

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-15145-1 - 100 Poems: George Herbert

Edited by Helen Wilcox

Excerpt

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I

THE DEDICATION



Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;
Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came,
And must return. Accept of them and me,
And make us strive, who shall sing best thy name.

5 Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain:
 Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.

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2

THE ALTAR



A broken A L T A R, Lord, thy servant reares,
 Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:
 Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
 No workmans tool hath touch'd the same.

5 A H E A R T alone
 Is such a stone,
 As nothing but
 Thy pow'r doth cut.
 Wherefore each part
 10 Of my hard heart
 Meets in this frame,
 To praise thy name.

 That if I chance to hold my peace,
 These stones to praise thee may not cease.
 15 O let thy blessed S A C R I F I C E be mine,
 And sanctifie this A L T A R to be thine.

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3

FROM THE SACRIFICE



*Oh all ye, who passe by, whose eyes and minde
 To worldly things are sharp, but to me blinde;
 To me, who took eyes that I might you finde:
 Was ever grief like mine?*

...

Mine own Apostle, who the bag did beare,
 Though he had all I had, did not forbear
 15 To sell me also, and to put me there:
 Was ever grief like mine?

For thirtie pence he did my death devise,
 Who at three hundred did the ointment prize,
 Not half so sweet as my sweet sacrifice:
 20 Was ever grief like mine?

Therefore my soul melts, and my hearts deare treasure
 Drops bloud (the onely beads) my words to measure:
O let this cup passe, if it be thy pleasure.
 Was ever grief like mine?

25 These drops being temper'd with a sinners tears,
 A Balsome are for both the Hemispheres:
 Curing all wounds, but mine; all, but my fears:
 Was ever grief like mine?

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Yet my Disciples sleep: I cannot gain
 30 One hour of watching; but their drowsie brain
 Comforts not me, and doth my doctrine stain:
 Was ever grief like mine?

Arise, arise, they come. Look how they runne.
 Alas! what haste they make to be undone!
 35 How with their lanterns do they seek the sunne!
 Was ever grief like mine?

With clubs and staves they seek me, as a thief,
 Who am the way of truth, the true relief;
 Most true to those, who are my greatest grief:
 40 Was ever grief like mine?

Judas, dost thou betray me with a kisse?
 Canst thou finde hell about my lips? and misse
 Of life, just at the gates of life and blisse?
 Was ever grief like mine?

...

O all ye who passe by, behold and see;
 Man stole the fruit, but I must climbe the tree;
 The tree of life to all, but onely me:
 Was ever grief like mine?

205 Lo, here I hang, charg'd with a world of sinne,
 The greater world o' th' two; for that came in
 By words, but this by sorrow I must win:
 Was ever grief like mine?

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Such sorrow, as if sinfull man could feel,
210 Or feel his part, he would not cease to kneel,
Till all were melted, though he were all steel:
Was ever grief like mine?

But, *O my God, my God!* why leav'st thou me,
The sonne, in whom thou dost delight to be?
215 *My God, my God* —————
Never was grief like mine.

Shame tears my soul, my bodie many a wound;
Sharp nails pierce this, but sharper that confound;
Reproches, which are free, while I am bound.
220 Was ever grief like mine?

Now heal thy self, Physician; now come down.
Alas! I did so, when I left my crown
And fathers smile for you, to feel his frown:
Was ever grief like mine?

225 In healing not my self, there doth consist
All that salvation, which ye now resist;
Your safetie in my sicknesse doth subsist:
Was ever grief like mine?

230 Betwixt two theeves I spend my utmost breath,
As he that for some robbetrie suffereth.
Alas! what have I stollen from you? death:
Was ever grief like mine?

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A king my title is, prefixt on high;
Yet by my subjects am condemn'd to die
235 A servile death in servile companie:
Was ever grief like mine?

They gave me vineger mingled with gall,
But more with malice: yet, when they did call,
With Manna, Angels food, I fed them all:
240 Was ever grief like mine?

They part my garments, and by lot dispose
My coat, the type of love, which once cur'd those
Who sought for help, never malicious foes:
Was ever grief like mine?

245 Nay, after death their spite shall further go;
For they will pierce my side, I full well know;
That as sinne came, so Sacraments might flow:
Was ever grief like mine?

But now I die; now all is finished.
250 My wo, mans weal: and now I bow my head.
Onely let others say, when I am dead,
Never was grief like mine.

Lines quoted are 1-4, 13-44, 201-52

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4

THE THANKSGIVING



Oh King of grief! (a title strange, yet true,
 To thee of all kings onely due)
 Oh King of wounds! how shall I grieve for thee,
 Who in all grief preventest me?
 5 Shall I weep bloud? why thou hast wept such store
 That all thy body was one doore.
 Shall I be scourged, flouted, boxed, sold?
 'Tis but to tell the tale is told.
My God, my God, why dost thou part from me?
 10 Was such a grief as cannot be.
 Shall I then sing, skipping, thy dolefull storie,
 And side with thy triumphant glorie?
 Shall thy strokes be my stroking? thorns, my flower?
 Thy rod, my posie? crosse, my bower?
 15 But how then shall I imitate thee, and
 Copie thy fair, though bloudie hand?
 Surely I will reuenge me on thy love,
 And trie who shall victorious prove.
 If thou dost give me wealth; I will restore
 20 All back unto thee by the poore.
 If thou dost give me honour; men shall see,
 The honour doth belong to thee.
 I will not marry; or, if she be mine,
 She and her children shall be thine.
 25 My bosome friend, if he blaspheme thy name,
 I will tear thence his love and fame.
 One half of me being gone, the rest I give
 Unto some Chappell, die or live.

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As for thy passion — But of that anon,
30 When with the other I have done.
For thy predestination I'll contrive,
 That three yeares hence, if I survive,
I'll build a spittle, or mend common wayes,
 But mend mine own without delayes.
35 Then I will use the works of thy creation,
 As if I us'd them but for fashion.
The world and I will quarrell; and the yeare
 Shall not perceive, that I am here.
My musick shall finde thee, and ev'ry string
40 Shall have his attribute to sing;
That all together may accord in thee,
 And prove one God, one harmonie.
If thou shalt give me wit, it shall appeare,
 If thou hast giv'n it me, 'tis here.
45 Nay, I will reade thy book, and never move
 Till I have found therein thy love;
Thy art of love, which I'll turn back on thee,
 O my deare Saviour, Victorie!
Then for thy passion — I will do for that —
50 Alas, my God, I know not what.

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5

THE AGONIE



Philosophers have measur'd mountains,
 Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings,
 Walk'd with a staffe to heav'n, and traced fountains:
 5 But there are two vast, spacious things,
 The which to measure it doth more behove:
 Yet few there are that sound them; Sinne and Love.

Who would know Sinne, let him repair
 Unto mount Olivet; there shall he see
 A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,
 10 His skinne, his garments bloudie be.
 Sinne is that presse and vice, which forceth pain
 To hunt his cruell food through ev'ry vein.

Who knows not Love, let him assay
 And taste that juice, which on the crosse a pike
 15 Did set again abroach; then let him say
 If ever he did taste the like.
 Love is that liquour sweet and most divine,
 Which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine.

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6

GOOD FRIDAY



O my chief good,
 How shall I measure out thy bloud?
 How shall I count what thee befell,
 And each grief tell?

5 Shall I thy woes
 Number according to thy foes?
 Or, since one starre show'd thy first breath,
 Shall all thy death?

10 Or shall each leaf,
 Which falls in Autumne, score a grief?
 Or cannot leaves, but fruit, be signe
 Of the true vine?

15 Then let each houre
 Of my whole life one grief devoure;
 That thy distresse through all may runne,
 And be my sunne.

20 Or rather let
 My severall sinnes their sorrows get;
 That as each beast his cure doth know,
 Each sinne may so.