THE POEMS OF

Emily Dickinson

VARIORUM EDITION

EDITED BY

R. W. FRANKLIN

The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
123  

Besides the autumn poets sing

MANUSCRIPTS: Two fair copies, about 1859. A pencil copy, signed "Emile" and addressed "Sue" (erased), was sent to Susan Dickinson about autumn 1859 (A 655). This manuscript came to Mabel Todd from the Bowles family, forwarded through Austin Dickinson, who may have erased his wife's name. It came with manuscripts sent to Samuel and Mary Bowles, in whose possession were some of those Susan had received.

A

Besides the autumn poets sing
A few prosaic days
A little this side of the snow
And that side of the Haze.
A few incisive mornings -
A few ascetic eyes -
Gone - Mr Bryant's "Golden Rod"
And Mr Thomson's "Sheaves" -
Still, is the bustle in the brook,
Sealed, are the spicy valves.
Mesmeric fingers softly touch
The eyes of many Elves -
Perhaps a squirrel may remain
My sentiments to share -
Grant me, Oh Lord, a sunny mind -
Thy windy will to bear!

Division 12 Elves

PUBLICATION: Hitchcock, The Handbook of Amherst, Massachusetts (1891), 27, stanzas 1 and 3 from the fascicle (B) in a chapter by Mabel Todd on the Connecticut Valley. Poems (1891), 173, entire, from the fascicle (B). Poems (1953), 93-94 (A summarized, B principal); CP (1960), 61-62 (B). MB (1981), 102-3 (B), in facsimile. (J131)

B  

Title November P91 5-8, 13-16 omitted Handbook91

124 Safe in their alabaster chambers

MANUSCRIPTS: Six (one lost) or seven (two lost), variant, about 1859, 1861, and 1862. There are versions from 1859 and 1861, two further attempts on the second stanza in 1861, and an 1862 holograph of the 1861 version.

The lost manuscript, sent to Susan Dickinson, presumably about late 1859, appears to have been the source for publication of the poem in the Springfield Daily Republican (1 March 1862), there titled "The Sleeping" and dated "Pelham Hill, June, 1861."

[A]  

Safe in their alabaster chambers,
Untouched by morning,
And untouched by noon,
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection,
Rafter of satin, and roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze
In her castle above them,
Babbles the bee in a stolid ear,
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadence:
Ah! what sagacity perished here!

Emendation
3, 5, 8, 10 | indented
9 cadence cadences

The lost manuscript was still in Susan's possession in December 1890, when she marked out a phrase in her copy of Poems (1890) (Y-BRBL), interlining another:
castle <of sunshine> above them

The canceled reading was an editorial alteration in the 1890 text, which derived from the fascicle, already in other editorial hands. The authentic reading there, as in Susan's manuscript and the Republican, was "castle above them"; no other source has this variant.

The Republican text is substantively identical to the fascicle, except for line 9 in the newspaper, which has "cadences" instead of "cadence." Since Susan did not mark this word when annotating the 1890 text, which also has the singular form, one may conjecture that "cadence" appeared in her manuscript and that the plural form in the Republican was alteration or error.

When Samuel Bowles visited Amherst in June 1861, he may have acquired from Susan a copy of the early version: on 1 March 1862 it was published in the Republican curiously dated "Pelham Hill, June, 1861." Pelham Hill, according to the Republican itself (6 July 1861, in a passage that Bowles may have written), was about two miles east of Amherst, the site of a new water-cure hotel named the Orient. This area is now called Mount Orient and Orient Springs, while the center of the town of Pelham, then known as Pelham Heights, has become known as Pelham Hill.

The record copy in Fascicle 6 is the earliest extant holograph, transcribed about late 1859 (H II).

B Safe in their Alabaster Chambers -
Untouched by morning
And untouched by noon -
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection -
Rafter of satín, and Roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze
In her Castle above them -
Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear,
Pipe the sweet Birds in ignorant cadence -
Ah, what sagacity perished here!

About 1861, perhaps as a consequence of Bowles's visit, a literary exchange with Susan Dickinson took this early version as the starting point. To Susan's criticism of the second stanza, Ed responded with a new version: the familiar first stanza (but variant in line 4: "Lie" for "Sleep") followed by a new one. She concluded the manuscript (H B74a), which is written in pencil and signed "Emily," with a note:

Perhaps this verse would please you better - Sue -

C Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,
Untouched by morning -
And untouched by noon -
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection -
Rafter of satín - and Roof of stone -

Grand go the Years - in the Crescent - above them -
Worlds scoop their Arcs -
And Firmaments - row -
Diadems - drop - and Doges - surrender -
Soundless as dots - on a Disc of snow -

Division 4 of 5 Roof of 6 in the 9 Doges 10 a

Susan liked the new stanza less than the earlier one and renewed her criticism by "Pony Express" (H B74b).

I am not suited dear Emily with the second verse - It is remarkable as the chain lightening that blinds us hot nights in the Southern sky but it does not go with the ghostly shimmer of the first verse as well as the other one - It just occurs to me that the first verse is complete in itself it needs no other, and can't be coupled - Strange things always go alone - as there is only one Gabriel and one Sun - You never made a peer for that verse, and I guess you[r] kingdom doesn't hold one - I always go to the fire and get warm after thinking of it, but I never can again.

Ed tried her hand at two more versions of the second stanza, dispatching one next door with a question and a final note to the exchange (H B74c).

Is this frostier?

D Springs - shake the Sills -
But - the Echoes - stiffen -
Hoar - is the Window - and numb - the Door -
Tribes of Eclipse - in Tents of Marble -
Staples of Ages - have buckled - there -

Division 3 and 4 Tents 5 have

Her note, which follows the poem, begins with the passage:

Dear Sue -
Your praise is good - to me - because I know it knows - and
suppose it means -
Could I make you and Austin - proud - sometime - a great way
off - twould give me taller feet -

In the second half of 1861, ED copied the revised portions of the poem onto a sheet of stationery (H 203), which she bound up as part of Fascicle 10. It was a complete record of the new attempts, including the stanza she had not sent to Susan.

E Safe in their Alabaster chambers -
Untouched by Morning -
And untouched by Noon -
Lie the meek members of the Resurrection -
Rafter of Satin - and Roof of Stone!

Grand go the Years - in the Crescent - above them -
Worlds scoop their Arcs -
And Firmaments - row -
Diadems - drop - and Doges - surrender -
Soundless as dots - on a Disc of snow -

6-10] Springs - shake the sills -
But - the Echoes - stiffen -
Hoar - is the window -
And - numb - the door -
Tribes - of Eclipse - in Tents - of Marble -
Staples - of Ages - have buckled - there -

Midnight in Marble -
Refutes - the Suns -

Division 1 Alabaster 4 of 6 in the 9 Doges 10 a alt
6-10 window - || alt 6-10 Tents - || alt 6-10 have - || alt 6-10 in the
alt 6-10 polar |

When ED sent her first letter to T. W. Higginson on 15 April 1862, six weeks after the early version of “Safe in their alabaster chambers” had appeared in the Republican, she enclosed a copy of the later version (BPL 2), one of four poems sent for his critical assessment. It is substantively identical with the copy in Fascicle 10, except for a return to “Sleep” in line 3.

F Safe in their Alabaster Chambers -
Untouched by Morning -
And untouched by noon -
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection,
Rafter of Satin and Roof of Stone -

Grand go the Years,
In the Crescent above them -
Worlds scoop their Arcs -
And Firmaments - row -
Diadems - drop -
And Doges - surrender -
Soundless as Dots,
On a Disc of Snow.

Division 1 Alabaster 1 ter 4 members mem - bers 5 and
| 7 above | 9 row -||

A transcript of the first stanza in an unidentified hand (A Tr69) may derive from another holograph now lost. The nature of the variants suggests the text to have been recalled, unreliably, from memory.

[G] Deep in their alabaster chambers,
Untouched by morn and untouched by noon,
Sleep the mute members of the Resurrection
Roof of satin and rafter of stone,

Emendation 2 and 4 and 8c

Each of the four lines, cited with the line numbering of the transcript, differs from all other sources:

162 1859 Fascicles

163 1859 Fascicles
clipped from her father's copy of Dickens's *Old Curiosity Shop*. One of these remains: a young man in a graveyard kissing the hand of a young woman.

A poor - torn Heart - a tattered heart,  
That sat it down to rest -  
Nor noticed that the ebbing Day  
Flowed silver to the West;  
Nor noticed night did soft descend,  
Nor Constellation burn -  
Intent upon a vision  
Of Latitudes unknown -  

The Angels, happening that way  
This dusty heart espied -  
Tenderly took it up from toil -  
And carried it to God -  
There - sandals for the Barefoot -  
There - gathered from the gales  
Do the blue Havens - by the hand  
Lead the wandering sails -

About late 1859 the poem was copied for Fascicle 6 (H 11).

A poor - torn heart - a tattered heart -  
That sat it down to rest -  
Nor noticed that the ebbing Day  
Flowed silver to the west -  
Nor noticed night did soft descend -  
Nor Constellation burn -  
Intent upon the vision  
Of latitudes unknown.  

The angels - happening that way  
This dusty heart espied -  
Tenderly took it up from toil  
And carried it to God -  
There - sandals for the Barefoot -  
There - gathered from the gales -  
Do the blue havens by the hand  
Lead the wandering Sails.

7 upon] made from on

Emendation 1 tattered] tattered