

Poems for the City of Chester in Old Times

Time Traveller

Transported from future time,
We came to the city in graveyard night,
And I have never known
Darkness so deep, a sea bed, as if
All spark in the universe had fled,
All gleam of luminance gone.
In house-windows candles stood snuffed,
All fires crushed to black grime,
And, save for the cry of owls,
We felt huge silence enfold
Every meadow, hill and flood.
Only a watchman shuffling the Rows
With troubled, painful feet,
Clapping hands in the cold,
Stamping nipped toes,
And rubbing a face hid from sight
In the shadow above his lantern,
Searched the skies' coal for the return of light.

A Millers Lament for Chester's Abandoned Port

There be no more shippes come here
From the high roaring sees.
The river chokes and now
Onely barge and small crafte steer
Where the Water Tour reiches down
To the Dee's withdrawying flowe.
There be those casten blame on me
For this siltyng, my mill and weir,
But truth is, vessels grow gross
And sands shift without my stir.
Parkgate brings Chesters loss
Of the Irish trayde; and there be fools
Which say eek that nat lasts
When Parkgate in its torn

Is ruined and surpassed
By swich rank creeks as that
Where the river Birket flowes,
Or the village Lyverpool.

'Ware the Welsh Invader!

An ye shoulde a Welshman spie
After sunsette in the Citie
'Tis Chester law to take a knyf
And make ending of a life
That doth bode no thing of meryte
For the folk that do dwelle in it.
Keep the foeman from the doore.
May he never set fote more
In the land of English folk.
When he hath his flight betook,
Sharpen knyfs and cudgels swing
Gainst firther Welsh betroubling.
By your valour evermore
Keep your wyves and doghters pure!

A Persone of the City

Age bendes and witheres Toby of oure toun.
Alwaies that when he to churche is gonn
He standeth long and gayzes at the walle
Whereon the Judgement is shewn clear to all.
The vyrtuose are to Heaven sent
While that the wicked which have noe repent
Full headlonge to the fierie pit be spedde.
Then doth he sigh and shaken of his hedd,
For he full many a mayd mysleden has
at harvest feaste in haystack or long gras,
And though with preeste he mayke confessioun
Still doth he doute his absolutioun.

A Troubled Time

That summer the river ran low.
Cattle on the drought-riven meadows
grew limbs like sticks. Without drink,
They toppled and died. Flies multiplied
In hordes on their cadavers, and the stink
Of flesh's rot doused the riverside.

As the slow August sun toiled higher
The gut-foul stench of sewers rose
And, inter-embracing its twin, infused
poison into men's lungs, till fire
consumed their bodies. Prayers were said
But God refused the sinful city rain,
this curse being worse than any other had
Since the Plague came.

George Horsman