

MY CICELY

(17-)

"Alive?"--And I leapt in my wonder,
Was faint of my joyance,
And grasses and grove shone in garments
Of glory to me.

"She lives, in a plenteous well-being,
To-day as aforehand;
The dead bore the name--though a rare one -
The name that bore she."

She lived . . . I, afar in the city
Of frenzy-led factions,
Had squandered green years and maturer
In bowing the knee

To Baals illusive and specious,
Till chance had there voiced me
That one I loved vainly in nonage
Had ceased her to be.

The passion the planets had scowled on,

And change had let dwindle,
Her death-rumour smartly relifted
To full apogee.

I mounted a steed in the dawning
With acheful remembrance,
And made for the ancient West Highway
To far Exonb'ry.

Passing heaths, and the House of Long Sieging,
I neared the thin steeple
That tops the fair fane of Poore's olden
Episcopal see;

And, changing anew my onbearer,
I traversed the downland
Whereon the bleak hill-graves of Chieftains
Bulge barren of tree;

And still sadly onward I followed
That Highway the Icen,
Which trails its pale riband down Wessex
O'er lynchet and lea.

Along through the Stour-bordered Forum,
Where Legions had wayfared,

And where the slow river upglasses

Its green canopy,

And by Weatherbury Castle, and thencefrom

Through Casterbridge held I

Still on, to entomb her my vision

Saw stretched pallidly.

No highwayman's trot blew the night-wind

To me so life-weary,

But only the creak of the gibbets

Or waggoners' jee.

Triple-ramparted Maidon gloomed grayly

Above me from southward,

And north the hill-fortress of Eggar,

And square Pummerie.

The Nine-Pillared Cromlech, the Bride-streams,

The Axe, and the Otter

I passed, to the gate of the city

Where Exe scents the sea;

Till, spent, in the graveacre pausing,

I learnt 'twas not my Love

To whom Mother Church had just murmured

A last lullaby.

- "Then, where dwells the Canon's kinswoman,

My friend of aforetime?"--

('Twas hard to repress my heart-heavings

And new ecstasy.)

"She wedded."--"Ah!"--"Wedded beneath her -

She keeps the stage-hostel

Ten miles hence, beside the great Highway -

The famed Lions-Three.

"Her spouse was her lackey--no option

'Twixt wedlock and worse things;

A lapse over-sad for a lady

Of her pedigree!"

I shuddered, said nothing, and wandered

To shades of green laurel:

Too ghastly had grown those first tidings

So brightsome of blee!

For, on my ride hither, I'd halted

Awhile at the Lions,

And her--her whose name had once opened

My heart as a key--

I'd looked on, unknowing, and witnessed
Her jests with the tapsters,
Her liquor-fired face, her thick accents
In naming her fee.

"O God, why this seeming derision!"
I cried in my anguish:
"O once Loved, O fair Unforgotten -
That Thing--meant it thee!

"Inurned and at peace, lost but sainted,
Were grief I could compass;
Depraved--'tis for Christ's poor dependent
A cruel decree!"

I backed on the Highway; but passed not
The hostel. Within there
Too mocking to Love's re-expression
Was Time's repartee!

Uptracking where Legions had wayfared,
By cromlechs unstoried,
And lynchets, and sepultured Chieftains,
In self-colloquy,

A feeling stirred in me and strengthened

That SHE was not my Love,

But she of the garth, who lay rapt in

Her long reverie.

And thence till to-day I persuade me

That this was the true one;

That Death stole intact her young dearness

And innocency.

Frail-witted, illuded they call me;

I may be. 'Tis better

To dream than to own the debasement

Of sweet Cicely.

Moreover I rate it unseemly

To hold that kind Heaven

Could work such device--to her ruin

And my misery.

So, lest I disturb my choice vision,

I shun the West Highway,

Even now, when the knaps ring with rhythms

From blackbird and bee;

And feel that with slumber half-conscious

She rests in the church-hay,
Her spirit unsoiled as in youth-time
When lovers were we.