

A Selection of Poems by George Herbert
October 28, 2014

Affliction (I)

When first thou didst entice to thee my heart,
 I thought the service brave;
So many joys I writ down for my part,
 Besides what I might have
Out of my stock of natural delights,
Augmented with thy gracious benefits.

I looked on thy furniture so fine,
 And made it fine to me;
Thy glorious household-stuff did me entwine,
 And 'tice me unto thee.
Such stars I counted mine: both heav'n and earth;
Paid me my wages in a world of mirth.

What pleasures could I want, whose King I serv'd,
 Where joys my fellows were?
Thus argu'd into hopes, my thoughts reserv'd
 No place for grief or fear.
Therefore my sudden soul caught at the place,
And made her youth and fierceness seek thy face.

At first thou gav'st me milk and sweetnesses;
 I had my wish and way;
My days were straw'd with flow'rs and happiness;
 There was no month but May.
But with my years sorrow did twist and grow,
And made a party unawares for woe.

My flesh began unto my soul in pain,
 "Sicknesses cleave my bones;
Consuming agues dwell in ev'ry vein,
 And tune my breath to groans."
Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce believ'd,
Till grief did tell me roundly, that I liv'd.

When I got health, thou took'st away my life,

And more, for my friends die;
My mirth and edge was lost, a blunted knife
Was of more use than I.
Thus thin and lean without a fence or friend,
I was blown through with ev'ry storm and wind.

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
The way that takes the town;
Thou didst betray me to a ling'ring book,
And wrap me in a gown.
I was entangled in the world of strife,
Before I had the power to change my life.

Yet, for I threaten'd oft the siege to raise,
Not simp'ring all mine age,
Thou often didst with academic praise
Melt and dissolve my rage.
I took thy sweet'ned pill, till I came where
I could not go away, nor persevere.

Yet lest perchance I should too happy be
In my unhappiness,
Turning my purge to food, thou throwest me
Into more sicknesses.
Thus doth thy power cross-bias me, not making
Thine own gift good, yet me from my ways taking.

Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me
None of my books will show;
I read, and sigh, and wish I were a tree,
For sure then I should grow
To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust
Her household to me, and I should be just.

Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek;
In weakness must be stout;
Well, I will change the service, and go seek
Some other master out.
Ah my dear God! though I am clean forgot,
Let me not love thee, if I love thee not

Denial

When my devotions could not pierce
Thy silent ears,
Then was my heart broken, as was my verse;
My breast was full of fears
And disorder.

My bent thoughts, like a brittle bow,
Did fly asunder:
Each took his way; some would to pleasures go,
Some to the wars and thunder
Of alarms.

“As good go anywhere,” they say,
“As to benumb
Both knees and heart, in crying night and day,
Come, come, my God, O come!
But no hearing.”

O that thou shouldst give dust a tongue
To cry to thee,
And then not hear it crying! All day long
My heart was in my knee,
But no hearing.

Therefore my soul lay out of sight,
Untuned, unstrung:
My feeble spirit, unable to look right,
Like a nipped blossom, hung
Discontented.

O cheer and tune my heartless breast,
Defer no time;
That so thy favors granting my request,
They and my mind may chime,
And mend my rhyme.

Discipline

Throw away thy rod,
Throw away thy wrath:
 O my God,
Take the gentle path.

For my heart's desire
Unto thine is bent:
 I aspire
To a full consent.

Not a word or look
I affect to own,
 But by book,
And thy book alone.

Though I fail, I weep:
Though I halt in pace,
 Yet I creep
To the throne of grace.

Then let wrath remove;
Love will do the deed:
 For with love
Stony hearts will bleed.

Love is swift of foot;
Love's a man of war,
 And can shoot,
And can hit from far.

Who can 'scape his bow?
That which wrought on thee,
 Brought thee low,
Needs must work on me.

Throw away thy rod;
Though man frailties hath,
 Thou art God:
Throw away thy wrath.