

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL

With bars they blur the gracious moon,
And blind the goodly sun :
And they do well to hide their Hell,
For in it things are done
That Son of God nor son of Man
Ever should look upon !

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The vilest deeds like poison weeds,
Bloom well in prison-air ;
It is only what is good in Man
That wastes and withers there :
Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate,
And the Warder is Despair.

For they starve the little frightened child
Till it weeps both night and day :
And they scourge the weak, and flog the fool,
And gibe the old and grey,
And some grow mad, and all grow bad,
And none a word may say.

Each narrow cell in which we dwell
Is a foul and dark latrine,
And the fetid breath of living Death
Chokes up each grated screen,
And all, but Lust, is turned to dust
In Humanity's machine.