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Songs and Odes





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RICHARD WATSON DIXON

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SONGS AND ODES

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SONGS AND ODES

BY

R. W. DIXON

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1896

THE Publisher is glad to be allowed to offer this selection from Canon Dixon's Lyrical Poems to the public in a cheap form. With three exceptions they are all of them taken from Mr. Daniel's rare volumes dated 1884 and 1887, which have been long out of print.

E. M.

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SONGS AND ODES

SONG

THE feathers of the willow
Are half of them grown yellow
 Above the swelling stream;
And ragged are the bushes,
And rusty now the rushes,
 And wild the clouded gleam.

The thistle now is older,
His stalk begins to moulder,
 His head is white as snow;
The branches all are barer,
The linnet's song is rarer,
 The robin pipeth now.

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THE SPIRIT WOODED

ART thou gone so far,
Beyond the poplar tops, beyond the sunset-bar,
Beyond the purple cloud that swells on high
In the tender fields of sky?

Leanest thou thy head
On sunset's golden breadth? is thy wide hair
spread
To his solemn kisses? Yet grow thou not pale
As he pales and dies: nor more my eyes avail
To search his cloud-drawn bed.

O come thou again!
Be seen on the falling slope: let thy footsteps pass
Where the river cuts with his blue scythe the
grass:
Be heard in the voice that across the river comes
From the distant wood, even when the stilly rain
Is made to cease by light winds: come again,
As out of yon grey glooms,
When the cloud grows luminous and shiftily
riven,

Forth comes the moon, the sweet surprise of
heaven :

And her footfall light

Drops on the multiplied wave : her face is seen

In evening's pallor green :

And she waxes bright

With the death of the tinted air : yea, brighter
grows

In sunset's gradual close.

To earth from heaven comes she,

So come thou to me.

Oh, lay 'thou thy head !

On sunset's breadth of gold, thy hair bespread

In his solemn kisses : but grow thou not pale

As he pales and dies, lest eye no more avail

To search thy cloud-drawn bed.

Can the weeping eye

Always feel light through mists that never dry ?

Can empty arms alone for ever fill

Enough the breast ? Can echo answer still

When the voice has ceased to cry ?

TO FANCY

I AM here for thee,
Art thou there for me?
Or, traitress to my watchful heart,
Dost thou from rock and wave depart
And from the desolate sea?

I am here for thee,
Art thou there for me?
Or, Fancy, with thy wondrous smile
Wilt thou no more my eyes beguile
Betwixt the clouds and sea?

I am here for thee :
Art thou there for me?
Spirit of brightness, shy and sweet !
My eyes thy glimmering robe would meet
Above the glimmering sea.

My little skill,
My passionate will
Are here : Where art thou ? Spirit, bow
From darkening cloud thy heavenly brow
Ere sinks the ebbing sea.

SONG

IF thou wast still, O stream,
Thou wouldst be frozen now :
And 'neath an icy shield
Thy current warm would flow.

But wild thou art and rough ;
And so the bitter breeze,
That chafes thy shuddering waves,
May never bid thee freeze.

SONG

WHY fadest thou in death,
Oh yellow waning tree?
Gentle is autumn's breath,
And green the oak by thee.

But with each wind that sighs
The leaves from thee take wing;
And bare thy branches rise
Above their drifted ring.

THE FALL OF THE LEAF

RISE in their place the woods: the trees have
cast,
Like earth to earth, their children: now they
stand

Above the graves where lie their very last:
Each pointing with her empty hand
And mourning o'er the russet floor,
Naked and dispossessed;
The queenly sycamore,
The linden, and the aspen, and the rest.

But thou, fair birch, doubtful to laugh or weep,
Who timorously dost keep
From the sad fallen ring thy face away;
Wouldst thou look to the heavens that wander
grey,
The unstilled clouds, slow mounting on their
way?
They not regard thee, neither do they send

One breath to wake thy sighs, nor gently tend
Thy sorrow or thy smile to passion's end.

Lo, there on high the unlighted moon is hung,
A cloud among the clouds: she giveth pledge,
Which none from hope debars,
Of hours that shall the naked boughs refledge
In seasons high: her drifted train among
Musing she leads the silent song,
Grave mistress of white clouds, as lucid queen
of stars.

TO A BRAMBLE IN WINTER

OH thou that sinkest lower, changing now
Into a vermeil russet thy green brow,
Is then the youth, that once shone clear and
bright,

Within thee still? Need I but think aright,
And in thy weak leaves, bibulous of rain,
And flaccid stem, I shall behold again
The trim, thorn-guarded vigour of thy prime,
And the green boldness of thy summer time,
Which dashed Jove's shower from thine unaltered
face,

And still maintained thy reappearing grace,
When the winds shook, but could not rattle thee?

Oh still would I believe thee blithe and free,
See thy flowers still, and then thy cherished germ
Nodding to ripeness all the summer's term,
And richly deepening: still would I confess
In later months thy freshness not the less
When all were trembling, when the beech turned
brown,

And life's last relics sought the foxglove's crown,

As sunk the year. But now, alas, behold
How droop thy fans! Some secret touch of cold
Trails thy rings lower, and relaxes all
The brave-spread stiffness of thy banners tall.
The bird that on thy shaken coil may light
Trusts not his little weight to thy weak might,
But beats his wings till he may spring from thee.
Playfellow of the winds no more, thy glee
Invites them not: the dark heaven-wandering
rain
Or smites or spares thee with the like disdain.

BOTH LESS AND MORE

I RODE my horse to the hostel gate,
And the landlord fed it with corn and hay :
His eyes were blear, he limped in his gait,
His lip hung down, his hair was grey.

I entered in the wayside inn ;
And the landlady met me without a smile ;
Her dreary dress was old and thin,
Her face was full of piteous guile.

There they had been for threescore years :
There was none to tell them they were great :
Not one to tell of our hopes and fears ;
And not far off was the churchyard gate.

LIFE AND DEATH

LIFE—

I AM the daughter of Time,
And twin to my brother Death :
Where I am, there is he.

Space to the star, to the earth her clime,
I make by my breath :
To the heart its beat.
The world's circumference
I take for my seat :
Nor less man's pageantry,
His ring of sense.
Round the one on guard
The stars keep burning ward :
The other is made sure
By phantoms I conjure.
Vermilion, saffron, white,
Weave ever my delight,
Lest Death should disenchant
Those whom I fain would haunt.

DEATH—

I am the brother of Life:
Of old she named me Strife.
In sorrow and in tears
I ruin what she rears.
She is a sorceress
Of might, of skill not less:
Who by her magic power
Gathers from hour to hour
Grains from the infinite:
And in them skills to write
The knowledge that they are.
Then pain and pleasure war
Within them, till I come
And redissolve her sum.
Forth from her painted hall
Her slaves I disenthral:
But when I come to break
The subtle bond, they shriek.

TERROR

TOUCH me not with fiery wand,
If the spell is in thine hand;
Neither drag me by the wrist
Through the valley full of mist.
I will sit with thee beneath
The arbour of the trees of death,
Where from the spotted laurel bower
Creeps the ivy's snaky flower.

SONG

OH, what shall lift the night,
The lightning or the moon?
There is no other light,
The day is gone too soon.

The lightning with his flash
An instant and no more,
Is as an angel's lash
Smiting the dusk-loved shore.

The moon with trembling light
From her pale shell of sleep
Shall kindlier break the night
Of yon thick clouds that weep.

UNREST

DAY is again begun
By the unresting sun :
Morning o'er all the lands
Rises with clasped hands :
And in the increasing light
Sickens the Moon of night :
For darkness leaves her there
To linger pale and bare,
Till fullest light, more kind,
From view her form shall wind.

But in this rising morn
Muse not on things forlorn,
Knowing thyself the thrall
Of life beyond them all.
Another day shall pass
Like yesterday that was ;
Another night shall come,
Like the last perished gloom :
And thou shalt never rest,
Nor yet attain thy quest :
But, like thy very earth,

Betwixt dark death, dark birth,
Speed, and not know thy speed,
While days and nights recede:
Thy seeming rest to be
Gyres in immensity,
The paces of thy strength
Small measures of fate's length:
Thy will revolving still
Against the heavenly will:
Thy waste or use of powers
Predestined to their hours:
And thou thyself?—The sob
Of pallid lips, the throb
Of every heart this day,
By which life ebbs away,
And yet by which life lives,—
Ah, this thy emblem gives.

ODE ON CONFLICTING CLAIMS

HAST thou no right to joy,
Oh youth grown old, who palest with the thought
Of the measureless annoy,
The pain and havoc wrought
By Fate on man: and of the many men
The unfed, the untaught,
Who groan beneath that adamant chain
Whose tightness kills, whose slackness whips the
 flow
Of waves of futile woe:
Hast thou no right to joy?

Thou thinkest in thy mind
In thee it were unkind
To revel in the liquid Hyblian store,
While more and more the horror and the shame,
The pity and the woe grow more and more,
Persistent still to claim
The filling of thy mind.

Thou thinkest that if none in all the rout
Who compass thee about
Turn full their soul to that which thou desirest,
Nor seek to gain thy goal,
Beauty, the heart of beauty,
The sweetness, yea, the thoughtful sweetness,
The one right way in each, the best,
Which satisfies the soul,
The firmness lost in softness, the touch of typical
 meetness,
Which lets the soul have rest ;
Those things to which thyself aspirest :—
That they, though born to quaff the bowl divine,
As thou art, yield to the strict law of duty ;
And thou from them must thine example take,
Leave the amaranthine vine,
And the prized joy forsake.

Oh thou, forgone in this,
Long struggling with a world that is amiss,
Reach some old volume down,
Some poet's book, which in thy bygone years,
Thou hast consumed with joys as keen as fears,
When o'er it thou wouldst hang with rapturous
 frown,
Admiring with sweet envy all
The exquisite of words, the lance-like fall
Of mighty verses, each on each,
The sweetness which did never cloy,

(So wrought of thought ere touched with speech),
And ask again, Hast thou no right to joy.
Take the most precious tones that thunderstruck
 thine ears
In gentler days gone by:
And if they yield no more the old ecstasy,
Then give thyself to tears.

MERCY

EARTH, sad earth, thou roamest
Through the day and night;
Weary with the darkness,
Weary with the light.

Clouds of hanging judgment,
And the cloud that weeps for me,
Swell above the mountain,
Strive above the sea.

But, sad earth, thou knowest
All my love for thee;
Therefore thou dost welcome
The cloud that weeps for me.

ODE ON ADVANCING AGE

THOU goest more and more
To the silent things: thy hair is hoar,
Emptier thy weary face: like to the shore
Far-ruined, and the desolate billow white,
That recedes and leaves^a it waif-wrinkled, gap-
rocked, weak. + . . .
The shore and the billow white
Groan, they cry and rest not: they would speak,
And call the eternal Night
To cease them for ever, bidding new things issue
From her cold tissue:
Night, that is ever young, nor knows decay,
Though older by eternity than they.

Go down upon the shore.
The breakers dash, the smitten spray drops to
the roar;
The spit upsprings, and drops again,
Where'er the white waves clash in the main.
Their sound is but one: 'tis the cry
That has risen from of old to the sky,

'Tis their silence !

Go now from the shore
Far-ruined : the grey shingly floor
To thy crashing step answers ; the doteril cries,
And on dipping wing flies :
'Tis their silence !

And thou, oh thou
To that wild silence sinkest now.
No more remains to thee than the cry of silence,
the cry
Of the waves, of the shore, of the bird to the sky.
Thy bald eyes neath as bald a brow
Ask but what Nature gives
To the inarticulate cries
Of the waves, of the shore, of the bird.
Earth in earth thou art being interred :
No longer in thee lives
The lordly essence, which was unlike all,
That was thy flower of soul, the imperial
Glory that separated thee
From all others that might be.

Thy dog hath died before.
Didst thou not mark him ; did he not neglect
What roused his rapture once, but still loved thee ?
Till, weaker grown, was he not fain reject
Thy pitying hand, thy meat and drink,
For all thou couldst implore ?
Then, at the last, how mournfully

Did not his eyelids sink
With wearied sighs?
He sought at last that never-moving night
Which is the same in darkness as in light,
The closing of the eyes.

So, Age, thou dealest us,
To the elements: but no! Resume thy pride,
O man, that musest thus.
Be to the end what thou hast been before:
The ancient joy shall wrap thee still—the tide
Return upon the shore.

SONG

THROUGH the clearness of heaven to the north
The sun casts his ceaseless rays:
And all day the clouds come forth
To float in the azure blaze.

They come o'er the long long hill,
That is yellow with corn to see,
Whose head wears the merry windmill,
Whose foot turns the watermill free.

SONG

IN the heart of the thorn is the thrush,
On its breast is the blossom of May:
On its knees is the head of the rush,
At its feet are the buttercups gay.

WINTER WILL FOLLOW

THE heaving roses of the hedge are stirred
By the sweet breath of summer, and the bird
Makes from within his jocund carols heard.

The winds that kiss the roses sweep the sea
Of uncut grass, whose billows rolling free
Half drown the hedges which part lea from lea.

But soon shall look the wondering roses down
Upon an empty field cut close and brown,
That lifts no more its hight against their own.

And in a little while those roses bright,
Leaf after leaf, shall flutter from their hight,
And on the reaped field lie pink and white.

And yet again the bird that sings so high
Shall ask the snow for alms with piteous cry,
Take fright in his bewildering bower, and die.

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