

UNTO THIS LAST

It well may be that we are born too late,
That we are weak to wrestle with the dead,
That we can only say what has been said,
That we should hold our peace, accept our fate.
Too feverish grow man's days, too brief their date
A thousand better poets lie unread.
What hope for us? Can we live in their stead?
What need of us? For we are born too late.

I do not care. Let others praise or blame;
I sing to please myself, though none be by.
Songs may be sung for finer things than fame,
Or than a paper immortality.
Let none or hundreds hear me, 'tis the same,
Since my own ears have heard my own lips cry.

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F. L. Lucas
Excerpt
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TO THE GRACES

Your quiet altar after all was best,
Fair sisters. Louder faiths grow cold.
Not you forged earth's foundations: but you blessed
What flowers her deserts hold.
Not yours alone is power that does not perish;
But yours is Youth. Only what your hands cherish,
Grows not old.

Thebes and Ecbatana, Babel, Nineveh,
All human grandeur's utmost reign—
Time seals them his. They bow down silently
Before the years' disdain.
But you are young as the poppy's banner burning
On their ruined towers to hail sweet June returning
Once again.

Not yours the mouths that justify God's ways,
By whom the depths of Hell are sung;
Deathless they seem, yet aged. Green their bays,
Yet Time has touched their tongue.
But Sappho's grace, La Fontaine's quiet laughter,
The lilt of Herrick—these heed no hereafter,
These are young.

Life's greatest things come seldom; seldom blows
The whirlwind, or the mountain quakes.
But you are with us in each gust that goes
Down the green corn, or shakes
Boughs like a bird alighting, or sets a-quiver
The forest's beauty, asleep in some still river,
Till it wakes.

Daughters of Zeus, you know what man's life is,
How brief, and yet how long the while—
Its epics, falls of sparrows; its tragedies
Half farces, and half vile;
How every hero's sword at last grows brittle,
How his dream fades, and night comes in a little—
And you smile.

All else turns vanity: but yours the day
Of little things, that grow not less.
Our moments fly—enough if on their way
You lent them loveliness.
Alone of gods, you lie not; yours no Heaven
That totters in the clouds—what you have given,
We possess.

You cannot lift life's burden. Nothing can.
You make it seem worth while to bear.
You cannot change the destiny of Man.
Death comes. Yet even there
You taught the Hellene not to shudder blindly
Before Sleep's Brother, but see him calm, half kindly,
Young and fair.

Our age forgets, denies you, shouts you hence.
With staring eyes and lips astrain,
The Goth rides back; we worship violence,
Trampling your silken chain.
Let be. Let them triumph out the hour assigned them.
All shoutings pass, and silence falls behind them.
You remain.

NEO-CLASSICISM

GUDGEON proclaims he follows only reason,
Says and repeats it in and out of season;
Most wisely too (though far from us to doubt it),
For no one ever would have guessed without it.

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TO THE CUCKOO

SINCE the first welcome to the spring was sung
In the green April of our English tongue,¹
Poets have loved your voice, whose single phrase
With soft reiteration mocks our Mays;
As if, enamoured now of his own name,
Back from the dead a new Narcissus came;
Or else, before he scorned poor Echo's troth,
He had begot you on her, child of both.
So Wordsworth praised you for your "mystic" cry,
And Thyrsis' friend, when Thyrsis came to die,
Made you his emblem. Yes, you so disarm
Even our sternest with your plaintive charm,
That they have quite forgot how very queer,
In some respects, your morals are, my dear.

¹ "Sumer is icumen in,
Lhude singe cuccu." (c. 1250.)

PAGEANT OF MAY

BLACK men, white men, grey men down the street,
Black, white, and grey to where the houses meet.
Friars black and white and grey are vanished all—
Strange that their mantle on mankind should fall!

Gone are the cramoisy, the cloth of vair,
The colour and the grace—we do not care.
For we, poor drudges, dress to match our mood—
A monastery, though not a brotherhood.

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THE MUSE BEMUSED

CLEARNESS!—for that our wise age cares no more,
Thinks all verse beautiful that is not plain;
Building, like Daedalus, Labyrinths to contain
Each an abortion and a Minotaur.

THE BENIGHTED PAGAN

“O GOD,” the Saints have cried, “let us love Thee.
Thou alone givest Immortality.
He that for earthly love can lose his heart,
Loses his soul. Give us the better part.”

“Goddess,” Odysseus said, “though thou wouldst give
Me for my love immortal years to live,
One woman’s heart is more than life to me—
Give back the lost face of Penelope.”

LOUIS XVI

1780

A YOUNG man—heavy-featured, dreamy, slow—
Tracing with child-like care a map of France:
Across the crested books, the gilt bureau,
Like butterflies the evening sunbeams dance.

That hand has helped re-draw the map of earth,
And change the colour of a hemisphere,
Brought a new nation through the throes of birth—
Yet his crown galls. He can forget it here.

Here he is happy. No more need to think.
To-day he made a perfect lock, alone.
Hunting to-morrow. Now in glistening ink
He marks the kingdom that he calls his own.

Dotting the strongholds his forefathers ruled—
Toul, Nancy, Sedan, Verdun, Metz—his pen
Hovers a moment on Sainte-Menehould,
Then slips, undoubting, onward past Varennes.

THE DESTINIES
(In the Elgin Room)

THERE you sit enthroned for ever,
While the tide of man's endeavour,
Like a wreckage-laden river,
Races past your heedless hands.
None beholds your hidden vision,
None can hear your dumb decision;
But before your mute misprision
Nothing stands.

Men that made you, you have shattered;
Your own nation you have scattered;
Your own beauty you have battered,
Ruined the walls where you sat shrined,
Ruined your own, earth's fairest, city—
Well has Fortune (she was witty!)
Left you, O Fates that know not pity,
Headless—blind!