

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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