IAMBIC IDIOSYNCRASY

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Word Ways readers may recall my "Potpourri" in the August 1981 Kickshaws, a poem consisting of lines from many different poets. If the following poem does not seem to make a great deal of sense, there is a very good reason; it, too, is a poetic patchwork. Can you identify the poets? (Warning: three of the lines are my own.) Identifications are given in Answers and Solutions.

True wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd.
When I consider how my light is spent,
I wonder then which way the Devil went.

As long as skies are blue and fields are green,
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen.
With streams and men be this the rule of thumb:
The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb.

The shell must break before the bird can fly.
When I have fears that I may cease to be,
I smile, of course and go on drinking tea.
Religion stands on tiptoe in our land,
But wild Ambition loves to slide, not stand.

With how sad steps, 0 Moon, thou climbs't the skies!
Tomorrow's sun to thee may never rise.
The holy time is quiet as a nun,
A wisp of fog betwixt us and the sun.

Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;
Ah, take the Cash and let the Credit go!
The quiet mind is richer than a crown,
Till human voices wake us and we drown.

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?
Twixt cup and lip there may be many slips.
I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.

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