

NO SUMMER YET

We've had no summer yet, they're saying,
And shan't have now, it stands to reason.
Nothing but rain and rain and rain,
In season and out of season.

There's something wrong, without a doubt.
The sun, it seems, is in disgrace.
With all this wild weather about,
He hardly dares to show his face.

But when he does, then as of old
Our drowning world becomes his glass,
Mud and puddle a glitter of gold
More poignant-fair than Eden was.

SEEN FROM A HILLTOP

Now from this island, high
Suspended in the sky,
I see the village below,
Far away, long ago,
A clear leisurely map
Lying in the downs' lap.

The illuminating sun
Lays his gold leaf upon
Cottage and church and farm,
Miniature meadows, warm
Brown acres ribbed by plow,
Haystack and hedgerow,
White roads, clustering timber,
Green, brown, and umber,
The covered Roman camp
Small as a postage stamp,
Far away, long ago.

Look, it is as though
The old cartographer
Having with love and care
Drawn his bright map
Had then fallen asleep,
Unflowing from his hand
The legends he had planned:

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‘Here dwelleth man.’ ‘Here browse
By day an hundred cows.’
‘Here lovers, paire by paire,
Enjoy the evening aire.’
‘In this moon-haunted dale
Plaineth the nightingale.’

OCTOBER

Mellow October,
He turns our green to yellow,
Our drunk to sober,
Our shrill to bass and cello,

Scatters our leaves,
Tears to wistful tatters,
Or ties in sheaves,
All (so we think) that matters,

Midsummer glory
Bared in her lusty humour
To frost and fury,
With Winter the next comer.

Rages October:
Yet in his moody pages,
Scan we them over,
Sums up the golden ages.

Glummer no story
Than his: yet every comma,
Dropt seed of glory,
Betokens a new summer.

THE NECKLACE

Rain lingers in rutted lane,
Birds beak at stubble field.
A wide grey sky
Stares at a dead day.

Willowherb, feathery still,
Stands tall and shivery,
His former bravery
No more than a memory.

Dolour for colour. The hedge
Sered with old man's beard,
Where, by malfeasance
Dead, the queen of seasons,

Bereft of hope, look, has left,
Hanging, a lank rope,
Startling to see,
Of berried bryony.

Reckless, she flung her necklace
To hang here shameless, strung
In plain vision
With blood of her passion.

SECOND CHILDHOOD

Crooked as a question-mark,
See how he sits
Mooning and mumbling
At sparrows and tits.
Poor old Tom Willow,
Wanting in wits,
He was once a fine fellow.

At the plow, in the dance,
He outlasted them all,
Who now shambles along
At a snail's crawl.
The man of tall tricks
That gossips recall
Now goes on two sticks.

Time has unsuppled
That sinewy one.
Dreaming and dribbling
He sits in the sun
Where now we find him,
A silly old man.
But the birds don't mind him.

DULL DAY

Why in such weather
Do I find pleasure?
Why joy in a pearl-pale
Dull sky, fine rain filling
Silkenly, quiet as death,
The day's held breath,
Mist veiling the clean
Line of the bare downs,
Trees, as by illness, tranced
Into utter stillness,
A fledgling moorhen's
Weak occasional cry
Forlorn and fond
From her obscured pond?
Why pleasure, why solace,
Why comfort and kindness,
In the taste of the year's
Autumnal tears?

DISTANT SCENE

Man and horse
In the high field
Moving aslant
A silken sky:
Vivid glowing
Arcadian print,
Framed in the eye.

The glitter of gulls
And hovering rooks,
Caper-cutting
Over the plow,
Looks like a scatter
Of burnt paper
And floating snow.

HILL SHEEP IN FLOODTIME

On the slope of a high meadow
Under the hills' shadow,
Secure from flood's rape,
Sheep, each grey shape
Pencilled in golden fire,
Crop their heart's desire.

Nothing those grazers know
Of the drowned land below
Where, bestrewn with sticks
And straw from despoiled ricks,
Liquid sunlight runs
Over the unluckier ones:

Nothing reck of the years'
Inescapable shears,
Nothing of what's to come,
Nor the impending doom
Of lambs, whose meek life
Bedews the butcher's knife.

Sheep, sealed from sorrow,
Take no thought for the morrow.
They know no better than
To enjoy, while they can,
Good food and warm wool.
How stupid! How beautiful!

THE AUCTION

On a day in October the villagers gathered
In the rectory garden, a garrulous company,
To enjoy the remains of the reverend gentleman
Who had married and buried them for half a century.
His dust was dissolving in the church yard.
His ghost pottered in the purlieu of memory.
Remained his garment to be parted among them,
The garment of his spirit, his soul's livery,
Soaked in himself by years of usage.

Warming-pans, water-colours, blankets, bedding,
Carpets, curtains, crocks and casseroles,
A galvanized dustbin, a garden roller,
A portable rosewood desk, genuine antique,
Blunt on the Pentateuch, bound volumes of *Punch*,
A carved walnut stool on cabriole legs,
Mahogany toilet mirror with two drawers,
Prie-dieu chairs upholstered in petit-point,
A set of ivory chessmen and sundry games,
Glass, china, pewter, a useful wheelbarrow,
Brushes and brooms and books various:
These his eyes had looked on, his blunt fingers
Handled, these from his brooding being
Had taken life, character, personality,
That now were items in a printed catalogue,
Yet quick, still, with intangible intimations,
Life in still life, of their bachelor husband.