ALICE MEYNELL

BUILDERS OF RUINS

We build with strength the deep tower-wall
That shall be shattered thus and thus.
And fair and great are court and hall,
But how fair—this is not for us,
Who know the lack that lurks in all.
We know, we know how all too bright
The hues are that our painting wears,
And how the marble gleams too white;—
We speak in unknown tongues, the years
Interpret everything aright,
And crown with weeds our pride of towers,
And warm our marble through with sun,
And break our pavements through with flowers,
With an Amen when all is done,
Knowing these perfect things of ours.
O days, we ponder, left alone,
Like children in their lonely hour,
And in our secrets keep your own,
As seeds the colour of the flower.
To-day they are not all unknown,
The stars that ’twixt the rise and fall,
Like relic-seers, shall one by one
Stand musing o’er our empty hall;
And setting moons shall brood upon
The frescoes of our inward wall.
And when some midsummer shall be,
Hither will come some little one
(Dusty with bloom of flowers is he),
Sit on a ruin i’ the late long sun,
And think, one foot upon his knee.
And where they wrought, these lives of ours,
So many-worded, many-souled,
A North-west wind will take the towers,
And dark with colour, sunny and cold,
Will range alone among the flowers.
And here or there, at our desire,
The little clamorous owl shall sit
Through her still time; and we aspire

To make a law (and know not it)
Unto the life of a wild briar.
Our purpose is distinct and dear,
Though from our open eyes ’tis hidden.
Thou, Time-to-come, shalt make it clear,
Undoing our work; we are children chidden
With pity and smiles of many a year.
Who shall allot the praise, and guess
What part is yours and what is ours?—
O years that certainly will bless
Our flowers with fruits, our seeds with flowers,
With ruin all our perfectness.
Be patient, Time, of our delays,
Too happy hopes, and wasted fears,
Our faithful ways, our wilful ways,
Solace our labours, O our seers
The seasons, and our bards the days;
And make our pause and silence brim
With the shrill children’s play, and sweets
Of those pathetic flowers and dim,
Of those eternal flowers my Keats
Dying felt growing over him.