GEORGE HERBERT

Temptation

Broken in pieces all asunder,
Lord, hunt me not,
A thing forgot,
Once a poor creature, now a wonder,
A wonder tortured in the space
Betwixt this world and that of grace.

My thoughts are all a case of knives,
Wounding my heart
With scattered smart,
As watering pots give flowers their lives.
Nothing their fury can control
While they do wound and pink\(^1\) my soul.

All my attendants are at strife,
Quitting their place
Unto my face\(^2\)
Nothing performs the task of life:
Th’ elements are let loose to fight,
And while I live, try out their right.

O help, my God! let not their plot
Kill them and me,
Who art my life: dissolve the knot,
As the sun scatters by his light
All the rebellions of the night.

Then shall those powers, which work for grief
Enter thy pay,
And day by day
Labor thy praise, and my relief:
With care and courage building me,
Till I reach heaven, and much more, thee.

\(\text{Ana}\{\text{Mary}\}\{\text{Army}\}\) gram

How well her name an \textit{Army} doth present,
In whom the Lord of Hosts did pitch his tent!

1. Stab, lacerate. The incongruity of the images ("knives" and furious "watering pots") illustrates the disorder of Herbert’s soul.
2. Before my face.
Hope

I gave to Hope a watch of mine: but he
An anchor gave to me.1
Then an old prayer-book I did present,
And he an optic sent.
With that I gave a vial full of tears,
But he a few green ears.
Ah, loiterer! I'll no more, no more I'll bring;
I did expect a ring.

Sin's Round

Sorry I am, my God, sorry I am
That my offenses course it in a ring.
My thoughts are working like a busy flame,
Until their cockatrice1 they hatch and bring:
And when they once have perfected their draughts,2
My words take fire from my inflamé thoughts.
My words take fire from my inflamé thoughts,
Which spit it forth like the Sicilian hill3
They vent4 the wares, and pass them with their faults,
And by their breathing ventilate5 the ill.
But words suffice not, where are lewd intentions:
My hands do join to finish the inventions.
My hands do join to finish the inventions:
And so my sins ascend three stories high,6
As Babel grew, before there were dissensions.
Yet ill deeds loiter not: for they supply
New thoughts of sinning: wherefore, to my shame,
Sorry I am, my God, sorry I am.

Love Unknown

Dear friend, sit down; the tale is long and sad,
And in my faintings I presume your love
Will more comply than help: a Lord I had,
And have, of Whom some grounds, which may improve,

1. The game is a parlor-game in which wordless emblems are exchanged; each of them can be translated into a religious statement. The poet’s gifts all suggest impatience after long service; the counter-gifts all imply, “Not yet.” An anchor is the emblem of faith, and an “optic” is a telescope.
2. This word, always pronounced and sometimes spelled drafts nowadays, was pronounced in the 17th century to rhyme with “naughts.”
3. Mt. Etna, a volcano.
4. Vend; also “let forth” or “give vent to.”
5. Increase, augment; also “give breath to.” The word is a reminder that the cockatrice could kill creatures simply by breathing on them.
6. I.e., thoughts, words, hands—like the Tower of Babel.
I hold for two lives, and both lives in me.¹
To Him I brought a dish of fruit one day,
And in the middle placed my heart. But He,
    I sigh to say,
Looked on a servant who did know His eye
Better than you know me, or which is one,
Than I myself. The servant, instantly
Quitting the fruit, seized on my heart alone,
And threw it in a font, wherein did fall
A stream of blood which issued from the side
Of a great rock—I well remember all,
And have good cause—there it was dipped and dyed
And washed and wrung; the very wringing yet
Enforceth tears. Your heart was foul, I fear.
Indeed, 'tis true: I did and do commit
Many a fault more than my lease will bear,
Yet still asked pardon and was not denied.
But you shall hear. After my heart was well
And clean and fair, as I one even-tide,
    I sigh to tell,
Walked by myself abroad, I saw a large
And spacious furnace flaming, and thereon
A boiling caldron, round about whose verge
Was in great letters set, Affliction.
The greatness showed the owner. So I went
To fetch a sacrifice out of my fold,
Thinking with that which I did thus present
To warm His love, which I did fear grew cold.
But as my heart did tender it, the man
Who was to take it from me slipped his hand,
And threw my heart into the scalding pan;
My heart that brought it (do you understand?),
The offerer's heart. Your heart was hard, I fear.
Indeed, 'tis true. I found a callous matter
Began to spread and to expatiate there;
But with a richer drug than scalding water
I bathed it often, ev'n with holy blood,
Which at a board, while many drank bare wine,
A friend did steal into my cup for good,
Ev'n taken inwardly, and most divine
To supple hardnesses. But at the length,
Out of the caldron getting, soon I fled
Unto my house, where to repair the strength
Which I had lost, I hasted to my bed.
But when I thought to sleep out all these faults,
    I sigh to speak,
I found that some had stuffed the bed with thoughts,
I would say thorns. Dear, could my heart not break,
When with my pleasures, ev'n my rest was gone?

¹. The terminology is from legal contracts for leasing ground for a fixed number of “lives” or generations. God has leased a soul to Herbert for two lives, one in this world, one in the next.
Full well I understood who had been there,
55 For I had given the key to none but one:
It must be He. Your heart was dull, I fear.
Indeed, a slack and sleepy state of mind
Did oft possess me, so that when I prayed,
Though my lips went, my heart did stay behind;
But all my scores were by another paid,
Who took the debt upon Him. Truly, friend,
For aught I hear, your Master shows to you
More favor than you wot of: mark the end.
The Font did only what was old renew,
65 The Caldron supplied what was grown too hard,
The Thorns did quicken what was grown too dull:
All did but strive to mend what you had marred.
Wherefore be cheered, and praise Him to the full,
Each day, each hour, each moment of the week,
Who fain would have you be new, tender, quick.2

Aaron

Holiness on the head,
Light and perfections on the breast,
Harmonious bells below, raising the dead
To lead them unto life and rest:

Thus are true Aarons dressed.1

Profaneness in my head,
Defects and darkness in my breast,
A noise of passions ringing me for dead
Unto a place where is no rest:

Poor priest, thus am I dressed.

Only another head
I have, another heart and breast,
Another music, making live, not dead,
Without whom I could have no rest:

In him I am well dressed.

Christ is my only head,
My alone only heart and breast,
My only music, striking me even dead,
That to the old man I may rest,

And be in him new dressed.2

So, holy in my head,
Perfect and light in my dear breast,

2. “Quick” carries the meaning of sensitive, as in the “quick” under our fingernails.
1. Exodus xxviii describes in great detail the garments to be worn by Aaron as high priest.
2. As the clapper strikes the bell and makes music of it, Christ strikes the priest, killing the Old Adam (the “old man,” i.e., human frailty) in him, and raising the regenerate soul.
My doctrine tuned by Christ, who is not dead,
   But lives in me while I do rest,
      Come, people; Aaron’s dressed.

The Altar

A broken altar, Lord, thy servant rears,
Made of a heart, and cemented with tears:
   Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workman’s tool hath touched the same.

   A heart alone
   Is such a stone,
   As nothing but
   Thy power doth cut.
Wherefore each part
   Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame,
   To praise thy Name:
      That, if I chance to hold my peace,
   These stones to praise thee may not cease.

Oh let thy blessed sacrifice be mine,
   And sanctify this altar to be thine.

Redemption

Having been tenant long to a rich lord,
   Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
And make a suit unto him, to afford
   A new small-rented lease, and cancel th’ old.

In heaven at his manor I him sought:
   They told me there that he was lately gone
About some land which he had dearly bought
   Long since on earth, to take possession.

I straight returned, and knowing his great birth,
   Sought him accordingly in great resorts—
In cities, theaters, gardens, parks, and courts:
   At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
Of thieves and murderers; there I him espied,
   Who straight, “Your suit is granted,” said, and died.

Easter Wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
   Though foolishly he lost the same,
   Decaying more and more
Till he became
  Most poor:
  With thee
  O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:

Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did begin:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sin,
That I became
  Most thin.
  With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victory;
For, if I imp my wing on thine,

Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

Jordan (1)

Who says that fictions only and false hair
Become a verse? Is there in truth no beauty?
Is all good structure in a winding stair?
May no lines pass, except they do their duty
  Not to a true, but painted chair?

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves
And sudden arbors shadow coarse-spun lines?
Must purling streams refresh a lover’s loves?
Must all be veiled, while he that reads, divines,
  Catching the sense at two removes?

Shepherds are honest people: let them sing;
Riddle who list, for me, and pull for prime:
I envy no man’s nightingale or spring;
Nor let them punish me with loss of rhyme,
  Who plainly say, My God, My King.

The Collar

I struck the board and cried, “No more;
  I will abroad!
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free, free as the road,
  Loose as the wind, as large as store.

Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?
Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn
Before my tears did drown it.
Is the year only lost to me?
Have I no bays to crown it,
No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?
All wasted?
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,
And thou hast hands.
Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,
Thy rope of sands,
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
Good cable, to enforce and draw,
And be thy law,
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
Away! take heed;
I will abroad.
Call in thy death’s-head there; tie up thy fears.
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need,
Deserves his load.”
But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methoughts I heard one calling, Child!
And I replied, My Lord.

The Pulley

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can:
Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span.”

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honor, pleasure.
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

“For if I should,” said he,
“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
So both should losers be.

“Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness:
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.”

The Flower

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! even as the flowers in spring,
To which, besides their own demesne,
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.
Grief melts away
Like snow in May,
As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shriveled heart
Could have recovered greenness? It was gone
Quite underground; as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown,
    Where they together
All the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are thy wonders, Lord of power,
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell
    And up to heaven in an hour,
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.
    We say amiss
This or that is:
Thy word is all, if we could spell.

O that I once past changing were,
    Fast in thy Paradise, where no flower can wither!
Many a spring I shoot up fair,
    Offering at heaven, growing and groaning thither;
Nor doth my flower
Want a spring shower,
My sins and I joining together.

But while I grow in a straight line,
    Still upwards bent, as if heaven were mine own,
Thy anger comes, and I decline:
    What frost to that? what pole is not the zone
Where all things burn,
    When thou dost turn,
And the least frown of thine is shown?

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write;
    I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing. O my only light,
    It cannot be
That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night.
These are thy wonders, Lord of love,
To make us see we are but flowers that glide;
Which when we once can find and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us where to bide;
Who would be more,
Swelling through store,
Forfeit their Paradise by their pride.

Love (3)

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked anything.

“A guest,” I answered, “worthy to be here”:
Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee.”
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
“Who made the eyes but I?”

“Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore the blame?”
“My dear, then I will serve.”
“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”
So I did sit and eat.