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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SONGS FOR A LITTLE HOUSE ***

E-text prepared by Ron Swanson

*"He that high growth on cedars did bestow,
Gave also lowly mushrumps leave to grow."
—R. Southwell, 1562-95*

SONGS FOR A LITTLE HOUSE

BY

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

**NEW YORK
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TO THE LITTLE HOUSE

Dear little house, dear shabby street,
Dear books and beds and food to eat!
How feeble words are to express
The facets of your tenderness.

How white the sun comes through the pane!
In tinkling music drips the rain!
How burning bright the furnace glows!
What paths to shovel when it snows!

O dearly loved Long Island trains!
O well remembered joys and pains....
How near the housetops Beauty leans
Along that little street in Queens!

Let these poor rhymes abide for proof
Joy dwells beneath a humble roof;
Heaven is not built of country seats
But little queer suburban streets!

Albany Avenue, Queens, Long Island,
March, 1917

ONE MOMENT, PLEASE

At fifty cents per agate line
Kind editors will buy your verse;
They'll make you swear that you resign
All claims, for better or for worse.
The book, dramatic, photoplay,
And interplanetary rights
They seize; but do not feel dismay—
Their barks are fiercer than their bites!

I thank, for leave to print these rhymes,
And for unfailing courtesy,
Everybody's, *New York Times*,
The Outlook and the *Century*;
The Boston Transcript, *L. H. J.*,
The Tribune, *Mail*, and *Evening Post*,
The Book News Monthly, chastely gay—
But *Life* and *Collier's* I thank most.

The Independent and *McClure's*
And *Argosy* have borne my flights:

Dear scribblers, how this reassures—
Their barks are fiercer than their bites!

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SONGS FOR A LITTLE HOUSE

BAYBERRY CANDLES

Dear sweet, when dusk comes up the hill,
The fire leaps high with golden prongs;
I place along the chimneysill
The tiny candles of my songs.

And though unsteadily they burn,
As evening shades from grey to blue
Like candles they will surely learn
To shine more clear, for love of you.

SECRET LAUGHTER

"I had a secret laughter."
—Walter de la Mare.

There is a secret laughter
That often comes to me,
And though I go about my work

As humble as can be,
There is no prince or prelate
I envy—no, not one.
No evil can befall me—
By God, I have a son!

A CHARM

For Our New Fireplace,
To Stop Its Smoking

O wood, burn bright; O flame, be quick;
O smoke, draw cleanly up the flue—
My lady chose your every brick
And sets her dearest hopes on you!

Logs cannot burn, nor tea be sweet,
Nor white bread turn to crispy toast,
Until the charm be made complete
By love, to lay the sooty ghost.

And then, dear books, dear waiting chairs,
Dear china and mahogany,
Draw close, for on the happy stairs
My brown-eyed girl comes down for tea!

SIX WEEKS OLD

He is so small, he does not know
The summer sun, the winter snow;
The spring that ebbs and comes again,
All this is far beyond his ken.

A little world he feels and sees:
His mother's arms, his mother's knees;
He hides his face against her breast,
And does not care to learn the rest.

THE YOUNG MOTHER

Of what concern are wars to her,
Or treaties broken on the seas?

Or all the cruelties of men?
She has her baby on her knees.

In blessed singleness of heart,
What heed has she for nations' wrath?
She sings a little peaceful hymn
As she prepares the baby's bath.

As in a dream, she hears the talk
Of mine, torpedo, bomb and gun—
She shudders, but her thoughts are all
Encradled with her little son.

PETER PAN

"The boy for whom Barrie wrote Peter Pan—the
original of Peter Pan—has died in battle."

—New York Times.

And Peter Pan is dead? not so!
When mothers turn the lights down low
And tuck their little sons in bed,
They know that Peter is not dead....

That little rounded blanket-hill;
Those prayer-time eyes, so deep and still—
However wise and great a man
He grows, he still is Peter Pan.

And mothers' ways are often queer:
They pause in doorways, just to hear
A tiny breathing; think a prayer;
And then go tiptoe down the stair.

THE 5:42

Lilac, violet, and rose
Ardently the city glows;
Sunset glory, purely sweet,
Gilds the dreaming byway-street,
And, above the Avenue,
Winter dusk is deepening blue.

(Then, across Long Island meadows,
Darker, darker, grow the shadows:
Patience, little waiting lass!
Laggard minutes slowly pass;
Patience, laughs the yellow fire:
Homeward bound is heart's desire!)

Hark, adown the canyon street

Flows the merry tide of feet;
High the golden buildings loom
Blazing in the purple gloom;
All the town is set with stars,
Homeward chant the Broadway cars!

All down Thirty-second Street
Homeward, Homeward, say the feet!
Tramping men, uncouth to view,
Footsore, weary, thrill anew;
Gone the ringing telephones,
Blessed nightfall now atones.
Casting brightness on the snow
Golden the train windows go.

Then (how long it seems) at last
All the way is overpast.
Heart that beats your muffled drum,
Lo, your venturer is come!
Wide the door! Leap high, O fire!
Home at length is heart's desire!
Gone is weariness and fret,
At the sill warm lips are met.
Once again may be renewed
The conjoined beatitude.

READING ALOUD

Once we read Tennyson aloud
In our great fireside chair;
Between the lines, my lips could touch
Her April-scented hair.

How very fond I was, to think
The printed poems fair,
When close within my arms I held
A living lyric there!

THE MOON-SHEEP

The moon seems like a docile sheep,
She pastures while all people sleep;
But sometimes, when she goes astray,
She wanders all alone by day.

Up in the clear blue morning air
We are surprised to see her there,
Grazing in her woolly white,
Waiting the return of night.

When dusk lets down the meadow bars
She greets again her lambs, the stars!

MAR QUONG, CHINESE LAUNDRYMAN

I like the Chinese laundryman:
He smokes a pipe that bubbles,
And seems, as far as I can tell,
A man with but few troubles.
He has much to do, no doubt,
But also, much to think about.

Most men (for instance I myself)
Are spending, at all times,
All our hard-earned quarters,
Our nickels and our dimes:
With Mar Quong it's the other way—
He takes in small change every day.

Next time you call for collars
In his steamy little shop,
Observe how tight his pigtail
Is coiled and piled on top.
But late at night he lets it hang
And thinks of the Yang-tse-kiang.

THE MILKMAN

Early in the morning, when the dawn is on the roofs,
You hear his wheels come rolling, you hear his horse's hoofs;
You hear the bottles clinking, and then he drives away:
You yawn in bed, turn over, and begin another day!

The old-time dairy maids are dear to every poet's heart—
I'd rather be the dairy *man* and drive a little cart,
And bustle round the village in the early morning blue,
And hang my reins upon a hook, as I've seen Casey do.

IN HONOUR OF TAFFY TOPAZ

Taffy, the topaz-coloured cat,
Thinks now of this and now of that,
But chiefly of his meals.
Asparagus, and cream, and fish,
Are objects of his Freudian wish;
What you don't give, he steals.

His gallant heart is strongly stirred
By clink of plate or flight of bird,
He has a plummy tail;

At night he treads on stealthy pad
As merry as Sir Galahad
A-seeking of the Grail.

His amiable amber eyes
Are very friendly, very wise;
Like Buddha, grave and fat,
He sits, regardless of applause,
And thinking, as he kneads his paws,
What fun to be a cat!

THE CEDAR CHEST

Her mind is like her cedar chest
Wherein in quietness do rest
The wistful dreamings of her heart
In fragrant folds all laid apart.

There, put away in sprigs of rhyme
Until her life's full blossom-time,
Flutter (like tremulous little birds)
Her small and sweet maternal words.

O PRAISE ME NOT THE COUNTRY

O praise me not the country—
The meadows green and cool,
The solemn glow of sunsets, the hidden silver pool!
The city for my craving,
Her lordship and her slaving,
The hot stones of her paving
For me, a city fool!

O praise me not the leisure
Of gardened country seats,
The fountains on the terrace against the summer heats—
The city for my yearning,
My spending and my earning.
Her winding ways for learning,
Sing hey! the city streets!

O praise me not the country,
Her sycamores and bees,
I had my youthful plenty of sour apple trees!
The city for my wooing,
My dreaming and my doing;
Her beauty for pursuing,
Her deathless mysteries.

O praise me not the country,
Her evenings full of stars,
Her yachts upon the water with the wind among their spars—
The city for my wonder,
Her glory and her blunder,
And O the haunting thunder

Of the Elevated cars!

ANIMAL CRACKERS

Animal crackers, and cocoa to drink,
That is the finest of suppers, I think;
When I'm grown up and can have what I please
I think I shall always insist upon these.

What do *you* choose when you're offered a treat?
When Mother says, "What would you like best to eat?"
Is it waffles and syrup, or cinnamon toast?
It's cocoa and animals that *I* love most!

The kitchen's the cosiest place that I know:
The kettle is singing, the stove is aglow,
And there in the twilight, how jolly to see
The cocoa and animals waiting for me.

Daddy and Mother dine later in state,
With Mary to cook for them, Susan to wait;
But they don't have nearly as much fun as I
Who eat in the kitchen with Nurse standing by;
And Daddy once said, he would like to be me
Having cocoa and animals once more for tea!

THE WAKEFUL HUSBAND

How blue the moonlight and how still the night.
Silent I ramble through the whole dear house
Setting aright in happy ownership
Whatever may lie out of its due place.
Books in the living room I rearrange,
Then in the dining room my pewter mugs,
And put her little brown nasturtium bowl
Where she can see it when she telephones.
Up in my den the papers are a-sprawl
And litter up my desk: these too I sort
Thinking, to-morrow I will rise betimes
And do my work neglected.... Tiptoe then
I pass into the Shrine. She is asleep,
Dark hair across the moon-blanch'd pillow slip.
Her eyes are sealed with peace, but as I touch
The girlish cheek, her lips are tremulous
With secret knowing smiles. In her boudoir
(Her "sulking room" I call it: did you know
It means that?) I wind up the tiny clock
And stand at her Prayer Window where the fields
Lie listening to the crickets and the stars....
Alas, I only hear the throb of pain
That echoes from the moonlit fields of France.

Into our kitchen, too, I love to go,
Straighten the spoons against our break of fast,
Share secrets with our dog, the drowsy-eyed,

Surprise the kitten with some midnight milk.
The pantry cupboard, full of pleasant things,
Attracts me: there I love to place in line
The packages of cereals, or fill up
The breakfast sugar bowl; and empty out
The icebox pan into the singing night.

Then, as I fixed the cushions on the porch,
I wondered whether God, while wandering
Through his big house, the World, householderwise,
Does also quietly set things aright,
Gives sleep to sleepless wives in Germany
And gently smooths the battlefields of France?
Dear Father God, the children in their play
Have tossed their toys in saddest disarray—
Wilt Thou not, like a kindly nurse at dusk,
Pass through the playroom, make it neat again?
September, 1914.

LIGHT VERSE

At night the gas lamps light our street,
Electric bulbs our homes;
The gas is billed in cubic feet,
Electric light in ohms.

But one illumination still
Is brighter far, and sweeter;
It is not figured in a bill,
Nor measured by a meter.

More bright than lights that money buys,
More pleasing to discerners,
The shining lamps of Helen's eyes,
Those lovely double burners!

FULL MOON

The moon is but a silver watch
To tell the time of night;
If you should wake, and wish to know
The hour, don't strike a light.

Just draw the blind, and closely scan
Her dial in the blue:
If it is round and bright, there is
A deal more sleep for you.

She runs without an error,
Not too slow nor too quick,
And better than alarum clocks—
She doesn't have to tick!

MY WIFE

Pure as the moonlight, sweet as midnight air,
Simple as the primrose, brave and just and fair,
Such is my wife. The more unworthy I
To kiss the little hand of her by whom I lie.

New words, true words, need I to make you see
The gallantry, the graciousness, that she has brought to me;
How humble and how haughty, how quick in thought and deed,
How loyally she comrades me in every time of need.

To-night she is not with me. I kiss her empty dress.
Here I kneel beside it, not ashamed to bless
Each dear bosom-fold of it that bears a breath of her,
Makes my heart a house of pain, and my eyes a blur.

Here I kneel beside it, humble now to pray
That God will send her back to me on the morrow day.

New words, true words, only such could praise
The blessed, blessed magic of her dear and dauntless ways.

WASHING THE DISHES

When we on simple rations sup
How easy is the washing up!
But heavy feeding complicates
The task by soiling many plates.

And though I grant that I have prayed
That we might find a serving-maid,
I'd scullion all my days, I think,
To see Her smile across the sink!

I wash, She wipes. In water hot
I souse each dish and pan and pot;
While Taffy mutters, purrs, and begs,
And rubs himself against my legs.

The man who never in his life
Has washed the dishes with his wife
Or polished up the silver plate—
He still is largely celibate.

One warning: there is certain ware
That must be handled with all care:
The Lord Himself will give you up
If you should drop a willow cup!

THE FURNACE

At night I opened
The furnace door:
The warm glow brightened
The cellar floor.

The fire that sparkled
Blue and red,
Kept small toes cosy
In their bed.

As up the stair
So late I stole,
I said my prayer:
Thank God for coal!

THE CHURCH OF UNBENT KNEES

As I went by the church to-day
I heard the organ cry;
And goodly folk were on their knees,
But I went striding by.

My minster hath a roof more vast:
My aisles are oak trees high;
My altar-cloth is on the hills,
My organ is the sky.

I see my rood upon the clouds,
The winds, my chanted choir;
My crystal windows, heaven-glazed,
Are stained with sunset fire.

The stars, the thunder, and the rain,
White sands and purple seas—
These are His pulpit and His pew,
My God of Unbent Knees!

THE NEW ALTMAN BUILDING

Madison Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street
(January, 1914)

Fled is the glamour, fled the royal dream,
Fled is the joy. They work no more by night
Deep in that cave of dazzling amber light,
In pools of darkness, under plumes of steam.
Gone are the laughing drills that sting and hiss

Deep in the ribs of the metropolis.

Gone are the torches and the great red cranes
That swung their arms with such resistless might;
Gone are the flags and drums of that great fight,
No more they swink with rocks and autumn rains;
And only girders, rising tier on tier,
Give hint of all the struggle that was here.

We too, mad zealots of the hardest craft,
Striving to build a word-house fair and tall,
Have wept to see our dear erections fall;
Have wept—then flung away our tools, and laughed.
Fled is the dream, but working year by year
We see our buildings rising, tier on tier.

THE MADONNA OF THE CURB

On the curb of a city pavement,
By the ash and garbage cans,
In the stench and rolling thunder
Of motor trucks and vans,
There sits my little lady,
With brave but troubled eyes,
And in her arms a baby
That cries and cries and cries.

She cannot be more than seven;
But years go fast in the slums,
And hard on the pains of winter
The pitiless summer comes.
The wail of sickly children
She knows; she understands
The pangs of puny bodies,
The clutch of small hot hands.

In the deadly blaze of August,
That turns men faint and mad,
She quiets the peevish urchins
By telling a dream she had—
A heaven with marble counters,
And ice, and a singing fan;
And a God in white, so friendly,
Just like the drug-store man.

Her ragged dress is dearer
Than the perfect robe of a queen!
Poor little lass, who knows not
The blessing of being clean.
And when you are giving millions
To Belgian, Pole and Serb,
Remember my pitiful lady—
Madonna of the Curb!

My pipe is old
And caked with soot;
My wife remarks:
"How can you put
That horrid relic,
So unclean,
Inside your mouth?
The nicotine
Is strong enough
To stupefy
A Swedish plumber."
I reply:

"This is the kind
Of pipe I like:
I fill it full
Of Happy Strike,
Or Barking Cat
Or Cabman's Puff,
Or Brooklyn Bridge
(That potent stuff)
Or Chaste Embraces,
Knacker's Twist,
Old Honeycomb
Or Niggerfist.

I clamp my teeth
Upon its stem—
It is my bliss,
My diadem.
Whatever Fate
May do to me,
This is my favourite

B^BB.

For this dear pipe
You feign to scorn
I smoked the night
The boy was born."

TO A GRANDMOTHER

At six o'clock in the evening,
The time for lullabies,
My son lay on my mother's lap
With sleepy, sleepy eyes!
*(O drowsy little manny boy,
With sleepy, sleepy eyes!)*

I heard her sing, and rock him,
And the creak of the swaying chair,
And the old dear cadence of the words
Came softly down the stair.

And all the years had vanished,
All folly, greed, and stain—
The old, old song, the creaking chair,
The dearest arms again!
*(O lucky little manny boy,
To feel those arms again!)*

A HANDFUL OF SONNETS

I

I have no hope to make you live in rhyme
Or with your beauty to enrich the years—
Enough for me this now, this present time;
The greater claim for greater sonneteers.
But O how covetous I am of NOW—
Dear human minutes, marred by human pains—
I want to know your lips, your cheek, your brow,
And all the miracles your heart contains.
I wish to study all your changing face,
Your eyes, divinely hurt with tenderness;
I hope to win your dear unstinted grace
For these blunt rhymes and what they would express.
Then may you say, when others better prove:—
"Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love."

II

When all my trivial rhymes are blotted out,
Vanished our days, so precious and so few,
If some should wonder what we were about
And what the little happenings we knew:
I wish that they might know how, night by night,
My pencil, heavy in the sleepy hours,
Sought vainly for some gracious way to write
How much this love is ours, and only ours.
How many evenings, as you drowsed to sleep,
I read to you by tawny candle-glow,
And watched you down the valley dim and deep
Where poppies and the April flowers grow.
Then knelt beside your pillow with a prayer,
And loved the breath of pansies in your hair.

PEDOMETER

My thoughts beat out in sonnets while I walk,
And every evening on the homeward street
I find the rhythm of my marching feet

Throbs into verses (though the rhyme may balk.)
I think the sonneteers were walking men:
The form is dour and rigid, like a clamp,
But with the swing of legs the tramp, tramp, tramp
Of syllables begins to thud, and then—
Lo! while you seek a rhyme for *hook* or *crook*
Vanished your shabby coat, and you are kith
To all great walk-and-singers—Meredith,
And Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats, and Rupert Brooke!
Free verse is poor for walking, but a sonnet—
O marvellous to stride and brood upon it!

ARS DURA

How many evenings, walking soberly
Along our street all dappled with rich sun,
I please myself with words, and happily
Time rhymes to footfalls, planning how they run;
And yet, when midnight comes, and paper lies
Clean, white, receptive, all that one can ask,
Alas for drowsy spirit, weary eyes
And traitor hand that fails the well loved task!

Who ever learned the sonnet's bitter craft
But he had put away his sleep, his ease,
The wine he loved, the men with whom he laughed,
To brood upon such thankless tricks as these?
And yet, such joy does in that craft abide
He greets the paper as the groom the bride!

O. HENRY—APOTHECARY

"O. Henry" once worked in a drug-store in Greensboro, N. C.

Where once he measured camphor, glycerine,
Quinine and potash, peppermint in bars,
And all the oils and essences so keen
That druggists keep in rows of stoppered jars—
Now, blender of strange drugs more volatile,
The master pharmacist of joy and pain
Dispenses sadness tintured with a smile
And laughter that dissolves in tears again.

O brave apothecary! You who knew
What dark and acid doses life prefers,
And yet with friendly face resolved to brew
These sparkling potions for your customers—
In each prescription your Physician writ
You poured your rich compassion and your wit!

FOR THE CENTENARY OF KEATS'S SONNET (1816)

"On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer."

I knew a scientist, an engineer,
Student of tensile strengths and calculus,
A man who loved a cantilever truss
And always wore a pencil on his ear.
My friend believed that poets all were queer,
And literary folk ridiculous;
But one night, when it chanced that three of us
Were reading Keats aloud, he stopped to hear.

Lo, a new planet swam into his ken!
His eager mind reached for it and took hold.
Ten years are by: I see him now and then,
And at alumni dinners, if cajoled,
He mumbles gravely, to the cheering men:—
Much have I travelled in the realms of gold.

TWO O'CLOCK

Night after night goes by: and clocks still chime
And stars are changing patterns in the dark,
And watches tick, and over-puissant Time
Benumbs the eager brain. The dogs that bark,
The trains that roar and rattle in the night,
The very cats that prowl, all quiet find
And leave the darkness empty, silent quite:
Sleep comes to chloroform the fretting mind.

So all things end: and what is left at last?
Some scribbled sonnets tossed upon the floor,
A memory of easy days gone past,
A run-down watch, a pipe, some clothes we wore—
And in the darkened room I lean to know
How warm her dreamless breath does pause and flow.

THE COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER

Ah very sweet! If news should come to you
Some afternoon, while waiting for our eve,
That the great Manager had made me leave

To travel on some territory new;
And that, whatever homeward winds there blew,
I could not touch your hand again, nor heave
The logs upon our hearth and bid you weave
Some wistful tale before the flames that grew....

Then, when the sudden tears had ceased to blind
Your pangs eyes, I wonder if you could
Remember rightly, and forget aright?
Remember just your lad, uncouthly good,
Forgetting when he failed in spleen or spite?
Could you remember him as always kind?

THE WEDDED LOVER

I read in our old journals of the days
When our first love was April-sweet and new,
How fair it blossomed and deep-rooted grew
Despite the adverse time; and our amaze
At moon and stars and beauty beyond praise
That burgeoned all about us: gold and blue
The heaven arched us in, and all we knew
Was gentleness. We walked on happy ways.

They said by now the path would be more steep,
The sunsets paler and less mild the air;
Rightly we heeded not: it was not true.
We will not tell the secret—let it keep.
I know not how I thought those days so fair
These being so much fairer, spent with you.

TO YOU, REMEMBERING THE PAST

When we were parted, sweet, and darkness came,
I used to strike a match, and hold the flame
Before your picture; and would breathless mark
The answering glimmer of the tiny spark
That brought to life the magic of your eyes,
Their wistful tenderness, their glad surprise.

Holding that mimic torch before your shrine
I used to light your eyes and make them mine;
Watch them like stars set in a lonely sky,
Whisper my heart out, yearning for reply;
Summon your lips from far across the sea
Bidding them live a twilight hour with me.

Then, when the match was shrivelled into gloom,
Lo—you were with me in the darkened room.

THE LAST SONNET

Suppose one knew that never more might one
Put pen to sonnet, well loved task; that now
These fourteen lines were all he could allow
To say his message, be forever done;
How he would scan the word, the line, the rhyme,
Intent to sum in dearly chosen phrase
The windy trees, the beauty of his days,
Life's pride and pathos in one verse sublime.
How bitter then would be regret and pang
For former rhymes he dallied to refine,
For every verse that was not crystalline....
And if belike this last one feebly rang,
Honour and pride would cast it to the floor
Facing the judge with what was done before.

THE WAR

IRONY

Anton Lang, the *Christus* of Oberammergau, has
not been called upon to fight in the German army.
NEWS ITEM.

So War hath still some ruth? some sense of shame?
The Crown of Thorns hath reverence even now?
For when the summons to that village came,
They spared the Christ of Oberammergau.

Enlist the actors of that sacred mime—
Paul, Peter, Pilate—Judas too, I trow;
Spurn Christ of Galilee, but (O sublime!)
Revere the Christ of Oberammergau.

TO A FRENCH BABY

Marcel Gaillard, Baby number 6 in *Life's* fund for
French war-orphans

What unsaid messages arise
Behind your clear and wondering eyes,
O grave and tiny citizen?
And who, of wise and valiant men,
Can answer those mute questionings?
I think the captains and the kings
Might well kneel in humility
Before you on your mother's knee,
As knelt, beside a stable door,
Other great men, long before.

In you, poor little lad, one sees
All children and all mothers' knees:
All voices inarticulate
That cry against the hymns of hate;
All homes, by Thames or Rhine or Seine,
Where cradles will not rock again.

AFTER HEARING GERMAN MUSIC

What pang of beauty is in all these songs,
Flooding the heart with painful bliss within—
Was this the folk to which Von Kluck belongs,
The land of poison gas and Zeppelin?

Most gifted race the world has ever known,
Now bleeding in the dust of rank despairs,—
Was it for this men builded at Cologne,
Kant wrote at midnight, Schumann dreamed his airs?

IN MEMORY OF THE AMERICAN AVIATORS KILLED IN FRANCE

Not at their own dear country's call,
But answering another voice,
They gave to Liberty their all,
Nor faltered in the choice.

Their young and ardent hearts were coined
Into a golden seal for France;
Above their graves two flags are joined;
They lie beyond mischance.

And we, remembering whence came
Our Goddess where the sea-tide runs,
Nobly acquit the noble claim
France has upon our sons.

Who dies for France, for us he dies,
For all that gentle is and fair:
God prosper, in those shell-torn skies,
Our chivalry of air.

THE FLAGS ON FIFTH AVENUE

Above the stately roofs, wind-lifted, high,
A lane of vivid colour in the sky,
They ripple cleanly, seen of every eye.

This is your flag: none other: yours alone:
Yours then to honour: and where it is flown
By your devotion let your heart be known.

Feeble the man who dare not bow the knee
Before some symbol greater far than he—
This is no pomp and no idolatry.

Emblem of youth, and hope, and strength held true
By honour, and by wise forbearance, too—
God bless the flags along the Avenue!

"THEY"

Whoso has gift of simple speech
Of measured words and plain,
To him be given it to teach
The sadness of Lorraine.

She asked but sun and rain to bless
Her blue enfolding hills,
And time, to heal the old distress
Of dim-remembered ills.

The fields, the vineyards and the lathe,
The river, loved so well—
O sunset pools and lads that bathe
Along the green Moselle.

One whispered word—curt, bitter, brief,
Lives now in black Lorraine,
One word that sums her whole of grief—
Dead children, women slain.

The curé's blood that stained the road,
The village burned away,
The needless horrors men abode
Are all in one word—*they*.

BALLAD OF FRENCH RIVERS

Of streams that men take honour in
The Frenchman looks to three,
And each one has for origin
The hills of Burgundy;
And each has known the quivers
Of blood and tears and pain—
O gallant bleeding rivers,
The Marne, the Meuse, the Aisne.

Says Marne: "My poplar fringes
Have felt the Prussian tread,
The blood of brave men tinges
My banks with lasting red;
Let others ask due credit,
But France has me to thank;
Von Kluck himself has said it:—
I turned the Boche's flank!"

Says Meuse: "I claim no winning,
No glory on the stage,
Save that, in the beginning
I strove to save Liége.
Alas that Frankish rivers
Should share such shame as mine—
In spite of all endeavours
I flow to join the Rhine!"

Says Aisne: "My silver shallows
Are saltier than the sea,
The woe of Rheims still hallows
My endless tragedy.
Of rivers rich in story
That run through green Champagne,
In agony and glory
The chief am I, the Aisne!"

Now there are greater waters
That Frenchmen all hold dear—
The Rhone, with many daughters,
That runs so icy clear;
There's Moselle, deep and winy,
There's Loire, Garonne and Seine,
But O the valiant tiny—
The Marne, the Meuse, the Aisne!

PEASANT AND KING

What the Peasants of Europe Are Thinking

You who put faith in your banks and brigades,
Drank and ate largely, slept easy at night,
Hoarded your lyddite and polished the blades,
Let down upon us this blistering blight—
You who played grandly the easiest game,
Now can you shoulder the weight of the same?
Say, can *you* fight?

Here is the tragedy: losing or winning
Who profits a copper? Who garners the fruit?

From bloodiest ending to futile beginning
Ours is the blood, and the sorrow to boot.
Muster your music, flutter your flags,
Ours are the hunger, the wounds, and the rags.
Say, can *you* shoot?

Down in the muck and despair of the trenches
Comes not the moment of bitterest need;
Over the sweat and the groans and the stench
There is a joy in the valorous deed—
But, lying wounded, what one forgets
You and your ribbons and d—d epaulettes—
Say, do *you* bleed?

This is *your* game: it was none of our choosing—
We are the pawns with whom you have played.
Yours is the winning and ours is the losing,
But, when the penalties have to be paid,
We who are left, and our womenfolk, too,
Rulers of Europe, will settle with you—
You, and your trade.
October, 1914.

TILL TWISTON WENT

Till Twiston went, the war still seemed
A far-off thing: a nightmare dreamed,
Some bruit or fable half-believed,
Too hideous to be conceived.

His letter came: the memories throng
Of days that made the friendship strong—
The oar he won, the ties he wore,
His love of china, fairy lore,
(And flappers); and his honest eyes;
His stammer, his absurdities;
His marmalade, his bitter beer,
And all that made him quaint and dear.

And though we muckle have to do
Yet love must needs come breaking through,
And now and then the office hum
Dies like a mist, ... and there will come
An Oxford breakfast scene: the quad
All blue and grey outside—O God—
And there sits Twiston at the feast
Proclaiming he will be a priest!
I see his eyes, his homely neb—
Ring, telephones, and cut the web!

And when it's over, will there be
In his grey house above the Dee
A mug to drain? Will we renew
The dreams of all we hoped to do?
Our Cotswold tramps? And will there still
Be flappers in the surf at Rhyl?
O how I counted on the hour
When he would see the Woolworth Tower,
And how we set our hearts upon
The steep grey walls of Carcassonne!

TO RUDYARD KIPLING

For His Fiftieth Birthday
(December 30, 1915)

Lord of our noble English tongue,
Who holdest seizin of our speech,
Whose epic Mowgli first did reach
The valves of all our hearts when young—

Master of every grace and ire,
Wide as the salt-winged fulmar gulls
That circle England's battle hulls,
Your songs have fanned the Imperial fire.

By Oak and Ash and Thorns, by all
Old memories of Sussex sod,
To you we pile the altar clod
And ask a new Recessional.

TO A U-BOAT

With Apologies to William Blake

Tiger, tiger of the seas,
King of scarlet butcheries,
What infernal hand and eye
Planned your dread machinery?

Men of Hamburg, Bremen, Kiel,
Watch the gauge and turn the wheel,
Proud, perhaps, to have defiled
Oceans, to destroy a child.

With your thunderbolt you strike
Cargo, women, all alike—
Stain with red God's clean green sea,
Call it "naval victory."

U-boat, U-boat, as you grope
With your half-blind periscope,
Lo, your hateful trail we mark,
Send you to your kin, the shark!

KITCHENER

No man in England slept, the night he died:
The harsh, stern spirit passed without a pang,
And freed of mortal clogs his message rang.
In every wakeful mind the challenge cried:
Think not of me: one servant less or more
Means nothing now: hold fast the greater thing—
Strike hard, love truth, serve England and the King!

Servant of England, soldier to the core,
What does it matter where his body fall?
What does it matter where they build the tomb?
Five million men, from Calais to Khartoum,
These are his wreath and his memorial.

MARCH 1915

Pussy willow, pussy willow
Do you bloom in Belgium now?

Tiny furry little catkins
Where the Meuse runs green and clear,
Do the children run to pick you
In this springtime of the year?
Do they stroke you and caress you
Kiss the silky balls of fur,
Take you to the priest to bless you
And pretend to hear you purr?
Do their small hot fingers wilt you?
(Sweethearts, you remember how—)

Pussy willow, pussy willow,
Do you bloom in Belgium now?

DEAD SHIPS

We are not sudden haters; but by dint
Of many horrors all our hearts are quick.
We are not ready writers, with the trick
Of rhyming just to see our words in print.
Nor are we fast forgetters: there remain
Bitter and shameful in our memory
Old murders that made horrible the sea
And tinged clean water with a red, red stain.
Titanic: she went down for love of speed;
The *Eastland*—curse her!—just for dirty greed;
But there are ships whose names are yet more rank.
The years have passed, but still our hearts are sick
To think of the cool cruelty that sank
The *Lusitania* and the *Arabic*.

ENGLAND, JULY 1913

To Rupert Brooke

O England, England ... that July
How placidly the days went by!

Two years ago (how long it seems)
In that dear England of my dreams
I loved and smoked and laughed amain
And rode to Cambridge in the rain.
A careless godlike life was there!
To spin the roads with *Shotover*,
To dream while punting on the Cam,
To lie, and never give a damn
For anything but comradeship
And books to read and ale to sip,
And shandygaff at every inn
When *The Gorilla* rode to Lynn!
O world of wheel and pipe and oar
In those old days before the War.
O poignant echoes of that time!
I hear the Oxford towers chime,
The throbbing of those mellow bells
And all the sweet old English smells—
The Deben water, quick with salt,
The Woodbridge brew-house and the malt;
The Suffolk villages, serene
With lads at cricket on the green,
And Wytham strawberries, so ripe,
And *Murray's Mixture* in my pipe!

In those dear days, in those dear days,
All pleasant lay the country ways;
The echoes of our stalwart mirth
Went echoing wide around the earth
And in an endless bliss of sun
We lay and watched the river run.
And you by Cam and I by Isis
Were happy with our own devices.

Ah, can we ever know again
Such friends as were those chosen men,
Such men to drink, to bike, to smoke with,
To worship with, or lie and joke with?
Never again, my lads, we'll see
The life we led at twenty-three.
Never again, perhaps, shall I
Go flashing bravely down the High
To see, in that transcendent hour,
The sunset glow on Magdalen Tower.

Dear Rupert Brooke, your words recall
Those endless afternoons, and all
Your Cambridge—which I loved as one
Who was her grandson, not her son.
O ripples where the river slacks
In greening eddies round the "backs";
Where men have dreamed such gallant things
Under the old stone bridge at *King's*,
Or leaned to feed the silver swans

By the tennis meads at *John's*.
O Granta's water, cold and fresh,
Kissing the warm and eager flesh
Under the willow's breathing stir—
The bathing pool at *Grantchester*...
What words can tell, what words can praise
The burly savour of those days!

Dear singing lad, those days are dead
And gone for aye your golden head;
And many other well-loved men
Will never dine in Hall again.
I too have lived remembered hours
In Cambridge; heard the summer showers
Make music on old *Heffer's* pane
While I was reading Pepys or Taine.
Through *Trumpington* and *Grantchester*
I used to roll on *Shotover*;
At *Hauxton Bridge* my lamp would light
And sleep in *Royston*, for the night.
Or to *Five Miles from Anywhere*
I used to scull; and sit and swear
While wasps attacked my bread and jam
Those summer evenings on the Cam.
(O crispy English cottage-loaves
Baked in ovens, not in stoves!
O white unsalted English butter
O satisfaction none can utter!) ...

To think that while those joys I knew
In Cambridge, I did not know you.
July 1915.

TO THE OXFORD MEN IN THE WAR

Often, on afternoons grey and sombre,
When clouds lie low and dark with rain,
A random bell strikes a chord familiar
And I hear the Oxford chimes again.
Never I see a swift stream running
Cold and full from shore to shore,
But I think of Isis, and remember
The leaping boat and the throbbing oar.

O my brothers, my more than brothers—
Lost and gone are those days indeed:
Where are the bells, the gowns, the voices,
All that made us one blood and breed?
Gone—and in many an unknown pitfall
You have swinked, and died like men—
And here I sit in a quiet chamber
Writing on paper with a pen.

O my brothers, my more than brothers—
Big, intolerant, gallant boys!
Going to war as into a boatrace,
Full of laughter and fond of noise!
I can imagine your smile: how eager,
Nervous for the suspense to be done—
And I remember the Iffley meadows,
The crew alert for the starting gun.

Old grey city, O dear grey city,
How young we were, and how close to Truth!
We envied no one, we hated no one,

All was magical to our youth.
Still, in the hall of the Triple Roses,
The candel casts its ruddy span,
And still the garden gate discloses
The message *Manners Makyth Man*.

Then I recall that an Oxford college,
Setting a stone for those who have died,
Nobly remembered all her children—
Even those on the German side.
That was Oxford! and that was England!
Fight your enemy, fight him square;
But in justice, honour, and pity
Even the enemy has his share.
November 1916.

FOR THE PRESENT TIME

"If the trumpet speak with an uncertain sound,
Who shall prepare himself for the battle?"

In all this time of agony
How does this mighty nation drift:
Our blood is red upon the sea,
The foe is merciless and swift.
We doubt, we sway,
And day by day
Our hearts are thicker with distrust....
We would, should, could, can, may—we must!

So many divers voices call,
And cloud our souls with dull dismay:
O when shall cry, clear over all,
The Voice that none can disobey?
My country, speak!
In no oblique
Uncertain tone; be this our cry:
If Honour is not ours, we die.

My country, speak! They lie who say
That we are soft with love of home;
For still, in all the ancient way,
Our ships shall kiss the perilled foam.
Yea, slow to wrath,
But lo, our path
Leads straight at last, and blithe to tread:
We shall live better, having bled.
March 1917.

Dynamo of strength uncurbed,
Boundless might, undisciplined;
Energies still undisturbed,
Power, unharnessed as the wind—

Huge, inchoate commonweal,
Lo, at last we catch the thrill:
Now we found and forge the steel,
Scoop a channel for the will.

Here we stand; and destiny
Now admits us no retreat:
Hearts are braced from sea to sea,
Hark! I hear the marching feet!

Hills are moved; streams faster run;
Plumper kernels fill the wheat,
Now we dream and do as one....
Hark! I hear the marching feet!
March 1917.

ON VIMY RIDGE

"The Stars and Stripes went into battle at Vimy Ridge on the bayonet of a young Texan, fighting with a Canadian regiment."—News item.

On Vimy Ridge the Flag renewed
Her youth: the thunder of the guns
Recalled the crimson plenitude
Shed by her ancient sons.

Once more her white and scarlet bands
Were new-baptized with battle sweat:
She felt the clutch of desperate hands,
The push of bayonet.

Across that bloody snarl of wire
Her colors blossomed clean as flame:
The Bride of Glory, in desire
To meet her groom she came.

The lightning in her folds she kept,
The sky, the stars, the dew—
Impassioned, in her youth she swept
On Vimy, born anew!

HAY FEVER

If Rudyard Kipling Had It

If you can face a ragweed without sneezing
And walk undaunted past a stack of hay;
If you can find a field of daisies pleasing,
And not require ten handkerchiefs a day;
If you can stroll in meadowland and orchard
And greet the goldenrod with gay surprise,
And not be most abominably tortured
By swollen nose and bloodshot, flaming eyes;
If you can go on sneezing like a geyser
And never utter one unmeasured curse;
If you can squeeze the useless atomiser
Nor look with envy on each passing hearse;
If you can still be merry in September,
And not lay plans to drown yourself in drink,
Then your career is something to remember,
And you deserve an Iron Cross, I think!

HAY FEVER

If Amy Lowell Had It

Far away
In the third-floor-back of my skull
I feel a light, airy, prurient, menacing tickling,
Dainty as the pattering toes of nautch girls
On a polished cabaret floor.
Suddenly,
With a crescendo like an approaching express train,
The fury bursts upon me....
My brain explodes.
Pinwheels of violet fire
Whirl and spin before my bloodshot eyes—
Violet, puce, ochre, nacre, euchre ... all the other
Colours,
Including jade, umber and sienna.
My ears ring, my soul reels.
I tingle with agony.
Who invented goldenrod?
I wish I were dead.
Aaaaaaarrrrrrhhhaashoooo!

HAY FEVER

If Hilaire Belloc Had It

With this handkerchief and this nose
Seven million separate blows
Neighed I, brayed I, sobbed I, blew I,
Snorted I, wept I, mopped I, crew I,
Tickled I, prickled I, groaned and moaned I,
And for all my sins atoned I;
Raged I, sniffled I, and exploded,
And a speedy death foreboded,
Swayed I, prayed I, shook I, shouted I,
To expensive doctors touted I,
Gobbled I, hobbled I, atomised I,
Cursed I and philosophised I,
Worked I, shirked I, lay and lurked I,
And in horrid spasms jerked I,
Camphored, menthol'd, and cold creamed I
And asthmatic nightmares dreamed I,
Those who hate me highly pleased I,
And—I'll not conceal it—
SNEEZED I!

HAY FEVER

If Edgar Lee Masters Had It

Ed Grimes always did hate me
Because I wrote better poetry than he did.
In the hay fever season I used to walk
Along the river bank, to keep as far as possible
Away from pollen.
One day Ed and his brother crept up behind me
While I was writing a sonnet,
Tied my hands and feet,
And carried me into a hayfield and left me.
I sneezed myself to death.
At the funeral the church was full of goldenrod,
And I think it must have been Ed
Who sowed that ragweed all round my grave.

HYMN TO THE DAIRYMAIDS ON BEACON STREET

Sweetly solemn see them stand,
Spinning churns on either hand,
Neatly capped and aproned white—
Airy fairy dairy sight!

Jersey priestesses they seem
Miracleing milk to cream.

Cream solidifies to cheese
By Pasteural mysteries,
And they give, within their shrine,
Their communion in kine.

Incantations pure they mutter
O'er the golden minted butter
And (no layman hand can pen it)
See them gloat above their rennet!

By that hillside window pane
Rugged teamsters draw the rein,
Doff the battered hat and bow
To these acolytes of cow.

Genuflect, ye passersby!
Muse upon their ritual high—
Milk to cream, yea, cream to cheese
White lacteal mysteries!
Let adorers sing the word
Of the smoothly flowing curd.
Yea, we sing with bells and fife
This is the Whey, this is the Life!

ON FIRST LOOKING INTO A SUBWAY EXCAVATION

Much have I travelled, a commuter bold,
And many goodly excavations seen;
Round many miles of planking have I been
Which wops in fealty to contractors hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
Where dynamite had swept the traffic clean,
And every passer-by must duck his bean
Or flying rocks would lay him stiff and cold.
As I was crossing Broadway, with surprise
I held my breath and improvised a prayer:
I saw the solid street before me rise
And men and trolleys leap into the air.
I gazed into the pit with doubtful eyes,
Silent upon a peak in Herald Square.

BALLAD OF NEW AMSTERDAM

There are no bowls on Bowling Green,
No maids in Maiden lane;
The river path to Greenwich
No longer doth remain.
No longer in the Bouwerie
Stands Peter Stuyvesant his tree!

And yet the Dutchmen built their dorp
With sturdy wit and will;

In Nassau street their spectral feet
Are heard to echo still.
In many places sure I am
New York is still Nieuw Amsterdam.

Sometimes at night in Bowling Green
There comes a rumbling sound,
Which literal minds are wont to think
The Subway. But I found
That still the Dutchmen ease their souls
By playing ghostly games of bowls!

CASUALTY

A well-sharp'd pencil leads one on to write:
When guns are cocked, the shot is guaranteed;
The primed occasion puts the deed in sight:
Who steals a book who knows not how to read?

Seeing a pulpit, who can silence keep?
A maid, who would not dream her ta'en to wife?
Men looking down from some sheer dizzy steep
Have (quite impromptu) leapt, and ended life.

AT THE WOMEN'S CLUBS

A representation of what happens when Mr. Dunraven Dulcet, the gifted poet, reads some of his verses to an audience of two hundred ladies and one man. After Mr. Dulcet has been introduced, and after he has expressed his mortification (or is it gratification?) at Madam Chairman's kind remarks, he proceeds as follows. The comments of his audience are indicated in italics.

Romance abides in humble things:—
How commonplace the precious ore!
The shining vision sometimes springs

The one man:

From too much cheese the night before!

The man who seeks the True Romance
Among the high aristocrats,
Forgets the crowning circumstance

Mrs. Smith:

My dear, he wears the sweetest spats!

Some little gutter-dabbling child,
Some shabby clerk whom all despise—
On him Olympus may have smiled

Mrs. Brown:

He has those dark romantic eyes!

Some shimmer from the lusted dawn
Of hitherto unguessed to-morrows,
Imperishable laurels drawn

Mrs. Jones:

I think he must have secret sorrows!

Immeasurable arcs of sky,
Vast spaces where the great winds shout,
His eye must pierce, his hand must try....

Mrs. Robinson:

Too bad that he is growing stout!

His heart is like a parchment scroll
Whereon the beautiful, the true,
Are registered; and in his soul

Mrs. Smith:

I do love poetry, don't you?

Romance abides in humble things,
And humble people understand
That feathers from an angel's wings

Mrs. Brown:

I must just go and shake his hand!

ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY COAL-BIN

The furnace tolls the knell of falling steam,
The coal supply is virtually done,
And at this price, indeed it does not seem
As though we could afford another ton.

Now fades the glossy, cherished anthracite;
The radiators lose their temperature:
How ill avail, on such a frosty night,
The "short and simple flannels of the poor."

Though in the ice-box, fresh and newly laid,
The rude forefathers of the omelet sleep,
No eggs for breakfast till the bill is paid:
We cannot cook again till coal is cheap.

Can Morris-chair or papier-maché bust
Revivify the failing pressure-gauge?
Chop up the grand piano if you must,
And burn the East Aurora parrot-cage!

Full many a can of purest kerosene
The dark unfathomed tanks of Standard Oil
Shall furnish me, and with their aid I mean
To bring my morning coffee to a boil.

The village collier (flinty-hearted beast)
Who tried to hold me up in such a pinch
May soon be numbered with the dear deceased:
I give him to the mercy of Judge Lynch.

MOONS WE SAW AT SEVENTEEN

August casts her burning spell:
One vast sapphire is the sky;
Woods still have their musky smell,
By the pool the dragon fly
Like a jewelled scarf-pin glows.
Doris, Vera, and Kathleen—
Where are they? and where are those
Moons we saw at seventeen?

Bright as amber, and as round
As a new engagement ring—
(So we murmured, gently bound
To some flapper's leading string.)
Sweet and witless repartee:
Perilous canoes careen—
Telescopes would split, to see
MOONS we saw at seventeen!

AT THE DOG SHOW

To an Irish Wolf Hound

Long and grey and gaunt he lies,
A Lincoln among dogs; his eyes,
Deep and clear of sight, appraise
The meaningless and shuffling ways
Of human folk that stop to stare.
One witless woman seeing there
How tired, how contemptuous
He is of all the smell and fuss
Asks him, "Poor fellow, are you sick?"

Yea, sick, and weary to the quick
Of heat and noise from dawn to dark.
He will not even stoop to bark
His protest, like the lesser bred.
Would he might know, one gazer read
The wistful longing in his face,
The thirst for wind and open space
And stretch of limbs to him begrudged.
There came a little, dapper, fat
And bustling man, with cane and spat
And pearl-grey vest and derby hat—
Such were the judger and the judged!

THE OLD SWIMMER

I often wander on the beach
Where once, so brown of limb,

The biting air, the roaring surf
Summoned me to swim.

I see my old abundant youth
Where combers lean and spill,
And though I taste the foam no more
Other swimmers will.

Oh, good exultant strength to meet
The arching wall of green,
To break the crystal, swirl, emerge
Dripping, taut, and clean.

To climb the moving hilly blue,
To dive in ecstasy
And feel the salty chill embrace
Arm and rib and knee.

What brave and vanished laughter then
And tingling thighs to run,
What warm and comfortable sands
Dreaming in the sun.

The crumbling water spreads in snow,
The surf is hissing still,
And though I kiss the salt no more
Other swimmers will.

TO ALL MY FRIENDS

"There's nothing worth the wear of winning
But laughter and the love of friends."

—*Hilaire Belloc.*

If those who have been kind to me
Should ever chance these rhymes to see;
Then let them know, upon the spot,
Their kindnesses are not forgot!

If any worthy task was done,
The acts were never mine, not one:
For parent, teacher, wife or friend
Inspired the will, foresaw the end.

What sorrows do our friends avert!
How loyal, far beyond desert!
And yet how churlish, dumb and crude
Are all our words of gratitude.

Then O remember, *you* and YOU,
My old familiars, leal and true—
The love that bonded you and me
Is not forgot, will never be!

A GRUB STREET RECESSIONAL

O noble gracious English tongue
Whose fibres we so sadly twist,
For caitiff measures he has sung
Have pardon on the journalist.

For mumbled metre, leaden pun,
For slipshod rhyme, and lazy word,
Have pity on this graceless one—
Thy mercy on Thy servant, Lord!

The metaphors and tropes depart,
Our little clippings fade and bleach:
There is no virtue and no art
Save in straightforward Saxon speech.

Yet not in ignorance or spite,
Nor with Thy noble past forgot
We sinned: indeed we had to write
To keep a fire beneath the pot.

Then grant that in the coming time,
With inky hand and polished sleeve,
In lucid prose or honest rhyme
Some worthy task we may achieve—

Some pinnacled and marbled phrase,
Some lyric, breaking like the sea,
That we may learn, not hoping praise,
The gift of Thy simplicity.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SONGS FOR A LITTLE HOUSE ***

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