Epi-strauss-iurn

Matthew and Mark and Luke and holy John
Evanished all and gone!
Yea, he that erst, his dusky curtains quitting,
Through Eastern pictured panes his level beams transmitting,
With gorgeous portraits blent,
On them his glories intercepted spent,
Southwestering now, through windows plainly glassed,
On the inside face his radiance keen hath cast,
And in the luster lost, invisible, and gone,
Are, say you, Matthew, Mark, and Luke and holy John?
Lost, is it? lost, to be recovered never?
However,
The place of worship the meantime with light
Is, if less richly, more sincerely bright,
And in blue skies the Orb is manifest to sight.

The Latest Decalogue

Thou shalt have one God only; who
Would be at the expense of two?
No graven images may be
Worshipped, except the currency.
Swear not at all; for, for thy curse
Thine enemy is none the worse.
At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world thy friend.
Honor thy parents; that is, all
From whom advancement may befall.
Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive.
Do not adultery commit;
Advantage rarely comes of it.
Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat,
When it's so lucrative to cheat.

1. The title is a play on *epi-thalamium*, which means “concerning the bridal chamber.” The word usually refers to a song in honor of a bride and bridegroom (as in Spenser’s poem). Clough’s title means “concerning Strauss-ism,” a reference to D. F. Strauss, a German biblical scholar whose *Life of Jesus* was translated into English by George Eliot in 1846. The “light” of Strauss’s analysis reputedly showed up the historical inaccuracy of parts of the Gospels in the Bible.
2. The sun. Cf. lines 13–16 of *Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth*. 
Bear not false witness; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly.
Thou shalt not covet, but tradition
Approves all forms of competition.

The sum of all is, thou shalt love,
If anybody, God above:
At any rate shall never labor
More than thyself to love thy neighbor.¹

Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth

Say not the struggle nought availeth,
The labor and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e’en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.

From Dipsychus

I Dreamt a Dream¹

* * *

I dreamt a dream; till morning light
A bell rang in my head all night,
Tinkling and tinkling first, and then

1. Lines 21–24 were discovered in one of Clough’s manuscripts and were not originally included in published versions of the poem.
1. Dipsychus, the Faust-like hero of Clough’s long poem, is in Venice, a city of many bells, where he reports observations and reflections to a companion. The name means “two-souled,” a reference to the split between his worldliness and his idealism. This selection is from scene 5.
Tolling; and tinkling, tolling again.
So brisk and gay, and then so slow!
O joy, and terror! mirth, and woe!
Ting, ting, there is no God; ting, ting—
Dong, there is no God; dong,
There is no God; dong, dong!

Ting, ting, there is no God; ting, ting;
Come dance and play, and merrily sing—
Ting, ting a ding; ting, ting a ding!
O pretty girl who trippest along,
Come to my bed—it isn’t wrong.
Uncork the bottle, sing the song!
Ting, ting a ding: dong, dong.
Wine has dregs; the song an end;
A silly girl is a poor friend
And age and weakness who shall mend?
Dong, there is no God; Dong!
Ting, ting a ding! Come dance and sing!
Staid Englishmen, who toil and slave
From your first breeching\(^2\) to your grave,
And seldom spend and always save,
And do your duty all your life
By your young family and wife;
Come, be ’t not said you ne’er had known
What earth can furnish you alone.

The Italian, Frenchman, German even,
Have given up all thoughts of heaven;
And you still linger—oh, you fool!
Because of what you learnt at school.
You should have gone at least to college,
And got a little ampler knowledge.
Ah well, and yet—dong, dong, dong;
Do, if you like, as now you do;
If work’s a cheat, so’s pleasure too;
And nothing’s new and nothing’s true;
Dong, there is no God; dong!

O Rosalie, my precious maid,
I think thou thinkest love is true;
And on thy fragrant bosom laid
I almost could believe it too.

O in our nook, unknown, unseen,
We’ll hold our fancy like a screen,
Us and the dreadful fact between.
And it shall yet be long, aye, long,
The quiet notes of our low song
Shall keep us from that sad dong, dong.

Hark, hark, hark! O voice of fear!\(^3\)

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2. First wearing of trousers or breeches by a boy.
It reaches us here, even here!
Dong, there is no God; dong!

Ring ding, ring ding, tara, tara,
To battle, to battle—haste, haste—
To battle, to battle—aha, aha!
On, on, to the conqueror’s feast.
From east and west, and south and north,
Ye men of valor and of worth,
Ye mighty men of arms, come forth,
And work your will, for that is just;
And in your impulse put your trust,
Beneath your feet the fools are dust.
Alas, alas! O grief and wrong,
The good are weak, the wicked strong;
And O my God, how long, how long?
Dong, there is no God; dong!

Ring, ting; to bow before the strong,
There is a rapture too in this;
Speak, outraged maiden, in thy wrong
Did terror bring no secret bliss?
Were boys’ shy lips worth half a song
Compared to the hot soldier’s kiss?
Work for thy master, work, thou slave
He is not merciful, but brave.
Be ’t joy to serve, who free and proud
Scorns thee and all the ignoble crowd;
Take that, ’tis all thou art allowed,
Except the snaky hope that they
May sometime serve, who rule today,
When, by hell-demons, shan’t they pay?
O wickedness, O shame and grief,
And heavy load, and no relief!
O God, O God! and which is worst,
To be the curser or the cursed,
The victim or the murderer? Dong
Dong, there is no God; dong!

* * *

I had a dream, from eve to light
A bell went sounding all the night.
Gay mirth, black woe, thin joys, huge pain:
I tried to stop it, but in vain.
It ran right on, and never broke;
Only when day began to stream
Through the white curtains to my bed,
And like an angel at my head
Light stood and touched me—I awoke,
And looked, and said, “It is a dream.”
“There Is No God,” the Wicked Saith

“There is no God,” the wicked saith,
   “And truly it's a blessing,
For what he might have done with us
   It's better only guessing.”

“There is no God,” a youngster thinks,
   “Or really, if there may be,
He surely didn't mean a man
   Always to be a baby.”

“There is no God, or if there is,”
The tradesman thinks, ‘twere funny
If he should take it ill in me
   To make a little money.”

“Whether there be,” the rich man says,
   "It matters very little,
For I and mine, thank somebody,
   Are not in want of victual."

Some others, also, to themselves
   Who scarce so much as doubt it,
Think there is none, when they are well
   And do not think about it.

But country folks who live beneath
   The shadow of the steeple;
The parson and the parson’s wife,
   And mostly married people;

Youths green and happy in first love,
   So thankful for illusion;
And men caught out in what the world
   Calls guilt, in first confusion;

And almost everyone when age,
   Disease, or sorrows strike him,
Inclines to think there is a God,
   Or something very like Him.

4. From *Dipsychus*, scene 5.