A WINTER NIGHT
It was a chilly winter’s night;
   And frost was glittering on the ground,
And evening stars were twinkling bright;
   And from the gloomy plain around
    Came no sound,
But where, within the wood-girt tower,
The church bell slowly struck the hour;
As if that all of human birth
    Had risen to the final day,
And soaring from the worn-out earth
    Were called in hurry and dismay,
    Far away;
And I alone of all mankind
Were left in loneliness behind.

William Barnes
The Dorset poet William Barnes (1801-86) learned Greek, Latin and music and taught himself wood-engraving. As a schoolmaster he was deeply interested in grammar, and waged a lifelong campaign to rid English of classical and foreign influences, suggesting many Saxonised alternatives, such as ‘sun-print’ for photograph and ‘fall-time’ for autumn. He wrote over 800 poems, mostly of rural life and many of them in Dorset dialect, which explains why he is not better known. However he had many admirers amongst poets themselves, including Tennyson, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Hardy. His poems evoke the Dorset landscape, country customs and happy childhood, although his few poems of grief, written after the death of his wife, are among his finest.

He became rector of St Peter's Church, Winterborne Came, where he is buried. Shortly before his death, he was visited by Thomas Hardy and Edmund Gosse. In a letter, Gosse wrote that Barnes was “dying as picturesquely as he lived”:

“We found him in bed in his study, his face turned to the window, where the light came streaming in through flowering plants, his brown books on all sides of him save one, the wall behind him being hung with old green tapestry. He had a scarlet bedgown on, a kind of soft biretta of dark red wool on his head, from which his long white hair escaped on to the pillow; his grey beard, grown very long, upon his breast; his complexion, which you recollect as richly bronzed, has become blanched by keeping indoors, and is now waxily white where it is not waxily pink; the blue eyes, half shut, restless under languid lids.”