

A. E. Housman (1859-1936)

14 *On Moonlit Heath*  
(*A Shropshire Lad*, 9)

On moonlit heath and lonesome bank  
The sheep beside me graze;  
And yon the gallows used to clank  
Fast by the four cross ways.

A careless shepherd once would keep 5  
The flocks by moonlight there,  
And high amongst the glimmering sheep  
The dead man stood on air.

They hang us now in Shrewsbury jail:  
The whistles blow forlorn, 10  
And trains all night groan on the rail  
To men that die at morn.

There sleeps in Shrewsbury jail to-night,  
Or wakes, as may betide,  
A better lad, if things went right, 15  
Than most that sleep outside.

And naked to the hangman's noose  
The morning clocks will ring  
A neck God made for other use  
Than strangling in a string. 20

And sharp the link of life will snap,  
And dead on air will stand  
Heels that held up as straight a chap  
As treads upon the land.

So here I'll watch the night and wait 25

To see the morning shine,  
When he will hear the stroke of eight  
And not the stroke of nine;

And wish my friend as sound a sleep  
As lads' I did not know,  
That shepherded the moonlit sheep  
A hundred years ago.

30

*1896*

(From *A Shropshire Lad*. London: E. Grant Richards, 1907)