey
priest unlocks the curtained shrine, And
makes God's body from the common fruit
of corn and vine.

Poor Fra Giovanni bawling at the Mass
Were out of tune now, for a small brown
bird Sings overhead, and through the long
cool grass I see that throbbing throat
which once I heard On starlit hills of
flower-starred Arcady, Once where the
white and crescent sand of Salamis meets
sea.

Sweet is the swallow twittering on the
eaves At daybreak, when the mower whets
his scythe, And stock-doves murmur, and
the milkmaid leaves Her little lonely bed,
and carols blithe To see the heavy-lowing
cattle wait Stretching their huge and
dripping mouths across the farmyard gate.

And sweet the hops upon the Kentish leas,
And sweet the wind that lifts the
new-mown hay, And sweet the fretful
swarms of grumbling bees That round and
round the linden blossoms play; And
sweet the heifer breathing in the stall, And
the green bursting figs that hang upon the
red-brick wall,

And sweet to hear the cuckoo mock the
spring While the last violet loiters by the
well, And sweet to hear the shepherd
Daphnis sing The song of Linus through a
sunny dell Of warm Arcadia where the
corn is gold And the slight lithe-limbed
reapers dance about the wattled fold.

* * * * *

It was a dream, the glade is tenantless, No
soft Ionian laughter moves the air, The
Thames creeps on in sluggish leadenness,

And from the copse left desolate and bare
Fled is young Bacchus with his revelry, Yet
still from Nuneham wood there comes that
thrilling melody

So sad, that one might think a human heart
Break in each separate note, a quality
Which music sometimes has, being the Art
Which is most nigh to tears and memory;
Poor mourning Philomel, what dost thou
fear? Thy sister doth not haunt these fields,
Pandion is not here,

Here is no cruel Lord with murderous
blade, No woven web of bloody
heraldries, But mossy dells for roving
comrades made, Warm valleys where the
tired student lies With half-shut book, and
many a winding walk Where rustic lovers
stray at eve in happy simple talk.

The harmless rabbit gambols with its

young Across the trampled towing-path,
where late A troop of laughing boys in
jostling throng Cheered with their noisy
cries the racing eight; The gossamer, with
ravelled silver threads, Works at its little
loom, and from the dusky red-eaved sheds

Of the lone Farm a flickering light shines
out Where the swinked shepherd drives
his bleating flock Back to their wattled
sheep-cotes, a faint shout Comes from
some Oxford boat at Sandford lock, And
starts the moor-hen from the sedgy rill,
And the dim lengthening shadows flit like
swallows up the hill.

The heron passes homeward to the mere,
The blue mist creeps among the shivering
trees, Gold world by world the silent stars
appear, And like a blossom blown before
the breeze A white moon drifts across the
shimmering sky, Mute arbitress of all thy

sad, thy rapturous threnody.

She does not heed thee, wherefore should
she heed, She knows Endymion is not far
away; 'Tis I, 'tis I, whose soul is as the reed
Which has no message of its own to play,
So pipes another's bidding, it is I, Drifting
with every wind on the wide sea of misery.

Ah! the brown bird has ceased: one
exquisite trill About the sombre woodland
seems to cling Dying in music, else the air
is still, So still that one might hear the bat's
small wing Wander and wheel above the
pines, or tell Each tiny dew-drop dripping
from the bluebell's brimming cell.

And far away across the lengthening wold,
Across the willowy flats and thickets
brown, Magdalen's tall tower tipped with
tremulous gold Marks the long High Street
of the little town, And warns me to return; I

must not wait, Hark ! 't is the curfew
booming from the bell at Christ Church
gate.

Poem: Flower of Love

Sweet, I blame you not, for mine the fault
was, had I not been made of common clay I
had climbed the higher heights unclimbed
yet, seen the fuller air, the larger day.

From the wildness of my wasted passion I
had struck a better, clearer song, Lit some
lighter light of freer freedom, battled with
some Hydra-headed wrong.

Had my lips been smitten into music by the
kisses that but made them bleed, You had
walked with Bice and the angels on that
verdant and enamelled mead.

I had trod the road which Dante treading
saw the suns of seven circles shine, Ay!
perchance had seen the heavens opening,
as they opened to the Florentine.

And the mighty nations would have
crowned me, who am crownless now and

without name, And some orient dawn had
found me kneeling on the threshold of the
House of Fame.

I had sat within that marble circle where
the oldest bard is as the young, And the
pipe is ever dropping honey, and the
lyre's strings are ever strung.

Keats had lifted up his hymeneal curls from
out the poppy-seeded wine, With
ambrosial mouth had kissed my forehead,
clasped the hand of noble love in mine.

And at springtide, when the
apple-blossoms brush the burnished
bosom of the dove, Two young lovers lying
in an orchard would have read the story of
our love;

Would have read the legend of my
passion, known the bitter secret of my

heart, Kissed as we have kissed, but never parted as we two are fated now to part.

For the crimson flower of our life is eaten by the cankerworm of truth, And no hand can gather up the fallen withered petals of the rose of youth.

Yet I am not sorry that I loved you - ah! what else had I a boy to do, - For the hungry teeth of time devour, and the silent-footed years pursue.

Rudderless, we drift athwart a tempest, and when once the storm of youth is past, Without lyre, without lute or chorus, Death the silent pilot comes at last.

And within the grave there is no pleasure, for the blindworm battens on the root, And Desire shudders into ashes, and the tree of Passion bears no fruit.

Ah! what else had I to do but love you?
God's own mother was less dear to me,
And less dear the Cytheraeon rising like
an argent lily from the sea.

I have made my choice, have lived my
poems, and, though youth is gone in
wasted days, I have found the lover's
crown of myrtle better than the poet's
crown of bays.

Footnotes:

{1} Shelley {2} Swinburne {3} Rossetti {4}
Burne-Jones

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