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VERSES ***

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**THE SONG
OF THE SWORD
AND OTHER VERSES**

BY

W. E. HENLEY

LONDON

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in the Strand
1892

To R. T. Hamilton-Bruce

p. vii

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**THE SONG OF THE SWORD
(To Rudyard Kipling)**

p. 1

The Sword

p. 3

Singing—

The voice of the Sword from the heart of the Sword

Clanging imperious

Forth from Time's battlements

His ancient and triumphing Song.

In the beginning,
Ere God inspired Himself
Into the clay thing
Thumbed to His image,
The vacant, the naked shell
Soon to be Man:
Thoughtful He pondered it,
Prone there and impotent,
Fragile, inviting
Attack and discomfiture:
Then, with a smile—
As He heard in the Thunder

p. 4

That laughed over Eden
The voice of the Trumpet,
The iron Beneficence,
Calling His dooms
To the Winds of the world—
Stooping, He drew
On the sand with His finger
A shape for a sign
Of His way to the eyes
That in wonder should waken,
For a proof of His will
To the breaking intelligence:
That was the birth of me:
I am the Sword.

p. 5

Hard and bleak, keen and cruel,
Short-hilted, long-shafted,
I froze into steel:
And the blood of my elder,
His hand on the hafts of me,
Sprang like a wave
In the wind, as the sense
Of his strength grew to ecstasy,
Glowed like a coal
At the throat of the furnace,
As he knew me and named me
The War-Thing, the Comrade,
Father of honour
And giver of kingship,
The fame-smith, the song-master,
Bringer of women
On fire at his hands
For the pride of fulfilment,
Priest (saith the Lord)
Of his marriage with victory.
Ho! then, the Trumpet,
Handmaid of heroes,
Calling the peers
To the place of espousal!
Ho! then, the splendour
And sheen of my ministry,
Clothing the earth
With a livery of lightnings!
Ho! then, the music
Of battles in onset
And ruining armours,
And God's gift returning
In fury to God!
Glittering and keen
As the song of the winter stars,
Ho! then, the sound
Of my voice, the implacable
Angel of Destiny!—
I am the Sword.

p. 6

p. 7

Heroes, my children,
Follow, O follow me,
Follow, exulting
In the great light that breaks
From the sacred companionship:
Thrust through the fatuous,
Thrust through the fungous brood
Spawned in my shadow
And gross with my gift!
Thrust through, and hearken,
O hark, to the Trumpet,
The Virgin of Battles,
Calling, still calling you
Into the Presence,
Sons of the Judgment,
Pure wafts of the Will!
Edged to annihilate,
Hilted with government,
Follow, O follow me
Till the waste places

p. 8

All the grey globe over
Ooze, as the honeycomb
Drips, with the sweetness
Distilled of my strength:
And, teeming in peace
Through the wrath of my coming,
They give back in beauty
The dread and the anguish
They had of me visitant!
Follow, O follow, then,
Heroes, my harvesters!
Where the tall grain is ripe
Thrust in your sickles:
Stripped and adust
In a stubble of empire,
Scything and binding
The full sheaves of sovranity:
Thus, O thus gloriously,
Shall you fulfil yourselves:
Thus, O thus mightily,
Show yourselves sons of mine—
Yea, and win grace of me:
I am the Sword.

p. 9

I am the feast-maker:
Hark, through a noise
Of the screaming of eagles,
Hark how the Trumpet,
The mistress of mistresses,
Calls, silver-throated
And stern, where the tables
Are spread, and the work
Of the Lord is in hand!
Driving the darkness,
Even as the banners
And spears of the Morning;
Sifting the nations,
The slag from the metal,
The waste and the weak
From the fit and the strong;
Fighting the brute,
The abysmal Fecundity;
Checking the gross,
Multitudinous blunders,
The groping, the purblind
Excesses in service,
Of the Womb universal,
The absolute Drudge;
Changing the charactry
Carved on the World,
The miraculous gem
In the seal-ring that burns
On the hand of the Master—
Yea! and authority
Flames through the dim,
Unappeasable Grisliness
Prone down the nethermost
Chasms of the Void;
Clear singing, clean slicing;
Sweet spoken, soft finishing;
Making death beautiful,
Life but a coin
To be staked in the pastime
Whose playing is more
Than the transfer of being;
Arch-anarch, chief builder,
Prince and evangelist,
I am the Will of God:
I am the Sword.

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p. 12

The Sword
Singing—
The voice of the Sword from the heart of the Sword
Clanging majestic,
As from the starry-staired

**LONDON
VOLUNTARIES
(To Charles Whibley)**

p. 13

I

p. 15

Andante con moto

Forth from the dust and din,
The crush, the heat, the many-spotted glare,
The odour and sense of life and lust aflare,
The wrangle and jangle of unrests,
Let us take horse, dear heart, take horse and win—
As from swart August to the green lap of May—
To quietness and the fresh and fragrant breasts
Of the still, delicious night, not yet aware
In any of her innumerable nests
Of that first sudden splash of dawn,
Clear, sapphirine, luminous, large,
Which tells that soon the flowing springs of day
In deep and ever deeper eddies drawn
Forward and up, in wider and wider way
Shall float the sands and brim the shores
On this our haunch of Earth, as round she roars
And spins into the outlook of the Sun
(The Lord's first gift, the Lord's especial charge)
With light, with living light, from marge to marge,
Until the course He set and staked be run.

p. 16

Through street and square, through square and street,
Each with his home-grown quality of dark
And violated silence, loud and fleet,
Waylaid by a merry ghost at every lamp,
The hansom wheels and plunges. Hark, O hark,
Sweet, how the old mare's bit and chain
Ring back a rough refrain
Upon the marked and cheerful tramp
Of her four shoes! Here is the Park,
And O the languid midsummer wafts adust,
The tired midsummer blooms!
O the mysterious distances, the glooms
Romantic, the august
And solemn shapes! At night this City of Trees
Tunis to a tryst of vague and strange
And monstrous Majesties,
Let loose from some dim underworld to range
These terrene vistas till their twilight sets:
When, dispossessed of wonderfulness, they stand
Beggared and common, plain to all the land
For stooks of leaves! And lo! the wizard hour
Whose shining, silent sorcery hath such power!
Still, still the streets, between their carcanets
Of linking gold, are avenues of sleep:
But see how gable ends and parapets
In gradual beauty and significance
Emerge! And did you hear
That little twitter-and-cheep,
Breaking inordinately loud and clear
On this still, spectral, exquisite atmosphere?
'Tis a first nest at matins! And behold
A rakehell cat—how furtive and acold!
A spent witch homing from some infamous dance—
Obscene, quick-trotting, see her tip and fade
Through shadowy railings into a pit of shade!
And lo! a little wind and shy,
The smell of ships (that earnest of romance),
A sense of space and water, and thereby

p. 17

p. 18

A lamplit bridge ouching the troubled sky.
And look, O look! a tangle of silver gleams
And dusky lights, our River and all his dreams,
His dreams of a dead past that cannot die!

p. 19

What miracle is happening in the air,
Charging the very texture of the gray
With something luminous and rare?
The night goes out like an ill-parcelled fire,
And, as one lights a candle, it is day.
The extinguisher that fain would strut for spire
On the formal little church is not yet green
Across the water: but the house-tops nigher,
The corner-lines, the chimneys—look how clean,
How new, how naked! See the batch of boats,
Here at the stairs, washed in the fresh-sprung beam!
And those are barges that were goblin floats,
Black, hag-steered, fraught with devilry and dream!
And in the piles the water frolics clear,
The ripples into loose rings wander and flee,
And we—we can behold that could but hear
The ancient River singing as he goes
New-mailed in morning to the ancient Sea.
The gas burns lank and jaded in its glass:
The old Ruffian soon shall yawn himself awake,
And light his pipe, and shoulder his tools, and take
His hobnailed way to work!

p. 20

Let us too pass:

Through these long blindfold rows
Of casements staring blind to right and left,
Each with his gaze turned inward on some piece
Of life in death's own likeness—Life bereft
Of living looks as by the Great Release
(Perchance of shadow-shapes from shadow-shows),
Whose upshot all men know yet no man knows.

Reach upon reach of burial—so they feel,
These colonies of dreams! And as we steal
Homeward together, but for the buxom breeze
That frolics at our heel,
Greeting the town with news of the summer seas,
We might—thus awed, thus lonely that we are—
Be wandering some depopulated star,
Some world of memories and unbroken graves,
So broods the abounding Silence near and far:
Till even your footfall craves
Forgiveness of the majesty it braves.

p. 21

II

p. 22

Scherzando

Down through the ancient Strand
The Spirit of October, mild and boon
And sauntering, takes his way
This golden end of afternoon,
As though the corn stood yellow in all the land
And the ripe apples dropped to the harvest-moon.

Lo! the round sun, half down the western slope—
Seen as along an unglazed telescope—
Lingers and lolls, loth to be done with day:
Gifting the long, lean, lanky street
And its abounding confluences of being
With aspects generous and bland:
Making a thousand harnesses to shine
As with new ore from some enchanted mine,
And every horse's coat so full of sheen
He looks new-tailored, and every 'bus feels clean,
And never a hansom but is worth the feeing;
And every jeweller within the pale
Offers a real Arabian Night for sale;
And even the roar
Of the strong streams of toil that pause and pour
Eastward and westward sounds suffused—
Seems as it were bemused

p. 23

And blurred, and like the speech
Of lazy seas upon a lotus-eating beach—
With this enchanted lustrousness,
This mellow magic, that (as a man's caress
Brings back to some faded face beloved before
A heavenly shadow of the grace it wore
Ere the poor eyes were minded to beseech)
Old things transfigures, and you hail and bless
Their looks of long-lapsed loveliness once more;
Till the sedate and mannered elegance
Of Clement's is all tintured with romance;
The while the fanciful, formal, finicking charm
Of Bride's, that madrigal in stone,
Glowed flushed and warm
And beauteous with a beauty not its own;
And the high majesty of Paul's
Uplifts a voice of living light, and calls—
Calls to his millions to behold and see
How goodly this his London Town can be!

p. 24

For earth and sky and air
Are golden everywhere,
And golden with a gold so suave and fine
The looking on it lifts the heart like wine.
Trafalgar Square
(The fountains volleying golden glaze)
Gleams like an angel-market. High aloft
Over his couchant Lions in a haze
Shimmering and bland and soft,
A dust of chrysoprase,
Our Sailor takes the golden gaze
Of the saluting sun, and flames superb
As once he flamed it on his ocean round.
The dingy dreariness of the picture-place,
Turned very nearly bright,
Takes on a certain dismal grace,
And shows not all a scandal to the ground.
The very blind man pottering on the kerb,
Among the posies and the ostrich feathers
And the rude voices touched with all the weathers
Of all the varying year,
Shares in the universal alms of light.
The windows, with their fleeting, flickering fires,
The height and spread of frontage shining sheer,
The glistening signs, the rejoicing roofs and spires—
'Tis El Dorado—El Dorado plain,
The Golden City! And when a girl goes by,
Look! as she turns her glancing head,
A call of gold is floated from her ear!
Golden, all golden! In a golden glory,
Long lapsing down a golden coasted sky,
The day not dies but seems
Dispersed in wafts and drifts of gold, and shed
Upon a past of golden song and story
And memories of gold and golden dreams.

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III

p. 27

Largo e mesto

Out of the poisonous East,
Over a continent of blight,
Like a maleficent Influence released
From the most squalid cellarage of hell,
The Wind-Fiend, the abominable—
The hangman wind that tortures temper and light—
Comes slouching, sullen and obscene,
Hard on the skirts of the embittered night:
And in a cloud unclean
Of excremental humours, roused to strife
By the operation of some ruinous change
Wherever his evil mandate run and range
Into a dire intensity of life,
A craftsman at his bench, he settles down
To the grim job of throttling London Town.

p. 28

And, by a jealous lightlessness beset
That might have oppressed the dragons of old time
Crunching and groping in the abysmal slime,
A cave of cut-throat thoughts and villainous dreams,
Hag-rid and crying with cold and dirt and wet,
The afflicted city, prone from mark to mark
In shameful occultation, seems
A nightmare labyrinthine, dim and drifting,
With wavering gulfs and antic heights and shifting
Rent in the stuff of a material dark
Wherein the lamplight, scattered and sick and pale,
Shows like the leper's living blotch of bale:
Uncoiling monstrous into street on street
Paven with perils, teeming with mischance,
Where man and beast go blindfold and in dread,
Working with oaths and threats and faltering feet
Somewhither in the hideousness ahead;
Working through wicked airs and deadly dews
That make the laden robber grin askance
At the good places in his black romance,
And the poor, loitering harlot rather choose
Go pinched and pined to bed
Than lurk and shiver and curse her wretched way
From arch to arch, scouting some threepenny prey.

p. 29

Forgot his dawns and far-flushed afterglows,
His green garlands and windy eyots forgot,
The old Father-River flows,
His watchfires cores of menace in the gloom,
As he came oozing from the Pit, and bore,
Sunk in his filthily transfigured sides,
Shoals of dishonoured dead to tumble and rot
In the squalor of the universal shore:
His voices sounding through the gruesome air
As from the ferry where the Boat of Doom
With her blaspheming cargo reels and rides:
The while his children, the brave ships,
No more adventurous and fair
Nor tripping it light of heel as home-bound brides,
But infamously enchanted,
Huddle together in the foul eclipse,
Or feel their course by inches desperately,
As through a tangle of alleys murder-haunted,
From sinister reach to reach—out—out—to sea.

p. 30

And Death the while—
Death with his well-worn, lean, professional smile,
Death in his threadbare working trim—
Comes to your bedside, unannounced and bland,
And with expert, inevitable hand
Feels at your windpipe, fingers you in the lung,
Or flicks the clot well into the labouring heart:
Thus signifying unto old and young,
However hard of mouth or wild of whim,
'Tis time—'tis time by his ancient watch—to part
With books and women and talk and drink and art:
And you go humbly after him
To a mean suburban lodging: on the way
To what or where
Not Death, who is old and very wise, can say:
And you—how should you care
So long as, unreclaimed of hell,
The Wind-Fiend, the insufferable,
Thus vicious and thus patient sits him down
To the black job of burking London Town?

p. 31

IV

p. 32

Allegro maestoso

Spring winds that blow
As over leagues of myrtle-blooms and may;
Bevies of spring clouds trooping slow,
Like matrons heavy-bosomed and aglow
With the mild and placid pride of increase! Nay,

What makes this insolent and comely stream
Of appetite, this freshet of desire
(Milk from the wild breasts of the wilful Day!),
Down Piccadilly dance and murmur and gleam
In genial wave on wave and gyre on gyre?
Why does that nymph unparalleled splash and churn
The wealth of her enchanted urn
Till, over-billowing all between
Her cheerful margents grey and living green,
It floats and wanders, glittering and fleeing,
An estuary of the joy of being?
Why should the buxom leafage of the Park
Touch to an ecstasy the act of seeing?
—As if my paramour, my bride of brides,
Lingering and flushed, mysteriously abides
In some dim, eye-proof angle of odorous dark,
Some smiling nook of green-and-golden shade,
In the divine conviction robed and crowned
The globe fulfils his immemorial round
But as the marrying-place of all things made!

p. 33

There is no man, this deifying day,
But feels the primal blessing in his blood.
The sacred impulse of the May
Brightening like sex made sunshine through her veins,
There is no woman but disdains
To veil the ensigns of her womanhood.
None but, rejoicing, flaunts them as she goes,
Bounteous in looks of her delicious best,
On her inviolable quest:
These with their hopes, with their sweet secrets those,
But all desirable and frankly fair,
As each were keeping some most prosperous tryst,
And in the knowledge went imparadised.
For look! a magical influence everywhere,
Look how the liberal and transfiguring air
Washes this inn of memorable meetings,
This centre of ravishments and gracious greetings,
Till, through its jocund loveliness of length
A tidal-race of lust from shore to shore,
A brimming reach of beauty met with strength,
It shines and sounds like some miraculous dream,
Some vision multitudinous and agleam,
Of happiness as it shall be evermore!

p. 34

p. 35

Praise God for giving
Through this His messenger among the days
His word the life He gave is thrice-worth living!
For Pan, the bountiful, imperious Pan—
Not dead, not dead, as dreamers feigned,
But the lush genius of a million Mays
Renewing his beneficent endeavour!—
Still reigns and triumphs, as he hath triumphed and reigned
Since in the dim blue dawn of time
The universal ebb-and-flow began,
To sound his ancient music, and prevails
By the persuasion of his mighty rhyme
Here in this radiant and immortal street
Lavishly and omnipotently as ever
In the open hills, the undissembling dales,
The laughing-places of the juvenile earth.
For lo! the wills of man and woman meet,
Meet and are moved, each unto each endeared
As once in Eden's prodigal bowers befell,
To share his shameless, elemental mirth
In one great act of faith, while deep and strong,
Incomparably nerved and cheered,
The enormous heart of London joys to beat
To the measures of his rough, majestic song:
The lewd, perennial, overmastering spell
That keeps the rolling universe ensphered
And life and all for which life lives to long
Wanton and wondrous and for ever well.

p. 36

RHYMES AND RHYTHMS

p. 37

I

p. 39

Where forlorn sunsets flare and fade
On desolate sea and lonely sand,
Out of the silence and the shade
What is the voice of strange command
Calling you still, as friend calls friend
With love that cannot brook delay,
To rise and follow the ways that wend
Over the hills and far away?

Hark in the city, street on street
A roaring reach of death and life,
Of vortices that clash and fleet
And ruin in appointed strife,
Hark to it calling, calling clear,
Calling until you cannot stay
From dearer things than your own most dear
Over the hills and far away.

p. 40

Out of the sound of ebb and flow,
Out of the sight of lamp and star,
It calls you where the good winds blow,
And the unchanging meadows are:
From faded hopes and hopes a gleam,
It calls you, calls you night and day
Beyond the dark into the dream
Over the hills and far away.

II

p. 41

A desolate shore,
The sinister seduction of the Moon,
The menace of the irreclaimable Sea.

Flaunting, tawdry and grim,
From cloud to cloud along her beat,
Leering her battered and inveterate leer,
She signals where he prowls in the dark alone,
Her horrible old man,
Mumbling old oaths and warming
His villainous old bones with villainous talk—
The secrets of their grisly housekeeping
Since they went out upon the pad
In the first twilight of self-conscious Time:
Growling, obscene and hoarse,
Tales of unnumbered Ships,
Goodly and strong, Companions of the Advance
In some vile alley of the night
Waylaid and bludgeoned—
Dead.

p. 42

Deep cellared in primeval ooze,
Ruined, dishonoured, spoiled,
They lie where the lean water-worm
Crawls free of their secrets, and their broken sides
Bulge with the slime of life. Thus they abide,
Thus fouled and desecrate,
The summons of the Trumpet, and the while
These Twain, their murderers,
Unravined, imperturbable, unsubdued,
Hang at the heels of their children—She aloft
As in the shining streets,
He as in ambush at some fetid stair.

p. 43

The stalwart Ships,
The beautiful and bold adventurers!
Stationed out yonder in the isle,
The tall Policeman,
Flashing his bull's-eye, as he peers

About him in the ancient vacancy,
Tells them this way is safety—this way home.

III (To R. F. B.)

p. 44

We are the Choice of the Will: God, when He gave the word
That called us into line, set in our hand a sword;

Set us a sword to wield none else could lift and draw,
And bade us forth to the sound of the trumpet of the Law.

East and west and north, wherever the battle grew,
As men to a feast we fared, the work of the Will to do.

Bent upon vast beginnings, bidding anarchy cease—
(Had we hacked it to the Pit, we had left it a place of peace!)

p. 45

Marching, building, sailing, pillar of cloud or fire,
Sons of the Will, we fought the fight of the Will, our sire.

Road was never so rough that we left its purpose dark;
Stark was ever the sea, but our ships were yet more stark;

We tracked the winds of the world to the steps of their very thrones;
The secret parts of the world were salted with our bones;

Till now the name of names, England, the name of might,
Flames from the austral bounds to the ends of the northern night;

p. 46

And the call of her morning drum goes in a girdle of sound,
Like the voice of the sun in song, the great globe round and round;

And the shadow of her flag, when it shouts to the mother-breeze,
Floats from shore to shore of the universal seas;

And the loneliest death is fair with a memory of her flowers,
And the end of the road to Hell with the sense of her dews and showers!

Who says that we shall pass, or the fame of us fade and die,
While the living stars fulfil their round in the living sky?

p. 47

For the sire lives in his sons, and they pay their father's debt,
And the Lion has left a whelp wherever his claw was set:

And the Lion in his whelps, his whelps that none shall brave,
Is but less strong than Time and the all-devouring Grave.

IV

p. 48

It came with the threat of a waning moon
And the wail of an ebbing tide,
But many a woman has lived for less,
And many a man has died;
For life upon life took hold and passed,
Strong in a fate set free,
Out of the deep, into the dark,
On for the years to be.

Between the gleam of a waning moon
And the song of an ebbing tide,
Chance upon chance of love and death
Took wing for the world so wide.
Leaf out of leaf is the way of the land,
Wave out of wave of the sea;
And who shall reckon what lives may live
In the life that we bade to be?

p. 49

V

p. 50

Why, my heart, do we love her so?
(Geraldine, Geraldine!)—
Why does the great sea ebb and flow?
Why does the round world spin?
Geraldine, Geraldine,
Bid me my life renew,
What is it worth unless I win,
Love—love and you?

Why, my heart, when we speak her name
(Geraldine, Geraldine!),
Throbs the word like a flinging flame?—
Why does the spring begin?
Geraldine, Geraldine,
Bid me indeed to be,
Open your heart and take us in,
Love—love and me.

p. 51

VI

p. 52

Space and dread and the dark—
Over a livid stretch of sky
Cloud-monsters crawling like a funeral train
Of huge primeval presences
Stooping beneath the weight
Of some enormous, rudimentary grief;
While in the haunting loneliness
The far sea waits and wanders, with a sound
As of the trailing skirts of Destiny
Passing unseen
To some immitigable end
With her grey henchman, Death.

p. 53

What larve, what spectre is this
Thrilling the wilderness to life
As with the bodily shape of Fear?
What but a desperate sense,
A strong foreboding of those dim,
Interminable continents, forlorn
And many-silenced in a dusk
Inviolable utterly, and dead
As the poor dead it huddles and swarms and styies
In hugger-mugger through eternity?

Life—life—let there be life!
Better a thousand times the roaring hours
When wave and wind,
Like the Arch-Murderer in flight
From the Avenger at his heel,
Storm through the desolate fastnesses
And wild waste places of the world!

p. 54

Life—give me life until the end,
That at the very top of being,
The battle-spirit shouting in my blood,
Out of the reddest hell of the fight
I may be snatched and flung
Into the everlasting lull,
The immortal, incommunicable dream.

VII

p. 55

There's a regret
So grinding, so immitigably sad,
Remorse thereby feels tolerant, even glad. . . .
Do you not know it yet?

For deeds undone
Rankle, and snarl, and hunger for their due
Till there seems naught so despicable as you
In all the grin o' the sun.

Like an old shoe
The sea spurns and the land abhors, you lie
About the beach of Time, till by-and-by
Death, that derides you too—

Death, as he goes
His ragman's round, espies you, where you stray,
With half-an-eye, and kicks you out of his way;
And then—and then, who knows

p. 56

But the kind Grave
Turns on you, and you feel the convict Worm,
In that black bridewell working out his term,
Hanker and grope and crave?

'Poor fool that might—
That might, yet would not, dared not, let this be,
Think of it, here and thus made over to me
In the implacable night!'

And writhing, fain
And like a lover, he his fill shall take
Where no triumphant memory lives to make
His obscene victory vain.

VIII (To J. A. C.)

p. 57

Fresh from his fastnesses
Wholesome and spacious,
The north wind, the mad huntsman,
Halloos on his white hounds
Over the grey, roaring
Reaches and ridges,
The forest of ocean,
The chace of the world.
Hark to the peal
Of the pack in full cry,
As he thongs them before him
Swarming voluminous,
Weltering, wide-wallowing,
Till in a ruining
Chaos of energy,
Hurled on their quarry,
They crash into foam!

p. 58

Old Indefatigable,
Time's right-hand man, the sea
Laughs as in joy
From his millions of wrinkles:
Laughs that his destiny,
Great with the greatness
Of triumphing order,
Shows as a dwarf
By the strength of his heart
And the might of his hands.

Master of masters,
O maker of heroes,
Thunder the brave,
Irresistible message:—
'Life is worth living
Through every grain of it
From the foundations
To the last edge
Of the cornerstone, death.'

p. 59

IX

p. 60

'As like the Woman as you can'—
(*Thus the New Adam was beguiled*)—
'So shall you touch the Perfect Man'—
(*God in the Garden heard and smiled*).
'Your father perished with his day:
'A clot of passions fierce and blind
'He fought, he slew, he hacked his way:
'Your muscles, Child, must be of mind.

'The Brute that lurks and irks within,
'How, till you have him gagged and bound,
'Escape the foulest form of Sin?'
(*God in the Garden laughed and frowned*).
'So vile, so rank, the bestial mood
'In which the race is bid to be,
'It wrecks the Rarer Womanhood:
'Live, therefore, you, for Purity!

p. 61

'Take for your mate no buxom croup,
'No girl all grace and natural will:
'To make her happy were to stoop
'From light to dark, from Good to Ill.

'Choose one of whom your grosser make'—
(*God in the Garden laughed outright*)—
'The true refining touch may take
'Till both attain Life's highest height.

'There, equal, purged of soul and sense,
'Beneficent, high-thinking, just,
'Beyond the appeal of Violence,
'Incapable of common Lust,
'In mental Marriage still prevail'—
(*God in the Garden hid His face*)—
'Till you achieve that Female-Male,
'In Which shall culminate the race.

p. 62

X

p. 63

Midsummer midnight skies,
Midsummer midnight influences and airs,
The shining sensitive silver of the sea
Touched with the strange-hued blazonings of dawn:
And all so solemnly still I seem to hear
The breathing of Life and Death,
The secular Accomplices,
Renewing the visible miracle of the world.

The wistful stars
Shine like good memories. The young morning wind
Blows full of unforgotten hours
As over a region of roses. Life and Death
Sound on—sound on. . . . And the night magical,
Troubled yet comforting, thrills
As if the Enchanted Castle at the heart
Of the wood's dark wonderment
Swung wide his valves and filled the dim sea-banks
With exquisite visitants:
Words fiery-hearted yet, dreams and desires
With living looks intolerable, regrets
Whose voice comes as the voice of an only child
Heard from the grave: shapes of a Might-Have-Been—
Beautiful, miserable, distraught—
The Law no man may baffle denied and slew.

p. 64

The spell-bound ships stand as at gaze
To let the marvel by. The grey road glooms . . .
Glimmers . . . goes out . . . and there, O there where it fades,
What grace, what glamour, what wild will,
Transfigure the shadows? Whose,
Heart of my heart, Soul of my soul, but yours?

p. 65

Ghosts—ghosts—the sapphirine air
Teems with them even to the gleaming ends
Of the wild day-spring! Ghosts,
Everywhere—everywhere—till I and you
At last—dear love, at last!—
Are in the dreaming, even as Life and Death,
Twin-ministers of the unoriginal Will.

XI

p. 66

Gulls in an aëry morrice
Gleam and vanish and gleam . . .
The full sea, sleepily basking,
Dreams under skies of dream.

Gulls in an aëry morrice
Circle and swoop and close . . .
Fuller and ever fuller
The rose of the morning blows.

Gulls in an aëry morrice
Frolicking float and fade . . .
O the way of a bird in the sunshine,
The way of a man with a maid!

XII

p. 67

Some starlit garden grey with dew,
Some chamber flushed with wine and fire,
What matters where, so I and you
Are worthy our desire?

Behind, a past that scolds and jeers
For ungirt loin and lamp unlit;
In front the unmanageable years,
The trap upon the pit;

Think on the shame of dreams for deeds,
The scandal of unnatural strife,
The slur upon immortal needs,
The treason done to life:

Arise! no more a living lie
And with me quicken and control
A memory that shall magnify
The universal Soul.

p. 68

XIII **(To James McNeill Whistler)**

p. 69

Under a stagnant sky,
Gloom out of gloom uncoiling into gloom,
The River, jaded and forlorn,
Welters and wanders wearily—wretchedly—on;
Yet in and out among the ribs
Of the old skeleton bridge, as in the piles
Of some dead lake-built city, fall of skulls,
Worm-worn, rat-riddled, mouldy with memories,
Lingers to babble, to a broken tune
(Once, O the unvoiced music of my heart!)
So melancholy a soliloquy
It sounds as it might tell
The secret of the unending grief-in-grain,
The terror of Time and Change and Death,
That wastes this floating, transitory world.

p. 70

What of the incantation
That forced the huddled shapes on yonder short
To take and wear the night
Like a material majesty?
That touched the shafts of wavering fire
About this miserable welter and wash—
(River, O River of Journeys, River of Dreams!—)
Into long, shining signals from the panes
Of an enchanted pleasure-house
Where life and life might live life lost in life
For ever and evermore?

O Death! O Change! O Time!
Without you, O the insufferable eyes
Of these poor Might-Have-Beens,
These fatuous, ineffectual Yesterdays!

XIV

p. 71

Time and the Earth—
The old Father and Mother—
Their teeming accomplished,
Their purpose fulfilled,
Close with a smile
For a moment of kindness
Ere for the winter
They settle to sleep.

Failing yet gracious,
Slow pacing, soon homing,
A patriarch that strolls
Through the tents of his children,
The Sun, as he journeys
His round on the lower
Ascents of the blue,
Washes the roofs
And the hillsides with clarity;

p. 72

Charms the dark pools
Till they break into pictures;
Scatters magnificent
Alms to the beggar trees;
Touches the mist-folk
That crowd to his escort
Into translucencies
Radiant and ravishing,
As with the visible
Spirit of Summer
Gloriously vaporised,
Visioned in gold.

Love, though the fallen leaf
Mark, and the fleeting light
And the loud, loitering
Footfall of darkness
Sign, to the heart
Of the passage of destiny,
Here is the ghost
Of a summer that lived for us,
Here is a promise
Of summers to be.

p. 73

XV

p. 74

You played and sang a snatch of song,
A song that all-too well we knew;
But whither had flown the ancient wrong;
And was it really I and you?
O since the end of life's to live
And pay in pence the common debt,
What should it cost us to forgive
Whose daily task is to forget?

You babbled in the well-known voice—
Not new, not new, the words you said.
You touched me off that famous poise,
That old effect, of neck and head.
Dear, was it really you and I?
In truth the riddle's ill to read,
So many are the deaths we die
Before we can be dead indeed.

p. 75

XVI

p. 76

One with the ruined sunset,
The strange forsaken sands,
What is it waits and wanders
And signs with desperate hands?

What is it calls in the twilight—
Calls as its chance were vain?
The cry of a gull sent seaward
Or the voice of an ancient pain?

The red ghost of the sunset,
It walks them as its own,
These dreary and desolate reaches . . .
But O that it walked alone!

XVII

p. 77

CARMEN PATIBULARE **(To H. S.)**

Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Crook
And the rope of the Black Election,
'Tis the faith of the Fool that a race you rule
Can never achieve perfection:
And 'It's O for the time of the New Sublime
And the better than human way
When the Wolf (poor beast) shall come to his own
And the Rat shall have his day!'

For Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Beam

And the power of provocation,
You have cockered the Brute with your dreadful fruit
Till your thought is mere stupration:
And 'It's how should we rise to be pure and wise,
And how can we choose but fall,
So long as the Hangman makes us dread
And the Noose floats free for all?'

p. 78

So Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Coign
And the trick there's no recalling,
They will haggle and hew till they hack you through
And at last they lay you sprawling:
When 'Hey! for the hour of the race in flower
And the long good-bye to sin!'
And 'Ho! for the fires of Hell gone out
For the want of keeping in!'

But Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Bough
And the ghastly Dreams that tend you,
Your growth began with the life of Man
And only his death can end you:
They may tug in line at your hempen twine,
They may flourish with axe and saw,
But your taproot drinks of the Sacred Springs
In the living rock of Law.

p. 79

And Tree, Old Tree of the Triple Fork,
When the spent sun reels and blunders
Down a welkin lit with the flare of the Pit
As it seethes in spate and thunders,
Stern on the glare of the tortured air
Your lines august shall gloom,
And your master-beam be the last thing whelmed
In the ruining roar of Doom.

XVIII **(To M. E. H.)**

p. 80

When you wake in your crib,
You, an inch of experience—
Vaulted about
With the wonder of darkness;
Wailing and striving
To reach from your feebleness
Something you feel
Will be good to and cherish you,
Something you know
And can rest upon blindly:
O then a hand
(Your mother's, your mother's!)
By the fall of its fingers
All knowledge, all power to you,
Out of the dreary,
Discouraging strangenesses
Comes to and masters you,
Takes you, and lovingly
Woos you and soothes you
Back, as you cling to it,
Back to some comforting
Corner of sleep.

p. 81

So you wake in your bed,
Having lived, having loved:
But the shadows are there,
And the world and its kingdoms
Incredibly faded;
And you grope in the Terror
Above you and under
For the light, for the warmth,
The assurance of life;
But the blasts are ice-born,
And your heart is nigh burst
With the weight of the gloom
And the stress of your strangled
And desperate endeavour:
Sudden a hand—

p. 82

Mother, O Mother!—
God at His best to you,
Out of the roaring,
Impossible silences,
Falls on and urges you,
Mightily, tenderly,
Forth, as you clutch at it,
Forth to the infinite
Peace of the Grave.

XIX

p. 83

O Time and Change, they range and range
From sunshine round to thunder!—
They glance and go as the great winds blow,
And the best of our dreams drive under:
For Time and Change estrange, estrange—
And, now they have looked and seen us,
O we that were dear we are all-too near
With the thick of the world between us.

O Death and Time, they chime and chime
Like bells at sunset falling!—
They end the song, they right the wrong,
They set the old echoes calling:
For Death and Time bring on the prime
Of God's own chosen weather,
And we lie in the peace of the Great Release
As once in the grass together.

p. 84

XX

p. 85

The shadow of Dawn;
Stillness and stars and over-mastering dreams
Of Life and Death and Sleep;
Heard over gleaming flats the old unchanging sound
Of the old unchanging Sea.

My soul and yours—
O hand in hand let us fare forth, two ghosts,
Into the ghostliness,
The infinite and abounding solitudes,
Beyond—O beyond!—beyond . . .

Here in the porch
Upon the multitudinous silences
Of the kingdoms of the grave,
We twain are you and I—two ghosts Omnipotence
Can touch no more—no more!

p. 86

XXI

p. 87

When the wind storms by with a shout, and the stern sea-caves
Exult in the tramp and the roar of onsetting waves,
Then, then, it comes home to the heart that the top of life
Is the passion that burns the blood in the act of strife—
Till you pity the dead down there in their quiet graves.

But to drowse with the fen behind and the fog before,
When the rain-rot spreads and a tame sea mumbles the shore,
Not to adventure, none to fight, no right and no wrong,
Sons of the Sword heart-sick for a stave of your sire's old song—
O you envy the blessed dead that can live no more!

p. 88

XXII

p. 89

Trees and the menace of night;
Then a long, lonely, leaden mere
Backed by a desolate fell
As by a spectral battlement; and then,
Low-brooding, interpenetrating all,
A vast, grey, listless, inexpressive sky,
So beggared, so incredibly bereft
Of starlight and the song of racing worlds
It might have bellied down upon the Void

Where as in terror Light was beginning to be.

Hist! In the trees fulfilled of night
(Night and the wretchedness of the sky)
Is it the hurry of the rain?
Or the noise of a drive of the Dead
Streaming before the irresistible Will
Through the strange dusk of this, the Debateable Land
Between their place and ours?

p. 90

Like the forgetfulness
Of the work-a-day world made visible,
A mist falls from the melancholy sky:
A messenger from some lost and loving soul,
Hopeless, far wandered, dazed
Here in the provinces of life,
A great white moth fades miserably past.

Thro' the trees in the strange dead night,
Under the vast dead sky,
Forgetting and forgot, a drift of Dead
Sets to the mystic mere, the phantom fell,
And the unimagined vastitudes beyond.

p. 91

XXIII (To P. A. G.)

p. 92

Here they trysted, here they strayed,
In the leafage dewy and boon,
Many a man and many a maid,
And the morn was merry June:
'Death is fleet, Life is sweet,'
Sang the blackbird in the may;
And the hour with flying feet
While they dreamed was yesterday.

Many a maid and many a man
Found the leafage close and boon;
Many a destiny began—
O the morn was merry June.
Dead and gone, dead and gone,
(Hark the blackbird in the may!),
Life and Death went hurrying on,
Cheek on cheek—and where were they?

p. 93

Dust in dust engendering dust
In the leafage fresh and boon,
Man and maid fulfil their trust—
Still the morn turns merry June.
Mother Life, Father Death
(O the blackbird in the may!),
Each the other's breath for breath,
Fleet the times of the world away.

XXIV (To A. C.)

p. 94

What should the Trees,
Midsummer-manifold, each one,
Voluminous, a labyrinth of life—
What should such things of bulk and multitude
Yield of their huge, unutterable selves,
To the random importunity of Day,
The blabbing journalist?
Alert to snatch and publish hour by hour
Their greenest hints, their leafiest privacies,
How can he other than endure
The ruminant irony that foists him off
With broad-blown falsehoods, or the obviousness
Of laughter flickering back from shine to shade,
And disappearances of homing birds,
And frolicsome freaks
Of little boughs that frisk with little boughs?

p. 95

Now, at the word
Of the ancient, sacerdotal Night,

Night of the many secrets, whose effect—
Transfiguring, hierophantic, dread—
Themselves alone may fully apprehend,
They tremble and are changed:
In each, the uncouth individual soul
Looms forth and glooms
Essential, and, their bodily presences
Touched with inordinate significance,
Wearing the darkness like the livery
Of some mysterious and tremendous guild,
They brood—they menace—they appal:
Or the anguish of prophecy tears them, and they wring
Wild hands of warning in the face
Of some inevitable advance of doom:
Or, each to the other bending, beckoning, signing,
As in some monstrous market-place,
They pass the news, these Gossips of the Prime,
In that old speech their forefathers
Learned on the lawns of Eden, ere they heard
The troubled voice of Eve
Naming the wondering folk of Paradise.

p. 96

Your sense is sealed, or you should hear them tell
The tale of their dim life and all
Its compost of experience: how the Sun
Spreads them their daily feast,
Sumptuous, of light, firing them as with wine;
Of the old Moon's fitful solicitude
And those mild messages the Stars
Descend in silver silences and dews;
Or what the buxom West,
Wanton with wading in the swirl of the wheat,
Said, and their leafage laughed;
And how the wet-winged Angel of the Rain
Came whispering . . . whispering; and the gifts of the Year—
The sting of the stirring sap
Under the wizardry of the young-eyed Spring,
Their summer amplitudes of pomp
And rich autumnal melancholy, and the shrill,
Embittered housewifery
Of the lean Winter: all such things,
And with them all the goodness of the Master
Whose right hand blesses with increase and life,
Whose left hand honours with decay and death.

p. 97

p. 98

So, under the constraint of Night,
These gross and simple creatures,
Each in his scores of rings, which rings are years,
A servant of the Will.
And God, the Craftsman, as He walks
The floor of His workshop, hearkens, full of cheer
In thus accomplishing
The aims of His miraculous artistry.

XXV

p. 99

What have I done for you,
 England, my England?
What is there I would not do,
 England my own?
With your glorious eyes austere,
As the Lord were walking near,
Whispering terrible things and dear
 As the Song on your bugles blown,
 England—
 Round the world on your bugles blown!

Where shall the watchful Sun,
 England, my England,
Match the master-work you've done,
 England my own?
When shall he rejoice agen
Such a breed of mighty men
As come forward, one to ten,
 To the Song on your bugles blown,

p. 100

England—
Down the years on your bugles blown?

Ever the faith endures,
England, my England:—
'Take and break us: we are yours,
'England, my own!
'Life is good, and joy runs high
'Between English earth and sky:
'Death is death; but we shall die
'To the Song on your bugles blown,
'England—
'To the stars on your bugles blown!'

They call you proud and hard,
England, my England:
You with worlds to watch and ward,
England, my own!
You whose mailed hand keeps the keys
Of such teeming destinies
You could know nor dread nor ease
Were the Song on your bugles blown,
England,
Round the Pit on your bugles blown!

Mother of Ships whose might,
England, my England,
Is the fierce old Sea's delight,
England, my own,
Chosen daughter of the Lord,
Spouse-in-Chief of the ancient Sword,
There's the menace of the Word
In the Song on your bugles blown,
England—
Out of heaven on your bugles blown!

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