The Poetry of John Gray
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"At the Lighting of the Lamps" and "Dregs" are among the texts copied by Dr. Helen Trudgian from manuscripts at the Dominican Chaplaincy, George Square, Edinburgh. There is no certainty that they are by Gray; internal evidence indeed would suggest that they are not. Moreover, Dr. Trudgian copied two unpublished poems which are attributable to "Wild Olive"—Olive Custance. Both are addressed to Gray.

"At the Lighting of the Lamps" has a faintly imagist tinge. Its subject is the Easter Pastoral Vigil. On the night of Holy Saturday, in anticipation of the Resurrection, a church, sometimes a whole city, would be ablaze with lights. Paulus the Silentiary has an eloquent description of the conduct of the rite in the great church of Santa Sophia. The ceremony, for long peculiar to the Greek Orthodox Church, is now found on occasion among the Latins. The second poem "Dregs" has a gnomic William-Blakeish quality.

At the Lighting of the Lamps

1.

The solemn, soundless music
Of the sun's setting reverberates
Along the low red cloud-reefs,

And the last echoing reflections
Of his great incandescence
Diminish among the mountain-tops,

As the sky's ebbing harmonies
Die down in modulations
Of gold and red to red-gold,

Old gold, pale gold, gold-veiled
Lingering pearl-greyness,
Grey silence of sleep.

The mountains stand round about
Like sable-vestured chorus,
Until they are swallowed up
In the all-encompassing dark.
Appendix

2.

But see! from the deepening dark
Of the dumb and slumbering plain,
Sudden a new song springs;
Gold lights on the plain
Suddenly gleam and quiver,
Suddenly, over all the plain
Glimmer, now, golden lights.

As instruments with strings
Quiver, as dreaming reeds
Gleam, soft, in symphonies,
On the wide orchestral plain
From the foothills to the sea’s
Margin, bright companies,
Choirs of golden lights.

O glittering harmony!
O tranquil jubilee!
The lamp-set champaign sings!
A thousand golden lights
Gleam, a thousand sparks
Glow, out of the deepening dark
Now, the deepening night.

3.

And out of the deepening dark
Of night, above and beyond,
Calm, antiphonal stars
Now from on high respond;
And the music of the spheres,
Out of the depths and heights,
Hails, to vigilant ears,
Flickering to human phares;
Greater and lesser lights
All in their measure set,
Proud imperial orbs
Answering by name,
By note in the vast accord;
Stars that moons beget,
Planets of magnitude
Earth’s murmurings amplify;
In fiery celsitude
Suns to sun reply;
Appendix

Flames to ordered flame,
Lights to stedfast light,
Stars to serene star,
Into the profound, far
Distances of night.

4.

Were you not wont, early illumined Christians,
To sing, at the time of lamp-lighting, hymns of confident praise?
Now should a high seraph, sounding his silver clarion,
Echoing in heaven's vaults these lamp-kindling lauds,
Summon melodious shouts of bright clair-audient angels,
Because the All-Wise, All-Merciful, All-Compassionate
Father of lights, in whom there is not shadow of turning,
Has laid the foundations of all universes secure.

Sleep by the shrouded mountains, now, pastoral ministers,
While the Shepherd of Israel musters his flocks of suns and moons,
Sleep by the hidden rivers, now, fervent industrials,
While the Master of Music weaves with his time-space loom;
Sleep now, peering philosophers, venturing physicists,
The Lord of Love his alembic allumes, his crucible glows.
The watchers and holy ones of our darkness are cognisant,
But now shadow of night their lucid vigil knows.

5.

Praise, praise to thee, Almighty Artificer, Architect,
Poet, whose pure inexhaustible spring eternally flows,
Artist, whose marvellous works eternally are made manifest.
Eternally making, in making, eternally finding repose.
Praise to the All; the One; and Intimate;
Calling thy stars, thy souls, thy least electrons by name;
For thine, as ours, the human heart that beat upon Olivet
Under these same stars; and thine the unquenchable flame
Of love in that heart. . . The City lights of Jerusalem
Burned low, . . . beloved, pitiless city of light
Put out, put out; but in pity, on high, to be lit again,
For the price of the heart broken, the life put out again for a night.
But mightily rising, rising again, and prevailing mightily, . . .
LIGHT of Lights, Lamp of the City, Orient blaze
Of glorious splendour, on us shed forth thy golden rays!
In thy Light our lights are consumed, and yet not utterly,
Night after night, in peace, amen, we hymn thy praise.
6.

Still the gold lights quiver
By hidden sea and river;

From the dim arena below
Shines their concerted glow;

And the bright stars answer still
Over above the hill.

The deep dome overhead
Is fully furnished

With lamps, and they are lit
To the outmost bounds of it.

And each mighty spark
Sends its gentle light
Into the silent dark,
The silent night,
On and on, through the dark, the silent night.

Dregs

The drunkard and the liar
May yet escape God's ire,
The strumpet and the thief
May also win reprieve;
But the shallow, vulgar breed
Who terms "RESPECTABLE" a creed,
Or who worship "BROTHER MAN";
Or whose minds grow so somatic
That they shun all truth dogmatic,
Are far deeper in the mire
Than the drunkard and the liar
And have greater cause for grief
Than the strumpet and the thief.