

Classic Poetry Series

Lascelles Abercrombie
- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Lascelles Abercrombie(9 January 1881 – 27 October 1938)

Lascelles Abercrombie (also known as the Georgian Laureate, linking him with the "Georgian poets") was a British poet and literary critic, one of the "Dymock poets". He was born in Ashton upon Mersey and educated at the University of Manchester.

Before the First World War, he lived for a time at Dymock in Gloucestershire, part of a community that included Rupert Brooke and Robert Frost. Edward Thomas also visited. In 1922, he was appointed Professor of English at the University of Leeds. In 1929 he moved on to the University of London, and in 1935 to a prestigious readership at Oxford University. He wrote a series of works on the nature of poetry, and several volumes of original verse, that were collected in 'Poems' (1930). In the same year he published separately his most important poem, 'The Sale of Saint Thomas' in six 'Acts'. Non-poetic works of his include *The Idea of Great Poetry* (1925) and *Romanticism* (1926).

He was the brother of the architect Patrick Abercrombie. His son was the cell biologist Michael Abercrombie.

Emblems Of Love

She

ONLY to be twin elements of joy
In this extravagance of Being, Love,
Were our divided natures shaped in twain;
And to this hour the whole world must consent.
Is it not very marvellous, our lives
Can only come to this out of a long
Strange sundering, with the years of the world between us?

He

Shall life do more than God? for hath not God
Striven with himself, when into known delight
His unaccomplisht joy he would put forth,—
This mystery of a world sign of his striving?
Else wherefore this, a thing to break the mind
With labouring in the wonder of it, that here
Being—the world and we—is suffered to be!—
But, lying on thy breast one notable day,
Sudden exceeding agony of love
Made my mind a trance of infinite knowledge.
I was not: yet I saw the will of God
As light unfashion'd, unendurable flame,
Interminable, not to be supposed;
And there was no more creature except light,—
The dreadful burning of the lonely God's
Unutter'd joy. And then, past telling, came
Shuddering and division in the light:
Therein, like trembling, was desire to know
Its own perfect beauty; and it became
A cloven fire, a double flaming, each
Adorable to each; against itself
Waging a burning love, which was the world;—
A moment satisfied in that love-strife
I knew the world!—And when I fell from there,
Then knew I also what this life would do
In being twin,—in being man and woman!
For it would do even as its endless Master,

Making the world, had done; yea, with itself
Would strive, and for the strife would into sex
Be cloven, double burning, made thereby
Desirable to itself. Contrived joy
Is sex in life; and by no other thing
Than by a perfect sundering, could life
Change the dark stream of unappointed joy
To perfect praise of itself, the glee that loves
And worships its own Being. This is ours!
Yet only for that we have been so long
Sundered desire: thence is our life all praise.—
But we, well knowing by our strength of joy
There is no sundering more, how far we love
From those sad lives that know a half-love only,
Alone thereby knowing themselves for ever
Sealed in division of love, and therefore made
To pour their strength always into their love's
Fierceness, as green wood bleeds its hissing sap
Into red heat of a fire! Not so do we:
The cloven anger, life, hath left to wage
Its flame against itself, here turned to one
Self-adoration.—Ah, what comes of this?
The joy falters a moment, with closed wings
Wearied in its upward journey, ere
Again it goes on high, bearing its song,
Its delight breathing and its vigour beating
The highest height of the air above the world.

She

What hast thou done to me!—I would have soul,
Before I knew thee, Love, a captive held
By flesh. Now, inly delighted with desire,
My body knows itself to be nought else
But thy heart's worship of me; and my soul
Therein is sunlight held by warm gold air.
Nay, all my body is become a song
Upon the breath of spirit, a love-song.

He

And mine is all like one rapt faculty,

As it were listening to the love in thee,
My whole mortality trembling to take
Thy body like heard singing of thy spirit.

She

Surely by this, Beloved, we must know
Our love is perfect here,—that not as holds
The common dullard thought, we are things lost
In an amazement that is all unaware;
But wonderfully knowing what we are!
Lo, now that body is the song whereof
Spirit is mood, knoweth not our delight?
Knoweth not beautifully now our love,
That Life, here to this festival bid come
Clad in his splendour of worldly day and night,
Filled and empower'd by heavenly lust, is all
The glad imagination of the Spirit?

He

Were it not so, Love could not be at all:
Nought could be, but a yearning to fulfil
Desire of beauty, by vain reaching forth
Of sense to hold and understand the vision
Made by impassion'd body,—vision of thee!
But music mixt with music are, in love,
Bodily senses; and as flame hath light,
Spirit this nature hath imagined round it,
No way concealed therein, when love comes near,
Nor in the perfect wedding of desires
Suffering any hindrance.

She

Ah, but now,
Now am I given love's eternal secret!
Yea, thou and I who speak, are but the joy
Of our for ever mated spirits; but now
The wisdom of my gladness even through Spirit
Looks, divinely elate. Who hath for joy
Our Spirits? Who hath imagined them

Round him in fashion'd radiance of desire,
As into light of these exulting bodies
Flaming Spirit is uttered?

He

Yea, here the end
Of love's astonishment! Now know we Spirit,
And Who, for ease of joy, contriveth Spirit.
Now all life's loveliness and power we have
Dissolved in this one moment, and our burning
Carries all shining upward, till in us
Life is not life, but the desire of God,
Himself desiring and himself accepting.
Now what was prophecy in us is made
Fulfilment: we are the hour and we are the joy,
We in our marvellousness of single knowledge,
Of Spirit breaking down the room of fate
And drawing into his light the greeting fire
Of God,—God known in ecstasy of love
Wedding himself to utterance of himself

Lascelles Abercrombie

Epitaph

ir, you shall notice me: I am the Man;
I am Good Fortune: I am satisfied.
All I desired, more than I could desire,
I have: everything has gone right with me.
Life was a hiding-place that played me false;
I croucht ashamed, and still was seen and scorned:
But now I am not seen. I was a fool,
And now I know what wisdom dare not know:
For I know Nothing. I was a slave, and now
I have ungoverned freedom and the wealth
That cannot be conceived: for I have Nothing.
I lookt for beauty and I longed for rest,
And now I have perfection: nay, I am
perfection: I am nothing, I am dead.

Lascelles Abercrombie

From "Vashti"

WHAT thing shall be held up to woman's beauty?
Where are the bounds of it? Yea, what is all
The world, but an awning scaffolded amid
The waste perilous Eternity, to lodge
This Heaven-wander'd princess, woman's beauty?
The East and West kneel down to thee, the North
And South; and all for thee their shoulders bear
The load of fourfold space. As yellow morn
Runs on the slippery waves of the spread sea,
Thy feet are on the griefs and joys of men
That sheen to be thy causey. Out of tears
Indeed, and blitheness, murder and lust and love,
Whatever has been passionate in clay,
Thy flesh was tempered. Behold in thy body
The yearnings of all men measured and told,
Insatiate endless agonies of desire
Given thy flesh, the meaning of thy shape!
What beauty is there, but thou makest it?
How is earth good to look on, woods and fields,
The season's garden, and the courageous hills,
All this green raft of earth moored in the seas?
The manner of the sun to ride the air,
The stars God has imagined for the night?
What's this behind them, that we cannot near,
Secret still on the point of being blabbed,
The ghost in the world that flies from being named?
Where do they get their beauty from, all these?
They do but glaze a lantern lit for man,
And woman's beauty is the flame therein.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Hope And Despair

Said God, 'You sisters, ere ye go
Down among men, my work to do,
I will on each a badge bestow:
Hope I love best, and gold for her,
Yet a silver glory for Despair,
For she is my angel too.'
Then like a queen, Despair
Put on the stars to wear.
But Hope took ears of corn, and round
Her temples in a wreath them bound.--
Which think ye lookt the more fair?

Lascelles Abercrombie

Hymn To Love

We are thine, O Love, being in thee and made of thee,
As théou, Léove, were the déep thought
And we the speech of the thought; yea, spoken are we,
Thy fires of thought out-spoken:

But burn'd not through us thy imagining
Like fiérce méood in a séong céaught,
We were as clamour'd words a fool may fling,
Loose words, of meaning broken.

For what more like the brainless speech of a fool,—
The lives travelling dark fears,
And as a boy throws pebbles in a pool
Thrown down abysmal places?

Hazardous are the stars, yet is our birth
And our journeying time theirs;
As words of air, life makes of starry earth
Sweet soul-delighted faces;

As voices are we in the worldly wind;
The great wind of the world's fate
Is turn'd, as air to a shapen sound, to mind
And marvellous desires.

But not in the world as voices storm-shatter'd,
Not borne down by the wind's weight;
The rushing time rings with our splendid word
Like darkness fill'd with fires.

For Love doth use us for a sound of song,
And Love's meaning our life wields,
Making our souls like syllables to throng
His tunes of exultation.

Down the blind speed of a fatal world we fly,
As rain blown along earth's fields;
Yet are we god-desiring liturgy,
Sung joys of adoration;

Yea, made of chance and all a labouring strife,
We go charged with a strong flame;
For as a language Love hath seized on life
His burning heart to story.

Yea, Love, we are thine, the liturgy of thee,
Thy thought's golden and glad name,
The mortal conscience of immortal glee,
Love's zeal in Love's own glory.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Margaret's Song

Too soothe and mild your lowland airs
for one whose hope is gone:
I'm think of the little tarn,
Brown, very lone.

Would now the tall swift mists could lay
their wet grasp on my hair,
and the great natures of the hills
round me friendly were.

In vain! - for taking hills your plains
have spoilt my soul I think,
But would my feet were going down
Towards the brown tarn's brink.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Roses Can Wound

Roses can wound,
But not from having thorns they do most harm;
Often the night gives, starry-sheen or moon'd,
Deep in the soul alarm.
And it hath been deep within my heart like fear,
Girl, when you are near.
The mist of sense,
Wherein the soul goes shielded, can divide,
And she must cringe and be ashamed, and wince,
Not in appearance hide
Of rose or girl from the blazing mastery
Of bared Eternity.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Ryton Firs

The Dream

All round the knoll, on days of quietest air,
Secrets are being told; and if the trees
Speak out — let them make uproar loud as drums —
'Tis secrets still, shouted instead of whisper'd.

There must have been a warning given once:
No tree, on pain of withering and sawfly,
To reach the slimmest of his snaky toes
Into this mounded sward and rumple it;
All trees stand back: taboo is on this soil. —

The trees have always scrupulously obeyed.
The grass, that elsewhere grows as best it may
Under the larches, countable long nesh blades,
Here in clear sky pads the ground thick and close
As wool upon a Southdown wether's back;
And as in Southdown wool, your hand must sink
Up to the wrist before it find the roots.
A bed for summer afternoons, this grass;
But in the Spring, not too softly entangling
For lively feet to dance on, when the green
Flashes with daffodils. From Marcle way,
From Dymock, Kempley, Newent, Bromesberrow,
Redmarley, all the meadowland daffodils seem
Running in golden tides to Ryton Firs,
To make the knot of steep little wooded hills
Their brightest show: O bella età de l'oro!
Now I breathe you again, my woods of Ryton:
Not only golden with your daffodil-fires
Lying in pools on the loose dusky ground
Beneath the larches, tumbling in broad rivers
Down sloping grass under the cherry trees
And birches: but among your branches clinging
A mist of that Ferrara-gold I first
Loved in the easy hours then green with you;
And as I stroll about you now, I have
Accompanying me — like troops of lads and lasses

Chattering and dancing in a shining fortune —
Those mornings when your alleys of long light
And your brown rosin-scented shadows were
Enchanted with the laughter of my boys.

The Voices in the Dream

Follow my heart, my dancing feet,
Dance as blithe as my heart can beat.
Only can dancing understand
What a heavenly way we pass
Treading the green and golden land,
Daffodillies and grass.

I had a song, too, on my road,
But mine was in my eyes;
For Malvern Hills were with me all the way,
Singing loveliest visible melodies
Blue as a south-sea bay;
And ruddy as wine of France
Breadths of new-turn'd ploughland under them glowed.
'Twas my heart then must dance
To dwell in my delight;
No need to sing when all in song my sight
Moved over hills so musically made
And with such colour played. —
And only yesterday it was I saw
Veil'd in streamers of grey wavering smoke
My shapely Malvern Hills.
That was the last hail-storm to trouble spring:
He came in gloomy haste,
Pusht in front of the white clouds quietly basking,
In such a hurry he tript against the hills
And stumbling forward spilt over his shoulders
All his black baggage held,
Streaking downpour of hail.
Then fled dismayed, and the sun in golden glee
And the high white clouds laught down his dusky ghost.

For all that's left of winter
Is moisture in the ground.

When I came down the valley last, the sun
Just thawed the grass and made me gentle turf,
But still the frost was bony underneath.
Now moles take burrowing jaunts abroad, and ply
Their shovelling hands in earth
As nimbly as the strokes
Of a swimmer in a long dive under water.
The meadows in the sun are twice as green
For all the scatter of fresh red mounded earth,
The mischief of the moles:
No dullish red, Glostershire earth new-delved
In April! And I think shows fairest where
These rummaging small rogues have been at work.
If you will look the way the sunlight slants
Making the grass one great green gem of light,
Bright earth, crimson and even
Scarlet, everywhere tracks
The rambling underground affairs of moles:
Though 'tis but kestrel-bay
Looking against the sun.

But here's the happiest light can lie on ground,
Grass sloping under trees
Alive with yellow shine of daffodils!
If quicksilver were gold,
And troubled pools of it shaking in the sun
It were not such a fancy of bickering gleam
As Ryton daffodils when the air but stirs.
And all the miles and miles of meadowland
The spring makes golden ways,
Lead here, for here the gold
Grows brightest for our eyes,
And for our hearts lovelier even than love.
So here, each spring, our daffodil festival.

How smooth and quick the year
Spins me the seasons round!
How many days have slid across my mind
Since we had snow pitying the frozen ground!
Then winter sunshine cheered
The bitter skies; the snow,
Reluctantly obeying lofty winds,

Drew off in shining clouds,
Wishing it still might love
With its white mercy the cold earth beneath.
But when the beautiful ground
Lights upward all the air,
Noon thaws the frozen eaves,
And makes the rime on post and paling steam
Silvery blue smoke in the golden day.
And soon from loaded trees in noiseless woods
The snows slip thudding down,
Scattering in their trail
Bright icy sparkles through the glittering air;
And the fir-branches, patiently bent so long,
Sigh as they lift themselves to rights again.
Then warm moist hours steal in,
Such as can draw the year's
First fragrance from the sap of cherry wood
Or from the leaves of budless violets;
And travellers in lanes
Catch the hot tawny smell
Reynard's damp fur left as he sneakt marauding

Across from gap to gap:
And in the larch woods on the highest boughs
The long-eared owls like grey cats sitting still
Peer down to quiz the passengers below.

Light has killed the winter and all dark dreams.
Now winds live all in light,
Light has come down to earth and blossoms here,
And we have golden minds.
From out the long shade of a road high-bankt,
I came on shelving fields;
And from my feet cascading,
Streaming down the land,
Flickering lavish of daffodils flowed and fell;
Like sunlight on a water thrill'd with haste,
Such clear pale quivering flame,
But a flame even more marvellously yellow.
And all the way to Ryton here I walkt
Ankle-deep in light.
It was as if the world had just begun;

And in a mind new-made
Of shadowless delight
My spirit drank my flashing senses in,
And gloried to be made
Of young mortality.
No darker joy than this
Golden amazement now
Shall dare intrude into our dazzling lives:
Stain were it now to know
Mists of sweet warmth and deep delicious colour,
Those lovable accomplices that come
Befriending languid hours.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Song From Judith 3

BALKIS was in her marble town,
And shadow over the world came down.
Whiteness of walls, towers and piers,
That all day dazzled eyes to tears,
Turned from being white-golden flame,
And like the deep-sea blue became.
Balkis into her garden went;
Her spirit was in discontent
Like a torch in restless air.
Joylessly she wandered there,
And saw her city's azure white
Lying under the great night,
Beautiful as the memory
Of a worshipping world would be
In the mind of a god, in the hour
When he must kill his outward power;
And, coming to a pool where trees
Grew in double greeneries,
Saw herself, as she went by
The water, walking beautifully,
And saw the stars shine in the glance
Of her eyes, and her own fair countenance
Passing, pale and wonderful,
Across the night that filled the pool.
And cruel was the grief that played
With the queen's spirit; and she said:
'What do I here, reigning alone?
For to be unloved is to be alone.
There is no man in all my land
Dare my longing understand;
The whole folk like a peasant bows
Lest its look should meet my brows
And be harmed by this beauty of mine.
I burn their brains as I were sign
Of God's beautiful anger sent
To master them with punishment
Of beauty that must pour distress
On hearts grown dark with ugliness.
But it is I am the punisht one.

Is there no man, is there none,
In whom my beauty will but move
The lust of a delighted love;
In whom some spirit of God so thrives
That we may wed our lonely lives.
Is there no man, is there none? '—
She said, 'I will go to Solomon.'

Lascelles Abercrombie

The Box

Once upon a time, in the land of Hush-A-Bye,
Around about the wondrous days of yore,
They came across a kind of box
Bound up with chains and locked with locks
And labeled 'Kindly do not touch; it's war.'
A decree was issued round about, and all with a flourish and a shout
And a gaily colored mascot tripping lightly on before.
Don't fiddle with this deadly box, Or break the chains, or pick the locks.
And please don't ever play about with war.
The children understood. Children happen to be good
And they were just as good around the time of yore.
They didn't try to pick the locks Or break into that deadly box.
They never tried to play about with war.
Mommies didn't either; sisters, aunts, grannies neither
'Cause they were quiet, and sweet, and pretty
In those wondrous days of yore.
Well, very much the same as now,
And not the ones to blame somehow
For opening up that deadly box of war.
But someone did. Someone battered in the lid
And spilled the insides out across the floor.
A kind of bouncy, bumpy ball made up of guns and flags
And all the tears, and horror, and death that comes with war.
It bounced right out and went bashing all about,
Bumping into everything in what was sad and most unfair
Was that it didn't really seem to care
Much who it bumped, or why, or what, or for.
It bumped the children mainly. And I'll tell you this quite plainly,
It bumps them every day and more, and more,
And leaves them dead, and burned, and dying
Thousands of them sick and crying.
'Cause when it bumps, it's really very sore.
Now there's a way to stop the ball. It isn't difficult at all.
All it takes is wisdom, and I'm absolutely sure
That we can get it back into the box, And bind the chains, and lock the locks.
But no one seems to want to save the children anymore.
Well, that's the way it all appears, 'cause it's been bouncing round
for years and years
In spite of all the wisdom wizzed since those wondrous days of yore

And the time they came across the box,
Bound up with chains and locked with locks,
And labeled 'Kindly do not touch; it's war.'

Lascelles Abercrombie

The Sale Of Saint Thomas

A quay with vessels moored

Thomas

To India! Yea, here I may take ship;
From here the courses go over the seas,
Along which the intent prows wonderfully
Nose like lean hounds, and tack their journeys out,
Making for harbours as some sleuth was laid
For them to follow on their shifting road.
Again I front my appointed ministry. --
But why the Indian lot to me? Why mine
Such fearful gospelling? For the Lord knew
What a frail soul He gave me, and a heart
Lame and unlikely for the large events. --
And this is worse than Baghdad! though that was
A fearful brink of travel. But if the lots,
That gave to me the Indian duty, were
Shuffled by the unseen skill of Heaven, surely
That fear of mine in Baghdad was the same
Marvellous Hand working again, to guard
The landward gate of India from me. There
I stood, waiting in the weak early dawn
To start my journey; the great caravan's
Strange cattle with their snoring breaths made steam
Upon the air, and (as I thought) sadly
The beasts at market-booths and awnings gay
Of shops, the city's comfortable trade,
Lookt, and then into months of plodding lookt.
And swiftly on my brain there came a wind
Of vision; and I saw the road mapt out
Along the desert with a chalk of bones;
I saw a famine and the Afghan greed
Waiting for us, spears at our throats, all we
Made women by our hunger; and I saw
Gigantic thirst grieving our mouths with dust,
Scattering up against our breathing salt
Of blown dried dung, till the taste eat like fires
Of a wild vinegar into our sheathèd marrows;

And a sudden decay thicken'd all our bloods
As rotten leaves in fall will baulk a stream;
Then my kill'd life the munched food of jackals. --
The wind of vision died in my brain; and lo,
The jangling of the caravan's long gait
Was small as the luting of a breeze in grass
Upon my ears. Into the waiting thirst
Camels and merchants all were gone, while I
Had been in my amazement. Was this not
A sign? God with a vision tript me, lest
Those tall fiends that ken for my approach
In middle Asia, Thirst and his grisly band
Of plagues, should with their brigand fingers stop
His message in my mouth. Therefore I said,
If India is the place where I must preach,
I am to go by ship, not overland.
And here my ship is berthed. But worse, far worse
Than Baghdad, is this roadstead, the brown sails,
All the enginery of going on sea,
The tackle and the rigging, tholes and sweeps,
The prows built to put by the waves, the masts
Stayed for a hurricane; and lo, that line
Of gilded water there! the sun has drawn
In a long narrow band of shining oil
His light over the sea; how evilly move
Ripples along that golden skin! -- the gleam
Works like a muscular thing! like the half-gorged
Sleepy swallowing of a serpent's neck.
The sea lives, surely! My eyes swear to it;
And, like a murderous smile that glimpses through
A villain's courtesy, that twitching dazzle
Parts the kind mood of weather to bewray
The feasted waters of the sea, stretched out
In lazy gluttony, expecting prey.
How fearful is this trade of sailing! Worse
Than all land-evils is the water-way
Before me now. -- What, cowardice? Nay, why
Trouble myself with ugly words? 'Tis prudence,
And prudence is an admirable thing.
Yet here's much cost -- these packages piled up,
Ivory doubtless, emeralds, gums, and silks,
All these they trust on shipboard? Ah, but I,

I who have seen God, I to put myself
Amid the heathen outrage of the sea
In a deal-wood box! It were plain folly.
There is naught more precious in the world than I:
I carry God in me, to give to men.
And when has the sea been friendly unto man?
Let it but guess my errand, it will call
The dangers of the air to wreak upon me,
Winds to juggle the puny boat and pinch
The water into unbelievable creases.
And shall my soul, and God in my soul, drown?
Or venture drowning? -- But no, no; I am safe.
Smooth as believing souls over their deaths
And over agonies shall slide henceforth
To God, so shall my way be blest amid
The quiet crouching terrors of the sea,
Like panthers when a fire weakens their hearts;
Ay, this huge sin of nature, the salt sea,
Shall be afraid of me, and of the mind
Within me, that with gesture, speech and eyes
Of the Messiah flames. What element
Dare snarl against my going, what incubus dare
Remember to be fiendish, when I light
My whole being with memory of Him?
The malice of the sea will slink from me,
And the air be harmless as a muzzled wolf;
For I am a torch, and the flame of me is God.

A Ship's Captain

You are my man, my passenger?

Thomas

I am.

I go to India with you.

Captain

Well, I hope so.

There's threatening in the weather. Have you a mind
To hug your belly to the slanted deck,
Like a louse on a whip-top, when the boat
Spins on an axlie in the hissing gales?

Thomas

Fear not. 'Tis likely indeed that storms are now

Plotting against our voyage; ay, no doubt
The very bottom of the sea prepares
To stand up mountainous or reach a limb
Out of his night of water and huge shingles,
That he and the waves may break our keel. Fear not;
Like those who manage horses, I've a word
Will fasten up within their evil natures
The meanings of the winds and waves and reefs.

Captain

You have a talisman? I have one too;
I know not if the storms think much of it.
I may be shark's meat yet. And would your spell
Be daunting to a cuttle, think you now?
We had a bout with one on our way here;
It had green lidless eyes like lanterns, arms
As many as the branches of a tree,
But limber, and each one of them wise as a snake.
It laid hold of our bulwarks, and with three
Long knowing arms, slimy, and of a flesh
So tough they'd fool a hatchet, searcht the ship,
And stole out of the midst of us all a man;
Yes, and he the proudest man upon the seas
For the rare powerful talisman he'd got.
And would yours have done better?

Thomas

I am one

Not easily frightened. I'm for India.
You will not put me from my way with talk.

Captain

My heart, I never thought of frightening you. --
Well, here's both tide and wind, and we may not start.

Thomas

Not start? I pray you, do.

Captain

It's no use praying;

I dare not. I've not half my cargo yet.

Thomas

What do you wait for, then?

The things he's filched out of the earth's old pockets
And hoisted up into walls and domes; the gold,
Ebony, agate stairs, wainscots of jade,
The windows of jargoon, and heavenly lofts
Of marble, all the stuff he takes to be wealth,
Reckons like savage mud and wattle against
The matter of my building.' -- And the king,
Gloating upon the white sheen of that palace,
And weeping like a girl ashamed, inquired
'What is that stone?' And the voice answered him,
'Soul.' 'But in my palaces too,' said he,
'There should be soul built: I have driven nations,
What with quarrying, what with craning, down
To death, and sure their souls stay in my work.'
And 'Mud and wattle' sneered the voice again;
But added, 'In the west there is a man,
A slave, a carpenter, whose heart has been
Apprenticed to the skill that built my reign,
This beauty; and were he master of your gangs,
He'd build you a palace that would look like mine.' --
So now no ship may sail from India,
Since the king's scornful dream, unless it bring
A carpenter among its homeward lading:
And carpenters are getting hard to find.

Thomas

And have none made for the king his desire?

Captain

Many have tried, with roasting living men
In queer huge kilns, and other sleights, to found
A glass of human souls; and others seek
With marvellous stone to please our desperate king.
Always at last their own tormented bodies
Delight the cruelty of the king's heart.

Thomas

Well then, I hope you'll find your carpenter,
And soon. I would not that we wait too long;
I loathe a dallying journey. -- I should suppose
We'd have good sailing at this season, now?

Captain

Why, you were looking, a few minutes gone,
For rare wild storms: I hope we'll have them too;
I want to see you work that talisman
You boast about: I've a great love for spells.

Thomas

Let it be storm or calm, so we be sailing.
I long have wished to voyage into mid sea,
To give my senses rest from wondering
On this perplexèd grammar of the land
Written in men and women, the strange trees,
Herbs, and those things so like to souls, the beasts.
My wilful senses will keep perilously
Employed with these my brain, and weary it
Still to be asking. But on the high seas
Such throng'd reality is left behind, --
Only vast air and water, and the hue
That always seems like special news of God.
Surely 'tis half way to eternity
To go where only size and colour live;
And I could purify my mind from all
Worldly amazement by imagining
Beyond my senses into God's great Heaven,
If I were in mid sea. I have dreamed of this.
Wondrous too, I think, to sail at night
While shaols of moonlight flickers dance beside,
Like swimming glee of fishes scaled in gold,
Curvetting in thwart bounds over the swell;
The perceiving flesh, in bliss of such a beauty,
Must sure feel fine as spiritual sight. --
Moods have been on me, too, when I would be
Sailing recklessly through wild darkness, where
Gigantic whispers of a harassed sea
Fill the whole world of air, and I stand up
To breast the danger of the loosen'd sky,
And feel my immortality like music, --
Yea, I alone in the broken world, firm things
All gone to monstrous flurry, knowing myself
An indestructible word spoken by God. --
This is a small, small boat?

Captain Small is nothing,
A bucket will do, so it know how to ride
Top upward: cleverness is the thing in boats.
And I wish this were cleverer: she goes crank
At times just when she should go sober.
But what? Boats are but girls for whimsies: men
Must let them have their freaks.

Thomas Have you good skill
In seamanship?

Captain Well, I am not drowned yet,
Though I'm a grey man and have been at sea
Longer than you've been walking. My old sight
Can tell Mizar from Alcor still.

Thomas Ay, so;
Doubtless you'll bring me safe to India.
But being there -- tell me now of the land:
How use they strangers there?

Captain Queerly, sometimes
If the king's moody, and tired of feeling nerves
Mildly made happy with soft jewels of silk,
Odours and wines and slim lascivious girls,
And yearns for sharper thrills to pierce his brain,
He often finds a stranger handy then.

Thomas
Why, what do you mean?

Captain There was a merchant came
To Travancore, and could not speak our talk;
And, it chanced, he was brought before the throne
Just when the king was weary of sweet pleasures.
So, to better his tongue, a rope was bent
Beneath his oxters, up he was hauled, and fire
Let singe the soles of his feet, until his legs
Wriggled like frying eels; then the king's dogs
Were set to hunt the hirpling man. The king
Laught greatly and cried, 'But give the dogs words they know,
And they'll be tame.' -- Have you the Indian speech?

Thomas

Not yet: it will be given me, I trust.

Captain

You'd best make sure of the gift. Another stranger,
Who swore he knew of better gods than ours,
Seemed to the king troubled with fleas, and slaves
Were told to groom him smartly, which they did
Thoroughly with steel combs, until at last
They curried the living flesh from his bones
And stript his face of gristle, till he was
Skull and half skeleton and yet alive.
You're not for dealing in new gods?

Thomas

Not I.

Was the man killed?

Captain

He lived a little while;

But the flies killed him.

Thomas

Flies? I hope India

Is not a fly-plagued land? I abhor flies.

Captain

You will see strange ones, for our Indian life
Hath wonderful fierce breeding. Common earth
With us quickens to buzzing flights of wings
As readily as a week-old carcass here
Thrown in a sunny marsh. Why, we have wasps
That make your hornets seem like pretty midges;
And there be flies in India will drink
Not only blood of bulls, tigers, and bears,
But pierce the river-horses' creasy leather,
Ay, worry crocodiles through their cuirasses
And prick the metal fishes when they bask.
You'll feel them soon, with beaks like sturdy pins,
Treating their stinging thirsts with your best blood.
A man can't walk a mile in India
Without being the business of a throng'd
And moving town of flies; they hawk at a man
As bold as little eagles, and as wild.

And, I suppose, only a fool will blame them.
Flies have the right to sink wells in our skin
All as men to bore parcht earth for water.
But I must do a job on board, and then
Search the town afresh for a carpenter.

Thomas (alone)

Ay, loose tongue, I know how thou art prompted.
Satan's cunning device thou art, to sap
My heart with chatter'd fears. How easy it is
For a stiff mind to hold itself upright
Against the cords of devilish suggestion
Tackled about it, though kept downward strained
With sly, masterful winches made of fear.
Yea, when the mind is warned what engines mean
To ply it into grovelling, and thought set firm,
The tugging strings fail like a cobweb-stuff.
Not as in Baghdad is it with me now;
Nor canst thou, Satan, by a prating mouth,
Fell my tall purpose to a flatlong scorn.
I can divide the check of God's own hand
From tempting such as this: India is mine! --
Ay, fiend, and if thou utter thy storming heart
Into the ocean sea, as into mob
A rebel utters turbulence and rage,
And raise before my path swelling barriers
Of hatred soul'd in water, yet will I strike
My purpose, and God's purpose, clean through all
The ridges of thy power. And I will show
This mask that the devil wears, this old shipman,
A thing to make his proud heart of evil
Writhe like a trodden snake; yea, he shall see
How godly faith can go upon the huge Fury of forces bursting out of

law,

Easily as a boy goes on windy grass. --
O marvel! that my little life of mind
Can by mere thinking the unsizeable
Creatures of sea enslave! I must believe it.
The mind hath many powers beyond name
Deep womb'd within it, and can shoot strange vigours:
Men there have been who could so grimly look
That soldiers' hearts went out like candle flames

Before their eyes, and the blood perisht in them. --
But I -- could I do that? Would I not feel
The power in me if 'twas there? And yet
'Twere a child's game to what I have to do,
For days and days with sleepless faith oppress
And terrorise the demon sea. I think
A man might, as I saw my Master once,
Pass unharmed through a storm of men, yet fail
At this that lies before me: men are mind,
And mind can conquer mind; but how can it quell
The unappointed purpose of great waters? --
Well, say the sea is past: why, then, I have
My feet but on the threshold of my task,
To gospel India, -- my single heart
To seize into the order of its beat
All the strange blood of India, my brain
To lord the dark thought of that tann'd mankind! --
O, horrible those sweltry places are,
Where the sun comes so close, it makes the earth
Burn in a frenzy of breeding, -- smoke and flame
Of lives burning up from agoniz'd loam!
Those monstrous sappy jungles of clutcht growth,
What can such fearful increase have to do
With prospering bounty? A rage works in the ground,
Incurably, like frantic lechery,
Pouring its passion out in crops and spawns.
'Tis as the mighty spirit of life, that here
Walketh beautifully praising, glad of God,
Should, stepping on the poison'd Indian shore,
Breathing the Indian air of fire and steams,
Fling herself into a craze of hideous dancing,
The green gown whipping her swift limbs, all her body
Writhen to speak inutterable desire,
Tormented by a glee of hating God.
Nay, it must be, to visit India,
That frantic pomp and hurrying forth of life,
As if a man should enter at unawares
The dreaming mind of Satan, gorgeously
Imagining his eternal hell of lust. --

They say the land is full of apes, which have
Their own gods and worship: how ghastly, this! --

That demons (for it must be so) should build,
In mockery of man's upward faith, the souls
Of monkeys, those lewd mammals of mankind,
Into a dreadful farce of adoration!
And flies! a land of flies! where the hot soil
Foul with ceaseless decay steams into flies!
So thick they pile themselves in the air above
Their meal of filth, they seem like breathing heaps
Of formless life mounded upon the earth;
And buzzing always like the pipes and strings
Of solemn music made for sorcerers. --
I abhor flies, -- to see them stare upon me
Out of their little faces of gibbous eyes;
To feel the dry cool skin of their bodies alight
Perching upon my lips! -- O yea, a dream,
A dream of impious obscene Satan, this
Monstrous frenzy of life, the Indian being!
And there are men in the dream! What men are they?
I've heard, naught relishes their brains so much
As to tie down a man and tease his flesh
Infamously, until a hundred pains
Hound the desiring life out of his body,
Filling his nerves with such a fearful zest
That the soul overstrained shatters beneath it.
Must I preach God to these murderous hearts?
I would my lot had fallen to go and dare
Death from the silent dealing of Northern cold! --

O, but I would face all these Indian fears,
The horror of the huge power of life,
The beasts all fierce and venomous, the men
With cruel souls, learned to invent pain,
All these and more, if I had any hope
That, braving them, Lord Christ prosper'd through me.
If Christ desired India, He had sent
The band of us, soldier'd in one great purpose,
To strike His message through those dark vast tribes.
But one man! -- O surely it is folly,
And we misread the lot! One man, to thrust,
Even though in his soul the lamp was kindled
At God's own hands, one man's lit soul to thrust
The immense Indian darkness out of the world!

For human flesh there breeds as furiously
As the green things and the cattle; and it is all,
All this enormity of measureless folk,
Penn'd in a land so close to the devil's reign
The very apes have faith in him. -- No, no;
Impetuous brains mistake the signs of God
Too easily. God would not have me waste
My zeal for Him in this wild enterprise,
Of going alone to swarming India; -- one man,
One mortal voice, to charm those myriad ears
Away from the fiendish clamour of Indian gods,
One man preaching the truth against the huge
Bray of the gongs and horns of the Indian priests!
A cup of wine poured in the sea were not
More surely lost in the green and brackish depths,
Than the fire and fragrance of my doctrine poured
Into that multitudinous pond of men,
India. -- Shipman! Master of the ship! --
I have thought better of this journey; now
I find I am not meant to go.

Captain

Not meant?

Thomas

I would say, I had forgotten Indian air
Is full of fevers; and my health is bad
For holding out against fever.

Captain

As you please.

I keep your fare, though.

Thomas

O, { 'tis yours. -- Good sailing!

As he makes to depart, a Noble Stranger is seen approaching along
the quay.

Captain

Well, here's a marvel: 'Tis a king, for sure!
'Twould take the taxes of a world to dress
A man in that silken gold, and all those gems.
What a flash the light makes of him, nay, he burns;
And he's here on the quay all by himself,

Stranger

He is a carpenter.

Captain

A carpenter!

Why, for a good one I'd give all my purse.

Stranger

No, twenty silver pieces is the price;
Though 'tis a slave a king might joy to own.
I've taught him to imagine palaces
So high, and tower'd so nobly, they might seem
The marvelling of a God-delighted heart
Escaping into ecstasy; he knows,
Moreover, of a stuff so rare it makes
Smaragdus and the dragon-stone despised;
And yet the quarries whereof he is wise
Would yield enough to house the tribes of the world
In palaces of beautiful shining work.

Captain

Lo there! why, that is it: the carpenter
I am to bring is needed for to build
The king's new palace.

Stranger

Yea? He is your man.

Captain

Come on, my man. I'll put your cunning heels
Where they'll not budge more than a shuffled inch.
My lord, if you'll bide with the rascal here
I'll get the irons ready. Here's your sum. --

Stranger

Now, Thomas, know thy sin. It was not fear;
Easily may a man crouch down for fear,
And yet rise up on firmer knees, and face
The hailing storm of the world with graver courage.
But prudence, prudence is the deadly sin,
And one that groweth deep into a life,
With hardening roots that clutch about the breast.
For this refuses faith in the unknown powers
Within man's nature; shrewdly bringeth all

Their inspiration of strange eagerness(
To a judgment bought by safe experience;
Narrows desire into the scope of thought.
But it is written in the heart of man,
Thou shalt no larger be than thy desire.
Thou must not therefore stoop thy spirit's sight
To pore only within the candle-gleam
Of conscious wit and reasonable brain;
But search into the sacred darkness lying
Outside thy knowledge of thyself, the vast
Measureless fate, full of the power of stars,
The outer noiseless heavens of thy soul.
Keep thy desire closed in the room of light
The labouring fires of thy mind have made,
And thou shalt find the vision of thy spirit
Pitifully dazzled to so shrunk a ken,
There are no spacious puissances about it.
But send desire often forth to scan
The immense night which is thy greater soul;
Knowing the possible, see thou try beyond it
Into impossible things, unlikely ends;
And thou shalt find thy knowledgeable desire
Grow large as all the regions of thy soul,
Whose firmament doth cover the whole of Being,
And of created purpose reach the ends.

Lascelles Abercrombie

The Stream's Song

Make way, make way,
You thwarting stones;
Room for my play,
Serious ones.

Do you not fear,
O rocks and boulders,
To feel my laughter
On your broad shoulders?

So you not know
My joy at length
Will all wear out
Your solemn strength?

You will not for ever
Cumber my play:
With joy and son
I clear my way.

Your faith of rock
Shall yield to me,
And be carried away
By the song of my glee.

Crumble, crumble,
Voiceless things;
No faith can last
That never sings.

For the last hour
To joy belongs:
The steadfast perish,
But not the songs.

Yet for a while
Thwart me, O boulders;
I need for laughter
Your serious shoulders.

And when my singing
Has razed your quite,
I shall have lost
Half my delight.

Lascelles Abercrombie

Witchcraft: New Style

The sun drew off at last his piercing fires.
Over the stale warm air, dull as a pond
And moveless in the grey quieted street,
Blue magic of a summer evening glowed.
The sky, that had been dazzling stone all day,
Hollowed in smooth hard brightness, now dissolved
To infinite soft depth, and smoulder'd down
Low as the roofs, dark burning blue, and soared
Clear to that winking drop of liquid silver,
The first exquisite star. Now the half-light
Tidied away the dusty litter parching
Among the cobbles, veiled in the colour of distance
Shabby slates and brickwork mouldering, turn'd
The hunchback houses into patient things
Resting; and golden windows now began.

A little brisk grey slattern of a woman,
Pattering along in her loose-heel'd clogs,
Pushed the brass-barr'd door of a public-house;
The spring went hard against her; hand and knee
Shoved their weak best. As the door poised ajar,
Hullabaloo of talking men burst out,
A pouring babble of inflamed palaver,
And overriding it and shouted down
High words, jeering or downright, broken like
Crests that leap and stumble in rushing water.
Just as the door went wide and she stepped in,
'She cannot do it!' one was bawling out:
A glaring hulk of flesh with a bull's voice.
He finger'd with his neckerchief, and stretched
His throat to ease the anger of dispute,
Then spat to put a full stop to the matter.

The little woman waited, with one hand
Propping the door, and smiled at the loud man.
They saw her then; and the sight was enough
To gag the speech of every drinker there:
The din fell down like something chopt off short.
Blank they all wheel'd towards her, with their mouths

Still gaping as though full of voiceless words.
She let the door slam to; and all at ease,
Amused, her smile wrinkling about her eyes,
Went forward: they made room for her quick enough.
Her chin just topt the counter; she gave in
Her bottle to the potboy, tuckt it back,
Full of bright tawny ale, under her arm,
Rapt down the coppers on the planisht zinc,
And turned: and no word spoken all the while.

The first voice, in that silent crowd, was hers,
Her light snickering laugh, as she stood there
Pausing, scanning the sawdust at her feet.
Then she switcht round and faced the positive man
Whose strong 'She cannot do it!' all still felt
Huskily shouting in their guilty ears.

'She can't, eh? She can't do it? ' — Then she'd heard!

The man, inside his ruddy insolent flesh,
Had hoped she did not hear. His barrel chest
Gave a slight cringe, as though the glint of her eyes
Prickt him. But he stood up to her awkwardly bold,
One elbow on the counter, gripping his mug
Like a man holding on to a post for safety.

The Man:
You can't do what's not nature: nobody can.

The Woman:
And louts like you have nature in your pocket?

The Man:
I don't say that —

The Woman:
If you kept saying naught, No one would guess the fool you are.

Second Man:
Almost
My very words!

The Woman:
O you're the knowing man!
The spark among the cinders!

First Man:
You can't fetch
A free man back, unless he wants to come.

The Woman:
Nay, I'll be bound he doesn't want to come!

Third Man:
And he won't come: he told me flat he wouldn't.

The Woman:
Are you there too?

Third Man:
And if he does come back
It will be devilry brought him.

The Woman:
I shall bring him; —
Tonight.

First Man:
How will he come?

The Woman:
Running: unless
He's broke his leg, and then he'll have to come
Crawling: but he will come.

First Man:
How do you know
What he may choose to do, three counties off?

The Woman:
He choose?

Third Man:
You haven't got him on a lead.

The Woman:
Haven't I though!

Second Man:
That's right; it's what I said.

The Woman:
Ay, there are brains in your family.

First Man:
You have
Some sort of pull on him, to draw him home?

The Woman:
You may say that: I have hold of his mind.
And I can slack it off or fetch it taut.
And make him dance a score of miles away
An answer to the least twangling thrum
I play on it. He thought he lurkt at last
Safely; and all the while, what has he been?
An eel on the end of a night line; and it's time
I haul'd him in. You'll see, to-night I'll land him.

Third Man:
Bragging's a light job.

The Woman:
You daren't let me take
Your eyes in mine! — Haul, did I say? no need:
I give his mind a twitch, and up he comes
Tumbling home to me. Whatever work he's at,
He drops the thing he holds like redhot iron
And runs — runs till he falls down like a beast
Pole-axt, and grunts for breath; then up and on,
No matter does he know the road or not:
The strain I put on his mind will keep him going
Right as a homing-pigeon.

First Man:
Devilry I call it.

The Woman:
And you're welcome.

Second Man:
But the law should have a say here.

The Woman:
What, isn't he mine,
My own? There's naught but what I please about it.

Third Man:
Why did you let him go?

The Woman:
To fetch him back!
For I enjoy this, mind. There's many a one
Would think, to see me, There goes misery!
There's a queer starveling for you! — and I do
A thing that makes me like a saint in glory,
The life of me the sound of a great tune
Your flesh could never hear: I can send power
Delighting out of me! O, the mere thought
Has made my blood go smarting in my veins,
Such a flame glowing along it! — And all the same
I'll pay him out for sidling off from me.
But I'll have supper first.

When she was gone,
Their talk could scarcely raise itself again
Above a grumble. But at last a cry
Sharp-pitcht came startling in from the street: at once
Their moody talk exploded into flare
Of swearing hubbub, like gunpowder dropt
On embers; mugs were clapt down, out they bolted
Rowdily jostling, eager for the event.

All down the street the folk throng'd out of doors,
But left a narrow track clear in the middle;
And there a man came running, a tall man
Running desperately and slowly, pounding
Like a machine, so evenly, so blindly;

And regularly his trotting body wagg'd.
Only one foot clatter'd upon the stones;
The other padded in his dogged stride:
The boot was gone, the sock hung frayed in shreds
About his ankle, the foot was blood and earth;
And never a limp, not the least flinch, to tell
The wounded pulp hit stone at every step.
His clothes were tatter'd and his rent skin showed,
Harrowed with thorns. His face was pale as putty,
Thrown far back; clots of drooping spittle foamed
On his moustache, and his hair hung in tails,
Mired with sweat; and sightless in their sockets
His eyeballs turned up white, as dull as pebbles.
Evenly and doggedly he trotted,
And as he went he moaned. Then out of sight
Round a corner he swerved, and out of hearing.

— 'The law should have a say to that, by God!'

Lascelles Abercrombie