

Hap¹

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: 'Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!'

- 5 Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire^o unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted^o me the tears I shed.

anger

allotted, given

- But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
10 And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters² had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

1866

1898

1. I.e., chance (as also "Casualty," line 11).

The Darkling¹ Thrush

Thomas Hardy
(1840-1928)

I leant upon a coppice gate²
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
5 The tangled bine-stems³ scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh^o
Had sought their household fires.

near

- The land's sharp features seemed to be
10 The Century's corpse outleant,⁴
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
15 And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

- At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
20 Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

- 25 So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
30 His happy good-night-air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

1900, 1901

1. In the dark.
2. Gate leading to a small wood or thicket.
3. Twining stems of shrubs.

4. Leaning out (of its coffin); i.e., the 19th century was dead. This poem was dated December 31, 1900.

Channel Firing¹

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel² window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgement-day

And sat upright. While drearishome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar-crumbs,
The worms drew back into the mounds,

The glebe cow³ drooled. Till God called, 'No;
10 It's gunnery practise out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be:

'All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters⁴
15 They do no more for Christ's⁵ sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

'That this is not the judgement-hour
For some of them's a blessed thing,
For if it were they'd have to scour
20 Hell's floor for so much threatening. . . .

'Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need).'

25 So down we lay again. 'I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be,'
Said one, 'than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!'

And many a skeleton shook his head.
30 'Instead of preaching forty year,'

My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,
'I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer.'

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
35 As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.⁶

1914

1914

¹ When in April 1914, when Anglo-German rivalry was growing steadily more acute; the Germans began to gunnery practice in the English Channel. Four months later (August 4), World War I broke out.
² The church nearest to the altar.

³ I.e., cow on a small plot of land belonging to a church (a "glebe" is a small field).
⁴ Cf. the Mad Hatter in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).
⁵ The archaic spelling and pronunciation suggest a ballad note of doom.

⁶ The sound of guns preparing for war across the Channel reaches Alfred's ("Stourton") Tower (near Stourton in Dorset), commemorating King Alfred's defeat of a Danish invasion in 878; also the site of King Arthur's court at Camelot (supposedly near Glastonbury) and the famous prehistoric stone circle of Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain.