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**Satires of Circumstance, lyrics and  
reveries with miscellaneous pieces**

Thomas Hardy

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**SATIRES OF CIRCUMSTANCE WITH  
MISCELLANEOUS PIECES**

by  
Thomas Hardy



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## IN FRONT OF THE LANDSCAPE

Plunging and labouring on in a tide of visions,  
Dolorous and dear,  
Forward I pushed my way as amid waste waters  
Stretching around,  
Through whose eddies there glimmered the customed landscape  
Yonder and near,

Blotted to feeble mist. And the coomb and the upland  
Foliage-crowned,  
Ancient chalk-pit, milestone, rills in the grass-flat  
Stroked by the light,  
Seemed but a ghost-like gauze, and no substantial  
Meadow or mound.

What were the infinite spectacles bulking foremost  
Under my sight,  
Hindering me to discern my paced advancement  
Lengthening to miles;  
What were the re-creations killing the daytime  
As by the night?

O they were speechful faces, gazing insistent,  
Some as with smiles,  
Some as with slow-born tears that brinily trundled  
Over the wrecked  
Cheeks that were fair in their flush-time, ash now with anguish,  
Harrowed by wiles.

Yes, I could see them, feel them, hear them, address them -  
Halo-bedecked -  
And, alas, onwards, shaken by fierce unreason,

Rigid in hate,  
Smitten by years-long wryness born of misprision,  
Dreaded, suspect.

Then there would breast me shining sights, sweet seasons  
Further in date;  
Instruments of strings with the tenderest passion  
Vibrant, beside  
Lamps long extinguished, robes, cheeks, eyes with the earth's crust  
Now corporate.

Also there rose a headland of hoary aspect  
Gnawed by the tide,  
Frisled by the nimb of the morning as two friends stood there  
Guilelessly glad -  
Wherefore they knew not – touched by the fringe of an ecstasy  
Scantly descried.

Later images too did the day unfurl me,  
Shadowed and sad,  
Clay cadavers of those who had shared in the dramas,  
Laid now at ease,  
Passions all spent, chiefest the one of the broad brow  
Sepulture-clad.

So did beset me scenes miscalled of the bygone,  
Over the leaze,  
Past the clump, and down to where lay the beheld ones;  
– Yea, as the rhyme  
Sung by the sea-swell, so in their pleading dumbness  
Captured me these.

For, their lost revisiting manifestations  
In their own time  
Much had I slighted, caring not for their purport,  
Seeing behind  
Things more coveted, reckoned the better worth calling  
Sweet, sad, sublime.

Thus do they now show hourly before the intenser  
Stare of the mind  
As they were ghosts avenging their slights by my bypast  
Body-borne eyes,  
Show, too, with fuller translation than rested upon them  
As living kind.

Hence wag the tongues of the passing people, saying  
In their surmise,  
"Ah—whose is this dull form that perambulates, seeing nought  
Round him that looms  
Whithersoever his footsteps turn in his farings,  
Save a few tombs?"

## CHANNEL FIRING

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

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

The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, "No;  
It's gunnery practice 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 hatters  
They do no more for Christ's sake  
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

"That this is not the judgment-hour  
For some of them's a blessed thing,  
For if it were they'd have to scour  
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)."

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.  
"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,  
As far inland as Stourton Tower,  
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

April 1914.

## THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN

(Lines on the loss of the "Titanic")

### I

In a solitude of the sea  
Deep from human vanity,  
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

### II

Steel chambers, late the pyres  
Of her salamandrine fires,  
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

### III

Over the mirrors meant  
To glass the opulent  
The sea-worm crawls – grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

### IV

Jewels in joy designed  
To ravish the sensuous mind  
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

### V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near  
Gaze at the gilded gear  
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" . . .

## VI

Well: while was fashioning  
This creature of cleaving wing,  
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

## VII

Prepared a sinister mate  
For her — so gaily great -  
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

## VIII

And as the smart ship grew  
In stature, grace, and hue,  
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

## IX

Alien they seemed to be:  
No mortal eye could see  
The intimate welding of their later history,

## X

Or sign that they were bent  
By paths coincident  
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

## XI

Till the Spinner of the Years  
Said "Now!" And each one hears,  
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

## THE GHOST OF THE PAST

We two kept house, the Past and I,  
The Past and I;  
I tended while it hovered nigh,  
Leaving me never alone.  
It was a spectral housekeeping  
Where fell no jarring tone,  
As strange, as still a housekeeping  
As ever has been known.

As daily I went up the stair  
And down the stair,  
I did not mind the Bygone there -  
The Present once to me;  
Its moving meek companionship  
I wished might ever be,  
There was in that companionship  
Something of ecstasy.

It dwelt with me just as it was,  
Just as it was  
When first its prospects gave me pause  
In wayward wanderings,  
Before the years had torn old troths  
As they tear all sweet things,  
Before gaunt griefs had torn old troths  
And dulled old rapturings.

And then its form began to fade,  
Began to fade,  
Its gentle echoes faintlier played  
At eves upon my ear  
Than when the autumn's look embrowned  
The lonely chambers here,  
The autumn's settling shades embrowned

Nooks that it haunted near.

And so with time my vision less,  
Yea, less and less  
Makes of that Past my housemistress,  
It dwindles in my eye;  
It looms a far-off skeleton  
And not a comrade nigh,  
A fitful far-off skeleton  
Dimming as days draw by.

AFTER THE VISIT  
(To F. E. D.)

Come again to the place  
Where your presence was as a leaf that skims  
Down a drouthy way whose ascent bedims  
The bloom on the farer's face.

Come again, with the feet  
That were light on the green as a thistledown ball,  
And those mute ministrations to one and to all  
Beyond a man's saying sweet.

Until then the faint scent  
Of the bordering flowers swam unheeded away,  
And I marked not the charm in the changes of day  
As the cloud-colours came and went.

Through the dark corridors  
Your walk was so soundless I did not know  
Your form from a phantom's of long ago

Said to pass on the ancient floors,

Till you drew from the shade,  
And I saw the large luminous living eyes  
Regard me in fixed inquiring-wise  
As those of a soul that weighed,

Scarce consciously,  
The eternal question of what Life was,  
And why we were there, and by whose strange laws  
That which mattered most could not be.