

Drummer Hodge

I

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
 Uncoffined—just as found:
 His landmark is a kopje-crest
 That breaks the veldt¹ around;
 5 And foreign constellations² west° *set*
 Each night above his mound.

2

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew—
 Fresh from his Wessex home—
 The meaning of the broad Karoo,³
 10 The Bush,⁴ the dusty loam,
 And why uprose to nightly view
 Strange stars amid the gloam.

3

Yet portion of that unknown plain
 Will Hodge for ever be;
 15 His homely Northern breast and brain
 Grow to some Southern tree,
 And strange-eyed constellations reign
 His stars eternally.

1899, 1901

The Darkling¹ Thrush

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° *near*
 Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
 10 The Century's corpse outleant,⁴
 His crypt the cloudy canopy,

1. South African Dutch (Afrikaans) word for a plain or prairie. "Kopje-crest": Afrikaans for a small hill. The poem is a lament for an English soldier killed in the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902).

2. Those visible only in the Southern Hemisphere.

3. A dry tableland region in South Africa (usually spelled "Karoo").

4. British colonial word for an uncleared area of land.

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.

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

The Ruined Maid

'O 'Melia,¹ my dear, this does everything crown!
 Who could have supposed I should meet you in Town?
 And whence such fair garments, such prosperi-ty?'—
 'O didn't you know I'd been ruined?' said she.

5 —'You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,
 Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;²
 And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!'—
 'Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined,' said she.

—'At home in the barton° you said "thee" and "thou", *farmyard*
 10 And "thik oon", and "theās oon", and "t'other"; but now
 Your talking quite fits 'ee for high compa-ny!'—
 'Some polish is gained with one's ruin,' said she.

—'Your hands were like paws then, your face blue and bleak
 But now I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek,
 15 And your little gloves fit as on any la-dy!'—
 'We never do work when we're ruined,' said she.

—'You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,
 And you'd sigh, and you'd sock;° but at present you seem *sigh*

1. Diminutive form of Amelia.

2. Digging up a species of thick-rooted weed.