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by Oscar Wilde**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL ***

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL

By Oscar Wilde

In Memoriam

C.T.W.

**Sometime Trooper of the Royal Horse Guards.
Obit H.M. Prison, Reading, Berkshire,**

July 7th, 1896

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VERSION ONE

VERSION TWO

I. He did not wear his scarlet coat, For blood and wine are red, And blood and wine were on his hands When they found him with the dead, The poor dead woman whom he loved, And murdered in her bed. He walked amongst the Trial Men In a suit of shabby grey; A cricket cap was on his head, And his step seemed light and gay; But I never saw a man who looked So wistfully at the day. I never saw a man who looked With such a wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue Which prisoners call the sky, And at every drifting cloud that went With sails of silver by. I walked, with other souls in pain, Within another ring, And was wondering if the man had done A great or little thing, When a voice behind me whispered low, "That fellow's got to swing." Dear Christ! the very prison walls

Suddenly seemed to reel, And the sky above my head got to swing." Dear Christ! the very prison walls became Like a casque of scorching steel; And, though Suddenly seemed to reel, And the sky above my head I was a soul in pain, My pain I could not feel. I only became Like a casque of scorching steel; And, though knew what hunted thought Quickened his step, and I was a soul in pain, My pain I could not feel. I only why He looked upon the garish day With such a knew what haunted thought Quickened his step, and wistful eye; The man had killed the thing he loved And why He looked upon the garish day With such a so he had to die. Yet each man kills the thing he loves wistful eye; The man had killed the thing he loved, By each let this be heard, Some do it with a bitter And so he had to die. Yet each man kills the thing he look, Some with a flattering word, The coward does it loves, By each let this be heard, Some do it with a with a kiss, The brave man with a sword! Some kill bitter look, Some with a flattering word, The coward their love when they are young, And some when they does it with a kiss, The brave man with a sword! Some are old; Some strangle with the hands of Lust, Some kill their love when they are young, And some when with the hands of Gold: The kindest use a knife, they are old; Some strangle with the hands of Lust, because The dead so soon grow cold. Some love too Some with the hands of Gold: The kindest use a knife, little, some too long, Some sell, and others buy; Some because The dead so soon grow cold. Some love too do the deed with many tears, And some without a little, some too long, Some sell, and others buy; Some sigh: For each man kills the thing he loves, Yet each do the deed with many tears, And some without a man does not die. He does not die a death of shame sigh: For each man kills the thing he loves, Yet each On a day of dark disgrace, Nor have a noose about his man does not die. He does not die a death of shame neck, Nor a cloth upon his face, Nor drop feet On a day of dark disgrace, Nor have a noose about his foremost through the floor Into an empty place He neck, Nor a cloth upon his face, Nor drop feet does not sit with silent men Who watch him night and foremost through the floor Into an empty space. He day; Who watch him when he tries to weep, And when does not sit with silent men Who watch him night and he tries to pray; Who watch him lest himself should day; Who watch him when he tries to weep, And when rob The prison of its prey. He does not wake at dawn he tries to pray; Who watch him lest himself should to see Dread figures thron his room, The shivering rob The prison of its prey. He does not wake at dawn Chaplain robed in white, The Sheriff stern with to see Dread figures thron his room, The shivering gloom, And the Governor all in shiny black, With the Chaplain robed in white, The Sheriff stern with yellow face of Doom. He does not rise in piteous haste gloom, And the Governor all in shiny black, With the To put on convict-clothes, While some coarse-yellow face of Doom. He does not rise in piteous haste mouthed Doctor gloats, and notes Each new and To put on convict-clothes, While some coarse-nerve-twitched pose, Fingering a watch whose little mouthed Doctor gloats, and notes Each new and ticks Are like horrible hammer-blows. He does not nerve-twitched pose, Fingering a watch whose little know that sickening thirst That sands one's throat, ticks Are like horrible hammer-blows. He does not before The hangman with his gardener's gloves Slips feel that sickening thirst That sands one's throat, through the padded door, And binds one with three before The hangman with his gardener's gloves leathern thongs, That the throat may thirst no more. Comes through the padded door, And binds one with He does not bend his head to hear The Burial Office three leathern thongs, That the throat may thirst no read, Nor, while the terror of his soul Tells him he is more. He does not bend his head to hear The Burial not dead, Cross his own coffin, as he moves Into the Office read, Nor, while the anguish of his soul Tells hideous shed. He does not stare upon the air Through him he is not dead, Cross his own coffin, as he moves a little roof of glass; He does not pray with lips of clay Into the hideous shed. He does not stare upon the air For his agony to pass; Nor feel upon his shuddering Through a little roof of glass: He does not pray with cheek The kiss of Caiaphas. II. Six weeks our lips of clay For his agony to pass; Nor feel upon his guardsman walked the yard, In a suit of shabby grey: shuddering cheek The kiss of Caiaphas. II Six weeks His cricket cap was on his head, And his step seemed the guardsman walked the yard, In the suit of shabby light and gay, But I never saw a man who looked So gray: His cricket cap was on his head, And his step wistfully at the day. I never saw a man who looked was light and gay, But I never saw a man who looked With such a wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue So wistfully at the day. I never saw a man who looked Which prisoners call the sky, And at every wandering With such a wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue cloud that trailed Its ravelled fleeces by. He did not Which prisoners call the sky, And at every wandering wring his hands, as do Those witless men who dare To cloud that trailed Its ravelled fleeces by. He did not try to rear the changeling Hope In the cave of black wring his hands, as do Those witless men who dare To Despair: He only looked upon the sun, And drank the try to rear the changeling Hope In the cave of black morning air. He did not wring his hands nor weep, Despair: He only looked upon the sun, And drank the Nor did he peek or pine, But he drank the air as morning air. He did not wring his hands nor weep, though it held Some healthful anodyne; With open Nor did he peek or pine, But he drank the air as mouth he drank the sun As though it had been wine! though it held Some healthful anodyne; With open And I and all the souls in pain, Who tramped the other mouth he drank the sun As though it had been wine! ring, Forgot if we ourselves had done A great or little And I and all the souls in pain, Who tramped the other thing, And watched with gaze of dull amaze The man ring, Forgot if we ourselves had done A great or little who had to swing. And strange it was to see him pass thing, And watched with gaze of dull amaze The man With a step so light and gay, And strange it was to see who had to swing. For strange it was to see him pass him look So wistfully at the day, And strange it was to With a step so light and gay, And strange it was to see think that he Had such a debt to pay. For oak and elm him look So wistfully at the day, And strange it was to have pleasant leaves That in the spring-time shoot: think that he Had such a debt to pay. The oak and elm But grim to see is the gallows-tree, With its adder-have pleasant leaves That in the spring-time shoot: bitten root, And, green or dry, a man must die Before But grim to see is the gallows-tree, With its alder-it bears its fruit! The loftiest place is that seat of bitten root, And, green or dry, a man must die Before grace For which all worldlings try: But who would it bears its fruit! The loftiest place is the seat of grace stand in hempen band Upon a scaffold high, And For which all worldlings try: But who would stand in through a murderer's collar take His last look at the hempen band Upon a scaffold high, And through a sky? It is sweet to dance to violins When Love and murderer's collar take His last look at the sky? It is Life are fair: To dance to flutes, to dance to lutes Is sweet to dance to violins When Love and Life are fair: delicate and rare: But it is not sweet with nimble feet To dance to flutes, to dance to lutes Is delicate and

To dance upon the air! So with curious eyes and sick rare: But it is not sweet with nimble feet To dance surmise We watched him day by day, And wondered if upon the air! So with curious eyes and sick surmise each one of us Would end the self-same way, For none We watched him day by day, And wondered if each can tell to what red Hell His sightless soul may stray. one of us Would end the self-same way, For none can At last the dead man walked no more Amongst the tell to what red Hell His sightless soul may stray. At Trial Men, And I knew that he was standing up In the last the dead man walked no more Amongst the Trial black dock's dreadful pen, And that never would I see Men, And I knew that he was standing up In the black his face In God's sweet world again. Like two doomed dock's dreadful pen, And that never would I see his ships that pass in storm We had crossed each other's face For weal or woe again. Like two doomed ships way: But we made no sign, we said no word, We had that pass in storm We had crossed each other's way: no word to say; For we did not meet in the holy night, But we made no sign, we said no word, We had no But in the shameful day. A prison wall was round us word to say; For we did not meet in the holy night, both, Two outcast men were we: The world had thrust But in the shameful day. A prison wall was round us us from its heart, And God from out His care: And the both, Two outcast men we were: The world had thrust iron gin that waits for Sin Had caught us in its snare. us from its heart, And God from out His care: And the III In Debtors' Yard the stones are hard, And the iron gin that waits for Sin Had caught us in its snare. dripping wall is high, So it was there he took the air III In Debtors' Yard the stones are hard, And the Beneath the leaden sky, And by each side a Warder dripping wall is high, So it was there he took the air walked, For fear the man might die. Or else he sat Beneath the leaden sky, And by each side a warder with those who watched His anguish night and day; walked, For fear the man might die. Or else he sat Who watched him when he rose to weep, And when with those who watched His anguish night and day; he crouched to pray; Who watched him lest himself Who watched him when he rose to weep, And when should rob Their scaffold of its prey. The Governor he crouched to pray; Who watched him lest himself was strong upon The Regulations Act: The Doctor said should rob Their scaffold of its prey. The Governor that Death was but A scientific fact: And twice a day was strong upon The Regulations Act: The Doctor said the Chaplain called And left a little tract. And twice a that Death was but A scientific fact: And twice a day day he smoked his pipe, And drank his quart of beer: the Chaplain called, And left a little tract. And twice a His soul was resolute, and held No hiding-place for day he smoked his pipe, And drank his quart of beer: fear; He often said that he was glad The hangman's His soul was resolute, and held No hiding-place for hands were near. But why he said so strange a thing fear; He often said that he was glad The hangman's No Warder dared to ask: For he to whom a watcher's day was near. But why he said so strange a thing No doom Is given as his task, Must set a lock upon his warder dared to ask: For he to whom a watcher's lips, And make his face a mask. Or else he might be doom Is given as his task, Must set a lock upon his moved, and try To comfort or console: And what lips, And make his face a mask. Or else he might be should Human Pity do Pent up in Murderers' Hole? moved, and try To comfort or console: And what What word of grace in such a place Could help a should Human Pity do Pent up in Murderers' Hole? brother's soul? With slouch and swing around the ring What word of grace in such a place Could help a We trod the Fool's Parade! We did not care: we knew brother's soul? With slouch and swing around the ring we were The Devil's Own Brigade: And shaven head We trod the Fools' Parade! We did not care: we knew and feet of lead Make a merry masquerade. We tore we were The Devils' Own Brigade: And shaven head the tarry rope to shreds With blunt and bleeding and feet of lead Make a merry masquerade. We tore nails; We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the floors, the tarry rope to shreds With blunt and bleeding nails; And cleaned the shining rails: And, rank by rank, we We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the floors, And soaped the plank, And clattered with the pails. We cleaned the shining rails: And, rank by rank, we sewed the sacks, we broke the stones, We turned the soaped the plank, And clattered with the pails. We dusty drill: We banged the tins, and bawled the sewed the sacks, we broke the stones, We turned the hymns, And sweated on the mill: But in the heart of dusty drill: We banged the tins, and bawled the every man Terror was lying still. So still it lay that hymns, And sweated on the mill: But in the heart of every day Crawled like a weed-clogged wave: And we every man Terror was lying still. So still it lay that forgot the bitter lot That waits for fool and knave, Till every day Crawled like a weed-clogged wave: And we once, as we tramped in from work, We passed an forgot the bitter lot That waits for fool and knave, Till open grave. With yawning mouth the yellow hole once, as we tramped in from work, We passed an Gaped for a living thing; The very mud cried out for open grave. With yawning mouth the horrid hole blood To the thirsty asphalte ring: And we knew that Gaped for a living thing; The very mud cried out for ere one dawn grew fair Some prisoner had to swing. blood To the thirsty asphalte ring: And we knew that Right in we went, with soul intent On Death and ere one dawn grew fair The fellow had to swing. Right Dread and Doom: The hangman, with his little bag, in we went, with soul intent On Death and Dread and Went shuffling through the gloom And each man Doom: The hangman, with his little bag, Went trembled as he crept Into his numbered tomb. That shuffling through the gloom: And I trembled as I night the empty corridors Were full of forms of Fear, groped my way Into my numbered tomb. That night And up and down the iron town Stole feet we could the empty corridors Were full of forms of Fear, And not hear, And through the bars that hide the stars up and down the iron town Stole feet we could not White faces seemed to peer. He lay as one who lies hear, And through the bars that hide the stars White and dreams In a pleasant meadow-land, The watcher faces seemed to peer. He lay as one who lies and watched him as he slept, And could not understand dreams In a pleasant meadow-land, The watchers How one could sleep so sweet a sleep With a watched him as he slept, And could not understand hangman close at hand? But there is no sleep when How one could sleep so sweet a sleep With a men must weep Who never yet have wept: So we—the hangman close at hand. But there is no sleep when fool, the fraud, the knave— That endless vigil kept, men must weep Who never yet have wept: So we- the And through each brain on hands of pain Another's fool, the fraud, the knave- That endless vigil kept, And terror crept. Alas! it is a fearful thing To feel through each brain on hands of pain Another's terror another's guilt! For, right within, the sword of Sin crept. Alas! it is a fearful thing To feel another's guilt! Pierced to its poisoned hilt, And as molten lead were For, right within, the sword of Sin Pierced to its the tears we shed For the blood we had not spilt. The poisoned hilt, And as molten lead were the tears we Warders with their shoes of felt Crept by each shed For the blood we had not spilt. The warders with

padlocked door, And peeped and saw, with eyes of their shoes of felt Crept by each padlocked door, And awe, Grey figures on the floor, And wondered why peeped and saw, with eyes of awe, Gray figures on the men knelt to pray Who never prayed before. All floor, And wondered why men knelt to pray Who through the night we knelt and prayed, Mad never prayed before. All through the night we knelt mourners of a corpse! The troubled plumes of and prayed, Mad mourners of a corpse! The troubled midnight were The plumes upon a hearse: And bitter plumes of midnight shook Like the plumes upon a wine upon a sponge Was the savior of Remorse. The hearse: And as bitter wine upon a sponge Was the cock crew, the red cock crew, But never came the savour of Remorse. The gray cock crew, the red cock day: And crooked shape of Terror crouched, In the crew, But never came the day: And crooked shapes of corners where we lay: And each evil sprite that walks Terror crouched, In the corners where we lay: And by night Before us seemed to play. They glided past, each evil sprite that walks by night Before us seemed they glided fast, Like travelers through a mist: They to play. They glided past, the glided fast, Like mocked the moon in a rigadon Of delicate turn and travellers through a mist: They mocked the moon in a twist, And with formal pace and loathsome grace The rigadon Of delicate turn and twist, And with formal phantoms kept their tryst. With mop and mow, we pace and loathsome grace The phantoms kept their saw them go, Slim shadows hand in hand: About, tryst. With mop and mow, we saw them go, Slim about, in ghostly rout They trod a saraband: And the shadows hand in hand: About, about, in ghostly rout damned grotesques made arabesques, Like the wind They trod a saraband: And the damned grotesques upon the sand! With the pirouettes of marionettes, made arabesques, Like the wind upon the sand! With They tripped on pointed tread: But with flutes of Fear the pirouettes of marionettes, They tripped on pointed they filled the ear, As their grisly masque they led, tread: But with flutes of Fear they filled the ear, As And loud they sang, and loud they sang, For they sang their grisly masque they led, And loud they sang, and to wake the dead. "Oho!" they cried, "The world is long they sang, For they sang to wake the dead. wide, But fettered limbs go lame! And once, or twice, "Oho!" they cried, "the world is wide, But fettered to throw the dice Is a gentlemanly game, But he does limbs go lame! And once, or twice, to throw the dice not win who plays with Sin In the secret House of Is a gentlemanly game, But he does not win who plays Shame." No things of air these antics were That with Sin In the secret House of Shame." No things of frolicked with such glee: To men whose lives were air these antics were, That frolicked with such glee: held in gyves, And whose feet might not go free, Ah! To men whose lives were held in gyves, And whose wounds of Christ! they were living things, Most feet might not go free, Ah! wounds of Christ! they terrible to see. Around, around, they waltzed and were living things, Most terrible to see. Around, wound; Some wheeled in smirking pairs: With the around, they waltzed and wound; Some wheeled in mincing step of demirep Some sidled up the stairs: smirking pairs; With the mincing step of a demirep And with subtle sneer, and fawning leer, Each helped Some sidled up the stairs: And with subtle sneer, and us at our prayers. The morning wind began to moan, fawning leer, Each helped us at our prayers. The But still the night went on: Through its giant loom the morning wind began to moan, But still the night went web of gloom Crept till each thread was spun: And, as on: Through its giant loom the web of gloom Crept till we prayed, we grew afraid Of the Justice of the Sun. each thread was spun: And, as we prayed, we grew The moaning wind went wandering round The afraid Of the Justice of the Sun. The moaning wind weeping prison-wall: Till like a wheel of turning-steel went wandering round The weeping prison wall: Till We felt the minutes crawl: O moaning wind! what had like a wheel of turning steel We felt the minutes we done To have such a seneschal? At last I saw the crawl: O moaning wind! what had we done To have shadowed bars Like a lattice wrought in lead, Move such a seneschal? At last I saw the shadowed bars, right across the whitewashed wall That faced my Like a lattice wrought in lead, Move right across the three-plank bed, And I knew that somewhere in the whitewashed wall That faced my three-plank bed, And world God's dreadful dawn was red. At six o'clock we I knew that somewhere in the world God's dreadful cleaned our cells, At seven all was still, But the sough dawn was red. At six o'clock we cleaned our cells, At and swing of a mighty wing The prison seemed to fill, seven all was still, But the sough and swing of a For the Lord of Death with icy breath Had entered in mighty wing The prison seemed to fill, For the Lord of to kill. He did not pass in purple pomp, Nor ride a Death with icy breath Had entered in to kill. He did moon-white steed. Three yards of cord and a sliding not pass in purple pomp, Nor ride a moon-white board Are all the gallows' need: So with rope of steed. Three yards of cord and a sliding board Are all shame the Herald came To do the secret deed. We the gallows' need: So with rope of shame the Herald were as men who through a fen Of filthy darkness came To do the secret deed. We were as men who grope: We did not dare to breathe a prayer, Or give through a fen Of filthy darkness grope: We did not our anguish scope: Something was dead in each of us, dare to breathe a prayer, Or to give our anguish And what was dead was Hope. For Man's grim Justice scope: Something was dead in each of us, And what goes its way, And will not swerve aside: It slays the was dead was Hope. For Man's grim Justice goes its weak, it slays the strong, It has a deadly stride: With way And will not swerve aside: It slays the weak, it iron heel it slays the strong, The monstrous parricide! slays the strong, It has a deadly stride: With iron heel We waited for the stroke of eight: Each tongue was it slays the strong The monstrous parricide! We thick with thirst: For the stroke of eight is the stroke waited for the stroke of eight: Each tongue was thick of Fate That makes a man accursed, And Fate will use with thirst: For the stroke of eight is the stroke of a running noose For the best man and the worst. We Fate That makes a man accursed, And Fate will use a had no other thing to do, Save to wait for the sign to running noose For the best man and the worst. We come: So, like things of stone in a valley lone, Quiet had no other thing to do, Save to wait for the sign to we sat and dumb: But each man's heart beat thick and come: So, like things of stone in a valley lone, Quiet quick Like a madman on a drum! With sudden shock we sat and dumb: But each man's heart beat thick and the prison-clock Smote on the shivering air, And from quick, Like a madman on a drum! With sudden shock all the gaol rose up a wail Of impotent despair, Like the prison-clock Smote on the shivering air, And from the sound that frightened marshes hear From a leper all the gaol rose up a wail Of impotent despair, Like in his lair. And as one sees most fearful things In the the sound the frightened marshes hear From some crystal of a dream, We saw the greasy hempen rope leper in his lair. And as one sees most fearful things Hooked to the blackened beam, And heard the prayer In the crystal of a dream, We saw the greasy hempen the hangman's snare Strangled into a scream. And all rope Hooked to the blackened beam, And heard the

the woe that moved him so That he gave that bitter prayer the hangman's snare Strangled into a scream.
cry, And the wild regrets, and the bloody sweats, And all the woe that moved him so That he gave that
None knew so well as I: For he who live more lives bitter cry, And the wild regrets, and the bloody
than one More deaths than one must die. IV. There is sweats, None knew so well as I: For he who lives
no chapel on the day On which they hang a man: The more lives than one More deaths that one must die. IV
Chaplain's heart is far too sick, Or his face is far too There is no chapel on the day On which they hang a
wan, Or there is that written in his eyes Which none man: The Chaplain's heart is far too sick, Or his face
should look upon. So they kept us close till nigh on is far too wan, Or there is that written in his eyes
noon, And then they rang the bell, And the Warders Which none should look upon. So they kept us close
with their jingling keys Opened each listening cell, till nigh on noon, And then they rang the bell, And the
And down the iron stair we tramped, Each from his warders with their jingling keys Opened each
separate Hell. Out into God's sweet air we went, But listening cell, And down the iron stair we tramped,
not in wonted way, For this man's face was white with Each from his separate Hell. Out into God's sweet air
fear, And that man's face was grey, And I never saw we went, But not in wonted way, For this man's face
sad men who looked So wistfully at the day. I never was white with fear, And that man's face was gray,
saw sad men who looked With such a wistful eye And I never saw sad men who looked So wistfully at
Upon that little tent of blue We prisoners called the the day. I never saw sad men who looked With such a
sky, And at every careless cloud that passed In happy wistful eye Upon that little tent of blue We prisoners
freedom by. But there were those amongst us all Who called the sky, And at every happy cloud that passed
walked with downcast head, And knew that, had each In such strange freedom by. But there were those
got his due, They should have died instead: He had amongst us all Who walked with downcast head, And
but killed a thing that lived Whilst they had killed the knew that, had each got his due, They should have
dead. For he who sins a second time Wakes a dead died instead: He had but killed a thing that lived,
soul to pain, And draws it from its spotted shroud, Whilst they had killed the dead. For he who sins a
And makes it bleed again, And makes it bleed great second time Wakes a dead soul to pain, And draws it
gouts of blood And makes it bleed in vain! Like ape or from its spotted shroud And makes it bleed again, And
clown, in monstrous garb With crooked arrows makes it bleed great gouts of blood, And makes it
starred, Silently we went round and round The bleed in vain! Like ape or clown, in monstrous garb
slippery asphalte yard; Silently we went round and With crooked arrows starred, Silently we went round
round, And no man spoke a word. Silently we went and round The slippery asphalte yard; Silently we
round and round, And through each hollow mind The went round and round, And no man spoke a word.
memory of dreadful things Rushed like a dreadful Silently we went round and round, And through each
wind, An Horror stalked before each man, And terror hollow mind The Memory of dreadful things Rushed
crept behind. The Warders strutted up and down, And like a dreadful wind, And Horror stalked before each
kept their herd of brutes, Their uniforms were spick man, And Terror crept behind. The warders strutted
and span, And they wore their Sunday suits, But we up and down, And watched their herd of brutes, Their
knew the work they had been at By the quicklime on uniforms were spick and span, And they wore their
their boots. For where a grave had opened wide, Sunday suits, But we knew the work they had been at,
There was no grave at all: Only a stretch of mud and By the quicklime on their boots. For where a grave
sand By the hideous prison-wall, And a little heap of had opened wide, There was no grave at all: Only a
burning lime, That the man should have his pall. For stretch of mud and sand By the hideous prison-wall,
he has a pall, this wretched man, Such as few men And a little heap of burning lime, That the man should
can claim: Deep down below a prison-yard, Naked for have his pall. For he has a pall, this wretched man,
greater shame, He lies, with fetters on each foot, Such as few men can claim: Deep down below a
Wrapt in a sheet of flame! And all the while the prison-yard, Naked, for greater shame, He lies, with
burning lime Eats flesh and bone away, It eats the fetters on each foot, Wrapt in a sheet of flame! And all
brittle bone by night, And the soft flesh by the day, It the while the burning lime Eats flesh and bone away,
eats the flesh and bones by turns, But it eats the heart It eats the brittle bones by night, And the soft flesh by
away. For three long years they will not sow Or root day, It eats the flesh and bone by turns, But it eats the
or seedling there: For three long years the unblessed heart away. For three long years they will not sow Or
spot Will sterile be and bare, And look upon the root or seedling there: For three long years the
wondering sky With unreprouchful stare. They think a unblessed spot Will sterile be and bare, And look upon
murderer's heart would taint Each simple seed they the wondering sky With unreprouchful stare. They
sow. It is not true! God's kindly earth Is kindlier than think a murderer's heart would taint Each simple seed
men know, And the red rose would but blow more red, they sow. It is not true! God's kindly earth Is kindlier
The white rose whiter blow. Out of his mouth a red, than men know, And the red rose would but glow
red rose! Out of his heart a white! For who can say by more red, The white rose whiter blow. Out of his
what strange way, Christ brings his will to light, Since mouth a red, red rose! Out of his heart a white! For
the barren staff the pilgrim bore Bloomed in the great who can say by what strange way, Christ brings His
Pope's sight? But neither milk-white rose nor red May will to light, Since the barren staff the pilgrim bore
bloom in prison air; The shard, the pebble, and the Bloomed in the great Pope's sight? But neither milk-
flint, Are what they give us there: For flowers have white rose nor red May bloom in prison air; The
been known to heal A common man's despair. So shard, the pebble, and the flint, Are what they give us
never will wine-red rose or white, Petal by petal, fall there: For flowers have been known to heal A
On that stretch of mud and sand that lies By the common man's despair. So never will wine-red rose or
hideous prison-wall, To tell the men who tramp the white, Petal by petal, fall On that stretch of mud and
yard That God's Son died for all. Yet though the sand that lies By the hideous prison-wall, To tell the
hideous prison-wall Still hems him round and round, men who tramp the yard That God's Son died for all.
And a spirit may not walk by night That is with fetters Yet though the hideous prison-wall Still hems him
bound, And a spirit may but weep that lies In such round and round, And a spirit may not walk by night
unholy ground, He is at peace—this wretched man— That is with fetters bound, And a spirit may but weep
At peace, or will be soon: There is no thing to make that lies In such unholy ground, He is at peace- this
him mad, Nor does Terror walk at noon, For the wretched man- At peace, or will be soon: There is no
lampless Earth in which he lies Has neither Sun nor thing to make him mad, Nor does Terror walk at
Moon. They hanged him as a beast is hanged: They noon, For the lampless Earth in which he lies Has

did not even toll A requiem that might have brought neither Sun nor Moon. They hanged him as a beast is Rest to his startled soul, But hurriedly they took him hanged: They did not even toll A requiem that might out, And hid him in a hole. They stripped him of his have brought Rest to his startled soul, But hurriedly canvas clothes, And gave him to the flies; They they took him out, And hid him in a hole. The warders mocked the swollen purple throat And the stark and stripped him of his clothes, And gave him to the flies: staring eyes: And with laughter loud they heaped the They mocked the swollen purple throat, And the stark shroud In which their convict lies. The Chaplain and staring eyes: And with laughter loud they heaped would not kneel to pray By his dishonored grave: Nor the shroud In which the convict lies. The Chaplain mark it with that blessed Cross That Christ for sinners would not kneel to pray By his dishonoured grave: gave, Because the man was one of those Whom Christ Nor mark it with that blessed Cross That Christ for came down to save. Yet all is well; he has but passed sinners gave, Because the man was one of those To Life's appointed bourne: And alien tears will fill for Whom Christ came down to save. Yet all is well; he him Pity's long-broken urn, For his mourner will be has but passed To Life's appointed bourne: And alien outcast men, And outcasts always mourn. V. I know tears will fill for him Pity's long-broken urn, For his not whether Laws be right, Or whether Laws be mourners be outcast men, And outcasts always wrong; All that we know who lie in gaol Is that the mourn. V I know not whether Laws be right, Or wall is strong; And that each day is like a year, A year whether Laws be wrong; All that we know who lie in whose days are long. But this I know, that every Law gaol Is that the wall is strong; And that each day is That men have made for Man, Since first Man took his like a year, A year whose days are long. But this I brother's life, And the sad world began, But straws know, that every Law That men have made for Man, the wheat and saves the chaff With a most evil fan. Since first Man took His brother's life, And the sad This too I know—and wise it were If each could know world began, But straws the wheat and saves the the same— That every prison that men build Is built chaff With a most evil fan. This too I know- and wise it with bricks of shame, And bound with bars lest Christ were If each could know the same- That every prison should see How men their brothers maim. With bars that men build Is built with bricks of shame, And they blur the gracious moon, And blind the goodly bound with bars lest Christ should see How men their sun: And they do well to hide their Hell, For in it brothers maim. With bars they blur the gracious things are done That Son of God nor son of Man Ever moon, And blind the goodly sun: And they do well to should look upon! The vilest deeds like poison weeds hide their Hell, For in it things are done That Son of Bloom well in prison-air: It is only what is good in God nor son of Man Ever should look upon! The vilest Man That wastes and withers there: Pale Anguish deeds like poison weeds Bloom well in prison-air: It is keeps the heavy gate, And the Warder is Despair For only what is good in Man That wastes and withers they starve the little frightened child Till it weeps there: Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate, And the both night and day: And they scourge the weak, and warder is Despair. For they starve the little frightened flog the fool, And gibe the old and grey, And some child Till it weeps both night and day: And they grow mad, and all grow bad, And none a word may scourge the weak, and flog the fool, And gibe the old say. Each narrow cell in which we dwell Is a foul and and gray, And some grow mad, and all grow bad, And dark latrine, And the fetid breath of living Death none a word may say. Each narrow cell in which we Chokes up each grated screen, And all, but Lust, is dwell Is a foul and dark latrine, And the fetid breath turned to dust In Humanity's machine. The brackish of living Death Chokes up each grated screen, And all, water that we drink Creeps with a loathsome slime, but Lust, is turned to dust In Humanity's machine. And the bitter bread they weigh in scales Is full of The brackish water that we drink Creeps with a chalk and lime, And Sleep will not lie down, but walks loathsome slime, And the bitter bread they weigh in Wild-eyed and cries to Time. But though lean Hunger scales Is full of chalk and lime, And Sleep will not lie and green Thirst Like asp with adder fight, We have down, but walks Wild-eyed, and cries to Time. But little care of prison fare, For what chills and kills though lean Hunger and green Thirst Like asp with outright Is that every stone one lifts by day Becomes adder fight, We have little care of prison fare, For one's heart by night. With midnight always in one's what chills and kills outright Is that every stone one heart, And twilight in one's cell, We turn the crank, or lifts by day Becomes one's heart by night. With tear the rope, Each in his separate Hell, And the midnight always in one's heart, And twilight in one's silence is more awful far Than the sound of a brazen cell, We turn the crank, or tear the rope, Each in his bell. And never a human voice comes near To speak a separate Hell, And the silence is more awful far Than gentle word: And the eye that watches through the the sound of a brazen bell. And never a human voice door Is pitiless and hard: And by all forgot, we rot and comes near To speak a gentle word: And the eye that rot, With soul and body marred. And thus we rust watches through the door Is pitiless and hard: And by Life's iron chain Degraded and alone: And some men all forgot, we rot and rot, With soul and body marred. curse, and some men weep, And some men make no And thus we rust Life's iron chain Degraded and moan: But God's eternal Laws are kind And break the alone: And some men curse, and some men weep, And heart of stone. And every human heart that breaks, In some men make no moan: But God's eternal Laws are prison-cell or yard, Is as that broken box that gave Its kind And break the heart of stone. And every human treasure to the Lord, And filled the unclean leper's heart that breaks, In prison-cell or yard, Is as that house With the scent of costliest nard. Ah! happy day broken box that gave Its treasure to the Lord, And they whose hearts can break And peace of pardon filled the unclean leper's house With the scent of win! How else may man make straight his plan And costliest nard. Ah! happy they whose hearts can break cleanse his soul from Sin? How else but through a And peace of pardon win! How else may man make broken heart May Lord Christ enter in? And he of the straight his plan And cleanse his soul from Sin? How swollen purple throat. And the stark and staring eyes, else but through a broken heart May Lord Christ Waits for the holy hands that took The Thief to enter in? And he of the swollen purple throat, And the Paradise; And a broken and a contrite heart The Lord stark and staring eyes, Waits for the holy hands that will not despise. The man in red who reads the Law took The Thief to Paradise; And a broken and a Gave him three weeks of life, Three little weeks in contrite heart The Lord will not despise. The man in which to heal His soul of his soul's strife, And cleanse red who reads the Law Gave him three weeks of life, from every blot of blood The hand that held the knife. Three little weeks in which to heal His soul of his And with tears of blood he cleansed the hand, The soul's strife, And cleanse from every blot of blood The hand that held the steel: For only blood can wipe out hand that held the knife. And with tears of blood he

blood, And only tears can heal: And the crimson stain cleansed the hand, The hand that held the steel: For that was of Cain Became Christ's snow-white seal. VI. only blood can wipe out blood, And only tears can In Reading gaol by Reading town There is a pit of heal: And the crimson stain that was of Cain Became shame, And in it lies a wretched man Eaten by teeth Christ's snow-white seal. VI In Reading gaol by of flame, In burning winding-sheet he lies, And his Reading town There is a pit of shame, And in it lies a grave has got no name. And there, till Christ call forth wretched man Eaten by teeth of flame, In a burning the dead, In silence let him lie: No need to waste the winding-sheet he lies, And his grave has got no name. foolish tear, Or heave the windy sigh: The man had And there, till Christ call forth the dead, In silence let killed the thing he loved, And so he had to die. And all him lie: No need to waste the foolish tear, Or heave men kill the thing they love, By all let this be heard, the windy sigh: The man had killed the thing he loved, Some do it with a bitter look, Some with a flattering And so he had to die. And all men kill the thing they word, The coward does it with a kiss, The brave man love, By all let this be heard, Some do it with a bitter with a sword! look, Some with a flattering word, The coward does it with a kiss, The brave man with a sword!

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