

BRIDGES

ROBERT

OCTOBER AND OTHER
POEMS WITH
OCCASIONAL VERSES
ON THE WAR

Robert Bridges
October and Other Poems with
Occasional Verses on the War

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October and Other Poems / with Occasional Verses on the War:*

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PREFACE

This miscellaneous volume is composed of three sections. The first twelve poems were written in 1913, and printed privately by Mr. Hornby in 1914.

The last of these poems proved to be a "war poem," and on that follow eighteen pieces which were called forth on occasion during the War, the last being a broadsheet on the surrender of the German ships. All of these verses appeared in some journal or serial. There were a few others, but they are not included in this collection, either because they are lost, or because they show decidedly inferior claims to salvage.

The last six poems or sonnets are of various dates.

R. B.

OCTOBER

April adance in play
met with his lover May
where she came garlanded.
The blossoming boughs o'erhead
were thrill'd to bursting by
the dazzle from the sky
and the wild music there
that shook the odorous air.

Each moment some new birth
hasten'd to deck the earth
in the gay sunbeams.
Between their kisses dreams:
And dream and kiss were rife
with laughter of mortal life.

But this late day of golden fall
is still as a picture upon a wall
or a poem in a book lying open unread.
Or whatever else is shrined
when the Virgin hath vanishèd:
Footsteps of eternal Mind
on the path of the dead.

THE FLOWERING TREE

What Fairy fann'd my dreams
while I slept in the sun?
As if a flowering tree
were standing over me:
Its young stem strong and lithe
went branching overhead
And willowy sprays around
fell tasseling to the ground
All with wild blossom gay
as is the cherry in May
When her fresh flaunt of leaf
gives crowns of golden green.

The sunlight was enmesh'd
in the shifting splendour
And I saw through on high
to soft lakes of blue sky:
Ne'er was mortal slumber
so lapt in luxury.

Rather—Endymion—
would I sleep in the sun
Neath the trees divinely
with day's azure above

When my love of Beauty
is met by beauty's love.

So I slept enchanted
under my loving tree
Till from his late resting
the sweet songster of night
Rousing awaken'd me:
Then! this—the bird's note—
Was the voice of thy throat
which thou gav'st me to kiss.

NOEL: CHRISTMAS EVE, 1913

Pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis

A frosty Christmas Eve
when the stars were shining
Fared I forth alone
where westward falls the hill,
And from many a village
in the water'd valley
Distant music reach'd me
peals of bells aringing:
The constellated sounds
ran sprinkling on earth's floor
As the dark vault above
with stars was spangled o'er.

Then sped my thought to keep
that first Christmas of all
When the shepherds watching
by their folds ere the dawn
Heard music in the fields
and marveling could not tell
Whether it were angels
or the bright stars singing.

Now blessed be the tow'rs
that crown England so fair
That stand up strong in prayer
unto God for our souls:
Blessed be their founders
(said I) an' our country folk
Who are ringing for Christ
in the belfries to-night
With arms lifted to clutch
the rattling ropes that race
Into the dark above
and the mad romping din.

But to me heard afar
it was starry music
Angels' song, comforting
as the comfort of Christ
When he spake tenderly
to his sorrowful flock:
The old words came to me
by the riches of time
Mellow'd and transfigured
as I stood on the hill
Heark'ning in the aspect
of th' eternal silence.

IN DER FREMDE

Ah! wild-hearted wand'rer
far in the world away
Restless nor knowest why
only thou canst not stay
And now turnest trembling
hearing the wind to sigh:
'Twas thy lover calling
whom thou didst leave forby.

So faint and yet so far
so far and yet so fain—
“Return belov'd to me”
but thou must onward strain:
Thy trembling is in vain
as thy wand'ring shall be.
What so well thou lovest
thou nevermore shalt see.

THE PHILOSOPHER AND HIS MISTRESS

We watch'd the wintry moon
Suffer her full eclipse
Riding at night's high noon
Beyond the earth's ellipse.

The conquering shadow quell'd
Her splendour in its robe:
And darkling we beheld
A dim and lurid globe;

Yet felt thereat no dread,
Nor waited we to see
The sullen dragon fled,
The heav'nly Queen go free.

So if my heart of pain
One hour o'ershadow thine,
I fear for thee no stain,
Thou wilt come forth and shine:

And far my sorrowing shade
Will slip to empty space
Invisible, but made

Happier for that embrace.

NARCISSUS

Almighty wondrous everlasting
Whether in a cradle of astral whirlfire
Or globed in a piercing star thou slumb'rest
The impassive body of God:
Thou deep i' the core of earth—Almighty!—
From numbing stress and gloom profound
Madest escape in life desirous
To embroider her thin-spun robe.

'Twas down in a wood—they tell—
In a running water thou sawest thyself
Or leaning over a pool: The sedges
Were twinn'd at the mirror's brim
The sky was there and the trees—Almighty!—
A bird of a bird and white clouds floating
And seeing thou knewest thine own image
To love it beyond all else.

Then wondering didst thou speak
Of beauty and wisdom of art and worship
Didst build the fanes of Zeus and Apollo
The high cathedrals of Christ.

All that we love is thine—Almighty!—

Heart-felt music and lyric song
Language the eager grasp of knowledge
All that we think is thine.

But whence?—Beauteous everlasting!—
Whence and whither? Hast thou mistaken?
Or dost forget? Look again! Thou seest
A shadow and not thyself.

OUR LADY

I

Goddess azure-mantled and aureoled
That standing barefoot upon the moon
Or throned as a Queen of the earth
Tranquilly smilest to hold
The Child-god in thine arms,
Whence thy glory? Art not she
The country maiden of Galilee
Simple in dowerless poverty
Who from humble cradle to grave
Hadst no thought of this wonder?

When to man dull of heart
Dawn'd at length graciously
Thy might of Motherhood
The starry Truth beam'd on his home;
Then with insight exalted he gave thee
The trappings—Lady—wherewith his art
Delighteth to picture his spirit to sense
And that grace is immortal.

Fount of creative Love

Mother of the Word eternal
Atoning man with God:
Who set thee apart as a garden enclosed
From Nature's all-producing wilds
To rear the richest fruit o' the Life
Ever continuing out from Him
Urgent since the beginning.

II

Behold! Man setteth thine image in the height of Heaven
And hallowing his untemper'd love
Crowneth and throneth thee ador'd
(Tranquilly joyous to hold
The man-child in thine arms)
God-like apart from conflict to save thee
To guard thy weak caressive beauty
With incontaminate jewels of soul
Courage, patience, and self-devotion:
All this glory he gave thee.

Secret and slow is Nature
Imperceptibly moving
With surely determinate aim:
To woman it fell to be early in prime
Ready to labour, mould, and cherish

The delicate head of all Production
The wistful late-maturing boy
Who made Knowing of Being.

Therefore art thou ador'd
Mother of God in man
Naturing nurse of power:
They who adore not thee shall perish
But thou shalt keep thy path of joy
Envied of Angels because the All-father
Call'd thee to mother his nascent Word
And complete the creation.

THE CURFEW TOWER

Thro' innocent eyes at the world awond'ring
Nothing spake to me more superbly
Than the round bastion of Windsor's wall

That warding the Castle's southern angle
An old inheritor of Norman prowess
Was call'd by the folk the Curfew Tow'r.

Above the masonry's rugged courses
A turreted clock of Caroline fashion
Told time to the town in black and gold.

It charmed the hearts of Henry's scholars
As kingly a mentor of English story
As Homer's poem is of Ilion:

Nor e'er in the landscape look'd it fairer
Than when we saw its white bulk halo'd
In a lattice of slender scaffoldings.

Month by month on the airy platforms
Workmen labour'd hacking and hoisting
Till again the tower was stript to the sun:

The old tow'r? Nay a new tow'r stood there
From footing to battlemented skyline
And topt with a cap the slice of a cone

Archæologic and counterfeited
The smoothest thing in all the high-street
As Eton scholars to-day may see:

They—wherever else they find their wonder
And feed their boyhood on Time's enchantment—
See never the Tow'r that spoke to me.

FLYCATCHERS

Sweet pretty fledgelings, perched on the rail arow,
Expectantly happy, where ye can watch below
Your parents a-hunting i' the meadow grasses
All the gay morning to feed you with flies;

Ye recall me a time sixty summers ago,
When, a young chubby chap, I sat just so
With others on a school-form rank'd in a row,
Not less eager and hungry than you, I trow,
With intelligences agape and eyes aglow,
While an authoritative old wise-acre
Stood over us and from a desk fed us with flies.

Dead flies—such as litter the library south-window,
That buzzed at the panes until they fell stiff-baked on the sill,
Or are roll'd up asleep i' the blinds at sunrise,
Or wafer'd flat in a shrunken folio.

A dry biped he was, nurtured likewise
On skins and skeletons, stale from top to toe
With all manner of rubbish and all manner of lies.

GHOSTS

Mazing around my mind like moths at a shaded candle,
In my heart like lost bats in a cave fluttering,
Mock ye the charm whereby I thought reverently to lay you,
When to the wall I nail'd your reticent effigys?

Ἐτώσιον ἄχθος ἀρούρης

Who goes there? God knows. I'm nobody. How should I answer?

Can't jump over a gate nor run across the meadow.

I'm but an old whitebeard of inane identity. Pass on!

What's left of me to-day will very soon be nothing.

HELL AND HATE

Two demons thrust their arms out over the world,
Hell with a ruddy torch of fire,
And Hate with gasping mouth,
Striving to seize two children fair
Who play'd on the upper curve of the Earth.

Their shapes were vast as the thoughts of man,
But the Earth was small
As the moon's rim appeareth
Scann'd through an optic glass.

The younger child stood erect on the Earth
As a charioteer in a car
Or a dancer with arm upraised;
Her whole form—barely clad
From feet to golden head—
Leapt brightly against the uttermost azure,
Whereon the stars were splashes of light
Dazed in the gulping beds of space.

The elder might have been stell'd to show
The lady who led my boyish love;
But her face was graver than e'er to me
When I look'd in her eyes long ago,

And the hair on her shoulders fal'n
Nestled its luminous brown
I' the downy spring of her wings:
Her figure aneath was screen'd by the Earth,
Whereoff—so small that was
No footing for her could be—
She appeared to be sailing free
I' the glide and poise of her flight.

Then knew I the Angel Faith,
Who was guarding human Love.

Happy were both, of peaceful mien,
Contented as mankind longeth to be,
Not merry as children are;
And show'd no fear of the Fiends' pursuit,
As ever those demons clutched in vain;
And I, who had fear'd awhile to see
Such gentleness in such jeopardy,
Lost fear myself; for I saw the foes
Were slipping aback and had no hold
On the round Earth that sped its course.

The painted figures never could move,
But the artist's mind was there:
The longer I look'd the more I knew
They were falling, falling away below
To the darkness out of sight.

December 16, 1913.

“WAKE UP, ENGLAND!”¹

Thou careless, awake!
Thou peacemaker, fight!
Stand England for honour
And God guard the Right!

Thy mirth lay aside,
Thy cavil and play;
The fiend is upon thee
And grave is the day.

* * *

Through fire, air and water
Thy trial must be;
But they that love life best
Die gladly for thee.

¹ [See notes at end of volume.](#)

* * *

Much suffering shall cleanse thee
But thou through the flood
Shalt win to salvation,
To beauty through blood.

Up, careless, awake!
Ye peacemakers, fight!
Stand England for honour,
And God guard the Right!

August, 1914.

LORD KITCHENER

Unflinching hero, watchful to foresee
And face thy country's peril wheresoe'er,
Directing war and peace with equal care,
Till by long toil ennobled thou wert he
Whom England call'd and bade "Set my arm free
To obey my will and save my honour fair"—
What day the foe presumed on her despair
And she herself had trust in none but thee:

Among Herculean deeds the miracle
That mass'd the labour of ten years in one
Shall be thy monument. Thy work is done
Ere we could thank thee; and the high sea-swell
Surgeth unheeding where thy proud ship fell
By the lone Orkneys, at the set of sun.

ODE ON THE TRICENTENARY COMMEMORATION OF SHAKESPEARE, 1916

Kind dove-wing'd Peace, for whose green olive-crown
The noblest kings would give their diadems,
Mother who hast ruled our home so long,
How suddenly art thou fled!
Leaving our cities astir with war;
And yet on the fair fields deserted
Lingerest, wherever the gaudy seasons
Deck with excessive splendour
The sorrow-stricken year,
Where cornlands bask and high elms rustle gently,
And still the unweeting birds sing on by brae and bourn.

The trumpet blareth and calleth the true to be stern
Be then thy soft reposeful music dumb;
Yet shall thy lovers awhile give ear
—Tho' in war's garb they come—
To the praise of England's gentlest son;
Whom when she bore the Muses lov'd
Above the best of eldest honour
—Yea, save one without peer—
And by great Homer set,

Not to impugn his undisputed throne,
The myriad-hearted by the mighty-hearted one.

For God of His gifts pour'd on him a full measure,
And gave him to know Nature and the ways of men:
To dower with inexhaustible treasure
A world-conquering speech,
Which surg'd as a river high-descended
That gathering tributaries of many lands
Rolls through the plain a bounteous flood,
Picturing towers and temples
And ruin of bygone times,
And floateth the ships deep-laden with merchandise
Out on the windy seas to traffic in foreign climes.

Thee Shakespeare to-day we honour; and evermore,
Since England bore thee, the master of human song,
Thy folk are we, children of thee,
Who knitting in one her realm
And strengthening with pride her sea-borne clans,
Scorn'st in the grave the bruize of death.
All thy later-laurel'd choir
Laud thee in thy world-shrine:
London's laughter is thine;
One with thee is our temper in melancholy or might,
And in thy book Great-Britain's rule readeth her right.

Her chains are chains of Freedom, and her bright arms
Honour Justice and Truth and Love to man.

Though first from a pirate ancestry
She took her home on the wave,
Her gentler spirit arose disdainful,
And smiting the fetters of slavery
Made the high seaways safe and free,
In wisdom bidding aloud
To world-wide brotherhood,
Till her flag was hail'd as the ensign of Liberty,
And the boom of her guns went round the earth in salvos of
peace.

And thou, when Nature bow'd her mastering hand
To borrow an ecstasy of man's art from thee,
Thou her poet secure as she
Of the shows of eternity,
Didst never fear thy work should fall
To fashion's craze nor pedant's folly
Nor devastator whose arrogant arms
Murder and maim mankind;
Who when in scorn of grace
He hath batter'd and burn'd some loveliest dearest shrine,
Laugheth in ire and boasteth aloud his brazen god.

* * * * *

I saw the Angel of Earth from strife aloof

Mounting the heavenly stair with Time on high,
Growing ever younger in the brightening air
Of the everlasting dawn:
It was not terror in his eyes nor wonder,
That glance of the intimate exaltation
Which lieth as Power under all Being,
And broodeth in Thought above,
As a bird wingeth over the ocean,
Whether indolently the heavy water sleepeth
Or is dash'd in a million waves, chafing or lightly laughing.

I hear his voice in the music of lamentation,
In echoing chant and cadenced litany,
In country song and pastoral piping
And silvery dances of mirth:
And oft, as the eyes of a lion in the brake,
His presence hath startled me,
In austere shapes of beauty lurking,
Beautiful for Beauty's sake;
As a lonely blade of life
Ariseth to flower whensoever the unseen Will
Stirreth with kindling aim the dark fecundity of Being.

Man knoweth but as in a dream of his own desire
The thing that is good for man, and he dreameth well:
But the lot of the gentle heart is hard
That is cast in an epoch of life,
When evil is knotted and demons fight,
Who know not, they, that the lowest lot

Is treachery hate and trust in sin
And perseverance in ill,
Doom'd to oblivious Hell,
To pass with the shames unspoken of men away,
Wash'd out with their tombs by the grey unpitying tears of
Heaven.

But ye, dear Youth, who lightly in the day of fury
Put on England's glory as a common coat,
And in your stature of masking grace
Stood forth warriors complete,
No praise o'ershadoweth yours to-day,
Walking out of the home of love
To match the deeds of all the dead.—
Alas! alas! fair Peace,
These were thy blossoming roses.
Look on thy shame, fair Peace, thy tearful shame!
Turn to thine isle, fair Peace; return thou and guard it well!

THE CHIVALRY OF THE SEA

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF CHARLES FISHER, LATE STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD, LOST IN THE “INVINCIBLE.”

Over the warring waters, beneath the wandering skies,
The heart of Britain roameth, the Chivalry of the sea,
Where Spring never bringeth a flower, nor bird singeth in a tree;
Far, afar, O beloved, beyond the sight of our eyes,
Over the warring waters, beneath the stormy skies.

Staunch and valiant-hearted, to whom our toil were play,
Ye man with armour'd patience the bulwarks night and day,
Or on your iron coursers plough shuddering through the Bay,
Or neath the deluge drive the skirmishing sharks of war:
Venturous boys who leapt on the pinnace and row'd from shore,
A mother's tear in the eye, a swift farewell to say,
And a great glory at heart that none can take away.

Seldom is your home-coming; for aye your pennon flies
In unrecorded exploits on the tumultuous wave;

Till, in the storm of battle, fast-thundering upon the foe,
Ye add your kindred names to the heroes of long-ago,
And mid the blasting wrack, in the glad sudden death of the
brave,

Ye are gone to return no more.—Idly our tears arise;
Too proud for praise as ye lie in your unvisited grave,
The wide-warring water, under the starry skies.

FOR “PAGES INÉDITES,” Etc

April, 1916

By our dear sons' graves, fair France, thou'rt now to us,
endear'd;

Since no more as of old stand th' English against thee in fight,
But rallying to defend thee they die guarding thy beauty
From blind envious Hate and Perfidy leagued with Might.

GHELUVELT

EPITAPH ON THE WORCESTERS. OCTOBER 31, 1914

Askest thou of these graves? They'll tell thee,
O stranger, in England
How we Worcesters lie where we redeem'd the battle.

THE WEST FRONT

AN ENGLISH MOTHER, ON LOOKING INTO MASEFIELD'S "OLD FRONT LINE."

No country know I so well
as this landscape of hell.
Why bring you to my pain
these shadow'd effigys
Of barb'd wire, riven trees,
the corpse-strewn blasted plain?

And the names—Hebuterne
Bethune and La Bassée—
I have nothing to learn—
Contalmaison, Boisselle,
And one where night and day
my heart would pray and dwell;

A desert sanctuary,
where in holy vigil
Year-long I have held my faith
against th' imaginings
Of horror and agony

in an ordeal above

The tears of suffering
and took aid of angels:
This was the temple of God:
no mortuary of kings
Ever gathered the spoils
of such chivalry and love:

No pilgrim shrine soe'er
hath assembled such prayer—
With rich incense-wafted
ritual and requiem
Not beauteous batter'd Rheims
nor lorn Jerusalem.

TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

April, 1917

Brothers in blood! They who this wrong began
To wreck our commonwealth, will rue the day
When first they challenged freemen to the fray,
And with the Briton dared the American.
Now are we pledged to win the Rights of man;
Labour and justice now shall have their way,
And in a League of Peace—God grant we may—
Transform the earth, not patch up the old plan.

Sure is our hope since he, who led your nation,
Spake for mankind; and ye arose in awe
Of that high call to work the world's salvation;
Clearing your minds of all estranging blindness
In the vision of Beauty, and the Spirit's law,
Freedom and Honour and sweet Loving-kindness.

TRAFALGAR SQUARE

September, 1917

Fool that I was: my heart was sore,
Yea sick for the myriad wounded men,
The maim'd in the war: I had grief for each one:
And I came in the gay September sun
To the open smile of Trafalgar Square;
Where many a lad with a limb fordone
Loll'd by the lion-guarded column
That holdeth Nelson statued thereon
Upright in the air.

The Parliament towers and the Abbey towers,
The white Horseguards and grey Whitehall,
He looketh on all,
Past Somerset House and the river's bend
To the pillar'd dome of St. Paul,
That slumbers confessing God's solemn blessing
On England's glory, to keep it ours—
While children true her prowess renew
And throng from the ends of the earth to defend
Freedom and honour—till Earth shall end.

The gentle unjealous Shakespeare, I trow,
In his country tomb of peaceful fame,
Must feel exiled from life and glow
If he think of this man with his warrior claim,
Who looketh o'er London as if 'twere his own,
As he standeth in stone, aloft and alone,
Sailing the sky with one arm and one eye.

CHRISTMAS EVE, 1917

Many happy returns, sweet Babe, of the day!
Didst not thou sow good seed in the world, thy field?
Cam'st thou to save the poor? Thy poor yet pine.
Thousands to-day suffer death-pangs like thine;
Our jewels of life are spilt on the ground as dross;
Ten thousand mothers stand beneath the cross.
Peace to men of goodwill was the angels' song:
Now there is fiercer war, worse filth and wrong.
If thou didst sow good seed, is this the yield?
Shall not thy folk be quell'd in dead dismay?

Nay, with a larger hope we are fed and heal'd
Than e'er was reveal'd to the saints who died so strong;
For while men slept the seed had quicken'd unseen.
England is as a field whereon the corn is green.

Of trial and dark tribulation this vision is born—
Britain as a field green with the springing corn.
While we slumber'd the seed was growing unseen.
Happy returns of the day, dear Babe, we say.

England has buried her sins with her fathers' bones.
Thou shalt be throned on the ruin of kingly thrones.
The wish of thine heart is rooted in carnal mind;

For good seed didst thou sow in the world thy field:
It shall ripen in gold and harvest an hundredfold.
Peace shall come as a flood upon all mankind;
Love shall comfort and succour the poor that are pined.

Wherever our gentle children are wander'd and sped,
Simple apostles thine of the world to come,
They carried the living seed of the living Bread.
The angel-song and the gospel of Christendom,
That while the nation slept was springing unseen.

So tho' we be sorely stricken we feel no dread:
Our thousand sons suffer death-pangs like thine:
It shall ripen in gold and harvest an hundredfold:
Peace and Love shall hallow our care and teen,
Shall bind in fellowship all the folk of the earth
To kneel at thy cradle, Babe, and bless thy birth.

Ring we the bells up and down in country and town,
And keep the old feast unholpen of preacher or priest,
Wishing thee happy returns, and thy Mother May,
Ever happier and happier returns, dear Christ, of thy day!

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

August, 1918

See England's stalwart daughter, who made emprise
'Gainst her own mother, freeborn of the free,
Who slew her sons for her slaves' liberty,
See for mankind her majesty arise!
From her new world her unattainted eyes
Espy deliverance, and her bold decree
Speaks for Great Britain's wide confederacy:
The folk shall rule, if only they be wise.

Ambition, hate, revenge, the secret sway
Of priest and kingcraft shall be done away
By faith in beauty, chivalry and good.
One God made all, and will all wrongs forgive
Save their hell-heart who stab man's hope to live
In mutual freedom, peace and brotherhood.

OUR PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY

October, 1918

Prisoners to a foe inhuman, Oh! but our hearts rebel:
Defenceless victims ye are, in claws of spite a prey,
Conquering your torturers, enduring night and day
Malice, year-long drawn out your noble spirits to quell.
Fearsomer than death this rack they ranged, and reckon'd
well
'Twould harrow our homes, and plied, such devilish aim had
they,
That England roused to rage should wrong with wrong repay,
And smirch her envied honour in deeds unspeakable.

Nor trouble we just Heaven that quick revenge be done
On Satan's chamberlains highseated in Berlin;
Their reek floats round the world on all lands 'neath the sun:
Tho' in craven Germany was no man found, not one
With spirit enough to cry Shame!—Nay, but on such sin
Follows Perdition eternal ... and it has begun.

HARVEST-HOME

VERSES TO THE AMERICANS ON THEIR THANKSGIVING DAY, CELEBRATED IN ENGLAND NOVEMBER 28, 1918

A toast for West and East
Drink on this Thursday feast
Last in November,
The year when Albion's lands
Across the sea join hands—
Drink and remember!

Nineteen-eighteen fulfill'd
The kindly purpose will'd
By the Ever-living,
When first in hope upstay'd
The Pilgrim Fathers made
Harvest thanksgiving.

And since the seed bore fruit,
Which they went forth to root
In the wildernesses,
Ye now return to find

The Rose that they resigned
With their distresses.

'Twas when the wide world o'er,
Whatever peaceful shore
Britons inherit,
Britons claim'd right of birth,
And fought hell in the mirth
Of Shakespeare's spirit.

Then your true heart was stirr'd,
Your arm raised, and your word
Went forth, forecasting
That the great war should cease
In British bonds of peace,
Peace everlasting.

*The good God bless this day,
And we for ever and aye
Keep our love living,
Till all men 'neath heaven's dome
Sing Freedom's Harvest-home
In one Thanksgiving!*

TO AUSTRALIA

WITH THE WOUNDED AND THE SURVIVORS OF 1914 RETURNING HOME IN AUTUMN, 1918

A loving message at Christmastide,
Sent round the world to the underside
A-sail in the ship that across the foam
Carries the wounded Aussies home,
Who rallied at War's far-thundering call,
When England stood with her back to the wall,
To fight for Freedom, that ne'er shall die
So long as on earth the old flag fly.

O hearts so loving, eager and bold—
Whose praise hath claim to be writ on the sky
In letters of gold, of fire and gold—
Never shall prouder tale be told,
Than how ye fought as the knights of old
“Against the heathen in Turkey
In Flanders Artois and Picardie:”
But above all triumph that else ye have won
This is the goodliest deed ye have done,
To have seal'd with blood in a desperate day

The love-bond that binds us for ever and aye.

September, 1918.

THE EXCELLENT WAY

Man's mind that hath this earth for home
Hath too its far-spread starry dome
Where thought is lost in going free,
Prison'd but by infinity.
He first in slumbrous babyhood
Took conscience of his heavenly good;
Then with his sins grown up to youth
Wept at the vision of God's truth.

Soon in his heart new hopes awoke
As poet sang or prophet spoke:
Temples arose and stone he taught
To stand agaze in trancèd thought:
He won the trembling air to tell
Of far passions ineffable,
Feeding the hungry things of sense
With instincts of omniscience,
Immortal modes that should abide
Cherish'd by love and pious pride,
That unborn children might inherit
The triumph of his holy spirit,
Outbidding Nature, to entice
Her soul from her own Paradise,
Till her wild face had fallen to shame

Had he not praised her in God's name.

Alas! poor man, what blockish curse
Would violate thy universe,
To enchain thy freedom and entomb
Thy pleasance in devouring gloom?
Behold thy savage foes of yore
With woes of pestilence and war,
Siva and Moloch, Odin and Thor,
Rise from their graves to greet amain
The deeds that give them life again.

Poor man, sunk deeper than thy slime
In blood and hate, in terror and crime,
Thou who wert lifted on the wings
Of thy desire, the king of kings,
In promise beyond ken sublime:
O thou man-soul, who mightest climb
To heavenly happiness, whereof
Thine easy path were Mirth and Love!

October, 1918.

ENGLAND TO INDIA

Christmas, 1918

Beautiful is man's home: how fair,
Wrapt in her robe of azurous air,
The Earth thro' stress of ice and fire
Came on the path of God's desire,
Redeeming Chaos, to compose
Exquisite forms of lily and rose,
With every creature a design
Of loveliness or craft divine
Searchable and unsearchable,
And each insect a miracle!

Truth is as Beauty unconfined:
Various as Nature is man's Mind:
Each race and tribe is as a flower
Set in God's garden with its dower
Of special instinct; and man's grace
Compact of all must all embrace.
China and Ind, Hellas or France,
Each hath its own inheritance;
And each to Truth's rich market brings
Its bright divine imaginings,

In rival tribute to surprise
The world with native merchandise.
Nor least in worth nor last in years
Of artists, poets, saints and seers,
England, in her far northern sea,
Fashion'd the jewel of Liberty,
Fetch'd from the shore of Palestine
(Land of the Lily and mystic Vine).
Where once in the everlasting dawn
Christ's Love-star flamed, that heavenly sign
Where to all nations shall be drawn,
Unfabled Magi, and uplift
Each to Love's cradle his own gift.

Thou who canst dream and understand,
Dost thou not dream for thine own land
This dream of Truth, and contemplate
That happier world, Love's free Estate?
Say, didst thou dream, O Sister fair,
How hand in hand we entered there?

BRITANNIA VICTRIX

Careless wast thou in thy pride,
Queen of seas and countries wide,
Glorying on thy peaceful throne:—
Can thy love thy sins atone?
What shall dreams of glory serve,
If thy sloth thy doom deserve,
When the strong relentless foe
Storm thy gates to lay thee low?

Careless, ah! he saw thee leap
Mighty from thy startled sleep,
Heard afar thy challenge ring:
'Twas the world's awakening.

Welcome to thy children all
Rallying to thee without call
Oversea, the sportive sons
From thy vast dominions!
Stern in onset or defence,
Terrible in their confidence.

Dauntless wast thou, fair goddess,
'Neath the cloud of thy distress;
Fierce and mirthful wast thou seen

In thy toil and in thy teen;
While the nations looked to thee,
Spent in worldwide agony.

Oft, throughout that long ordeal
Dark with horror-stricken duty,
Nature on thy heart would steal
Beckoning thee with heavenly beauty,
Heightening ever on thine isle
All her seasons' tranquil smile;
Till thy soul anew converted,
Roaming o'er the fields deserted,
By thy sorrow sanctified,
Found a place wherein to hide.

Soon fresh beauty lit thy face,
Then thou stood'st in Heaven's high grace:
Sudden in air on land and sea
Swell'd the voice of victory.

Now when jubilant bells resound
And thy sons come laurel-crown'd,
After all thy years of woe
Thou no longer canst forgo,
Now thy tears are loos'd to flow.

Land, dear land, whose sea-built shore
Nurseth warriors evermore,
Land, whence Freedom far and lone

Round the earth her speech has thrown
Like a planet's luminous zone,—
In thy strength and calm defiance
Hold mankind in love's alliance!

Beauteous art thou, but the foes
Of thy beauty are not those
Who lie tangled and dismay'd;
Fearless one, be yet afraid
Lest thyself thyself condemn
In the wrong that ruin'd them.

God, who chose thee and upraised
'Mong the folk (His name be praised!),
Proved thee then by chastisement
Worthy of His high intent,
Who, because thou could'st endure,
Saved thee free and purged thee pure,
Won thee thus His grace to win,
For thy love forgave thy sin,
For thy truth forgave thy pride,
Queen of seas and countries wide,—
He who led thee still will guide.

Hark! thy sons, those spirits fresh
Dearly housed in dazzling flesh,
Thy full brightening buds of strength,
Ere their day had any length
Crush'd, and fallen in torment sorest,

Hark! the sons whom thou deplorest
Call—I hear one call; he saith:
“Mother, weep not for my death:
’Twas to guard our home from hell,
’Twas to make thy joy I fell
Praising God, and all is well.
What if now thy heart should quail
And in peace our victory fail!
If low greed in guise of right
Should consume thy gather’d might,
And thy power mankind to save
Fall and perish on our grave!
On my grave, whose legend be
*Fought with the brave and joyfully
Died in faith of victory.*
Follow on the way we won!
Thou hast found, not lost thy son.”

November 23, 1918.

DER TAG: NELSON AND BEATTY

A BROADSHEET

1

No doubt 'twas a truly Christian sight
When the German ships came out of the Bight,
But it can't be said it was much of a fight
That grey November morning;
The wonderful day, the great Der Tag,
Which Prussians had vow'd with unmannerly brag
Should see Old England lower her flag
Some grey November morning.

2

The spirit of Nelson, that haunts the Fleet,
Had come whereabouts the ships must meet,
But he fear'd there was some decoy or cheat

That grey November morning,
When the enemy led by a British scout
Stole 'twixt our lines ... and never a shout
Or a signal; and never a gun spoke out
That grey November morning.

3

So he shaped his course to the Admiral's ship,
Where Beatty stood with hand on hip
Impassive, nor ever moved his lip
That grey November morning;
And touching his shoulder he said: "My mate,
Am I come too soon or am I too late?
Is it friendly manœuvres or pageant of State
This grey November morning?"

4

Then Beatty said: "As Admiral here
In the name of the King I bid you good cheer:
It's not my fault that it looks so queer
This grey November morning;
But there come the enemy all in queues;

They can fight well enough if only they choose;
Small blame to me if the fools refuse,
This grey November morning.

5

“That’s Admiral Reuter, surrendering nine
Great Dreadnoughts, all first-rates of the line;
Beyond, in the haze that veils the brine
This grey November morning,
Loom five heavy Cruisers, and light ones four,
With a tail of Destroyers, fifty or more,
Each squadron under its Commodore,
This grey November morning.

6

“The least of all those captive queens
Could have knock’d your whole navy to smithereens,
And nothing said of the other machines,
On a grey November morning,
The aeroplanes and the submarines,
Bombs, torpedoes, and Zeppelins,
Their floating mines and their smoky screens,

Of a grey November morning.

7

“They’ll rage like bulls sans reason or rhyme,
And next day, as if ’twere a pantomime,
They walk in like cows at milking-time,
On a grey November morning.
We’re four years sick of the pestilent mob;
—You’ve heard of our biblical *Battle in Gob?*—
At times it was hardly a gentleman’s job
Of a grey November morning.”

8

Then Nelson said: “God bless my soul!
How things are changed in this age of coal;
For the spittle it isn’t with you I’d condole
This grey November morning.
By George! you’ve netted a monstrous catch:
You’ll be able to pen the best dispatch
That ever an Admiral wrote under hatch
On a grey November morning.

9

“I like your looks and I like your name:
My heart goes out to the old fleet’s fame,
And I’m pleased to find you so spry at the game
This grey November morning.
Your ships, tho’ I don’t half understand
Their build, are stouter and better mann’d
Than anything I ever had in command
Of a grey November morning.”

10

Then Beatty spoke: “Sir! none of my crew,
All bravest of brave and truest of true,
Is thinking of me so much as of you
This grey November morning.”
And Nelson replied: “Well, thanks f’ your chat.
Forgive my intrusion! I take off my hat
And make you my bow ... we’ll leave it at that,
This grey November morning.”

“TO BURNS”

TOAST FOR THE GREENOCK CLUB DINNER, JANUARY, 1914

To Burns! brave Scotia's laurel'd son
Who drove his plough on Helicon—
Who with his Doric rhyme erewhile
Taught English bards to mend their style—
And by the humour of his pen
Fairly befool'd auld Nickie-ben ...
Blithe Robbie Burns! we love thee well
Because thou wert so like thysel',
And in full cups with festive cheer
We toast thy fame from year to year.

POOR CHILD

On a mournful day
When my heart was lonely,
O'er and o'er my thought
Conned but one thing only,

Thinking how I lost
Wand'ring in the wild-wood
The companion self
Of my careless childhood.

How, poor child, it was
I shall ne'er discover,
But 'twas just when he
Grew to be thy lover,

With thine eyes of trust
And thy mirth, whereunder
All the world's hope lay
In thy heart of wonder.

Now, beyond regrets
And faint memories of thee.
Saddest is, poor child,
That I cannot love thee.

TO PERCY BUCK

Folk alien to the Muse have hemm'd us round
And fiends have suck'd our blood: our best delight
Is poison'd, and the year's infective blight
Hath made almost a silence of sweet sound.
But you, what fortune, Percy, have you found
At Harrow? doth fair hope your toil requite?
Doth beauty win her praise and truth her right,
Or hath the good seed fal'n on stony ground?

Ply the art ever nobly, single-soul'd
Like Brahms, or as you ruled in Wells erewhile,
—Nor yet the memory of that zeal is cold—
Where lately I, who love the purer style,
Enter'd, and felt your spirit as of old
Beside me, listening in the chancel-aisle.

1904.

TO HARRY ELLIS WOOLDRIDGE

Love and the Muse have left their home, now bare
Of memorable beauty, all is gone,
The dedicated charm of Yattendon,
Which thou wert apt, dear Hal, to build and share.
What noble shades are flitting, who while-ere
Haunted the ivy'd walls, where time ran on
In sanctities of joy by reverence won,
Music and choral grace and studies fair!

These on some kindlier field may Fate restore,
And may the old house prosper, dispossesst
Of her whose equal it can nevermore
Hold till it crumble: O nay! and the door
Will moulder ere it open on a guest
To match thee in thy wisdom and thy jest.

October, 1905.

FORTUNATUS NIMIUM

I have lain in the sun
I have toil'd as I might
I have thought as I would
And now it is night.

My bed full of sleep
My heart of content
For friends that I met
The way that I went.

I welcome fatigue
While frenzy and care
Like thin summer clouds
Go melting in air.

To dream as I may
And awake when I will
With the song of the birds
And the sun on the hill.

Or death—were it death—
To what should I wake
Who loved in my home
All life for its sake?

What good have I wrought?
I laugh to have learned
That joy cannot come
Unless it be earned;

For a happier lot
Than God giveth me
It never hath been
Nor ever shall be.

DEMOCRITUS

Joy of your opulent atoms! wouldst thou dare
Say that Thought also of atoms self-became,
Waving to soul as light had the eye in aim;
And so with things of bodily sense compare
Those native notions that the heavens declare,
Space and Time, Beauty and God—Praise we his name!—
Real ideas, that on tongues of flame
From out mind's cooling paste leapt unaware?

Thy spirit, Democritus, orb'd in the eterne
Illimitable galaxy of night
Shineth undimm'd where greater splendours burn
Of sage and poet: by their influence bright
We are held; and pouring from his quenchless urn
Christ with immortal love-beams laves the height.

1919.

NOTES

Poem 3.—As the metre or scansion of this poem was publicly discussed and wrongly analysed by some who admired its effects, it may be well to explain that it and the three other poems in similar measure, “Flowering Tree,” “In der Fremde,” “The West Front,” are strictly syllabic verse on the model left by Milton in “Samson Agonistes”; except that his system, which depended on exclusion of extra-metrical syllables (that is, syllables which did not admit of resolution by “elision” into a disyllabic scheme) from all places but the last, still admitted them in that place, thereby forbidding inversion of the last foot. It is natural to conclude that, had he pursued his inventions, his next step would have been to get rid of this anomaly; and if that is done, the result is the new rhythms that these poems exhibit. In this sort of prosody rhyme is admitted, like alliteration, as an ornament at will; it is not needed. My four experiments are confined to the twelve-syllable verse. It is probably agreed that there are possibilities in that long six-foot line which English poetry has not fully explored.

Poem 12, “Hell and Hate.”—This poem was written December 16, 1913. It is the description of a little picture hanging in my bedroom; it had been painted for me as a New Year’s gift more than thirty years before, and I described it partly because I never exactly knew what it meant. When the war broke

out I remembered my poem and sent it to *The Times*, where it appeared in the Literary Supplement September 24, 1914.

Poem 13, “Wake up, England!”—This motto is the King’s well-known call to the country in 1901 at the Guildhall.

The verses appeared in *The Times* on August 8, 1914. There were three other stanzas, which are better omitted; and the last two lines, which were printed in capitals and ran thus,

England stands for honour,
May God defend the right,

were purposely set out of metre. In the second stanza the words “The fiend” are what I originally wrote, and I think that the friends who persuaded me to substitute “Thy foe” will no longer wish to protest.