

A. E. Housman (1859-1936)

11 *New Year's Eve*

The end of the year fell chilly  
    Between a moon and a moon;  
Thorough the twilight shrilly  
    The bells rang, ringing no tune.

The windows stained with story, 5  
    The walls with miracle scored,  
Were hidden for gloom and glory  
    Filling the house of the Lord.

Arch and aisle and rafter 10  
    And roof-tree dizzily high  
Were full of weeping and laughter  
    And song and saying good-bye.

There stood in the holy places  
    A multitude none could name,  
Ranks of dreadful faces, 15  
    Flaming, transfigured in flame.

Crown and tiar and mitre  
    Were starry with gold and gem;  
Christmas never was whiter  
    Than fear on the face of them. 20

In aisles that emperors vaulted  
    For a faith the world confessed,  
Abasing the Host exalted,  
    They worshipped towards the west.

They brought with laughter oblation; 25  
    They prayed, not bowing the head;  
They made without tear lamentation,  
    And rendered me answer and said:

'Oh thou that seest our sorrow,  
It fares with us even thus: 30  
To-day we are gods, to-morrow  
Hell have mercy on us.

'Lo, morning over our border  
From out of the west comes cold;  
Down ruins the ancient order 35  
And empire builded of old.

'Our house at even is queenly  
With psalm and censers alight:  
Look thou never so keenly  
Thou shalt not find us to-night. 40

'We are come to the end appointed  
With sands not many to run;  
Divinities disanointed  
And kings whose kingdom is done.

'The peoples knelt down at our portal, 45  
All kindreds under the sky;  
We were gods and implored and immortal  
Then; and to-day we die.'

They turned them again to their praying,  
They worshipped and took no rest, 50  
Singing old tunes and saying  
'We have seen his star in the west',

Old tunes of the sacred psalters,  
Set to wild farewells;  
And I left them there at their altars 55  
Ringing their own dead knells.

1939

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