

IMPENITENTIA ULTIMA

BEFORE my light goes out for ever, if God should give me a choice
of graces,

I would not reck of length of days, nor crave for things to be ;
But cry : "One day of the great lost days, one face of all the faces,
Grant me to see and touch once more, and nothing more to see."

For, Lord, I was free of all Thy flowers, and I chose the world's sad roses,
And that is why I must eat my bread in bitterness and sweat ;
But at Thy terrible Judgment Seat, when this my tired life closes,
I am ready to reap whereof I sowed, and pay my righteous debt.

But once before the sand is run and the silver thread is broken,
Give me a grace and cast aside the veil of dolorous years ;
Grant me one hour of all mine hours, and let me see for a token
Her pure and pitiful eyes shine out, and bathe her feet with tears.

Her pitiful hands should calm, and her hair stream down and blind me
Out of the sight of night and out of the reach of fear,
And her eyes should be my light, while the sun went out behind me ;
And the viols in her voice be the last sound in mine ear.

Before the ruining waters fall, and my soul be carried under,
And Thine anger cleave me through, as a child cuts down a flower,
I will praise Thee, Lord! in Hell, while my limbs are racked asunder,
For the last sad sight of her face and the little grace of an hour.

ERNEST DOWSON.