

## ERNEST DOWSON

### “Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration” (1891)

Calm, sad, secure; behind high convent walls.  
These watch the sacred lamp, these watch and pray:  
And it is one with them when evening falls,  
And one with them the cold return of day,

These heed not time; their nights and days they make  
Into a long, returning rosary,  
Whereon their lives are threaded for Christ's sake:  
Meekness and vigilance and chastity.

A vowed patrol, in silent companies,  
Life-long they keep before the living Christ:  
In the dim church, their prayers and penances  
Are fragrant incense to the Sacrificed.

Outside, the world is wild and passionate;  
Man's weary laughter and his sick despair  
Entreat at their impenetrable gate:  
They heed no voices in their dream of prayer.

They saw the glory of the world displayed;  
They saw the bitter of it, and the sweet;  
They knew the roses of the world should fade,  
And be trod under by the hurrying feet.

Therefore they rather put away desire,  
And crossed their hands and came to sanctuary;  
And veiled their heads and put on coarse attire:  
Because their comeliness was vanity.

And there they rest; they have serene insight  
Of the illuminating dawn to be;  
Mary's sweet Star dispels for them the night,  
The proper darkness of humanity.

Calm, sad, secure; with faces worn and mild:  
Surely their choice of vigil is the best?  
Yea! for our roses fade, the world is wild;  
But there, beside the altar, there, is rest.