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A first collection of poems by a writer whose work, published in war-time anthologies, has already attracted notice. In their strength, economy, and directness, their concentration of thought and feeling, these poems are at times reminiscent of Emily Bronte. The influence of Rilke, too, is apparent. The subject of many of them is the human situation and the inherent bias there towards catastrophe. The fate with which man's own inventions threaten him to-day is seen to be different only in degree, not in kind, from that which has always shadowed him, and which overtook those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell. Miss Cruickshank looks past the narrow cages of this world's despair, however, to a view of life which, though grim, is not pessimistic.

IN THE TOWER'S SHADO

IN THE TOWER'S SHADOW

N. K. Cruickshank

GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE
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*To my
Father and Mother*

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Now that the Sun has Power

Now that the sun has power,
Once more, to tan the skin and make wool hateful
And chill streams dear to touch; now that, once more,
First heat-wave weather swings our wall-cut lives
Like the toy, timepiece figures, inside-out:
Brings airy coolness in,
And chink of tea-cups to the glowing lawn;
Now that the casual tea-time talk and laughter
Is backed for miles by birds' tiered orchestra—
Flute notes and bells, deep ripples, drops, jets and,
High, linkt sweet sprinkling buttercups of sound—
Just as at last Spring's flowery end:
We think of you who young and laughing then
Lazed on the grass with us, and now do not,
And have so changed; whose image now,
Summoned in thought, reproves and quiets us
Like deed of valour, like a man at prayer,
A soul in pain, one of the very poor.
Now you have gone too near
The vast, unresting dynamos that drive
Love, joy, creation, ever to be idle,
Ever to saunter without aim, like us
Who live in vanity under the sun.

All through that Year

ALL through that year, he, almost still a boy,
Planned, gazed ahead. Time's unsuspected slope
Hooded the sails of gladness and of hope,
As the glass bottle does the full-rigged toy.

This snapshot taken soon before he died—
The smile, the eager look we so well knew—
Perplexes us: we are like children who
Wonder: *How did the tall sails get inside?*

As though the Eye were Death

AS though the eye were Death—
Were death by drowning, were that hole in time
Through which life runs to which the leucocyte years
Of breath and vigour pour, thronging the narrow
Flood-lit corridor of memory—

As though the eye were Death, my love puts round you
Before you come yourself as mirror sequence:
Your face in many moods, words, gestures filled with
Your goodness and your grace
Back to the very salt-fresh verge of childhood.

In case you drown, are for a moment lost:
Lest the calm eye, instant as sudden death,
Sees for one breath an ordinary face:
Bonny; but where the flood, the sword of beauty,
Striking away my rest?

Absence

YOU whose absence was always
A homesick winter term; whose smiled
Greeting was further from my need
Than a cool drink from burning grief;
Whose mild
Affection troubled me like hate—

You have put time to absence
Till surf of anguish seldom breaks
On tune or line or a dream's reef:
The heart so long heaped with your spell
Now wakes,
Knows it will not so pine again.

Though as an artist exiled
From his own people, from a race
Governed by blind intolerant sons,
Hears the world praise him in that tongue
I face
Thoughts, work to you, my audience yet.

The Poet

I DAWDLE idle as a cloud,
I eat the crust of solitude,
My strength wastes in the feeble cold,
I wear my coat of patience out,
Who strike thought on vacant thought
Silently, till dawn begins—

Till an arrow in my head,
Like a highroad, points beyond
Outposts of expectation, and
Puffed-on embers heat the breast
As the suns of love or wine;

Till the son is born, the word,
Arrow in a world of cold:
Man remember your far goal,
Seek the hearth of your own heart;
Molten is the core of love
And the righteous burn like suns.

Emily, Heathcliff and Hareton

SEEING it is my own body
I have created from the crag and heather,
You wearing it are my tremendous rival,
The whole is rival self, keen-envied brother.
My task is an equation here: and as
The narrow garment my girl's body
Hindered the striding intellect—so with you
The clumsy rider your dark intellect
Hinders the arrogant, striding body.
The lover missed by your own fault
Dies unpossessed. Bone, iron sinews,
Turn to cell, hard prison keeping you,
Frenzied with passion, from her ghost.
Your face is sculpted with suffering. I give
That love no peace while it has breath;
No satisfaction till you stand
Bare in Eternity's hill wind.

But as I kill you I am building again
The surly farmer's boy, frowning and silent:
Seeing him now not as the giant rival—
Rather as gently as
A lost brother, or the plain home
Longed for with many tears in absence.

Now wind's wide blade puts colour on the scene—
Soft moorland pastoral, a burn's light
Hum after burly thunder . . .

And soon we leave you in the broad sun,
Humorous, content: digging primrose
Roots for her, your bonny love, Hareton.

Death-History

ALWAYS it swung him with magnetic power,
That mystery beyond the edge of Time;
Long before any loss had shadowed him
It tortured boyhood, baffled his young prime.

Was there a sudden wall? A conscious void?
A land? Could one be sure? He could not say.
His thought wheeled over Death, no eye in it,
Explored directed by fear's far-sent ray.

Then he came nearer. Came, saw for himself
That darkness. Plunged his vision hard, to find
The faintest of blurred contours. Ah, Death changed,
As for the steady peering of mankind

Night's pinpoint mysteries flowered into worlds
Not wholly other nor yet quite unknown:
Built of our atoms, having heat or ice,
Nitrogen, ores, rocks, vapour, like our own.

As though he shouted back thousands of years
And spoke of stars, of our known firmament,
His words tapped on shut eyelids through deaf ears.
Anger and pity pierced him as he went

Arguing with the hand crooked on the trigger,
With the vague lifted blue reposeful stare,
With the short footsteps padding round and round
The narrow cages of this world's despair.

Though often, when all meaning weighed too heavy,
When the long choice was agony too deep,
He envied some their still-life, easy heaven,
Others their faith in a perpetual sleep.

The Walk

UNWINDING the weighty glare from our limbs,
The long, hot scarf of summer streets, we came
To a cinder track between tall hedges
Thick with dust; under a railway bridge
While a goods engine thundered on it; then,
Soon after, weary, to the nursery garden:
To where a man wearing a sack apron
Straightened himself from work as we came in;
To where, with countless whispering lips, green—
Boughs, unmown grass—received and cooled the sun,
Made for itself, as Deity the heart.

Then it was worth it, having come so far.
Flowers hailed us, or were met for the first time.
Spired lupins' many a pinch of salted flame,
Spurred, fluted motley of columbines, whose white,
Mauve, gold, pink, purple, seemed a moat
Of luminous, rainbow-coloured dust,
Their brilliance festive as a thrust
Of hasty soda/bubbles threading milk,
Loosened the calm, withholding air, the sulk
Which dragged back our slow feet. We started to run
Around a bed planted with rhododendron,
Through the silk grass; ventured a step or two
Down mossy paths plunging to caves of shadow,
Promising glens and waters, many a wood,
Not setting out for Manchester Road—

The trams, pubs, tripe-shops, churches—any more
Than paths in pictures lead up to a wall;
Or the mossed exits of our childhood,
Hope's shadowy, enchanted footpaths, led
Our feet to this dull walk:
This long, hot, heavy street of years.

Dives and Lazarus

WHY should we marvel that the two, those neighbours,
The enemy immense fierce cancelling states,
Hail and go near remaining Hell and Heaven:

Are globes the pitiful or thirsty eye
Encircles, leans upon, but cannot pierce—
Hard, unabsorbing, clenched, withheld, entire?

Consider the one small and moatless heart:
Have not red depths of pain there sighed across
To past peace for the merest cooling flake,

A least, light, flavoured touch, and been denied?
Has not, on peaks of quiet, memory
Shut fast round lurid hell her unsinged hand?

The Refugees

LET us praise those who, with a fraction less
Than absolute courage (since the perfect dares
To change life standing), on swift wheel, smooth keel,
Slid from the past's long tyrannies and snares:

Those who, abhorring the tithe-burdened hour,
Hating the chains that money, comforts, birth,
Had sewn for them; the prospect or the fact
Of smothering marriage—ran, for all their worth!

From the white midnights, from the northern land
Of pine and reindeer shook sun-gathering sails
Eager for southern vineyards; hand in hand
Crossed over, eastward, to the shores of Wales;

Or roamed with bicycle through lanes, and lived
On birdsmeat, berries; or, in desperate flight,
Was found at last at the small country station
By speedier Death—too old, too old for flight.

While, hooked to cup or glass, by rustling fire,
Friends called them fools, preposterous, insane;
The pile of letters mounted in the hall,
And brass-voiced gongs were banged for them in vain.

The Great Frost

THE boys enjoy
Their hurtling sledges on the brae,
Eyes lit, cheeks red and jolly.
But the man walking
Solitary as a shepherd, alone
Vertical on the moor's round whiteness,
Curses the cold that mocks his paper wraps:

The wind's devil's persistence
And spurting shoves that plaster
His numb lips with Polar night,
Slice out a lattice in his chest,
Make muscle wicker and the veins' beck
Weak as that ditch's under medals
Of ice commemorating a lost dash.

The ghost within him weeps,
Retreats to last defence of bone.
Its voice so various—obscene, divine—
Has shrunk to a mere whistle:
Says *Heat beat* only and *Hot soup*.

Newspaper Illustration

SEVEN, with eyes turned right,
Behind the policeman's horizontal arm:
The short man in a burberry; the tall
Bareheaded man with horn-rimmed glasses;
The women with shopping-bags and leather cases:
On these the quick
Slick shutter like Tower of Siloam fell.

That eye accuses them of even grief:
Heaped silt of care no single joy or grief
Had size to cancel.
How, there, would the single
Mood on a saint's face, or a child's, have shown,
Have shone!—like yellow rocket
At dusk, or in soiled street laburnum:
Spared the quick verdict of that single eye.

The Road through the Valley

NOW we come to the narrows,
To the close-rocked valley;
The coldness; to the shadowed
Numb and silent pass.

Now the mind must forget
Its soaring morning flight
And with the patient feet
Keep pace, through a nick of time,

On a road forgetting roads
Where easeful steps return,
Glens where the burn
Of warm desire flows.

All warmth is bled away
From this long vale; the bare,
Bent, short trees are drained
Of sap, as men's faces are.

Is it fear with which you are pale,
You that come slowly on?—
Seeing the feet impelled,
Not lured, by a vision:

Seeing the force and pace
Of the feet that quicken forward
To the bitter repellent city
And the hill my soul abhors.

Snowy Morning, 1940

MARGINED by dirty snow-heaps, pavements puffed and
clean,

Slapping through folds of slush with their galoshèd feet,
They plod to their work down the middle of the street,
In the narrow fairway as dark as nicotine.

Heads bowed, they meet with silence or good-humoured
curse

A sudden snarl of ice in the quick, bitter breeze.
They march like the unemployed or like refugees
Or as though they follow an invisible hearse.

The Poor at War

(Britain, winter 1940)

O THAT one current steady across years!—
Millions, millions of arms forever reaching,
Athwart the saint's example and his teaching,
Backwards from poverty, away from tears!

These many now for righteousness and good
Enduring terrors, anguish, mutilations,
Leave the one-way and nameless generations,
Live with that lovable small multitude
Who, their simple hearths and suppers calling,
Stayed on the fells far off as dusk was falling,
Eating up every word the prophet said,
Dimly aware that such alone could save them—
Who were amazed when tenderly he gave them,
After that feast, the meal of fish and bread.

Enemy Action

IT has happened before that death came after breakfast
On a scrubbed working day: again and again
Bolts fell, Siloams crumbled, in the past,
Upon the young, the usual, the plain.

And the one who simply went across the road
To post a letter or to look around
Holds his redeemed breath, struggles from a load
Of smouldering dread. After, with what profound

Wonder, what thankful, what extensive fears,
Standing alone in the bright summer weather,
Examines that mild choice, which now appears
A least hinge swinging, lightly as it were a feather,
The vast door, opening, of some forty years.

Epitaph for an Air-raid Victim, Unidentified

ALL night you were lost in a forest of statistics.
Then, at dawn, the birds came and covered you
with leaves:

With pieces of blank paper out of a hat,
With the enormous white relief
Of those on whom the lot has not fallen.
But you, Anon,
Have walked out to yourself, your mystery.

The Tower

THE warning has exploded
Its flatulent see-saw, its inaugural,
Obscene lament. The guns have flogged the air.
The sky-black dragon with the ticking snarl
Has soared and circled, voided spoor of fire.
And now the weak tower hangs:
Now the dark holds invisible Siloam.

Under its wall you, nameless,
Wait. Stranger whom the tower shall kill,
I with no face and in the same shadow
Speak to you who may be my own shadow.
(None wears a name under this eyeless tower.)

You are the one who shoots,
Ever, a vacant, a posthumous name
Up to the list slung from to-morrow's headline.
You are the one who sweats
Under the pending cataract of coal;
And you obey the false nod of the signal,
Rush on the great bridge as the girders fall,
Come to the iceberg on the mooning keel,
Chat by original Siloam.

(You always, under, always,
The one hinged, fatal, fabulous tower,
Whose smooth stones are the curse of Adam,
Whose weight is the weight of uncreating chaos,
And mortar the mathematics of chance.)

But now, see your predicament illumined
As not in annals of catastrophe.
Clear, the sin root of this mad fate;
Clear, O for long, the signpost warning *Doom*.
You to the dark tower come
Tense to endure a toppling Siloam:

Aware that the loud night
May, of a sudden, shriek at you and point
A bitter avalanche
Too swift for anguish. . . .

The sirens shall ring out,
Shall wail through octaves of relief;
The moon be neutral again, and for peace;
The clocks pass ticking from their tunnel, din;
The planets walk a transparent floor of silence;
And you shall rest under that felled Siloam,

Whose immense falling, falling,
Tearing the mask off shall put back
The careful name given at baptism
By the chill font, under a gothic hope.
O you shall rest an honoured victim!
You shall be innocent: that cap, your share
Of the great canopy of the curse of Adam,
Will have shaken from your dusty hair.

Lament of a Maker

MOVEMENT of my hands, like canvas
Under coloured wool, supported thought:
Their lifting after fruit—pears; raspberry,
Hung upon tall spray, obvious, or in
A leaf's lit tent sequestered ruby.

Rhythmic, the reach and ebb of muscle
Stroking a saw down timber cut
A track in sloth for mind to fill.
It was my rigid heart I dug,
My slipshod words I rinsed from cups,
Visions I followed plunging through
The jade-green air of winter moors.

Then for those ways, that work, I died:
Grow narrow and am present-minded;
Learn to be one among the tidy
Sober folk, the neat destroyers;
March with carefree girls and boys.
'My meaning ends now in my hands'
Useful movements, dull as canvas.

An Evening in the War

OUT of the cloudy confusion of voices, faces,
Hail of exacting clocks, anxiety's
Currents, the gust this way and that, I drop
On to the sudden world of my own past

Whose grave, plain stillness meets me like a blow;
Whose quietness arrests me as the night does eyes.
I grope at impact of this thoughtful,
Time-forgetting youth, and its large seasons.

I wait. And slowly from the backs of books
Those words prick out which are the stars of silence,
Realer than crowd on lips. Leopardi,
Brontë, Rainer Maria Rilke

Control my night. They dare me to dare to wait,
Staving off sounds, to hear my own heart speaking:
Stab me to eavesdrop on that simple
Quicksilver stream of loneliest truth.

Faces

FACES that I unwrap
From patchwork miles, from rustling apprehension,
Reluctantly from treasured distance;
That, the last beat of travel done,
Fold in upon me like a trap:

Dark, light, complexions, looks,
Weaving a fence meaning the loss
Of easy, fertile solitude,
A cordon flung across
Thought's lanes, the avenues of books!—

O faces of the War!
Still in the mind's uncrowded space
Growing, as actors do in a finale
Who row by row give place,
Keep on receding to make room for more—

You mass, you mass in me;
You pass through me, yet mass in me, yet wait:
Waving your smiles of recognition,
And known like sisters, populate
Like settlers, the wide noun *humanity*.

Madrigal for the Times

NOW let the eyes that all winter, those ages,
Hid in swart clefts of brick, saw sun through smoke,
Strained along watches of the fear-filled night,
Held furious tears before the sight
Of wreck and ruin—come,
O return home, slip from those cages:

Here let them fly supple and glad as thrushes,
Light upon field where sap's nudge interrupts
With sudden bubbles a lamb's skipping run;
Bare elm, blue crocuses. The lukewarm sun
Strokes rails of webs, and puts
Dabs of rainbow on cringing lashes.

Farewell to X Platoon

ONCE more, the train; the wet,
Grey, hauled-on, flying fields,
The sadness, the cold. This year
For the second time I set
Behind me the far from dear
Place with a strange regret.

A tale as hard to begin
And finish as *War and Peace*,
A system of people, ends.
For a breathing-space, within,
You walk and speak, my friends,
Before the loud others win.

I see a leaf that grips
A twig lodged in a stream,
Tugged at, as good as gone,
When I think of these years' friendships:
The straggling tide sweeps on;
The face from fond-thought slips.

The time is salt with farewells.
But, calling the better years,
But, tuned to the rushing train,
My stumbling verse tells:
In this body of death and pain
Were green, rebellious cells:

Were cells of kindness, whose sum
Worked softly to lift the whole,
To leaven this doughy lump
Our sighing world, this numb
Sin-tip, devil's dump,
And make the good kingdom come.

Hate thickens. But who will take
Back the same feckless heart,
Having seen in many places
The dull, cold, sealed crowd make
Way for names, for faces,
And liking and laughter break?

Good luck! A safe return
To city or glen or vale
At no distant day.
Heaven bless your return.
May tides be gentle, may
The tide of the world turn.

New Year, 1945

STRANGELY unviolent, ringed with shadows,
Round hooded lamps I watch us stand.
I see the soiled aloof ingenious hand
Whose tinkering launched that avalanche enclose
The match's curt, diminutive rose.
I see us covered with patience like a sand—
Bored spectators of our own violence, and,
Guiltless, of our own guilt—that drifts and grows.

What do we wait for on the windy platform?
Perhaps for the violence that was stolen from us
To emerge returning from the cold machine—
Our birthright violence, fiery and cruel and warm:
The power, the flickering glory that has been
Lucifer, Eros, Christ, Prometheus?

The Prophets

THE wakeful voices of the prophets called
Across the nervous roofs of history:
He will be falling when the time is ripe,
Out of a peaceful sky's impassive depths,
Meteor-sudden, with a sun-bright flash.

The siren voices of the prophets warned:
Look to yourselves, for there will be no shelter
When he comes on you, save the heart's repentance
Turn and be sorry then before he falls;

Before his sheeted lightning strikes away
The traveller's sight upon the noonday road,
And passes through the calloused lids of blindness;
Before he strikes our heavy earth, to knock
Each reasoned pillar sideways, and to flatten
The heart's excuses like a town of cards.

The Hare in the Wheat-field

WHAT have I done,
Or what have my fathers done,
That the large, red hare,
Sitting up in the wheat,
Should watch me with this stare—
Me, who have no gun?
I grieve for that Adam did,
I grieve and ask what,
As the flick of an eyelid
Sends him, like a shot,
Off in great darts over the green wheat.

Leopardi

I TRY to let the stares run through me.
The field-workers, resting upon their hoes,
And the cat-callers in the street
See what they see: I pass alone, unnoticed.

Only the eyes of women have that power
To set my mirrored self before myself.
Dark with shame, then I grudge bitterly
My dour youth, my unheeded life.

A passing girl's gentle disregard
Has, in a moment, crumbled my thought's towers;
Changed Eternity to a poor suburb
Of her instant, dazzling city.

Yet life is not unsweet.
Sometimes, the flesh fading in solitude's
Gulf, this universe of stars and sighs
Turns round on the axis of my heart.

Then it is pleasant to go unregarded
Up to the hill-field by the quiet path;
Well that you scarcely heed me as I walk,
Softly, in and out of your house, my father.

Kierkegaard

SIGNPOST forking at the fork of way,
Stickler for the choice of yea or nay;
Streak of lightning forked at *Humbug's* head;
Fork in *Truth's* fingers all but devilish;

And *Charity's* infernally clever tool;
Wit's weighty user, *Wisdom's* motley fool;
Unwavering lover; heart of lead,
Cruel to his girl, crueller to his own wish—

Going off with the God of Abraham
Who has no use for the blood of goat or ram,
But does require the willing spots of red
Wherewith to spice Creation's jubilant dish.

Ex-Aircraftman Shaw

THE bicycle stands ready. Now to flit
Through the great staring landscape, large as life,
Back to the shelf where Blake and Hopkins sit
And Homer waits like a reproachful wife.

Handing the tunic in, catching a brief
Glimpse of the sheltered time as in a glass,
He feels at one with the reluctant leaf
Bowled by a nattering wind along the grass.

The fallen leaf knows what he feels, handed
Himself again, how severed and forlorn.
(Yet the rough sex-talk left him stranded
Often, a sheep-surrounded unicorn.)

Goodbye, goodbye, kind Ordinairiness,
Dear Golden Mean ungraspable as the moon!
Sighing, he goes out from the privates' mess
To the long empty autumn afternoon.

The I's

THE sum of these most resembles a hive.
Sink down your thought: listen to the tangled hum.
Here is one whose whole world is a mirror
Offering him the velvet approved hero
Of an intensely unique serial;
Whose food is the dutch-nectar of opinion.
Here is the sensual idler; and one
All thrusting spite. Another is wound up
To run in thin-lipped grooves backwards and forwards,
After fame, cash, or time. Nearer the centre
Are the ingenious talkative attendants:
The secretary the great reader,
The bard, the fool.

While O far down—
Deep as a mine, more legendary than royalty,
Having no use for clocks or books or mirrors—
Lives a gentle and judging one who eats,
Springly, flower hues and the milk of stars.

This one is very lonely and always waiting
For the important visitor Death,
Who will come straight to her, waving the others aside.

The Comrade

*. . . ever-present, phantom thing—
My slave, my comrade, and my king.*

EMILY BRONTË

WHAT were you, flourishing cool dock beside
The rash first bitter nettle griefs of youth;
Voice taking over from the play of childhood?

What are you, coming like a dog
With me on all my walks? You that have seemed
Shadow, demon godmother, good angel,
And a money-box in which I put
What is too hard in time, love, anguish, thought;

You the dark host of my solitude
Welcoming me with fire-warmth and with flowers;

You that, if you are banished, leave the day
Scrubbed, naked, long, nostalgic as a ward;
Returning, oil the runners of the hours
Expertly, often perfectly as kisses;

Wishing me so to lack success,
Be distant from my friends, downcast in love;
Pleased if I turn towards the lonely house
Or the wide-margined friendship of the old.

What are you, always beckoning me into
Prisons; adept at the whispered escape?

Daphne

HOW often,—*sad, afraid, self-sick, heart-sore—*

Pacing these gardens, I have longed to be

Metamorphosed into a peaceful tree!

But have you thought what you are wishing for?

Thought what it meant to Daphne (you've had hints
In moments when not words failed you but feeling)—

Thought what it meant as, wooden numbness stealing
Up from her throat, her tremulous knees in splints,

Her headache going, and that wild brown sheaf
Her hair far more involved than Absalom's locks,
She saw, with just the echo of a shock's
Percussion at her scandalous lack of grief,

Through a slit no greater than a letter-box,
For the last time ever, sunlight silvering a leaf?

Buchan

HERE are my cousins' farms, flaked with sea-birds;
And, though I was not bred here, only born,
My struggling, patient, slow, emphatic words
Are the cousins of their corn.

The Loom

I

ALTHOUGH my work walks, being in my head,
Upstairs and down, along street, through meadow,
Often it is reproduced, exhorted,
By tethered workers in a picture-show

Out at the corner of the mind's eye.
There turner with his lathe, miner with lamp,
Illustrate my lone effort tinily;
Appears like the small engraving on a stamp

A fellow axeing with smooth-piston grip;
The ploughman, urging forward from a halt;
Or the dour mechanic, Woodbine on lip,
Breathing his way towards the subtle fault.
My shop my head, I weave with every man
Who weaves, unravels, hauls, broods on a plan.

2

And yet, the loom on which I weave is time;
And yet, it is not *I* who work, but *we*,
Because the man who quarries thought, turns rhyme,
Is never one, only, but always three:

The past consults the present: *Will this do?*
The present vetoes or approves; is stern;
Cuts, fault-finds, finishes. *Over to you*
Cries to the judging future, in his turn.

Endlessly they confer. And so, no wonder
He is lack-lustre, sometimes, like the sun's
Forsaken collier, crouching under
His propped-up, crackling, dark, primeval tons;
Walks with a slow, encumbered ploughman's tread,
The poet, juggling with three balls in his head.

3

And yet, his truer image, prototype,
Is the dense earth under the ploughman's boot;
The tree, under the axe. His dear, unripe-
For-so-long, never-to-be-hastened fruit

Reflects the small, green apple, daily adding
Imperceptible circles to its size,
Ready for the redness padding
Nearer, and, softly, nearer to our eyes.

And he must wait, must walk envying the slow
Ploughman his twilit acreage; the speed
Of shuttles, or the coal-belt's laden flow.
Ah! he must wait and work, walk with the seed,
Be geared to pulse of roots far under, when
He is a man, labours with living men.

Origin

BEFORE heart-beat or breathing was turned on;
Before, even, the prologue to the tale:
The seed's peregrination up the vale
Through miles of night to the receptive mansion—

Lord, was I in your mind? Did your fire sea
Of being circle me, in being yet not:
Lost, like the unmade poem in my thought,
Hidden, yet waiting, as my word in me?

Hearing me stir, that ghost of a ghost of sound,
Did you drop, swift as gannet, and explore
Caverns of silence, oceans, the sea-floor?
Did you follow me, Father, through Heaven, like a hound:

Fall on me, override my prostrate *No*;
Seize my faint hands, more negative than mist;
Persuade me like a lover—to exist,
And, like a gardener, to grow?

Sometimes I feel, about me and about,
The lion's gaze that put the wind up Job,
And seem to hear, while the dark searchlights probe,
Where there was no way in is no way out.

Garden Rising

OUT of what depths, what downcast hours, dark
Forsaken hours; out of what speechless gloom,—
Sunken, hell-snake-infested, as the sleep
She rose from, earlier, to weep—
This rising fire now hurls the sprinkling lark;
Sucks the wet leaf, the hyacinth's cold bloom;
Rescues the pale yawn of this hollow tomb!

All praises, rises—fire, flower, woman, wing.
And meanwhile, multiplied in the bright air,
Blocking the hyacinth's white upward track,
At top of the lark's stair,
Crown for the risen woman's hair,
Hangs Eden's serpent like a huddled spring—
Steel strength to crush all back.
Only on His raised arm the coils droop, slack.

The Talent

SOME did not bury it but threw it away,
To burn small on the dark ground,
Fly on the snowing wind, float upon waves,
Be found by whomsoever it concerned.
And this one or that one, coming slowly,
Coming at long last, separated
By the great width of starlit centuries,
By tracts more desolate, dividing,
Than the forsakenest, winter-drifted moor—
Finding it, was consoled, was concerned;

Is comforted, alone, at midnight—
The book open, the solitary candle
Shining, the heart, quiet, beating.

And they kiss, more cold and lonely
Than starlight's touch on January snow.

A Portrait

THIS plain face, queered by conflict, saddened in
Thought's foreign part, surprises amongst those
Faces which are at home in being faces
And use the passport of an easy smile.

The eyes, remarkable, have the sombre beauty
Of stars and visions. But the separate mouth
Disconcerts, contradicts: it has been wrecked
By fierce, boxer's knuckles, from within.

It is a face, no doubt, fated to watch,
Being the frozen visitor from the Heights,
Love, with his smooth behaviour and light hair,
Warm at the Grange, inside a brilliant window;

Fated to, having mirrored faithfully
The groping, wildfire prince when he was down,
Keep the moon-minion look while that old comrade
Triumphing rides between the crowds on words.

Christ at Emmaus

(After the painting by Michelangelo da Caravaggio)

THE fingers are stamens, and about them
The circle concentrates: dark heads,
Rough faces, thick, astonished hands.
Light shines on the clean table-cloth,
While the hand, palm in shadow, hangs
Over the meal: bird, loaves, decanter, cups,
Fruit-basket. The raised, blessing hand
Leans forward from a sea of shadow—
Like the globe turning, like His word
Emerging from where seven-eighths
Of deeper meaning is submerged.

Divine Comedy

PRESIDES over my changeful journey—
Whether behind the lilacs of lips and eyes,
Dense aspen-shiver of small purposes,
Or unleaved boughs of my solitude—
The round, full moon of that outrageous vision:
That shows: under the moss of peace,
Under our wars more transient 'than grass,
One iron skeleton of conflict;
Under our numerous faces' colours, shapes,
Our tongues, various like syllables of birds,
Our customs, differing, marrying like rivers—
Two languages,
Only two races:
Only the strong, who strip themselves, accept
Weakness, exacting happiness; partake
Of tears: who kiss life's blade, and come
Into the living rose, love's kingdom;
Those; and the weak who will
Not: the weak who fail,
Who fall, who endure the terrible
Obstruction in memory for ever.

EARLIER POEMS

The Enemy

(*L'Ennemi*—BAUDELAIRE)

MY sky of youth was overcast and wild,
Though brilliant sunshafts here and there outshone;
Thunder and rain my garden so defiled
That almost all its ruddy fruits are gone.

I, visited by autumn thoughts, despair,
Was forced to labour then with rakes and spade
Amongst my flooded flower-beds, to repair
The grave-deep cavities the waters made.

And who knows whether, washed like shores, the beams
Of this late sun will to these flowers of dreams,
New-born, health's mystic aliment impart?

Alas! Alas! Time eats away our lives,
And this dark Enemy who gnaws the heart
On lifeblood that we lose grows fat and thrives!

While Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets

I THOUGHT then of the frailty of all strongholds
That beauty builds herself in time and place;
The gift to children and to children's children
Of the blurred echo, the resembling face;
How I should mourn seeing through other features
And strangers' looks your youth's dear image stray,
Veiled and remote, as violins richly weaving
Music that fireside chatter thrusts away.

How if the red mouth of a grandchild's daughter
Should keep, long afterwards, your beckoned smile,
As hedge does snow—should gather and preserve you
Past memory's limit for a little while—
There in her face your face would be like music
Turned low left playing to a room that's empty.

Caption for One's Own Photograph

A SECRET map is all that others see.
I, the sole native of the country, find
The skies of a lost season: river, tree,
Mountain—a vast, dim landscape of the mind.

Stone Walls

STONE walls do not a prison make unless
Heart's wall surrounds them. You remember how,
Returned from wandering, returned from freedom,
These narrow floors only so far contained you—
These four walls nudged the heart,
Insufferable, as pebble sole in shoe.

Stone walls do not nor iron bars, alas!
Diminished we find solace. You know how
You walked between—you, manikin and freeman—
Wide walls, trod spacious floors that once confined
you:
Between two nutshell halves
A sandwiched Hamlet, calm, liking the view.

The Abyss

(*Le Gouffre*—BAUDELAIRE)

PASCAL'S abyss moved with him everywhere.
All—dream, desire, deed, word—is gulf, alas!
Often I feel the wind of Terror pass
Across my limbs and lift erect each hair.

High, low, near, far, on shore, in seas profound,
Silence, and fearful, fascinating space.
God's all-wise finger builds, my nights for base,
A varied nightmare, giving rest no ground.

Sleep frightens me as would a hole which led
To depths unfathomed filled with shapeless dread;
Infinity peers in at every pane,

And my soul, always dizzy on a height,
Longs to be ended in eternal night.
—Ah! Longs with Numbers, Beings, to remain!

I Know Them Well

I KNOW them well, those cottages on hills,
Farm-houses distant from the nearest train,
Lean rocks at which the mail-boats rarely call:
I myself have lived among far islands :

Far, wave-divided reefs where live the old
Whose senses drown; to which the lover sails
With his undared confession, as the dear
Friend speaks to him of longing for another;

Where torn by suffering the sick man finds
No words uncover or can comfort pain;
The mourner wakes from quiet dream suddenly;
The new blind sit apart with folded hands.

Who now am safe where telephone connects,
Dry, well-lit pavements fasten home to home,
And posts ring often; where the sea's unseen,
Waves murmur only in the whispering midnight.

The Street

THE great, grey, centuried church struck seven,
Sun-bathing in the light of that mild season
When children, brown-limbed, come to their school year
When youth, in uniform, waves, leaves for war,
And swallows' flight says to the heart *departure*.

By the low wall an apple's dab of red
Peered out. Dark-green as bottle or glass bead,
The broad, smooth, columned yew-trees, threaded
With their multitude of blood-prick berries,
Watched by the leaning grave-stones by the street.

The long, wide, quiet street was empty except
For myself in the waiting car and one small schoolgirl
Who propped her bicycle and called up 'Mother!
And soon, rode off. The lungs of my spirit drew,
Suddenly, a long breath. I hardly knew
If it was hope it breathed or hope remembered.

Moesta et Errabunda

(BAUDELAIRE)

AGATHA, are there times when your heart flies
Far from the unclean city, this dark sea,
Back to a sea where glittering splendour lies,
Blue, deep and lucid as virginity?

Agatha, are there times when your heart flies?

The waves' great rhythms comfort us in toil!

What airy genius gives the raucous deep,

Singer to wind's huge organ, harsh turmoil,

This sublime art of lulling us to sleep?

The waves' great rhythms comfort us in toil!

Train, take me! frigate, carry me away!

Far! far! these muddy streets with tears are wet!

Agatha, does your sad heart sometimes say:

Far from the sins, the sorrows, the regret,

Train take me! frigate, carry me away!

How far you are, sweet paradise/on/earth

Where all was pleasure, love and cloudless light,

Where all we loved matched loving with its worth,

Where the heart fainted in a pure delight!

How far you are, sweet paradise/on/earth!

But the green paradise of love in childhood,

Songs, wildflowers, kisses, games one used to play,

Wine at those evening picnics in the wood,

With violin music throbbing far away—

But the green paradise of love in childhood,

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