

**THE LAST POEMS  
OF RICHARD  
WATSON DIXON**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649309795

The Last Poems of Richard Watson Dixon by Robert Bridges & M. E. Coleridge

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**ROBERT BRIDGES & M. E. COLERIDGE**

**THE LAST POEMS  
OF RICHARD  
WATSON DIXON**





©

**THE LAST POEMS**  
OF  
**RICHARD WATSON DXON**  
**D.D.**

LATE HON. CANON OF CARLISLE AND  
VICAR OF WARKWORTH

SELECTED AND EDITED  
BY  
**ROBERT BRIDGES**

WITH A PREFACE BY  
**M. E. COLERIDGE**  
AUTHOR OF 'THE KING WITH TWO FACES,' ETC.

**HENRY FROWDE**  
LONDON, EDINBURGH, GLASGOW  
NEW YORK AND TORONTO

1905

## PREFACE

**H**UNDREDS of years hence, if but one song were left out of the many songs of every poet who has made our age musical, which of them all would be thought the sweetest? How would they compare with the songs of an earlier generation?

It would be hard to find among the lyrics of our own time—or indeed of Shelley's—one more exquisite than this:

'The feathers of the willow  
Are half of them grown yellow  
Above the swelling stream;  
And ragged are the bushes,  
And rusty now the rushes,  
And wild the clouded gleam.

'The thistle now is older,  
His stalk begins to moulder,  
His head is white as snow;  
The branches all are barer,  
The linnet's song is rarer,  
The robin pipeth now.'

Among the many woods and forests of Victorians—nay, among those of the great forest-lover, Wordsworth himself—where shall we find a statelier forest than we find here?

‘Rise in their place the woods: the trees have cast,  
 Like earth to earth, their children: now they stand,  
 Above the graves where lie their very last:  
 Each pointing with her empty hand  
 And mourning o'er the russet floor,  
 Naked and dispossessed;  
 The queenly sycamore,  
 The linden, and the aspen, and the rest.’

Among the frequent similes that gem the work of contemporary writers we look in vain for one like this—a simile that might have haunted Keats:

‘the diamond drip  
 Of a white wing upon a lake struck dead  
 With shadows.’

No lover of poetry could question the beauty of these fragments; not one but would desire to read more. The appearance of this little volume therefore needs no defence.

But let us deprecate quick judgement! There is a kind of genius that only shows itself to become famous; there is another kind that remains long hidden. Elia said once that every poet asked a different mood in the reader. The high, still mood demanded by these poems is an unearthly, an ethereal temper of mind, free from all base distraction, all trivial, fond excitement. It is a mood that will not come at call unless in the hush of noontide among the mountains, or when the stars are shining at midnight. They are quiet; they make no stir;



## PREFACE

v

they are full of secret beauty that will not unfold itself excepting to the touch of love and reverence. It would be safe to say that the first feeling of nine readers out of ten will be *disappointment*; the second will be *surprise*, the third *ecstasy*. Thus men have often felt—and this has been the order of their feeling—about a picture or a statue of great renown. Defeated first of all by the stupidity of the beholder, the picture or the statue wins in the end. That which a few saw at once, the many come to see, given that they are not blinded by haste or pride. Those who could see at first, the brother poets of this poet, did not fail to understand. Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, Robert Bridges, men whose praise is not lightly given, praised him. There was one who gave more than praise. A young Oxford student of brilliantly original power loved the poems of Richard Watson Dixon with such devotion that, when he entered the ranks of the Jesuits and was forbidden to take any books with him, he copied out almost all those in his possession. Such minds as these do not labour in vain; others trust in them, follow their lead.

The book appeals, or should appeal, to many; but the closer interest of it will be, of course, for people to whom the author's earlier work is dear. Few traces of the strong pre-Raphaelitism that marked 'Christ's Company' remain. The mystic, passionate religion of the deeper heart is no longer *visible* in signs and symbols, be they as beautiful as

those of 'Mary Magdalene' or of 'St. John'—it is *audible*, it cries aloud in the Hymn beginning 'O Lord my God,' in the sustained, solemn, hierarchical chant of 'Priest of the only Sacrifice.' 'O Lord my God' could never have been written except by one to whom the experiences of the spirit were fact and not conjecture; it has the strangeness, the familiarity, of every word that comes straight from the truth. It is not memory that strikes like a flail; the worst is not the wrong that was, but rather the righteousness that might have been; the suppliant entreats that the future may in its turn become another past, the past that dares assure the future beyond. The poem fitly chosen for the last is not finished, but broken off upon a sacred word that leaves us on our knees. It could not have been finished upon earth. The end is out of sight—beyond. No formal ending could have held the pathos of this. We have overheard a saint in the sanctuary; and we dare hear no more.

We have spoken first of the Hymns, because, to this poet, religion was the life of life. The touch of humanity, which is absent in his dealings with fancied men and women, is never absent from his religious poems; and the men and women of the Bible are almost the only living men and women to be found in his pages. We say *almost*; for who that has read it could forget the singular and awful idyll of the dull innkeeper and his wife, who did not know the churchyard was so near!

'I rode my horse to the hostel gate,  
And the landlord fed it with corn and hay :  
His eyes were blear, he limped in his gait,  
His lip hung down, his hair was gray.

'I entered in the wayside inn,  
And the landlady met me without a smile ;  
Her dreary dress was old and thin,  
Her face was full of piteous guile.

'There they had been for threescore years,  
There was none to tell them they were great,  
Not one to tell of our hopes and fears ;  
And not far off was the churchyard gate.'

Nothing can beat this for sheer reality ; not Crabbe nor Burns. It shows that no general rule can be formulated about a true poet. During his lifetime he was full of sympathy for every man and woman whom he met ; and perhaps the very sensitiveness of his response to each fellow mortal rendered him cold to men and women whom he had not *seen*—whom he only imagined. Certain it is that he never adorned his landscapes with them, nor let them walk upon the beach when he was writing, as he could write, magnificently, about the sea—that he kept them out of those high-strung Odes in which he sang the conflicts of the soul, the mysteries of nature. There is a fine example before us in the 'Ode on the Death of Dickens.' The 'white precipitate clouds' are there, the bird with sun-smitten wing, the pink sea-thrift, the heather on the sandhill ; but where is Dickens ? Dickens he had not seen, Dickens was