

The lesser evil, George Orwell

The lesser evil

Empty as death and slow as pain
The days went by on leaden feet;
And parson's week had come again
As I walked down the little street.

Without, the weary doves were calling,
The sun burned on the banks of mud;
Within, old maids were caterwauling
A dismal tale of thorns and blood.

I thought of all the church bells ringing
In towns that Christian folks were in;
I heard the godly maidens singing;
I turned into the house of sin.

The house of sin was dark and mean,
With dying flowers round the doors;
They spat the betel juice between
The rotten bamboo of the floors.

Why did I come, the woman cried
So seldom to her bed of ease?
When I was not, her spirit died
And would I give her ten rupees.

The weeks went by, and many a day
That black-haired woman did implore
Me as I hurried on my way
To come more often than before.

The days went by like dead leaves falling,
And parson's week came round again.
Once more devout old maids were bawling
Their ugly rhymes of death and pain.

The woman waited for me there
As down the little street I trod,
And musing on her oily hair,
I turned into the house of God.

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THE END