

## ON AQUEDUCTS

**A**LONG the mountain let a shepherd guide  
your twice-shod feet by tracks his slow sheep mark  
in all their generations feeding wide,  
bulking and whitening in the gathering dark.

Wherever in broad gullies steep screes hide  
their guile in silent cataracts of stones  
mistrust their poise; and watch his nimble stride;  
slide merrily when the rustling torrent runs.

Great boulders wedge and pile; protruding crags  
exasperate the rough, laborious stair.  
Where men must cling and crawl, the leisured stags  
are stepping lightly in the ambient air.

Or halt. A deeply breathing world is hush  
in mellow splendour vast, unless their sound  
is audible where many waters rush,  
and gash the rocks with many an ancient wound.

These are your quarry. You it is invade  
their old dominion in the tangled moss  
and sulking, stagnant swamps. Your pick and spade  
make deep your lines which cut their flows across.

While with one gesture you assemble rills,  
and lead the wayward waters at your will,  
and steal the verdure of a hundred hills,  
with anxious greed continuing thirsty still,

## *On Aqueducts*

With yet another seize the greatest lake  
may lie convenient at your grasping hand,  
and all its riches ruthless overtake  
to realize the scheme your mind has planned.

With many-handed industry employ  
your servile engines. Tear the mountains down  
in serviceable blocks; uproot; destroy;  
and stack the plunder of your building stone.

For now you must assault the great lake's marge;  
and build a rampart on its shelving shores;  
and bar the route by which it would discharge  
the over-brimming drainage of the moors.

Buttress the walls against the heavy freight  
they bear anon: the drops and bubbles, borne  
by all those busy aqueducts you late  
contrived, of which the weeping hills are shorn.

Take the earth. Draw your fascinating line  
from where men herd and thirsting eyes look up  
for water wistfully, at the just incline,  
even to the lip of that vast rock-bound cup.

Its shadow as supposed will leap and sag  
and lie, on accidents of rolling ground;  
stretch your surveying chain, and drive a peg  
at each length, till the leagues are all upwound.

Marshall your slaves along the chosen route;  
and let them lay a causeway for the wains;  
for these will pass for years with bread and fruit,  
and basketfuls of relish for their pains.

## *Blackfriars*

Great piers support the channels in the air  
by which the streams beneficent shall roll.  
Look to it that, for glory, these declare  
whatever majesty is in your soul.

For once upon a distant time to be,  
when small men wonder at your antique ways,  
that you should dream and fashion mightily,  
these, whole or ruined, yet shall be your praise.

Your milliped is so disposed to ram  
its trough-head hard against the mighty doors  
which open where your river cuts the dam  
through which the strained and measured water pours.

Let the king's heart rejoice at grace and strength,  
blessed provision of the garnered rain,  
when the perfected instrument at length  
stalks the descending hills and strides the plain.

Watched as its nature asks it, for an age  
pure floods of great refreshment pouring through  
its cavities, your conduit will assuage  
parched Birmingham and sweltering Timbuctoo.

JOHN GRAY.