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# THE LAND

BY

V. SACKVILLE-WEST

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*Orchard & Vineyard: Poem;*  
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*To*  
D. W.

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# THE LAND

## WINTER

Nec sum animi dubius, verbis ea vincere magnum  
quam sit et angustis hunc addere rebus honorem.

*Georgics*, Book III, 289-90

## WINTER

I sing the cycle of my country's year,  
I sing the tillage, and the reaping sing,  
Classic monotony, that modes and wars  
Leave undisturbed, unbettered, for their best  
Was born immediate, of expediency.  
The sickle sought no art; the axe, the share  
Draped no superfluous beauty round their steel;  
The scythe desired no music for her stroke,  
Her stroke sufficed in music, as her blade  
Laid low the swathes; the scythesmen swept, nor cared  
What crop had ripened, whether oats in Greece  
Or oats in Kent; the shepherd on the ridge  
Like his Boeotian forebear kept his flocks,  
And still their outlines on our tenderer sky  
Simple and classic rear their grave design  
As once at Thebes, as once in Lombardy.

I sing once more  
The mild continuous epic of the soil,  
Haysel and harvest, tith and husbandry;  
I tell of marl and dung, and of the means  
That break the unkindly spirit of the clay;  
I tell the things I know, the things I knew  
Before I knew them, immemorially;  
And as the fieldsman of unhurrying tread  
Trudges with steady and unchanging gait,  
Being born to clays that in the winter hold,  
So my pedestrian measure gravely plods,  
Telling a loutish life. I have refused  
The easier uses of made poetry,  
But no small ploy disdain to chronicle,  
And (like that pious yeoman laid to rest  
Beneath the legend that told all his life  
In five hard words: "He tilled the soil well")  
Prune my ambition to the lowly prayer

That I may drive the furrow of my tale  
Straight, through the lives and dignities I know.

Why should a poet pray thus? poets scorn  
The bounded love of country, being free  
Of winds, and alien lands, and distances,  
Vagabonds of the compass, wayfarers,  
Pilgrims of thought, the tongues of Pentecost  
Their privilege, and in their peddler's pack  
The curious treasures of their stock-in-trade,  
Bossy and singular, the heritage  
Of poetry and science, polished bright,  
Thin with the rubbing of too many hands:  
Myth, glamour, hazard, fables dim as age,  
Faith, doubt, perplexity, grief, hope, despair,  
Wings, and great waters, and Promethean fire,  
Man's hand to clasp, and Helen's mouth to kiss  
Why then in little meadows hedge about  
A poet's pasture? shed a poet's cloak  
For fustian? cede a birthright, thus to map  
So small a corner of so great a world?

The country habit has me by the heart,  
For he's bewitched forever who has seen,  
Not with his eyes but with his vision, Spring  
Flow down the woods and stipple leaves with sun,  
As each man knows the life that fits him best,  
The shape it makes in his soul, the tune, the tone,  
And after ranging on a tentative flight  
Stoops like the merlin to the constant lure.  
The country habit has me by the heart.  
I never hear the sheep-bells in the fold,  
Nor see the ungainly heron rise and flap  
Over the marsh, nor hear the asprous corn  
Clash, as the reapers set the sheaves in shocks  
(That like a tented army dream away  
The night beneath the moon in silvered fields),  
Nor watch the stubborn team of horse and man  
Graven upon the skyline, nor regain  
The sign-posts on the roads towards my home  
Bearing familiar names—without a strong  
Leaping of recognition; only here  
Lies peace after uneasy truancy;  
Here meet and marry many harmonies,  
—All harmonies being ultimately one,—  
Small mirroring majestic; for as earth  
Rolls on her journey, so her little fields  
Ripen or sleep, and the necessities  
Of seasons match the planetary law.  
So truly stride between the earth and heaven  
Sowers of grain: so truly in the spring  
Earth's orbit swings both blood and sap to rhythm,  
And infinite and humble are at one;  
So the brown hedger, through the evening lanes

Homeward returning, sees above the ricks,  
Sickle in hand, the sickle in the sky.

Shepherds and stars are quiet with the hills.  
There is a bond between the men who go  
From youth about the business of the earth,  
And the earth they serve, their cradle and their grave;  
Stars with the seasons alter; only he  
Who wakeful follows the pricked revolving sky,  
Turns concordant with the earth while others sleep;  
To him the dawn is punctual; to him  
The quarters of the year no empty name.  
A loutish life, but in the midst of dark  
Cut to a gash of beauty, as when the hawk  
Bears upwards in its talons the striking snake,  
High, and yet higher, till those two hang close,  
Sculptural on the blue, together twined,  
Exalted, deathly, silent, and alone.

And since to live men labour, only knowing  
Life's little lantern between dark and dark,  
The fieldsman in his grave humility  
Goes about his centennial concerns,  
Bread for his race and fodder for his kine,  
Mating and breeding, since he only knows  
The life he sees, how it may best endure,  
(But on his Sabbath pacifies his God,  
Blindly, though storm may wreck his urgent crops,)  
And sees no beauty in his horny life,  
With closer wisdom than soft poets use.  
But I, like him, who strive  
Closely with earth, and know her grudging mind,  
Will sing no songs of bounty, for I see  
Only the battle between man and earth,  
The sweat, the weariness, the care, the balk;  
See earth the slave and tyrant, mutinous,  
Turning upon her tyrant and her slave,  
Yielding reluctantly her fruits, to none  
But most peremptory wooers.  
Wherever waste eludes man's vigilance,  
There spring the weeds and darnels; where he treads  
Through woods a tangle nets and trips his steps;  
His hands alone force fruitfulness and tilth;  
Strange lovers, man and earth! their love and hate  
Braided in mutual need; and of their strife  
A tired contentment born.

I then, who as a wrestler wrought with earth,  
Bending some stubborn acres to my will,  
Know that no miracle shall come to pass  
Informing man, no whisper from Demeter,—  
Miraculous strength, initiated lore.  
Nothing but toil shall serve him; in their rote  
The seasons shall compel his constancy,

(The fields not always fair, nor prospects kind,)
Year ripen year, and timely foresight yield
Its measure in due course. And so I sing
Without illusion, seeing fieldsmen go
Heads lowered against sleet, hands frozen red,
Without complaint, but only patient, patient:
So in December sing I, while they come
Weary and dull and silent, tramping home
Through rainy dark, the cowman taking down
The hurricane lantern from its usual peg,
And going round the cattle in the stalls,
The shifting, munching cattle in the dark
And aromatic stalls beneath the rafters,
Swinging the lantern as he goes his rounds.
Clapping the kine upon their bony rumps
And seeing to their comfort ere he comes
Back to the ruddy kitchen for his food,
—Thus sing in winter, watching by the fire:

Winter Song

Many have sung the summer's songs,
Many have sung the corn,
Many have sung white blossom too
That stars the naked thorn—
That stars the black and naked thorn
Against the chalky blue.

But I, crouched up beside the hearth,
Will sing the red and gray;
Red going-down of sun behind
Clubbed woods of winter's day;
Of winter's short and hodden day
That seals the sober hind:

Seals him sagacious through the year
Since winter comes again:
Since harvest's but another toil
And sorrow through the grain
Mounts up, through swathes of ripest grain
The sorrow of the soil.

No lightness is there at their heart,
No joy in country folk;
Only a patience slow and grave
Beneath their labour's yoke,—
Beneath the earth's compelling yoke
That only serves its slave.

Since countryman forever holds
The winter's memory.
When he, before the planets' fires
Have faded from the sky,
From black, resplendent winter sky
Must go about his byres;

And whether to the reaper's whirr

*That scythes the falling crops,  
He travels round the widening wake  
Between the corn and copse,  
The stubble wake 'twixt corn and copse  
Where gleaners ply the rake,*

*Or whether in his granary loft  
He pours the winnowed sacks,  
Or whether in his yard he routs  
The vermin from the stacks,  
The vermin from the staddled stacks  
With staves and stones and shouts,*

*Still, still through all the molten eyes  
Whether he reaps or hones,  
Or counts the guerdon of his sweat,  
Still to his inward bones,  
His ancient, sage, sardonic bones,  
The winter haunts him yet.*

*Winter and toil reward him still  
While he his course shall go  
According to his proven worth,  
Until his faith shall know  
The ultimate justice, and the slow  
Compassion of the earth.*

Hear first of the country that shall claim my theme,  
The Weald of Kent, once forest, and to-day  
Meadow and orchard, garden of fruit and hops,  
A green, wet country on a bed of clay,  
From Edenbridge to Appledore and Lympne  
Drained by the Medway and the Rother stream,  
With forest oaks still hearty in the copse,  
For this was Sylva Anderida. Here  
Stretched Andredsweald, and joined the wood of Blean,  
Forest and warren, cropped by herds of deer,  
And droves of swine that stirred the oak-trees' mast,  
So wild a tract, so darkly green,  
No stranger might forsake the trodden way,  
Or venture through the trees towards the dene,  
But on his horn must blow a warning blast;  
No stranger, under Ina's law, might burn the tree,  
And send the flame to sear the leaf;  
If so he did, he must pay grudgingly  
The fullest fine, for fire's a silent thief;  
But if he took an axe to fell the oak,

*Andredsweald*

Even several oaks, as many as might be,  
Then must he pay for three, not more than three,  
For axe is an informer, not a thief,  
And at the felling loud in protest spoke.

This was the Weald, compact of forest laws,  
Pannage and Gavelswine, Danger and Corredy;

Unhandseled, separate, dark;  
Where herdsman, seeking through the sunless days  
For berry and for nut,  
Shaggy with skins and hung with scarlet haws,  
While hogs between the trees went grunting ways,  
Lived a brute's life with brutes, and scored the bark  
To blaze the track that led him to his hut.  
This was the Weald, but as man conquers slow  
Each province of his fief,—poor simple land  
Or ravelled knowledge,—so the tardy herd,  
Waking to action, by impatience stirred,  
Bethought him he might throw  
Trees round his hovel, clearings make by hand,  
And in the sunlight let his children go.

So grew the dene.  
Next came the wooden plough,  
Turning the furrows of the first bold field,  
A patch of light, a square of paler green,  
Cupped in the darkness of the Weald.  
Hedges fenced off the boar, the bundling sow  
Followed by squealing litter; hedges made  
By loppings of the bough,  
With teinage rudely thrust between.

Thus the foundations of the farm were laid.

The common saying goes, that on the hill  
A man may lie in bed to work his farm,  
Propping his elbows on his window-sill  
To watch his harvest growing like a charm.  
But the man who works the wet and weeping soil  
Down in the Weald, must marl and delve and till  
His three-horse land, fearing nor sweat nor droil.  
For through the winter he must fight the flood,  
The clay, that yellow enemy, that rots  
His land, sucks at his horses' hooves  
So that his waggon plunges in the mud,  
And wheels revolve, but waggon never moves;  
Delays his plough, and holds his spud  
With yeavy spite in trenching garden-plots,  
The catchy clay, that does its utmost harm,  
And comes into his house, to spoil  
Even his dwelling, creeps into his bones  
Before their time, and makes them ache,  
Leaving its token in his husky tones;  
And all through summer he must see the clay  
Harden as brick, and bake,  
And open cracks to swallow up his arm,  
Where neither harrow, hoe, nor rake  
Can rasp a tilth, but young and eager shoots  
Pierce into blank, and wither at the roots.  
Yet with his stupid loyalty he will say,  
Being a wealden man of wealden land,

*The Weald of Kent*

Holding his wealden honour as a pledge,  
"In times of drought those farms up on the ridge,  
Light soil, half sand,  
With the first summer gale blow half away,"  
And lifts his eyes towards the hill with scorn.

But only a bold man ploughs the Weald for corn,  
Most are content with fruit or pasture, knowing  
Too well both drought and winter's heavy going;  
So the lush Weald to-day  
Lies green in distance, and the horizon's sweep  
Deepens to blue in woods, with the pointed spire  
Pricking the foreground by the village tiles,  
And the hop-kiln's whitened chimney stares between  
Paler and darker green of Kentish miles,  
And rarely a patch of corn in metal fire  
Burnished by sunset ruffles in the green;  
But meadow, shaw, and orchard keep  
The glaucous country like a hilly sea  
Pure in its monotone. Sad eyes that tire  
Of dangerous landscape, sadder minds  
That search impossible regions of their quest,  
Find clement haven after truancy,  
A temperate answer, and a makeshift rest.  
This is the thing familiar, known;  
The safety that the wanderer finds,  
Out of the world, one thing his own.  
A pause, a lull in journeying, return  
After the querying and astonishment;  
Reward that only rovers earn  
Who have strayed, departed from the peace,  
Whether in soul or body widely flown,  
Gone after Arabian Nights, the Golden Fleece,  
And come back empty-handed, as they went.

Hear next of winter, when the florid summer,  
The bright barbarian scarfed in a swathe of flowers,  
The corn a golden ear-ring on her cheek,  
Has left our north to winter's finer etching,  
To raw-boned winter, when the sun  
Slinks in a narrow and a furtive arc,  
Red as the harvest moon, from east to west,  
And the swans go home at dusk to the leaden lake  
Dark in the plains of snow.

*Winter*

Water alone remains untouched by snow.

Here is no colour, here but form and structure,  
The bones of trees, the magpie bark of birches,  
Apse of trees and tracery of network,  
Fields of snow and tranquil trees in snow  
Through veils of twilight, northern, still, and sad,  
Waiting for night, and for the moon  
Riding the sky and turning snow to beauty,  
Pale in herself as winter's very genius,

Casting the shadows delicate of trees,  
Moon-shadows on the moon-lit snow, the ghost  
Of shadows, veering with the moving moon,  
Faint as the markings on the silver coin  
Risen in heaven,—shades of barren ranges,  
Craters, and lunar Apennines, and plains  
Old as the earth, and cold as space, and empty,  
Whence Earth appears a planet far surpassing  
Our ken of any star for neighbouring splendour,  
Her continents, her seas, her mountain ranges  
Splendid and visible, majestic planet  
Sweeping through space, and bearing in her train  
Her silver satellite that sees no strife,  
No warring of her men, no grief, no anger,  
No blood spilt red to stain the golden planet,  
But sees her architecture royally:  
Dark Asia; islands; spread of the Pacific,  
The silver satellite that casts the ghost  
Of ghostly trees across the fields of snow.

Now in the radiant night no men are stirring:  
The little houses sleep with shuttered panes;  
Only the hares are wakeful, loosely loping  
Along the hedges with their easy gait,  
And big loose ears, and pad-prints crossing snow;  
The ricks and trees stand silent in the moon,  
Loaded with snow, and tiny drifts from branches  
Slip to the ground in woods with sliding sigh.  
Private the woods, enjoying a secret beauty.

But one man comes, one outcast and a vagrant  
Having no roof to keep him from the snow;  
Comes with a shuffling step between the trees;  
Vague, old; and sinks upon a fallen bole,  
Merging himself in night till silence gains him,  
And hares play fearless round him in the shadows  
Cast by the moon. Whence comes he? what have been  
His annals? what but annals of long roads,  
All roads alike, made sharp by hostile eyes,  
—Rightly, he yields it, in his resignation,—  
Whence has he shambled, into snow-bound Kent?  
Out of what night of lassitude and despair  
Into this night of beauty and cold death?  
What sire begot, what mother cradled him?  
He drowns on his bole, while snow-flakes gather,  
While snow-flakes drift and gather,  
Touching his darkness with their white, until  
He grows to an idol in the wood forgotten,  
Image of what men were, to silence frozen,  
Image of contemplation and enigma,  
So stiffens in his death. His old coat covers  
His heart's vain hieroglyph. But still the hares  
Play hopscotch with the shadows, having less fear  
Of death's quiescence than of life's quick danger,

*Vagrant*

In a world where men are truant, night to dawn,  
Suspended hours when life's poor common business  
Lies dormant in a world to silence given,  
Given to silence and the slanting moon.

Only the shepherd watching by his flock  
Sees the moon wax and wane; endures the time  
When frost is sharpest; hears the steeple chime  
Each hour neglected; hears the rutting brock  
Scream in the night; the prowling dog-fox bark;  
Snared rabbit cry, small tragedy of dark.

*Shepherd*

The shepherd watching by his ewes and theaves  
All night in loneliness, each cry knows well,  
Whether the early lambing on the Downs  
Rob him of Christmas, or on slopes of fell  
March keep him crouching, shawled against the sleet;  
But there's a cry that drowns  
All else to shepherd's ears: the wavering bleat  
Of weakling newly-born: then he shall lift  
The lanky baby to his own warm hut,  
Lay it on straw, and shift  
Closer the lamp, and set the bottle's teat  
With good warm milk between the lips half-shut,  
Coaxing the doubtful life, while wind and rain  
Against the window of the cabin beat,  
And homing cottars in the plain below  
Look up, and seeing the window's yellow glow,  
Mutter, "The shepherd's at his job again."

Poor heavy-sided ewes must have their care;  
Pasture, and in their pens a bite of hay.  
Poor roots, good lambs; good roots, poor lambs, they say;  
So shall the prudent shepherd keep them spare,  
And likewise short of cake before they can;  
And he shall set the double hurdles square  
Against the north and east with straw between,  
For shelter; he shall run his ewes and lambs  
In various pens: the twins, the little rams,  
And frolic younglings just about to wean;  
He shall turn little rams to little tegs,  
And dock their tails, but on a different day;  
Then, well content, sit down to watch them play,  
Companioned by his pipe and trowsled pup;  
Watch them, appraising strong and frisky legs,  
And grin when little ewe butts little tup.

But while the shepherd lonely in his cotes  
Lives the harsh months decreed,  
The farmer, thwarted by the early dusk,  
Uses the hours that keep his ploughman lusk,  
And plans his year for pasture or for seed.  
Champion and several each claim their meed;  
Fallow, and arable, and clover ley;  
Shall the Ten-Acre carry sheep or oats?

*Yeoman*

Shall the poor Roughets stand this year for hay?

For now when fields beneath the wintry light  
Lie stark, and snow along the hedgerow clings,  
When streams of rooks on swerving wings  
Blacken the sky with their untidy flight,  
When iron ridges bind the frozen clay,  
And sunset reddens cart-ruts on the road,—  
Now in the wolf-month, shrammed and gaunt,  
When vixens prowl, and hopping birds grow bold,  
And craven otters haunt  
The coops, by famine driven, and by cold,—  
There's little chance for labour on the land.  
Only the dung-cart with its reasty load  
Creaks safe across the fields on frozen ground,  
And horses for the fork or shovel stand  
Patient, their nostrils smoking on the air.  
Carting's a winter job. The strawy mound,  
The wedge-shaped hale of roots for winter feeding stored,  
Gapes, and gives up its rolling, orange hoard,  
Cut in the farmyard troughs to equal share.  
There's little else in these dead months to keep  
The farm-folks brisk; at dawn and dusk they go  
To break the ice on inky water-holes;  
Fold on fresh patch of swedes the fattening sheep;  
Put in a casual hour to dig out moles.  
All desultory tasks, while the short day  
Dulls from the morning's red to undern grey,  
And dyes to red again as sun sinks low.

Then pencil in hand beneath the hanging lamp  
The farmer ponders in the kitchen's hush;  
In the dark shippon tranquil cattle crush  
Sweet cake, sliced mangold; shift, and blow, and champ;  
In the dark stable tired horses stamp,  
And nuzzle at the manger for their feed.  
But though the homestead in such quiet doze  
Under the double spell of night and frost,  
Within the yeoman's kitchen scheme  
The year revolves its immemorial prose.  
He reckons labour, reckons too the cost;  
Mates up his beasts, and sees his calf-run teem;  
Takes pigs to market underneath a net;  
Sees blossom on his orchards in the spring;  
Sees rows of roots, all plump and stoutly set,  
And hears the windy barley hiss  
Like golden snakes before good harvesting;  
And, since no little winsel comes amiss,  
Cozens the dullards that go marketing.

He'd cheat a fool indeed, but do no worse;  
His heart is wider than his purse,  
Take all in all; but narrower than each  
The portals of his speech.

Few words must serve his turn,  
For he's sagacious who lives taciturn,  
And airs no noisy cunning of his trade,  
But keeps his private purpose deeply laid;  
Gives neighbours nothing of his confidence,  
And takes his counsel of his own good sense.  
No wise man utters what he inly knows;  
Certainty in a loose uncertain world  
Is far too firm a treasure; wiseman goes  
Jealous and wary, keeping darkly furled  
His small particular knowledge. So he plots  
To get the better of his lands again;  
Compels, coerces, sets in trim, allots,  
Renews the old campaign.  
His mind is but the map of his estate,  
No broader than his acres, fenced and bound  
Within the little England of his ground,  
Squared neat between the hedgerows of his brain,  
With here Lord's Meadow tilted on a hill,  
And Scallops' Coppice ending in a gate,  
And here the Eden passing by a mill,  
And there the barn with thatch,  
And here a patch of gorse, and there a patch  
Of iris on the fringes of a pond,  
And here Brook Orchard banded safe with grease;  
All this he sees, and nothing sees beyond  
The limits and the fealty of his lease.  
Tenant of his inheritance,  
Brief link in life's long circumstance,  
One of the nameless, name-forgotten line  
Descended from that nameless ancestor  
Who cut a holding in the serried weald  
Where droves of swine  
Rootled for acorns underneath the oaks,  
Anderida's sole yield  
When Drake played bowls at Plymouth, and the rare  
Coach with the cumbrous spokes  
Trundled along the single clay-wet track  
To Sussex with drawn blinds, or journeyed back  
To London on affairs of state, the fine  
Heraldic blazon eloquent on the door;  
Makers of land, one of the nameless line  
That fenced, and tilled, and overcame the waste,  
And cut the necessary gaps,  
And shaped the fields, slow-paced,  
Into their permanent design,  
Each field with local name, not marked on maps,  
How come by, how begotten,  
Long since forgotten:  
Clement's, the Roundabout, Black Mead and Bitter Docks,  
Rough Shepherd, Horses' Houghs,  
And trod the path that grew into this lane  
Bending between the hedgerows, where  
Convenience claimed a road,—for country road

Is natural growth, with here a curve  
Skirting a tree felled long ago, a swerve  
To let the rattling harrow pass, the wain  
With trussed and swaying load  
Lurch safely by, and empty pass again.

He tills the soil to-day,  
Surlly and grave, his difficult wage to earn.  
Cities of discontent, the sickened nerve,  
Are still a fashion that he will not learn.  
His way is still the obstinate old way,  
Even though his horses stare above the hedge,  
And whinny, while the tractor drives its wedge  
Where they were wont to serve,  
And iron robs them of their privilege.  
Still is his heart not given  
To such encroachments on a natural creed;  
Not wholly given, though he bows to need  
By urgency and competition driven,  
And vanity, to follow with the tide.  
Still with a secret triumph he will say,  
"Tractor for sand, maybe, but horse for clay,"  
And in his calling takes a stubborn pride  
That nature still defeats  
The frowsty science of the cloistered men,  
Their theory, their conceits;  
The faith within him still derides the pen,  
Experience his text-book. What have they,  
The bookish townsmen in their dry retreats,  
Known of December dawns, before the sun  
Reddened the east, and fields were wet and grey?  
When have they gone, another day begun,  
By tracks into a quagmire trodden,  
With sacks about their shoulders and the damp  
Soaking until their very souls were sodden,  
To help a sick beast, by a flickering lamp,  
With rough words and kind hands?  
Or felt their boots so heavy and so swere  
With trudging over cledgy lands,  
Held fast by earth, being to earth so near?

Book-learning they have known.  
They meet together, talk, and grow most wise,  
But they have lost, in losing solitude,  
Something,—an inward grace, the seeing eyes,  
The power of being alone;  
The power of being alone with earth and skies,  
Of going about a task with quietude,  
Aware at once of earth's surrounding mood  
And of an insect crawling on a stone.

## SPRING

### SPRING

*The peddler and the reddleman  
Go vagrant through the shires.  
The peddler tempts the farmer's wife  
With all she most admires,  
With beads, and boxes made of shells.  
With lace and huckaback.  
Buckles for shoes and rings for ears,  
And Old Moore's Almanack,  
With tapes and bobbins, pins and thread,  
"What lack you? what d'you lack?"*

*Fraternity*

*The reddleman from head to foot  
Dyed in his scarlet dye,  
Leans like the Devil on the gate,  
And grins when children cry.  
"Redd for your sheep today, shepherd?  
Redd for your yoes and rams?  
I never broke a tup's leg yet  
Or scared the mothering dams.  
You'll find me natty at my job,  
And gentle with the lambs."*

*The tinker and the boggart both  
Long since have learnt by rote  
How cold the rain and sharp the wind  
Drive through a ragged coat.  
The tinker with his little cart  
Hawking his tinny wares,  
Puts down his head against the sleet  
And whimpers for repairs.  
"Kind lady, patch your pots and pans,  
And mend your broken chairs?"*

*The boggart on the frosty ridge,  
His sleeveless arms held wide,  
Stands gaunt against the wintry sky  
Forever crucified,  
A raven perched upon his hat,  
About his feet the crows.  
How bleak December turns the fields,  
How desolate the snows,  
How long the nights and short the days,  
Tatterdemalion knows.*

*There's no beginning to the farmer's year,  
Only recurrent patterns on a scroll  
Unwinding; only use in step with need,  
Sharp on the minute when the minute's come;*

*Spring*

A watching, waiting thole,  
A reckoning by rule-of-thumb.  
You may see wealden farmers plough for seed  
Before July is out, or dung and drudge  
Midsummer yet being here,  
Using the drought to carry horse and wain,  
Else sinks the hoof to the fetlock, axles strain,  
Tines choke. Let farmers do as farmers judge.

Therefore let no man say, "Peas shall be sown  
This month or that; now shall the harrow go;  
Now scuffle with deep coulter, now with shallow;  
Wheat shall succeed to clover; oats to fallow;  
Roots after wheat be grown";  
Such arbitrary dates and rules are vain;  
Not thus the year's arithmetic is planned,  
But to outwit the cunning of the land  
That will not yield, and will not yield again  
Her due of food and wealth  
Unless the moment's twisted to its use,  
Wrung to the utmost by a vigilant hand,  
Admitting no unseasonable excuse.

Nevertheless with spring come certain tasks,  
The sowing of crops, as last year's store sinks low.  
Watch for the day when well-conditioned tilth,  
—Run by the winter frost, made sweet by rain,—  
Crumbles beneath the foot, and warmly basks  
In open fields between the budding shaws;  
Such time when first the rainbow spans its arch  
And settling plover wheel, and ragged daws  
Firk on the plough, in the first fair days of March,  
With the faint tinkle of a wether's bell;  
Days when the sky is wide and pale,  
Washed by shed rain, swept clear of cloud  
By a forgotten gale;  
Bare twiggy copses, uplands newly ploughed,  
Cart-tracks, gate-gaps in hedges, everything  
Wearing its winter aspect with a difference  
Not visible to eye, (not visible  
Save in close seeing, in the burgeoning  
Of a myriad black and thorny joints,)  
Still spare and wintry to the outward eye,  
But with what change to the sense,  
What readiness, what waiting; the suspense  
Of earth laid open, naked to the spring.  
Such days as these the wary man appoints  
For sowing where his earlier foresight tilled,  
And harrows cleared the ground of couch and stones.  
Yet will his patience still endure delay  
If weather's contrary; let boisterous March go by,  
And even April temper into May  
Before he entrusts the furrow straitly drilled  
With precious grain. He knows the clay,

*Sowing of crops*

Malevolent, unkind, a spiteful slave;  
Has he not felt its rancour in his bones?  
Gashed it with share and mattock? torn its flesh?  
Has he not stood beside some new-dug grave  
In that same churchyard where himself shall lie  
And seen the yellow pit? the clods turned fresh?  
And shall he entrust his summer's hope, his pence,  
His cattle's fodder, and his children's bread,  
Rashly to that inhospitable bed?

No, rather shall he leave his land unsown  
A month or more, if acres will not dry.  
Occasion's always timely, not so haste;  
And month from month takes many an usurer's loan.  
So, with his pocket full of tricks,  
His dodges girded on, his cunning braced,  
He waits his time, to master and defeat,  
For he, like other men, must live by politics.  
Thus, if the autumn rains have drowned his wheat,  
He shall put oats in April in its stead;  
Or if a field be obstinate in weeds,  
Set clearing crops from February to June:  
Roots that will shelter partridges, and swedes,  
And mangolds orange as the harvest-moon.  
So shall he fill his barns and build his ricks,  
Sowing in spring his barley, oats, and seeds,  
(But in the autumn, wheat, and the neglected rye,)  
And ever shall he bear in mind the art  
Known to the Roman, of a changing crop,  
To keep his land in kindly heart,  
Following wheat on clover, roots on grain,  
Fallow on cereal, as he judges best  
To restore his weary land and give it rest,  
And spare the toiling of his horse and cart  
With dung to spread. So shall he make his gain  
And please his fields, and profits shall not drop  
Nor men be idle.

*Rotation of crops*

Yet another care,  
The pruning and the training of the hop,  
Busies the farmer while the year is young.  
When bines are cut and cleaned, and poles are bare,  
And the loam is richly black with farmyard dung,  
Then comes the pruning-knife, and severs clean  
Unwanted shoots; the young, too prodigal green  
Falls cut, and sadly wilts  
There on the ground; but then with balls of twine  
Come men on high, strapped stilts,  
Woodenly walking, taller than the poles,  
Pocking the ground with small round holes,  
To tie the string to train the chosen bine,  
With a little crawling gang of boys  
Busily tying in amongst the hills.  
But all's not over then; the rapid plant

*Hops*

Wreathing its spiral upright or aslant,  
This delicate tendrilled thing, this English vine  
Has baleful foes that prey:  
Aphis, that bitter poison kills,  
And mould, that sulphur-dust destroys.  
So against knave and thief  
Work with unsparing hand your sulphur spray,  
In early morning when the dew  
Lies on the sickened leaf,  
Till the clean air with yellow powder fills,  
And the bare garden floats in dusty gold;  
Not once, but be you watchful to renew  
Strife against insect, battle against mould.

Look, too, to your orchards in the early spring.  
The blossom-weevil bores into the sheath,  
Grubs tunnel in the pith of promising shoots,  
The root-louse spends his winter tucked beneath  
Rough bark of trunks or chinks of tangled roots;  
Canker, rot, scab, and mildew blight the tree;  
There seems an enemy in everything.  
Even the bulfinch with his pretty song,  
And blue puffed tits make havoc in the pears  
Pecking with tiny beak and strong;  
Mild February airs  
Are full of rogues on mischievous wing,  
And orchard trees are wickedly tenanted  
By crawling pirates newly roused from sloth,  
The apple-sucker and wood-leopard moth;  
Who'd win his fight must wage a constant war,  
Have sense in his fingers, eyes behind his head;  
Therefore let foresight race ahead of time,  
Spray close and well  
With soap and sulphur, quassia, lead, and lime,  
When buds begin to swell,  
All to defeat some small conspirator.

### *Orchards*

Sometimes in apple country you may see  
A ghostly orchard standing all in white,  
Aisles of white trees, white branches, in the green,  
On some still day when the year hangs between  
Winter and spring, and heaven is full of light.  
And rising from the ground pale clouds of smoke  
Float through the trees and hang upon the air,  
Trailing their wisps of blue like a swelled cloak  
From the round cheeks of breezes. But though fair  
To him who leans upon the gate to stare  
And muse "How delicate in spring they be,  
That mobled blossom and that wimpled tree,"  
There is a purpose in the cloudy aisles  
That took no thought of beauty for its care.  
For here's the beauty of all country miles,  
Their rolling pattern and their space:  
That there's a reason for each changing square,

Here sleeping fallow, there a meadow mown,  
All to their use ranged different each year,  
The shaven grass, the gold, the brindled roan,  
Not in some search for empty grace,  
But fine through service and intent sincere.

*Young Stock*

Nor shall you for your fields neglect your stock;  
Spring is the season when the young things thrive,  
Having the kindly months before them. Lambs,  
Already sturdy, straggle from the flock;  
Frisk tails; tug grass-tufts; stare at children; prance;  
Then panic-stricken scuttle for their dams.  
Calves learn to drink from buckets; foals  
Trot laxly in the meadow, with soft glance  
Inquisitive; barn, sty and shed  
Teem with young innocence newly come alive.  
Round collie puppies, on the sunny step,  
Buffet each other with their duffer paws  
And pounce at flies, and nose the plaited skep,  
And with tucked tail slink yelping from the hive.  
Likewise the little secret beasts  
That open eyes on a world of death and dread,  
Thirst, hunger, and mishap,  
The covert denizens of holts and shaws,  
The little creatures of the ditch and hedge,  
Mice nested in a tussock, shrews, and voles,  
Inhabitants of the wood,  
The red-legged dabchick, paddling in the sedge,  
Followed by chubby brood;  
The vixen, prick-eared for the first alarm  
Beside her tumbling cubs at foot of tree,—  
All in the spring begin their precarious round,  
Not cherished as the striplings on the farm,  
Sheltered, and cosseted, and kept from harm,  
But fang and claw against them, snare and trap,  
For life is perilous to the small wild things,  
Danger's their lot, and fears abound;  
Great cats destroy unheedful wings,  
And nowhere's safety on the hunted ground;  
And who's to blame them, though they be  
Sly, as a man would think him shame?  
Man in security walks straight and free,  
And shall not measure blame,  
For they, that each on other preys,  
Weasel on rabbit, owl on shrew,  
Their cowardly and murderous ways  
In poor defence of life pursue,  
Not for a wanton killing, not for lust,  
As stags will fight among the trampled brake  
With antlers running red; with gore and thrust,  
With hoofs that stamp, and royal heads that shake  
Blood from their eyes,—in vain,  
Since still their splendid anger keeps them blind,  
And lowers their entangled brows again,

For brief possession of a faithless hind;—  
Not thus, but furtive through the rustling leaves  
Life preys on little life; the frightened throat  
Squeals once beneath the yellow bite of stoat,  
Destroyers all, necessity of kind;  
Talon rips fur, and fang meets sharper fang,  
And even sleeping limbs must be alert.  
But fortunate, if death with sudden pang  
Leaps, and is ended; if no lingering hurt,  
Dragging a broken wing or mangled paw,  
Brings the slow anguish that no night reprieves,  
In the dark refuge of a lonely shaw.

So do they venture on their chance of life  
When months seem friendliest; so shall men  
Repair their herds in spring by natural law  
In byre and farrowing pen.  
Thus shall you do, with calves that you would rear,  
—Heifer, not driven to the slaughterer's knife,  
And bull-calf, early cut from bull to steer,—  
Two to one udder run, till they may feed  
Alone; then turn the little foster-siblings out;  
Or wean from birth, and teach to drink from pail,  
With fair allowance of their mother's milk,  
(But watch, for as the calf grows hale,  
He's rough, and knocks the empty pail about.)  
By either method shall you safely breed  
Moist muzzles, thrifty coats of silk,  
Well-uddered heifers, bullocks strong and stout.

The wise man, too, will keep his stock of bees  
In a sheltered corner of his garden patch,  
Where they may winter warmly, breed and hatch  
New swarms to fill his combs and fertilize his trees.

*Bee-Master*

I have known honey from the Syrian hills  
Stored in cool jars; the wild accacia there  
On the rough terrace where the locust shrills,  
Tosses her spindrift to the ringing air;  
Narcissus bares his nectarous perianth  
In white and golden tabard to the sun,  
And while the workers rob the amaranth  
Or scarlet windflower low among the stone  
Intent upon their crops,  
The Syrian queens mate in the high hot day,  
Rapt visionaries of creative fray,  
Soaring from fecund ecstasy alone,  
While through the blazing ether, drops  
Like a small thunderbolt the vindicated drone.

I have known bees within the ruined arch  
Of Akbar's crimson city hang their comb;  
Swarm in forsaken courts in a sultry March,  
Where the mild ring-doves croon, and small apes play,  
And the thin mangy jackal makes his home;

And where, the red walls kindling in the flares,  
Once the great Moghul lolling on his throne,  
Between his languid fingers crumbling spice,  
Ordered his women to the chequered squares,  
And moved them at the hazard of the dice.

But this is the bee-master's reckoning  
In England. Walk among the hives and hear.

Forget not bees in winter, though they sleep,  
For winter's big with summer in her womb,  
And when you plant your rose-trees, plant them deep,  
Having regard to bushes all aflame,  
And see the dusky promise of their bloom  
In small red shoots, and let each redolent name—  
Tuscany, Crested Cabbage, Cottage Maid—  
Load with full June November's dank repose;  
See the kind cattle drowsing in the shade,  
And hear the bee about his amorous trade,  
Brown in the gipsy crimson of the rose.

In February, if the days be clear,  
The waking bee, still drowsy on the wing,  
Will guess the opening of another year  
And blunder out to seek another spring.  
Crashing through winter sunlight's pallid gold,  
His clumsiness sets catkins on the willow  
Ashake like lambs' tails in the early fold,  
Dusting with pollen all his brown and yellow,  
But when the rimy afternoon turns cold  
And undern squalls buffet the chilly fellow,  
He'll seek the hive's warm waxen welcoming  
And set about the chambers' classic mould.

And then pell-mell his harvest follows swift,  
Blossom and borage, lime and balm and clover,  
On Downs the thyme, on cliffs the scantling thrift,  
Everywhere bees go racing with the hours,  
For every bee becomes a drunken lover,  
Standing upon his head to sup the flowers.  
All over England, from Northumbrian coasts,  
To the wild sea-pink blown on Devon rocks,  
Over the merry southern gardens, over  
The grey-green bean-fields, round the Kentish oasts,  
Through the frilled spires of cottage hollyhocks,  
Go the big brown fat bees, and wander in  
Where dusty spears of sunlight cleave the barn,  
And seek the sun again, and storm the whin,  
And in the warm meridian solitude  
Hum in the heather round the moorland tarn.

Look, too, when summer hatches out the brood,  
In tardy May or early June,  
And the young queens are strong in the cocoon,  
Watch, if the days be warm,

The flitting of the swarm.  
Follow, for if beyond your sight they stray,  
Your bees are lost, and you must take your way  
Homeward disconsolate; but be at hand  
And you may take your bees on strangers' land.  
Have your skep ready, drowse them with your smoke;  
Whether they cluster on the handy bough  
Or in the difficult hedge, be nimble now,  
For bees are captious folk  
And quick to turn against the lubber's touch,  
But if you shake them to their wicker hutch  
Firmly, and turn towards the hive your skep,  
Into the hive the clustered thousands stream,  
Mounting the little slatted sloping step,  
A ready colony, queen, workers, drones,  
Patient to build again the waxen thrones  
For younger queens, and all the chambered cells  
For lesser brood, and all the immemorial scheme.

And still they labour, though the hand of man  
Inscrutable and ravaging descend,  
Pillaging in their citadels,  
Defeating wantonly their provident plan,  
Making a havoc of their patient hoard;  
Still silly bees, not knowing to what end,  
Not knowing to what ultimate reward  
Or what new ruin of the garnered hive  
The senseless god in man will send,  
Still in blind stupid industry will strive,  
Constructing for destruction pitiably,  
That still their unintelligible lord  
May reap his wealth from their calamity.

White virgin honey comes from earliest flowers,  
White virgin honey in the market prized;  
From the white clover creeping in the field,  
From orchard-blossom that the worker scours,  
—The richest honey-flow of all the Weald,—  
But cottage-gardens shall not be despised  
Here where no heather is, and scanty lime;  
Therefore, at evening, when the field-work's done,  
And daylight lingers with the latening sun,  
Let gardeners too remember sowing-time.

When skies are gentle, breezes bland,  
When loam that's warm within the hand  
Falls friable between the tines,  
Sow hollyhocks and columbines,  
The tufted pansy, and the tall  
Snapdragon in the broken wall,  
Not for this summer, but for next,  
Since foresight is the gardener's text,  
And though his eyes may never know  
How lavishly his flowers blow,

*Gardener*

Others will stand and musing say  
"These were the flowers he sowed that May."

But for this summer's quick delight  
Sow marigold, and sow the bright  
Frail poppy that with noonday dies  
But wakens to a fresh surprise;  
Along the pathway stones be set  
Sweet Alysson and mignonette,  
That when the full midsummer's come  
On scented clumps the bees may hum,  
Golden Italians, and the wild  
Black humble-bee alike beguiled:  
And lovers who have never kissed  
May sow the cloudy Love-in-Mist.

Nor be the little space forgot  
For herbs to spice the kitchen pot:  
Mint, pennyroyal, bergamot,  
Tarragon and melilot,  
Dill for witchcraft, prisoners' rue,  
Coriander, costmary,  
Tansy, thyme, Sweet Cicely,  
Saffron, balm, and rosemary  
That since the Virgin threw her cloak  
Across it,—so say cottage folk—  
Has changed its flowers from white to blue.  
But have a care that seeds be strewn  
One night beneath a waxing moon,  
And pick when the moon is on the wane,  
Else shall your toil be all in vain.

*She walks among the loveliness she made,  
Between the apple-blossom and the water—  
She walks among the patterned pied brocade,  
Each flower her son, and every tree her daughter.  
This is an island all with flowers inlaid,  
A square of grassy pavement tessellated;  
Flowers in their order blowing as she bade,  
And in their company by her created.  
The waving grasses freckle sun with shade,  
The wind-blown waters round the kingcups ripple,  
Colour on colour chequered and arrayed,  
Shadow on light in variable stipple.  
Her regiments at her command parade,  
Foot-soldier primrose in his rank comes trooping.  
Then wind-flowers in a scarlet loose brigade,  
Fritillary with dusky orchis grouping.  
They are the Cossacks, dim in ambushade,  
Scarfed in their purple like a foreign stranger,  
Piratical, and apt for stealthy raid,  
Wherever's mystery or doubtful danger.  
Iris salutes her with his broad green blade,  
And marches by with proud imperial pennant,*

*The Island*

*And tulips in a flying cavalcade  
Follow valerian for their lieutenant.  
The Lords-and-Ladies dressed for masquerade  
In green silk domino discreetly hooded,  
Hurry towards the nut-trees' colonnade,  
Philandering where privacy's well wooded;  
They're the civilians of this bold crusade,  
The courtiers of this camp by blossom tented,  
With woodbine clambering the balustrade,  
And all by briar roses battlemented.  
There, in the sunlit grasses green as jade,  
She walks; she sees her squadrons at attention,  
And, laughing at her flowery escapade,  
Stretches her hands towards her dear invention.*

This much of gardens; but I tell  
Also of native flowers in wood and dell;  
Not such as, sudden on a stony height,  
Break from the warmth of snow and live in light  
Of mountain sun on Alp or Dolomite,  
Bright squabs on limestone screes;  
Not of the Rhoetian poppy, fluttering brave  
Frail yellow flags beside a rocky track  
Alone with eagles; not of these,  
Not of the thymes that greenly pave  
A fallen cliff, rock-rose in cruel crack;  
Not of the scarlet tulip, slim and bright,  
Snapped by the gallop of the wild gazelle;  
But of such flowers as dwell  
In marsh and meadow, wayside, wood and waste,  
Of campion and the little pimpernel;  
Of kexen parsley and the varied vetch;  
Of the living mesh, cats-cradle in a ditch;  
Of gorse and broom and whins;  
Of hops and buckwheat and the wild woodbine  
That with their stems must twine  
Like the way of the sun to left from right;  
Of berried bindweeds, twisting widdershins;  
Of all the tangle of the hedgerow, laced  
With thorny dog-rose and the deadly dwale;  
Throughout the seasons do I count their tale,  
But orderly, that those who walk abroad

*The wild flowers*

In lane and wood  
May find them in their season as they grow;  
Anemones like some last drift of snow  
Between the hazels, hanging down their bell  
When rain's about; small woodruff low;  
Bugles, that leave the shelter of the glade  
And march across the open; violets that blow  
Purple and dim at tree's-foot; and the tall  
Orchis that country children call  
By many names, some pretty and some rude.  
These are the flowers that shelter in the wood,

*The wood-flowers*

Sulky in colour, as secret in the shade;

But wayside tramps, saucy and unafraid,  
Jack-by-the-hedge, Pickpocket, Ragged Robin,  
Small yellows and small scarlets, nowise strange,  
Nowise like aliens strayed,  
But English and robust,

*The wayside flowers*

Fight tangled for their life through grit and dust,  
Pushing their way with spring, when heifers range  
Uneasy up the lane, and as they go  
Tug at a passing mouthful, biting harsh.  
And others in the meadow and the marsh  
Make rings round Easter; kingcup, marigold,  
And the pale orchis dappled like a dobbin;  
Buttercups thousand-fold  
Wearing their cloth-of-gold among the hay  
With clover and the little eye-of-day.

But once I went through the lanes, over the sharp  
Tilt of the little bridges; past the forge,  
And heard the clang of anvil and of iron,  
And saw the founting sparks in the dusky forge,  
And men outside with horses, gossiping.  
So I came through that April England, moist  
And green in its lush fields between the willows,  
Foaming with cherry in the woods, and pale  
With clouds of lady's-smock along the hedge,  
Until I came to a gate and left the road  
For the gentle fields that enticed me, by the farms,  
Wandering through the embroidered fields, each one  
So like its fellow; wandered through the gaps,  
Past the mild cattle knee-deep in the brooks,  
And wandered drowsing as the meadows drowsed  
Under the pale wide heaven and slow clouds.  
And then I came to a field where the springing grass  
Was dulled by the hanging cups of fritillaries,  
Sullen and foreign-looking, the snaky flower,  
Scarfed in dull purple, like Egyptian girls  
Camping among the furze, staining the waste  
With foreign colour, sulky-dark and quaint,  
Dangerous too, as a girl might sidle up,  
An Egyptian girl, with an ancient snaring spell,  
Throwing a net, soft round the limbs and heart,  
Captivity soft and abhorrent, a close-meshed net,  
—See the square web on the murrey flesh of the flower—  
Holding her captive close with her bare brown arms.  
Close to her little breast beneath the silk,  
A gipsy Judith, witch of a ragged tent,  
And I shrank from the English field of fritillaries  
Before it should be too late, before I forgot  
The cherry white in the woods, and the curdled clouds,  
And the lapwings crying free above the plough.

*Fritillaries*

The spring was late that year, I well remember.

*Spring*

The year when first I came on the field of fritillaries;  
So late, the cottars meeting in the lanes  
Would stop to marvel mildly, with that old  
Unplumbed capacity for wonderment  
At Nature's whim. The calendar told spring,  
But spring was heedless: April into May  
Passed, and the trees still wore their livery  
Of lean black winter's servants; very strange  
Most lovely Easter played three days at summer,  
A heavy summer over winter's fields,  
Three days, and then was vanished, like a queen  
Dropping the lifted flap of her pavilion.

Nightly I leant me at the window-sill,  
Telling the chaplet of the slipping days,  
But still the lamp streamed wet on polished stones,  
And still the nights were empty silences  
Robbed of the nightingale; they only held  
The slanting strings of rain: Orion marched  
Invisible down the hours from dusk to dawn,  
Till morning pallor lost him, but the clouds  
Hid all his gradual latening; that year Spring  
He shot his midnight javelins unseen  
And dipped the horizon into other skies,  
Lost to the North, till autumn should renew  
His captaincy, with Rigel, Betelgeuse,  
Aldebaran, and brightest Sirius.

Have we so many springs allotted us,  
And who would rob a pauper of his pence?

Then broke the spring. The hedges in a day  
Burgeoned to green; the drawing of the trees,  
Incomparably pencilled line by line,  
Thickened to heaviness, and men forgot  
The intellectual austerity  
Of winter, in the rich warm-blooded rush  
Of growth, and mating beasts, and rising sap.  
How swift and sudden strode that tardy spring,  
Between a sunrise and a sunset come!  
The shadow of a swallow crossed the wall;  
Nightingales sang by day. The pushing blade  
Parted the soil. The morning roofs and oasts  
There, down the lane, beside the brook and willows,  
Cast their long shadows. Pasture, ankle-wet,  
Steamed to the sun. The tulips dyed their green  
To red in cottage gardens. Bees astir,  
Fussing from flower to flower, made war on time.  
Body and blood were princes; the cold mind  
Sank with Orion from the midnight sky;  
The stars of spring rose visible: The Virgin;  
Al Fard the solitary; Regulus  
The kingly star, the handle of the Sickle;  
And Venus, lonely splendour in the west,

Roamed over the rapt meadows; shone in gold  
Beneath the cottage eaves where nesting birds  
Obeyed love's law; shone through the cottage panes  
Where youth lay sleeping on the breast of youth,  
Where love was life, and not a brief desire;  
Shone on the heifer blaring for the bull  
Over the hedgerow deep in dewy grass:  
And glinted through the dark and open door  
Where the proud stallion neighing to his mares  
Stamped on the cobbles of the stable floor.  
For all were equal in the sight of spring,  
Man and his cattle; corn; and greening trees,  
Ignorant of the soul's perplexity,  
Ignorant of the wherefore and the end,  
Bewildered by no transient ecstasy,  
But following the old and natural law,  
Nor marred nor blazing with a royal excess;  
The law of life and life's continuance.

That was a spring of storms. They prowled the night;  
Low level lightning flickered in the east  
Continuous. The white pear-blossom gleamed  
Motionless in the flashes; birds were still;  
Darkness and silence knotted to suspense,  
Riven by the premonitory glint  
Of skulking storm, a giant that whirled a sword  
Over the low horizon, and with tread  
Earth-shaking ever threatened his approach,  
But to delay his terror kept afar,  
And held earth stayed in waiting like a beast  
Bowed to receive a blow. But when he strode  
Down from his throne of hills upon the plain,  
And broke his anger to a thousand shards  
Over the prostrate fields, then leapt the earth  
Proud to accept his challenge; drank his rain;  
Under his sudden wind tossed wild her trees;  
Opened her secret bosom to his shafts;  
The great drops spattered; then above the house  
Crashed thunder, and the little wainscot shook  
And the green garden in the lightning lay.

Who has not seen the spring, is blind, is dead.  
Better for him that he should coffined lie,  
And in that coin his toll to Nature pay  
Than live a debtor. All things shall pass by  
That fret his mind: the shift of policy,  
Princes' ambition, wiser governance,  
Civilisation's tides. There's dissonance  
By our great necessary Babel bred,  
Perplexes eager spirits unprepared,  
Puts out their seeing eyes, leaves their blind touch  
To grope past prejudice and ignorance  
Towards solution, as they throw away  
Each broken, each successive crutch.

Such truths as we have snared  
Into the spread conspiracy of our nets,  
Come to us fragmentary from a whole,  
As meteorites from space. Now science sets  
Two splintered ends together, makes one shred  
Corroborate another; now live flesh  
Persuades us by its drunken fallacy;  
Now the instinctive soul  
Takes its short-cut to grace; now blown by gust  
Of hazard, truth's entangled in strange mesh,  
Else how should poetry,  
The runes of divination, superstition  
Fastening sharp claw on common circumstance,  
Even artifice as neat astrology  
Twisting the very stars to fit man's ends,  
Mingle some ore with dross of sorcery  
Unless the fragment of the whole be part?  
There's some relation we may not adjust,  
Some concord of creation that the mind  
Only in perilous balance apprehends,  
Loth, fugitive, obscure.

All else dies in its season; all perplexities,  
Even human grief with the human body dies,  
Such griefs that press so wildly on the heart  
As to crush in its shell. But still endure  
Nature's renewal and man's fortitude,  
A common thing, a permanent common thing,  
So coarse, so stated, usual, and so rude,  
So quiet in performance, and so slow  
That hurrying wit outruns it. Yet with spring  
Life leaps; her fountains flow;  
And nimble foolish wit must humbled go.

There were so many days that I was given.  
But whether of this spring or that? they merge  
As travelling clouds across my permanent heaven.

My life was rich; I took a swarm of bees  
And found a crumpled snake-skin on the road,  
All in one day, and was increased by these.

I have not understood humanity.  
But those plain things, that gospel of each year,  
Made me the scholar of simplicity.

*This once I saw, but not again,  
Above the water pocked by rain:  
Three mottled eggs in a moorhen's nest,  
In a clump of kingcups by the edge  
Of the water, in amongst the sedge;  
The rain was but an April shower;  
The kingcup but a minted flower,  
Cup of a king in gold.*

*Was there not once a king who sought him*

*The perfect chalice, and bethought him  
The breast of Helen for his mould?  
A wild bird's nest and Helena's breast,  
What lovely things that spring did hold!*

\* \* \* \* \*

Now die the sounds. No whisper stirs the trees  
Her pattern merged into the general web  
The shriven day accepts her obsequies  
With humble ebb.

*Nocturne*

Now are the noiseless stars made visible  
That hidden by the day pursued their track,  
And this one planet that we know too well  
Mantles in black.

Then, from the thicket, sang the nightingale,  
So wildly sweet, so sudden, and so true,  
It seemed a herald from beyond the veil  
Had broken through.

The common earth's confusion all unseen,  
But worlds revealed in broad magnificence,—  
That unembodied music thrud between  
Sprang hence, or thence?

Nothing remained of the familiar round,  
Only the soul ecstatic and released  
Founted towards the spheres in jets of sound,  
And died, and ceased,

But plangent from the thickets of the thorn  
Broke other voices, taking up the choir,  
While Cancer interlaced with Capricorn  
In silent fire,

And all the harmonies were joined and whole,  
Silence was music, music silence made,  
Till each was both or either, and the soul  
Was not afraid.

**SUMMER**

**SUMMER**

Now be you thankful, who in England dwell,  
That to the starving trees and thirsty grass

Even at summer's height come cloudy fleets  
Moist from the wastes of the Atlantic swell,  
To spill their rain, and pass,  
While fields renew their sweets.  
Not as the Arab watches in despair  
The scannel promise of his harvest parch  
Even before the sun climbs high in March  
And only dust-motes dim the scorching air.  
He who must yoke to wooden water-wheel  
The bullock or the camel, turning slow  
But constant in the round and trodden groove,  
Slumberous as hypnotics move,  
To the lamentation of the whining cogs,  
While in the runnels rapid waters flow,  
Lapped by the timid tongue of pariah dogs,  
And in the trenches spread, to quench and heal.  
Or as the Persian from his hills of snow  
Gathers the freshet to the jealous pool,  
And floods his garden with a hundred streams  
Under the plane-trees when the evening's cool,  
But still for all his pains  
Sees roses languish with returning noon,  
And in the heat of June  
The leaves already flutter from the planes.

Such arid months as only exiles know,  
With longing for the smell of English rains,  
Some drops to lay the dust, some shower to stir  
The earthy redolence of soaking loam,  
Some saddening of the sky before the shower,  
Some dew to hold a footprint for an hour;  
When through the stones the lizard and the snake  
Rustle their brittle length, and crickets chirr  
Day after day, and broom-pods crackling break,  
Scavenger kites hang waiting for the dead  
Over the old and solitary ram,  
And the mule picks his way up the dried river-bed,—  
This know, and know then how the heart can ache  
With pining for the woods and clouds of home.

If I could take my England, and could wring  
One living moment from her simple year,  
One moment only, whether of place or time,  
—One winter coppice feathery with rime,  
One shred of dawn in spring,—  
Then should my voice find echo in English ear;  
Then might I say, "That which I love, I am."

Full summer comes; June brings the longest day.  
All country dwellers know the small despair  
Of the year's summit; but the yeoman now  
Has little time for vain regrets to spare.  
There's work enough for him and all his folks;  
He watches for the flowering of his hay;

Knows that cleared land is ready for the plough;  
Washes his empty sheds with cleansing lime  
While herds at pasture fatten to their prime,  
With risking tails in shade beneath the oaks.

And before great harvest takes him to the field,  
Imperious and urgent for his time,  
If he be wise he'll finish with his flock  
Shearing as early as the warmth of May  
Down in the genial meadows of the Weald.  
There, in a barn, with crazy doors swung wide  
Making a square of sun on dusty floor,  
The shearer sits, in shepherd's borrowed smock,  
And from the pen of huddled backs outside,  
Each beast in turn is driven through the door;  
Struggles, and kicks, but with a hands-twist thrown  
Lies foolish, as the fingers slick and deft  
Open the fleece and cut the belly up,  
(Changing left hand for right, and right for left,)  
Against the fall of wool, in one sole piece,  
All test of skill, all source of surly pride;  
Then on the heap is pitched the greasy fleece,  
And the clipped sheep,—hogg, wether, lusty tup,—  
Staggers astonished from such curt release,  
And bleating seeks the refuge of the heft;  
Naked, and bleating, and at first forlorn  
With narrow smear of blood on neck or side,  
From sharp experience goes the shearling shorn.

### *Sheep Shearing*

Yet is the shepherd roughly kind;  
Anoints a wound, shakes disapproving head,  
But tolerant, to slight mishap resigned;  
Scours the short wool for maggot, tick, or ked.  
Shepherd's an old and a familiar trade;  
Abel, that firstling of the sunburnt plains,  
Through the scorched months between the annual rains  
Sang to his firstlings in the fig-tree's shade;  
As Jacob, seven years to win a maid,  
—She being beautiful, and Leah but tender-eyed,—  
Drove out his flock into the stony place,  
Ringstraked, speckled, pied;  
Peeled the green poplar switch, and dreamed of Rachel's face;  
As David, young and ruddy, kept the sheep,  
Shepherd and harp-player in the wilderness;  
Shaping for kingship, growing to a throne,  
Come from the wilds to soothe dark Saul to sleep.  
For no man knows as he who lives alone  
The vigour of a purpose deeply laid,  
The strength, the fate, the seal upon his brow,  
The urgency of an unpublished vow,  
A vow unregistered, a vow unmade,  
Unknown to its maker, rather; only known  
To the God and origin of such fumbling ends,  
So inly lived, so congruously held,

### *Shepherd*

True in each gesture as by force compelled,  
(For no man sees the pattern of his maze,  
Least of all he who plans his careful ways  
Lacking the strong inevitable thing.)  
As Israel, Abel, David knew,  
Yet unaware to consummation grew,  
The patriarch, the martyr, and the king.

No man is closer to the beasts he tends,  
Nor, idle, savours such contented days;  
No man more blessed-free,  
Free from our need of comfort and of friends,  
Love, props, illusion, counterfeit, escape;  
Living a life that to its real shape  
Evolves, increases, swells its girth, ascends,  
As an unconscious and a splendid tree,  
A fact of Nature, not a random plan.

I remember, I met two shepherds carrying  
An old man, dead, high on the summer Downs.  
He was a shepherd too; I had known the man.  
Foxes he knew, he knew the ways of the hawk,  
The ways of the weather, but not the ways of towns.  
Dead now, his white flock going before  
With shaken bells across the scars of chalk,  
His dog at heel of the man who propped his head.  
I stopped to gaze, since I should gaze no more;  
To take my last look, since here was no returning,  
But could not learn from him, for there's no learning  
Either from alien or familiar dead.

After the general shearing still remain  
The tenderer milch-woes to be clipped.  
A separate job, some later week,  
When temperate days will hold,  
—For eild sheep, wethers, hoggs, and barren woes  
Risk with less danger the returning cold.  
Then may the lambs be dipped,  
The lambs that frantic for their mothers seek  
Who gaunt, ungainly, queer, regain the fold.  
And general dipping next in order goes,  
Snatched between hay and harvest, as may be,  
And as the ripening and the weather fit.  
This is a feast that makes the whole farm shout  
With laughter as on holiday, to see  
The bothered and unwilling beasts submit  
And swim the tank, and scramble dripping out  
With never a maggot left, or louse, or flea.  
Sheep do the work, while men stand grinning by,  
Knowing that work in earnest waits them after  
This interlude, this funning, and this laughter,  
Work in the fields, with aching thews, and sweat,  
And blessed coolth only when sun has set.

*Sheep Washing*

The summer's horn indeed is full with crops;

*Haysel and Harvest*

And earlier toil its due reward has earned.  
Now shall you reap and gather, store and stack  
Your hay, your corn, your barley and your hops  
In close succession, being less concerned  
With calendar and farmer's almanac  
Than with good timely weather, setting fair  
Over the parcelled fields from copse to copse;  
Good summer sun, that dries the waggon track,  
Ripens the grasses, tans the swollen awn,  
And puts contented faces everywhere.

First you shall cut your hay, when grasses stand  
In flower, but running not to seed,  
But even here rehearse the farmer's creed:  
'Tis farmer, not the date, that calls the tune;  
Better dry August hay than wet in June.  
Have your folks working in the fields by dawn,  
Your team of horses doubly spanned;  
Leave the cut swath all day; and air by rake  
Next morning, and, if weather still be set,  
Gather to cocks for carting, but should wet  
Flatten the cocks, then you shall tedd and shake  
Again when sun returns. Now you shall build  
Your rick in yard or field, as suits you best,  
Choosing your stacker for a good man skilled,  
Building on brushwood, sides both true and straight,  
That when hay settles lines may still be plumb;  
And let each forkful to its place be pressed  
And truly bound, by stacker's treading weight;  
Widen your eaving-course; let roof be steep,  
Bents sloping outwards, so to keep  
Rain from the heart until the thatcher come.  
Then you may leave your rick with easy mind;  
Fodder for sweet-breathed cattle shall be sweet;  
And whether nights be harsh or days be kind  
Your hay shall neither moulder, rot, nor heat;  
You shall not wake to hear your cowman shout,  
As calving heifer calls him from his rest;  
You shall not stare to see in fear and doubt  
A blood-red feather flaming on the west,  
And rousing all your people as you run,  
Hasten too late towards your labour's pyre,  
And see your reckoned trusses, hardly-won,  
Blaze to the wanton merriment of fire.

Next shall you reap your corn. Your oats shall fall  
Before full ripeness set them on to shed,  
But leave your barley till it droop the head  
With ripened beard. The tall  
Wheat for an early cut; at midday, walk  
When sun is hot and high, and if you hear  
Straw crackle in the standing crop,  
And see the slender forest of the stalk  
Still green towards the ground, but gold at top,

*Haysel*

Then you may know that cutting-time is near.  
Peas are pernickety; cut when you may.  
Beans, the sweet-scented beans of spring, shall stand  
Till pods are turning black, or till you clear  
Against the needs of autumn for your land.  
Now as to cutting: you shall choose your day  
When weather signs are fairest, as for hay;  
Scythe first the heading round the field by hand,  
Then send your reaper up the flat gold wall  
With whirling sails and clash of toppling sheaves:  
See that the cutter keen and sharply cleaves,  
And that the horses, driven with a level gait,  
Work the full width, and keep the measure straight.

And in the evening when the final square  
Of standing corn fast dwindles to its end,  
When the tired horses take a sharper bend,  
A shorter strip each time, as day grows late,  
Let boys stand round, with ready stick and stone,  
To watch for the dash of rabbit or of hare  
Within the last small narrowing refuge penned;  
Poor frightened Wat, that all the day alone  
(Since first the reaper with its whirring noise  
Made terror of the field,)  
Crouched to the ground, by friendly straw concealed,  
Inward and inward creeping, as the voice  
Of men came nearer, and the sheaves were thrown  
Out on the widening stubble, there to lie  
Until the stoker with his fork came by,  
And horses' shaggy fetlocks trampled past  
At their monotonous pacing, till at last  
Through thinning stalks, pressed flat against the earth,  
The fugitive saw, with starting eye,  
Their shining shoes strike fire on errant flints,  
And the sharp knives slip by with level glints.  
Then goes the lean brown body for its life,  
Streaked for the distant shelter of the wood,  
Across the new, strange stubble hurled,  
That was not there at dawn,—a different world  
Since men and horses came with cutting knife,  
And razed the corn that tall and rustling stood.  
But odds too heavy end the frantic race;  
There's nothing but a twitching body cast  
Down by a jacket, as 'twere nothing worth  
But shillings to the farmer's frugal wife.

An English cornfield in full harvesting  
Is English as the Bible, though no more  
(These clanking times) the gleaners following  
The reapers by their rhythm rapt  
Plunder the gavels for their little store;  
Or the sickle cut the poppies and the corn,  
Save when the crop is tangled by a gale,  
Beaten by rain, twisted like murdered hair:

Then comes the sickle to its old avail  
Crook'd as the young moon in her narrowest horn,  
And steals in the poor broken tangle, where  
Straightforward knives are parried, and the apt  
Inventiveness of man shall not prevail.  
Then to the simplest shapes of his first craft,  
—Livelihood wrested from the earth that bore,  
Cradled, and confined him,—man shall repair;  
Shapes copied from the sky, with cutting edge;  
Natural shapes, to meet the natural hitch  
Of hindering weather, the permanent enemy;  
Then, with the noonscape, underneath the hedge,  
His fingers blistered by the rubbing haft,  
His shoulders propped by hedge, his feet in ditch,  
The random reaper drains his pint of ale.

Look to your stocking, for full many a field  
Of hearty grain and straw runs half to waste  
Through heedless stocking, and the proper yield  
Leaves half its measure to the rook and daw.  
But if you'd have full grain and ripened straw,  
After a week of drying fit to cart,  
Stoker, take up a sheaf in either hand,  
Between the ears and band,  
And swing them clear, and bring the butts apart  
Sharply to ground, ears sloping to a peak,  
(Ten sheaves for Kent,) clashing together, braced,  
So that the little ridge be thatched and sleek,  
Firm to the wind, secure to rain and hail,  
That winnower and that flail,  
Those thieves of harvest, pilfering what they can  
In last-hour larceny from rival man.  
For nature gives, and nature takes again;  
Therefore be eager of her liberal hours;  
To drought succeeds the flood, to calm the gale,  
And winter's frost lays low the summer's flowers.  
Therefore, you harvesters, before the rain  
Trample your crop with roguish feet,  
Wring what you may, and if too fast and fleet  
Even the summer sun describe his arc  
Leaving you with your shocks but half-way set,  
Be prouder than the punctual rigid clerk,  
And stickle not to labour after dark,  
For you take nature's orders, he the clock's.  
The cooler night shall spare your noonday sweat;  
The breeze shall whisper in the rustling shocks;  
The moon above the thorn  
Rise harvest-tawny on the stubble shorn,  
And in the bending lines of girls and men  
Some snatch of song be born.  
Lovers shall find their magic then,  
And jolly farmers wink at privilege;  
Only the moon shall look behind the hedge,  
Confederate of youth;

Only the moon shall hear the whispered pledge,  
Great lyric liar, to a lovelier truth  
Transcending, setting purport free,  
And touching all things with her alchemy.

*When moonlight reigns, the meanest brick and stone  
Take on a beauty not their own,  
And past the flaw of builded wood  
Shines the intention whole and good,  
And all the little homes of man  
Rise to a dimmer, nobler plan  
When colour's absence gives escape  
To the deeper spirit of the shape,*

*—Then earth's great architecture swells  
Among her mountains and her fells  
Under the moon to amplitude  
Massive and primitive and rude,*

*—Then do the clouds like silver flags  
Stream out above the tattered crags,  
And black and silver all the coast  
Marshals its hunched and rocky host,  
And headlands striding sombrely  
Buttress the land against the sea,  
The darkening land, the brightening wave,—  
When moonlight slants through Merlin's cave.*

And August comes, when fields are sere and brown,  
When stubble takes the place of ruffling corn;  
When the sweet grass is like a prisoner shorn;  
The air is full of drifting thistledown,  
Grey pointed sprites, that on the breezes ride.  
The cloyed trees droop, the ash-keys spinning fall;  
The brooks are pebbly; for the trickle's dried;  
Birds moult, and in the leafy copses hide,  
And summer makes a silence after spring,  
As who with age a liberal youth should chide.

*This is the month of weeds,  
Kex, charlock, thistle,  
Among the shorn bristle  
Of stubble drop seeds.  
This is the month of weeds.*

*Wood-monath*

*Spurry, pimpernel, quitch,  
Twine in the stubble,  
Making for trouble;  
With nettle in ditch,  
Spurry, pimpernel, quitch.*

*Yet the field has a friend,  
The nimble clover,  
Custodian, lover,  
Tare to defend.*

*The field has a friend.*

*Humble-bees boldly reach  
Red clover's honey,  
Paid in sweet money.  
Hive-bees in vain beseech:  
Honey is out of reach.*

*Now let the clover spread;  
Nature it craveth;  
Foemen it braveth,  
Strangling them dead.  
So let the clover spread*

Now pasture's low; the moidered cattle-men  
Drive their poor stock by unaccustomed paths  
To forage on the richer aftermaths,  
Old hay-fields, billowy with dip and stetch.  
Now by the hedgerows and along the lane  
The berried cuckoo-pint and yellow vetch.  
Herald the autumn, and the squirrels rob  
Windfalls of hazel and the Kentish cob,  
(Plumping their kernels white as children's teeth,  
With acorns, provender for the winter drey,  
That little larder, safely tucked beneath  
Leaves, roots, old tree-stumps, for a milder day  
Of winter, when the sleeping muscles stretch  
And there's a stirring in the sodden wood  
As woken squirrel reaches after food.

Man's not the only harvester; urchins and voles  
Lay up their store of berries and of grain  
Preciously gleaned and carried to their holes  
With busy trotting paws and serious snout,  
Each to his schemes no less than man devout,  
Making of instinct all-sufficient reasons;  
Intent on waking with the spring again  
To life's new provocation, as if the seasons  
Eternally renewed were dedicate  
To hedge-hogs, squirrels, badgers, men, mice, moles.

But though such hints of autumn gild the late  
Summer, still is the summer fully here,  
Great-breasted, brazen, strumpet of the year;  
Furiously I do the summer hate,  
Resentfully I do the summer love,  
The woods all amorous with croodling dove,  
Days weakening to the soul, days threatening  
Winter-bought strength, thin purity of spring.  
With summer's laxness am I all undone.  
What can I do in summer? What but sing:

*Far from shrewd companies,  
Far from the flares,  
Here where the summer is,*

*Summer*

*And laden airs,  
Here where no noise of men  
Down in the wood  
Startles the water-hen  
And small black brood,  
Here where the branches wave  
And day is green,  
Making the wood a cave  
Aquamarine,  
Here where the insects hum,  
And dragon-fly,  
Here we clandestine come,  
Marvell and I.*

*In summer when the woods are deep,  
Ghostly society I keep,  
And play the spy, down dappled glades,  
On lovely or on ardent shades,  
Eavesdropper on the gallant game  
Where nothing's burnt by so much flame,  
And nothing broken but the rhyme  
From maying-time to haying-time.  
And what's the matter, though I see  
A wrongly amorous company?  
Though lover after lover flit  
Labelled with names that do not fit?  
If Lovelace Sacharissa woo,  
Or Waller Julia pursue,  
If Marvell do Lucasta find  
Than his own mistress less unkind,  
Or Herrick's persuasions prove  
A better argument of love  
Than the conversion of the Jew?*

*The cuckoo stutters in his note,  
But still the turbulent petticoat  
Of cherry silk or oyster grey  
Makes lively sport through summer day.  
The rounded arm, the bunchèd curl,  
The peeping shoe, the sullen pearl,—  
Between the trees they glance and pass,  
Or take their ease upon the grass.*

*Perilla, fly! Corinna, stay!  
In deserts of Bohemia,  
A wood near Athens, or this wood  
Where these grown oaks as saplings stood  
Three hundred English years gone by,  
"And yet I love her till I die."*

So, for the idle, float the lither days,  
The seremonth deepens as its age draws on;  
Morning and evening veil them in a haze;  
But when the last high loaded cart has gone  
Leaving its trail of straws along the hedge,

And the last mug is drained to harvest-pledge,  
Work still remains to finish what is done.

Thatcher with carpet bound about his knees  
Tramps farm to farm with slow deliberate stride.  
Thatchers are rare, these days, he'd have you know.  
Good thatchers, those that go  
About their business as it were a pride,  
Scorning Dutch barns and mushrooms such as these,  
New-fangled, driving out a settled trade.  
Once there were thatchers, ah, could hip a roof  
Easy as twist a sheaf; were not afraid  
Of any rain, since work was weather-proof.  
East Anglia bred them, where the reeds grow grey  
Mile upon fenny mile, and ducks go home  
Over the level wastes of dyke and sluice.  
Still maundering on, he sorts his pegs, his comb,  
His wooden bat, his twine, in neat array,  
Trimming his straw,—full length of wheaten straw,—  
Watered and sweated ready to its use,  
Sweet in the yelm, for thatch without a flaw.  
Grumbling and boasting turn and turn about,  
Having told the tally of the needed threaves,  
He mounts his ladder, pocket full of splines,  
And packs his yelms, and calls his mate a lout  
If he disturb one straw from ordered lines.  
Proud of his stelch, and prouder of his eaves,  
Proud of his skill to thatch an awkward pent,  
He is an artist with a long descent,  
Brother to workers in peculiar crafts;  
To the old wheel-wright, punctual timber-master,  
—Could tell you whether wood were frow or doted  
Before the trunk was opened; often quoted  
The Bible; could turn out a pair of shafts  
With straight and proper grain; adzed every spoke  
By hand, and never had one cracked or bent;—

*Thatcher*

Brother to pargetter, with hair and plaster,  
Combing the diaper on porous lime,  
Pleased as a child with patterns he'd invent;  
Brother to all the slow fastidious folk  
Whose care is matched by their disdain of time;  
To basket-makers, shaping Kentish boggles;  
To osier-weavers, twisting supple wands;  
To Jack-of-all-trades with his sundry dodges;  
Brick-layer, even, carrying his hod;  
To Down-bred shepherds, puddling secret ponds,  
So jealous of their mystery, for dew;  
Lastly, to dowser, forcing virgin wells,  
That changeling of the willows, simple, odd,  
Touched by some finger laid on him askew  
At birth by nixie or by water-god;  
But dowser never knows, or never tells.  
Smiling, the willow upright in his hold,

*Craftsmen*

Vacant he lags across the thirsty miles;  
Shall water pull him? or shall buried gold,  
Panoply of a Dane, beneath a mound?  
But dowsers never knew, or never told.  
Only, he pauses when he feels the switch  
Quickened between his fingers, curtsy, twitch;  
Pauses, and points, and smiles,  
And loses interest; for water's found.

All craftsmen share a knowledge. They have held  
Reality down fluttering to a bench;  
Cut wood to their own purposes; compelled  
The growth of pattern with the patient shuttle;  
Drained acres to a trench.  
Control is theirs. They have ignored the subtle  
Release of spirit from the jail of shape.  
They have been concerned with prison, not escape;  
Pinioned the fact, and let the rest go free,  
And out of need made inadvertent art.  
All things designed to play a faithful part  
Build up their plain particular poetry.  
Tools have their own integrity;  
The sneath of scythe curves rightly to the hand,  
The hammer knows its balance, knife its edge,  
All tools inevitably planned,  
Stout friends, with pledge  
Of service; with their crotchets too  
That masters understand,  
And proper character, and separate heart,  
But always to their chosen temper true.  
—So language, smithied at the common fire,  
Grew to its use; as sneath and shank and halt  
Of well-grained wood, nice instruments of craft,  
Curve to the simple mould the hands require,  
Born of the needs of man.  
The poet like the artisan  
Works lonely with his tools; picks up each one,  
Blunt mallet knowing, and the quick thin blade,  
And plane that travels when the hewing's done;  
Rejects, and chooses; scores a fresh faint line;  
Sharpens, intent upon his chiselling;  
Bends lower to examine his design,  
If it be truly made,  
And brings perfection to so slight a thing.  
But in the shadows of his working-place,  
Dust-moted, dim,  
Among the chips and lumber of his trade,  
Lifts never his bowed head, a breathing-space  
To look upon the world beyond the sill,  
The world framed small, in distance, for to him  
The world and all its weight are in his will.  
Yet in the ecstasy of his rapt mood  
There's no retreat his spirit cannot fill,  
No distant leagues, no present, and no past,

No essence that his need may not distil,  
All pressed into his service, but he knows  
Only the immediate care, if that be good;  
The little focus that his words enclose;  
As the poor joiner, working at his wood,  
Knew not the tree from which the planks were taken,  
Knew not the glade from which the trunk was brought,  
Knew not the soil in which the roots were fast,  
Nor by what centuries of gales the boughs were shaken,  
But holds them all beneath his hands at last.

Much goes to little making,—law and skill,  
Tradition's usage, each man's separate gift;  
Till the slow worker sees that he has wrought  
More than he knew of builded truth,  
As one who slips through years of youth,  
Leaving his young indignant rage,  
And finds the years' insensible drift  
Brings him achievement with the truce of age.

## AUTUMN

## AUTUMN

How slow the darkness comes, once daylight's gone,  
A slowness natural after English day,  
So unimpassioned, tardy to move on,  
No southern violence that burns away,  
Ardent to live, and eager to be done.  
The twilight lingers, etching tree on sky;  
The gap's a portal on the ridge's crest;  
The partridge coveys call beyond the rye;  
Still some red bar of sunset cracks the west;  
The orange harvest-moon like a dull sun  
Rolls silent up the east above the hill;  
Earth like a sleeper breathes, and all is still  
This hour of after-day, the dying day's bequest,  
This autumn dusk, when neither day nor night  
Urges a man to strive or sleep; he stands  
Filled with the calm of that familiar place,  
Idle the shaft beneath his folded hands,  
He who must work the lowlands of his farm,  
Making tenacity his only creed,  
Taking of death and birth his daily need,  
Viewing mortality without alarm.

*Angelus*

But brief, but short, this hour of quietude  
Gives pause to labour; but a breathing-space

*Autumn*

Granted, before necessity renewed  
Twists up the sinews of his fortitude;

For now the year draws on towards its ending.  
Squirrel has hoarded all his nuts, and man,  
(Laying for yet another spring his plan,)  
Counts over what he has for winter's spending.  
Granary's full with heaped and dusty store:  
Apples on attic floor  
Throughout the house their brackish smell are sending;  
The steeped ricks with frost are hoar  
In silent yard; the harvest's at its sleeping;  
That's slumber now, which once was heyday reaping.  
Now retrospect and prospect have their share,  
For autumn like the Janus of the year  
Holds spring to spring in double-handed keeping.  
That sleeps, which once was live; but in the womb  
Newly conceived, as corn within the ear,  
Another sowing ripens to its bloom.  
Further you may not know, but only this:  
Nature's an enemy who calls no armistice.  
Mistrust the seeming truce, that in the pyre  
Of distant woods, and in the gardens' fire,  
In pheasants running bronze on furrowed mould,  
Burnishes autumn with a coat of gold.  
Therefore towards the stubble turn your plough;  
Cut gashes new across the healing earth;  
Spare not your servant, since to man austere  
No respite comes, but bend beneath your vow  
Reluctant fields, and bring new life to birth.

Homer and Hesiod and Virgil knew  
The ploughshare in its reasonable shape,  
Classical from the moment it was new,  
Sprung ready-armed, ordained without escape,  
And never bettered though man's cunning grew,  
And barbarous countries joined the classic reach:  
Coulter and swingletree and share and haft  
Frugal of ornament as peasants' speech,  
Strong to their use and simple as their craft,  
Whether to turn the ridge or cleave the rean.  
And as the slow Egyptian turns the dark  
Loam in his narrow valley where the green  
Draws the rich record of the river's mark,  
Or as the Mede across his Asian plain,  
Watched by the circling mountains topped with snow,  
Scores the poor furrow for his meagre wheat  
With wooden yoke and lurching buffalo  
Pricked by the lazy goad,  
And leaves his sowing to the care of God  
And takes the southern road  
To summer pastures, where the waters flow,  
Driving his train of ponies roughly shod  
And camels with grave bells, that surly go

*Ploughing*

Where immemorial caravans have trod,  
Marking the trackway with their whitened bones,  
His four-span waggons with their homely load,  
Black curly lambs that scramble on the stones,  
Startling the cricket and the crested lark,  
And after summer northward moves again  
To reap his harvest in the wickering heat,—  
So set your English share, that as a lover tills  
The breaking field, and let the blade be keen;  
Brace up your hames that collars may not irk,  
And urge your horses to the guiding drills,  
But knot your hempen reins, and only yerk  
Your team by voice, for they will strain  
Against a fitful soil, and nobler work  
Spared the impatient checking of the rein.  
Ploughing's begun among the gentle hills;  
Wide skies where cloudy cities travel white  
Canopy little acres; in the blanched serene  
Tent of the heaven wheel the untidy rooks,  
And settle, gawky, on the browning tracks,  
While man and horse pursue their ancient rite.

Carted away are all the leaning stooks,  
And from the stackyard comes the thresher's purr  
England's a humming hive till threshing's done  
And chaff-motes blowing from the emptied sacks  
Mellow the barn in beams of dusty sun.  
Threshing's a game which sets the farm astir  
On fine October mornings when the mist  
Melts to reveal between the steaming stacks  
The thresher lumbering slowly up the lane.  
The gang swarms out in jolly morning vein;  
Unricker, leather strap about his wrist,  
Sackman, and stacker, and the loutish hands,  
And dairymaid, agreeable to be kissed,  
And farmer's wife, come out to see the fun  
After a week of baking loaf and pie,  
Admires the young men with a roguish eye;  
And barn-door hens that pick among the grain  
And terrier nosing round for rats, and bands  
Of children, rather shy.  
Straw, chaff, and grain, once work's begun,  
Clean winnowed, sorted fine,  
Heap in appointed place, all rising swift,  
And prudent farmer measures out his thrift,  
And take his sacks, and thankful sets them by,  
Each fat and solid as a new-killed swine,  
Till they may fill his boarded granary.

*Threshing*

And other cares in autumn fill the days,  
The care of gardens and of roadside ways.  
The weazen hedger with his hook and stick,  
Brown as a root himself, and stoutly gloved,  
Brishes the hedges, shaving countryside

*Hedging and  
Ditching*

Like a cropped schoolboy; brambles, and the loved  
Dog-rose, with hazel-shoots and thorny quick  
Shrivel to bonfire heaps along the waste  
From Michaelmas to Hallowtide  
That hedges be more closely interlaced  
Without a gap or flaw  
Next spring in chequered England, growing thick  
Against young stock or colts, for mark the law:  
If cattle stray and browse on neighbours' ground,  
You may go seek them in the common pound.

And gardener, let your spud be sharp to ridge  
The loam from spiny hedge to hedge;  
Labour within your garden square  
Till back be broke and light grow rare,  
But never heed the sinews' pain  
If you may snatch before the rain  
Crisp days when clods will turn up rough;  
Gentleman robin brown as snuff  
With spindle legs and bright round eye  
Shall be your autumn company.  
Trench deep; dig in the rotting weeds;  
Slash down the thistle's greybeard seeds;  
Then make the frost your servant; make  
His million fingers pry and break  
The clods by glittering midnight stealth  
Into the necessary tilth.  
Then may you shoulder spade and hoe,  
And heavy-booted homeward go,  
For no new flowers shall be born  
Save hellebore on Christmas morn,  
And bare gold jasmine on the wall,  
And violets, and soon the small  
Blue netted iris, like a cry  
Startling the sloth of February.

*Gardener*

And what of the woodman and his livelihood?  
Once in ten years the woodman with his axe  
Felling slim undergrowth from stubby boles,  
Shall bare the auburn flooring of the copse,  
Its ridges, and the sandy rabbit-holes.  
Then shall he pare the twigs, and set in stacks  
His tall young ash and stripling chestnut poles  
That presently shall serve the wreathing hops,  
And he shall peel the bark of shorter wood  
Clean as a cat in pattens, smelling good,  
And sharpen to a point for stakes and spiles,  
The whittled slivers flying as he chops,  
And lash the shaven wood in ready piles.

*Woodcraft*

But in late autumn with his ropes and guys  
He'll go along the peaty forest-tracks  
To seek the nobler prize  
Blazed with the timber-master's scarlet mark.

Oak will he fell in spring, to gain the bark,  
But ash and elm in winter, and the beech  
In the short daylight of November thrown,  
By Christmas shall lie open, fair to bleach,  
As white and hard as bone.

The smoke coils blue above the little camp;  
There, in the clearing at the fourfold went,  
On mould of leaves forgotten, reeking, damp  
And heavy with autumnal redolence,  
Leviathan lies prone.

Bare as the royal antlers of a stag,  
His branches fork, and strive to scorn the ground,  
Being born for heaven and for heaven crowned,  
But man to dust and trees to timber fall,  
And comes the hearse or comes the timber-wain  
With nut-brown team, patient to stand or haul,  
And like a naked savage bound in chain,  
With limbs once proud that now through ordure drag,  
A captive moves upon his way in thrall;  
And that live spirit that once lit the tree,  
Fled as a bird when first the ruin came,  
Sees only death, defeat, and consequent shame,  
Great dignity become a husk; as we  
Looking upon the dead demand in vain  
Some future use for such mortality!  
But being as gods to fallen trees, we know  
The lowly uses not within their ken,  
Re-fashioning their form to live again,  
A humble phoenix stripped of memory.

Their past is sure,  
Those woods deep-rooted in the swirl of time,  
Temples of myth and piety and fear,  
Lovely, obscure;  
Dark was the ilex in the Grecian vales,  
Crooked the olive, murmurous the lime.  
No woodsman but had heard the Dryad cry,  
No girl but knew the goat-foot faun was nigh,  
And saw the satyr through the branches leer,  
And fled from those too-peopled solitudes  
Into the open fields of maize and rye.  
And women still have memories of woods,  
Older than any personal memories;  
Writhen, primeval roots, though heads be fair,  
Like trees that fan the air with delicacies,  
With leaves and birds among the upper air,  
High, lifted canopies,  
Green and black fingers of the trees, dividing  
And reaching out towards an otherwhere,  
Threaded with birds and birds' sweet sudden gliding,  
Pattern and jargoning of tree-tops, such a world  
Tangled and resonant and earth-deriding,  
Now with the rain-drops' rounded globes bepearled,  
And little sullen moons of mistletoe,

Now fretted with the sun, when foxes play  
At fables on the dun and foxlike ground  
Between the tree-trunks, and the squirrels go  
Scuttering with a beechnut newly found,  
To vex the pigeon and to scare the jay.

Of such a tall and airy world are they,  
Women and woods, with shadowed aisles profound  
That none explore.

—Birches, frail whispering company, are these?  
Or lovely women rooted into trees?  
Daughters of Norsemen, on a foreign shore  
Left hostage, while the galley draws away,  
Beating its rise and fall on manifold oar,  
Beating a pathway to the broken coasts,  
Forgetful of its ghosts?

There is a kinship: down the open ride  
She strays, eternal nymph, and glances swift  
Into the ambushed depths on either side;  
Now fears the shadows, now the rift,  
Now fears the silence, now the rustling leaf  
That like a footfall with a nearing stride  
Startles the stronghold of her unbelief.  
Woods are her enemies, yet once she went  
Fleeing before a god, and, all but spent,  
Slipped from his arms, herself become a tree.  
She has forgotten; wood's an enemy;  
She has no knowledge of the woodland tracks,  
Only a knowledge of her jeopardy.  
And with lost steps, neglectful of her pride,  
Stumbles towards the music of the axe.  
There, brown old sylvan god, the woodsman plies  
His craft and drives his wedge,  
Spitting to ease the rub of tool on hands,  
And she arrested at the clearing's edge  
Awakened stands,  
With panic terror fading from her eyes.

Now I have told the year from dawn to dusk,  
Its morning and its evening and its noon;  
Once round the sun our slanting orbit rolled,  
Four times the seasons changed, twelve times the moon;  
Corn grew from seed to husk,  
The young spring grass to fodder for the herds;  
Drought came, and earth was grateful for the rain;  
The bees streamed in and out the summer hives;  
Birds wildly sang; were silent; birds  
With summer's passing fitfully sang again;  
The loaded waggon crossed the field; the sea  
Spread her great generous pasture as a robe  
Whereon the slow ships, circling statelily,  
Are patterned round the globe.  
The ample busyness of life went by,

*Autumn*

All the full busyness of lives  
Unknown to fame, made lovely by no words:  
The shepherd lonely in the winter fold;  
The tiller following the eternal plough  
Beneath a stormy or a gentle sky;  
The sower with his gesture like a gift  
Walking the furrowed hill from base to brow;  
The reaper in the piety of thrift  
Binding the sheaf against his slanted thigh.

And lastly,—since it was of Kent I told,  
Kent, and the parcels of her acreage,—  
Peculiar autumn crops  
Leave one thing more to tell,  
Spilt from the horn of plenty to my page,  
Spicing my line with tart or resinous smell.  
Apples and hops made Kent's clean autumn wine,  
Orchard and garden, loaded, looped with swags,  
Scarlet and green, on bough and bine;  
Heavy as apples, say we, light as hops,  
Where the leafy awning sags,  
And weighted boughs are crutched on forkèd props.

*Orchards*

I told in spring of the orchard's enemies,  
Wrapped in cocoon or pert upon the wing,  
And of the care that prudent growers bring,  
But now the swoln fulfilment of the trees,  
Coloured and round,  
Demands another order: nimble boys,  
Reared ladders, bushel baskets on the ground,  
And pick, pick, pick, while days are calm and fine,  
These orchards that have lonely stood since spring,  
Swelling their fruit unnoted in the sun,  
Are populous suddenly, with ringing voice,  
September mornings, when the sun's yet low,  
And dew upon the leas  
Makes brambles glisten and the mushrooms grow.  
Codlin's already stripped; his day was done  
When August holidays were first begun,  
Being the children's apple, earliest ripe  
And nothing worth for keeping; only worth  
Young teeth, and summer fun.  
But quarrendens, and russets nicely browned,  
And common Councillors, of varied stripe,  
And pippins smelling of the rainy earth  
Wait to be harvested  
With Peasgood Nonesuch, giant in his girth,  
Cox, Blenheim, Ribstone, properly renowned,  
Apples that wait for Christmas, darkly stored  
On shelf or floor, not touching, one by one.  
But by the red cheek never be misled;  
For virtue, flavour, seek the acid green,  
Of looks less kindly, but of sharp reward  
Like stringent wit that keeps a matter keen.

Full carts, full baskets, in the misty sun.  
And cider claims the windfall on the sward.

*Making Cider*

*I saw within the wheelwright's shed  
The big round cartwheels, blue and red;  
A plough with blunted share;  
A blue tin jug; a broken chair;  
And paint in trial patchwork square  
Slapped up against the wall;  
The lumber of the wheelwright's trade,  
And tools on benches neatly laid,  
The brace, the adze, the awl;*

*And, framed within the latticed-panes,  
Above the cluttered sill,  
Saw rooks upon the stubble hill  
Seeking forgotten grains;*

*And all the air was sweet and shrill  
With juice of apples heaped in skips,  
Fermenting, rotten, soft with bruise,  
And all the yard was strewn with pips,  
Discarded pulp, and wrung-out ooze  
That ducks with rummaging flat bill  
Searched through beside the cider-press  
To gobble in their greediness.*

*The young men strained upon the crank  
To wring the last reluctant inch.  
They laughed together, fair and frank,  
And threw their loins across the winch.  
A holiday from field and dung,  
From plough and harrow, scythe and spade,  
To dabble in another trade,  
To crush the pippins in the slats,  
And see that in the little vats  
An extra pint was wrung;  
While round about the worthies stood,  
Profuse in comment, praise or blame,  
Content the press should be of wood,  
Advising rum, decrying wheat,  
And black strong sugar makes it sweet,  
But still resolved, with maundering tongue,  
That cider could not be the same  
As once when they were young;  
But still the young contemptuous men  
Laughed kindly at their old conceit,  
And strained upon the crank again.*

*Now barrels ranged in portly line  
Mature through winter's sleep,  
Aping the leisured sloth of wine  
That dreams by Tiber or by Rhine,  
Mellowing slow and deep;  
But keen and cold the northern nights*

*Sharpen the quiet yard,  
And sharp like no rich southern wine  
The tang of cider bites;  
For here the splintered stars and hard  
Hold England in a frosty guard,  
Orion and the Pleiades  
Above the wheelwright's shed,  
And Sirius resting on the trees  
While all the village snores abed.*

Hops ripen to their picking. Down the rows  
Of pickers by their tally-baskets bent,  
The gaitered master goes,  
Slapping his leggings with a hazel switch,  
Nodding good-day to folk he knows,  
From London slums poured yearly into Kent,  
Waking the province with their cockney slang,  
And feathered hats, and fear of showers;  
Down leafy tunnels, dappled by the sun,  
Down sea-green aisles, where loam is brown and rich  
Between the hills, and overhead the flowers  
In pale imponderable clusters hang,  
He loiters, followed by his spaniel bitch  
Close in to heel, sulky for lack of gun.  
Passed from his keeping now, those bines  
That since their earliest shooting had his care;  
Already severed, half the lines  
Are fallen withered, and the poles are bare,  
But in the tallies rise the soft green heaps,  
High, and are emptied, once again to fill,  
For carts between the garden and the kiln  
Slow but unceasing ply,  
And down the trampled lane come for a fresh supply.

*Hop Garden*

Dusk sends the pickers home to camp,  
But the country works while London sleeps.  
Within the oast the sulphurous furnace roars;  
Men shovel coal, and clang the doors,  
And in an inner room play cards and dice  
Beneath a smoking lamp;  
Swear; spit; and grumble at the crop, the price,  
The master's profit and the labourer's wage  
With a fictitious indignation; rage  
Born of sound understanding, sprung  
Like lovers' quarrels from a prickly tongue,  
Vain of its independence and its wit,  
With hearts belying speech,  
Each against foreigner defending each,  
But bitter among friends,—unspoken laws.  
Comes here the master: silence falls.  
Shadows of men on whitewashed walls  
Throw dice; deal cards; turn down the lamp; puff smoke;  
Rise up; and on a sudden redly lit  
Pass to the kiln like demons; fiercely stoke;

*Oast*

And to the inner room return to swear and spit,  
To gamble and to grumble, spit and swear.

But he, the master, climbs the ladder-stair  
To the upper loft, where silence and pale peace  
Hold volatile lease;  
The upper loft, where mountains on the floor  
Of sapless flowers, sap-robbed flowers, swell  
Bulky and weightless, ashen as fair hair  
Beneath a lamp, ashen as moonlit corn,  
As stubble newly shorn,  
Hops dried and ready for the rhythmic press  
Crushing their levity to a nothingness  
Of prosy tonnage scribbled on a slate,  
—Those airy mountains packed in terms of weight;—  
The press that whirls its shadow on the bare  
White wall and raftered ceiling, wheel and spoke  
Distorted, laying like a heavier cloak  
New burdens of resin on the loaded air.

Now the old drier shuffles across the loft,  
Opens the oast-house door,  
Where hops spread drying, sappy, green, and soft,  
Wreathed with the mounting of the faint blue smoke  
In a round chamber with a pointed roof,  
And the scent overpowers.  
Knee-deep he slouches, kicking up the flowers;  
Like an old priest at some clandestine rite  
Round the white walls, he, dressed in white,  
Stealthily travels, ancient and aloof.  
Ancient as man on earth, man turns to wine  
Or bread earth's produce; seeks escape or need;  
Release, necessity, the alternating creed;  
Necessity, release; food, anodyne.  
So the old drier, forty or fifty years,  
Kicks up the hops, that they be evenly dried  
Each autumn as the harvest comes again,  
Grown old at a lonely task; he hears  
The sound of voices in the yard outside,  
The clang of furnace doors, the tread of men;  
And they, as they swing homeward down the lane,  
Look back at the oast and the single lighted pane  
Like a square beacon yellow in the night,  
And know that the drier slouches round the wall.

Yet I recall  
Another harvest, not beneath this sky  
So Saxon-fair, so washed by dews and rain;  
Another harvest, where the gods still rouse,  
And stretch, and waken with the evenfall.  
Down from the hill the slow white oxen crawl,  
Dragging the purple waggon heaped with must,  
Raising on sundered hoofs small puffs of dust,  
With scarlet tassels on their milky brows,

*Vintage*

Gentle as evening moths. Beneath the yoke  
Lounging against the shaft they fitful strain  
To draw the waggon on its creaking spoke,  
And all the vineyard folk  
With staves and shouldered tools surround the wain.  
The wooden shovels take the purple stain,  
The dusk is heavy with the wine's warm load;  
Here the long sense of classic measure cures  
The spirit weary of its difficult pain;  
Here the old Bacchic piety endures,  
Here the sweet legends of the world remain,  
Homeric waggons lumbering the road;  
Virgilian litanies among the bine;  
Pastoral sloth of flocks beneath the pine;  
The swineherd watching, propped upon his goad.  
Under the chestnut trees the rootling swine,  
Who could so stand, and see this evening fall,  
This calm of husbandry, this redolent tilth,  
This terracing of hills, this vintage wealth,  
Without the pagan sanity of blood  
Mounting his veins in young and tempered health?  
Who could so stand, and watch processional  
The vintners, herds, and flocks in dusty train  
Wend through the molten evening to regain  
The terraced farm and trodden threshing-floor  
Where late the flail  
Tossed high the maize in scud of gritty ore,  
And lies half-buried in the heap of grain,—  
Who could so watch, and not forget the rack  
Of wills worn thin and thought become too frail,  
Nor roll the centuries back  
And feel the sinews of his soul grow hale,  
And know himself for Rome's inheritor?

O Mantuan! that sang the bees and vines,  
The tillage and the flocks,  
I saw the round moon rise above the pines,  
One quiet planet prick the greening west,  
As goats came leaping up the stony crest  
And the crook'd goatherd moved between the rocks.  
That moon, that star, above my English weald,  
Hung at that hour, and I not there to see;  
Shining through mist above the dew-drenched field,  
Making a cavern of the plummy tree.  
Then all my deep acquaintance with that land,  
Crying for words, welled up; as man who knows  
That Nature, tender enemy, harsh friend,  
Takes from him soon the little that she gave,  
Yet for his span will labour to defend  
His courage, that his soul be not a slave,  
Whether on waxen tablet or on loam,  
Whether with stylus or with share and heft  
The record of his passage he engrave,  
And still, in toil, takes heart to love the rose.

Then thought I, Virgil! how from Mantua reft,  
Shy as a peasant in the courts of Rome,  
Thou took'st the waxen tablets in thy hand,  
And out of anger cut calm tales of home.

*Ispahan, April 1926.*

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