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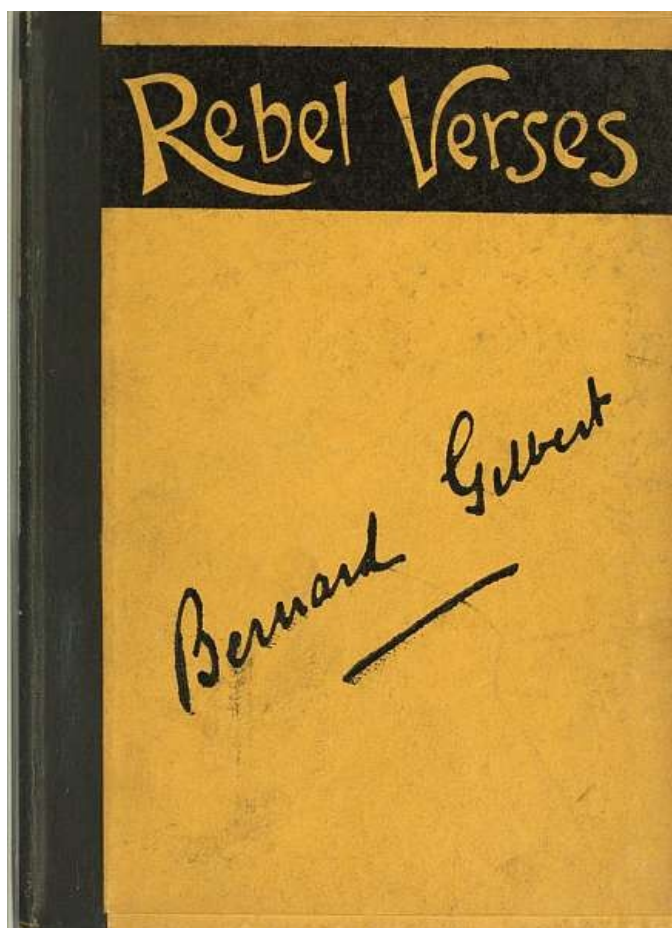
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK REBEL VERSES ***



REBEL VERSES

NEW YORK AGENTS
LONGMANS, GREEN & Co.
FOURTH AVENUE AND 30TH STREET

REBEL VERSES

BY

BERNARD GILBERT

OXFORD
B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD STREET
MCMXVIII

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

VERSE: LINCOLNSHIRE LAYS; FARMING LAYS; GONE TO THE WAR; WAR WORKERS.

DRAMA: ELDORADO; THEIR FATHER'S WILL; THE RUSKINGTON POACHER.

FICTION: WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT? TATTERSHALL CASTLE; THE YELLOW FLAG.

POLITICAL: FARMERS AND TARIFF REFORM; WHAT EVERY FARMER WANTS; THE FARM LABOURER'S FIX.

MISCELLANEOUS: LIVING LINCOLN; FORTUNES FOR FARMERS.

FROM *The New Witness*

MR. BERNARD GILBERT is one of the discoveries of the War. For years, it seems, he has been writing poetry, but it is only recently that an inapprehensive country has awakened to the fact. Now he is taking his rightful place among our foremost singers. What William Barnes was to Dorset, what T. E. Brown was to the Manx people—this is Mr. Gilbert to the folk of his native county of Lincoln. He has interpreted their lives, their sorrows, their aspirations, with a surprising fidelity. Mr. Gilbert never loses his grip upon realities. One feels that he knows the men of whom he writes in their most intimate moods; knows, too, their defects, which he does not shrink from recording. There is little of the dreamy idealism of the South in the peasant people of Lincolnshire. The outwardly respectable chapel-goer who asks himself, in a moment of introspection

But why not have a good time here?
Why should the Devil have all the beer?

is true to type. But he has, too, his softer moods. Fidelity in friendship, courage, resource and perseverance—these are typical of the men of the Fens.

TO
MORLEY ROBERTS

Acknowledgments to the Editors of the:

English Review

New Age

Colour

Westminster Gazette

New Witness

*To-Day
 Clarion
 Australian Triad
 Bystander
 Musical Student
 and Nash's Magazine*
in whose columns these verses have appeared during 1917.

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[1]

The Rebel

I live in music, in poetry, and in the life reflective.
 I seek intellectual boldness in man, I worship mental swiftness in women.
 I have no love for lawyers, priests, schoolmasters, or any dogmatic men.
 I am with poor against rich, labour against employer, women against men; I
 fight beside all strikers, mutineers, and rebels.
 I welcome foes; I desire criticism.
 I loathe prejudice, either social or national; I repudiate all claims.

I demand freedom of action and leisure for reflection.
Facing Death, I would say: 'I have tasted all, tried all, dared all, suffered all,
and I repent nothing.'

[2]

Song of Revolt

Crowns are ashake,
The princes and the Kings are bending low,
And, round the world,
Before the blast of Freedom, thrones are hurled:
The People are awake!

Over the Ark of Tyranny
The red flag flaunts abroad for all to see!
Whilst to the roll of drums
Swelling triumphantly, the glad cry comes:
The People shall be free!

In dungeons, men, long-bound for freedom's sake,
Forgotten of God, deep-frozen by despair,
Hear with surprise that clangorous fanfare:
The People are awake!

Our fathers heard the call,
When Liberty from her bonds like the angry sea,
Pouring mightily forth, slew tyranny,
And singing the Marseillaise, bade crowns to fall,
That all men should be free!

Men shall be slaves no more!
From sea to sea
That Word of hope unspeakable succour brings;
The day dawneth when there are no more Kings:
And the People, the People shall be free!

[3]

There Aint no God

There aint no God!
Coz if there were—
My boy what's under foreign sod
Would be alive, and here:
Instead of which young William Porter
What never listed when he orter—
Has his farm;
And braunges yonder safe away from harm.

Poor lad!—he went—
I can't forgit that night—
While Porter laughed him outer sight;
Now—he is spent:
Porter's all right.

What does he care?
He's thinking of another farm,
Instead of laying in some ditch
He's rich!
And folk'll gallop at his nod.

I say it!

'The Night is Dark'

Safe-guarded dwellers in your sea-girt eyrie
How fares the fight?
Terror has crept beneath your ocean wall,
Horror is over-reaching, to appal;
Your sons are menaced by a furnace fiery:
What of the night?

A hundred years have passed at ease
Since last you fought on bended knees;
And joints, unused, grow stiff and old,
And hearts unroused are faint and cold;
Whilst they who own but wealth, their creed,
Stand helpless in the hour of need.

Oh peace-bound nation!
Lapped in rich sloth; untroubled generation!
Know you that races change?
Some dwindle slowly downward in decay,
Unconscious, till the dawning of the day:
At touch of fire we learn how they are faring;
Thrice welcome is the test to nations daring;
To some—how strange!

Our ancient enemy—now brother—
From one Napoleon to another
Has seen his country ebb and flow
And now he holds the sternest foe,
Learning the lesson of strenuous fight
To brace defensive armour tight:
But what of you—old Islanders
So roughly woke?
Has gilded sloth 'mid dreamless calm
Stifled your soul, close wrapped from harm,
In Neptune's cloak?
Or is it but an idle dress,
Thrown off at breath of fearful stress?
Or has it slowly strangled that old oak?

None may foretell;
But this we know:
As fire testeth iron through and through,
So shall it be with you!
Not yet have you passed furnace-wise,
But soon, with newly opened eyes,
Upon your knees,
You shall discern Heaven's judgment on an age-long ease.

Poets and prophets darkly sang;
Unheeded then the tocsin rang;
But now the sky is grey and dim,
Your enemy is stern and grim,
Your leaders slow;
And, though you realise it not ...
You may lie low:
For, though to fight one son is bold,
Another hides, amassing gold;
The strain falls not in equal measure:
Whilst some lie cold—
Others distil their blood for treasure,
And that—Old England—if unchecked,
Shall see your ancient Empire wrecked.

You battle not to vanquish a great nation,
Nor for safety, nor the sceptre of the seas,
Nor for the Empire of a world at ease,
Nor fame's fair scroll:
For your salvation,
You wrestle with Apollyon for your soul.

And if you fail—
Your epitaph: 'too late'—
The Angel with the Pen shall grave your fate:
Your glorious history of no avail;
Whilst all the Earth shall know you were not great.

Not arms, nor weapons forged, nor serried forces,
Nor stout Allies nor multiplied resources
The victory giveth;
Not ships afar, nor numbers gradual tale,
Nor all your might, oh Britain! shall avail:
Only the Spirit liveth!
Yet this our hope (a hope unsaid),
And still our faith (though faith be dead),
That, as of old, you may awake,
Cast off your senile mood, and shake
Irresolution to the wall;
Bid equal sacrifice from all;
That each surrender to the state
A measured offering to fate,
Till Unity of Will, controlled
Shines through the nation, manifold:

Then should your Spirit conquer as before,
And Phoenix-like you should renew your youth and strength once more.

[7]

[8]

Return

From exile and disaster,
From banishment set free,
We shall return in sorrow,
Our homes once more to see.

The storm will surely finish,
The day must dawn at last,
The floods at length diminish,
The bitterness be past.

From Fatherland long-banished
(Oh, church in ruins low!
Oh, roofs and chimneys vanished!)
'Tis to our homes we go!

The land is torn asunder,
The orchard trees are bare;
A muttering of thunder
Still shakes the heavy air.

Yet life goes on undaunted:
With aching hearts, and sore,
To raise our hearths and altars
We shall return once more.

[9]

Nietzsche

In the silence of the night-time
Startled, we can hear a murmur
As of someone tapping, tapping,
Tapping at the breasts of idols
With an auscultating hammer,
Sounding all their hollow vitals
As they helplessly endeavour
To evade with vain pretences

Or atone:

Yes, we hear the distant thunder
Of an earthquake that convulses;
Poor old Mother Earth is shaken,
Sorely tried and whirled asunder,
Shaken by a fierce invader;
Where grim and slow you creep below,
Digging, digging, digging deep,
Troglodyte, untiring miner

All alone!

As you climb upon the mountains,
Glaciers, icy precipices,
Toward the lonely lightning-blasted
Peak that towers above in silence,
Plunging into deep crevasses
Where the frozen water falls:

Monotone:

And at last we wake from nightmare—
Wake, to find ourselves denuded
Naked, lonesome, 'mid our fellows
Lacking father, wife, or mother,
Lacking neighbour, child or brother:
All disown.

Still our eyes are fixed steadfastly
Where you soar above the heavens,
Spurning with your mighty pinions
Countless deities and angels,
Shattering our fondest visions
With your own:

Ever on your knees you creep,
Where the way is wild and steep.
Digging, digging, digging deep,
Whilst the priests and idols weep.

[10]

[11]

Sacrament

Beloved mine! we cannot falter now;
No threats avail, no claims affect this hour;
That kiss, far more than sacerdotal vow
Or golden circlet, making truly one
—More solemn than any oath—
Hath passed our lips:
Whilst Love, the great compeller, the mighty power
In his bewildering hand, hath seized us both.

No pardon comes for those who wrongly read
The books on stone engraved—
Our Primal Laws—
Or fail to satisfy the unchanging Cause;
Who reach this height, and fail, are dead indeed:
Their being void, their souls are cast without;
And from the Book their names are blotted out.

There is no holding back, no base endeavour,
The cup of true communion is filled,
The sacrament prepared as we have willed;

Hand joined to hand in clasp that none can sever;
Our quittance sure, our resolution taken,
With vows fulfilled we face the world unshaken;
And each to each we pledge ourselves for ever.

[12]

Fightin' Tomlinson

I sit by the chimbley corner,
My blood is runnin' slow,
My hands is white as a printed paage,
Wot once wor red wi' the fighter's waage;
They're withered an' wrinkled now wi' old aage;
An' the fire's burnin' low.

Once I could lether anyone
An' strike a knock-down blow:
My legs were limmack as a young bough,
They could race or dance or foller the plough;
But they're crookled and wemblin' all waays now,
An' the fire's burnin' low.

I 'member me of owden daays:
At Metheringham Show:
I fought young Jolland for a scarf,
I nearly brok his back in half;
He galloped hooam to Blankney Barff
As hard as he could go.

I fought an' danced an' carried on,
Razzlin 'igh an low;
I drank as long as I could see,
It made noa difference to me,
I wor a match for any three:
'Tis sixty year ago.

They called me 'Fightin' Tomlinson,'
(My name is Thomas Tow)
I wor the champion o' the sheer;
If any furriner come near,
I never shirked nor felt noa fear,
I allers 'ed a go.

On ivery night o' Saturday,
Noa matter raain nor snow,
We gethered in the market plaaces,
An' stripped stark naked to our waas'es,
Gev' one another bloody faaces—
A Sunday mornin' show!

I fought at all the County Fairs,
From Partney down to Stow;
They called me nobbut a 'Billinghay Rough,'
I niver knawed when I'd 'ed enough,
For I wor made o' the proper stuff,
I'd like to 'ev you know.

Aye—they wor roughish times—my word!
'Tis sixty year ago;
Our heads wor hard, our hearts as well,
I wonder as we niver fell,
Into the burnin' pit of hell,
Wheer dreadful fires glow.

I used to hit like this—but now
I cannot strike a blow:
My battle's nearly lost—or won,
My poor owd limbs is omost done,
The tears is droppin' one by one,

[13]

[14]

The Labourers' Hymn

We have slaved for you long days and nights of bent and weary lives;
Giving the strength of our muscles, our sweat, and our sons and wives;
With less food than your horses, and homes less warm than your hives.

We have ploughed and dug and sowed and reaped the seasons through and
through,

We have gathered in your grain and raised the 'Harvest Home' for you,
Who gave starvation pay to us and kept from us our due.

We asked for land and freedom, the right to till our own;
To harvest and to garner for ourselves, what we had sown;
We sought the fruit of our labour; you granted us a stone.

Who gave our lives to your children? Who pledged our souls to thine?
Who made you Lord and Master and placed us with the kine?
Who gave you leave to drink our sweat and mix our blood with wine?

To save the land for your children, who denied their country's wage,
Our sons have left their homes to fight, to guard your heritage;
When they return—Ah! woe to you before their righteous rage.

[16]

You held the land in sufferance to answer for your right,
To cherish those beneath you and lead them into fight;
You have refused all payment, and trampled in your might.

Our sons shall trample you and yours in their bloody and righteous rage,
Who hid at home in shelter whilst they paid for the land its wage:
They fought and died for the Land; and they shall enter their heritage.

[17]

Oliver Cromwell

A group of men stood watching round the bed,
Gazing in sadness at the lion's head,
Ugly and massive, coarse, yet noble, too,
Transfigured by the power shining through,
The steadfast purpose, the unflinching will,
Decisive, swift to save alive, or kill,
As was required. Aye, and more was there;
The tenderness, the pity, all the care
Of one who watches o'er his fatherland,
And bears upon his countenance the brand
Of deep unutterable sorrow burned
Into his soul, whilst he, the lesson learned
That they who wield responsibility,
Alas, must always compromising be;
And to help on the cause they deem divine
Must waver from their ever rigid line.
The singleness of heart for which they pray,
Doth bow before expediency each day;
No longer fate allows the choice between
A good or evil course—with answer clean—
But rather shews two evils to be done,
And they must boldly choose the lesser one.

'Tis this that makes him groan with agony,

The searching question 'Is it well with me?'
The question that at last must come to all
When at their end, they wonderingly recall
This point—or that one—' *Was I justified?*
For there—I stepped out of my way for pride
And there—I stooped, perhaps, to save a friend,
Or—Pity swayed me over much to bend
From justice there. Yes, I have always sinned.
Weak! Weak!
Have pity on him now,
The valley of the shadow dewes his brow!

[18]

Then in a half delirium he saw
A vivid pageant passing through the door,
Of all the deeds that he had ever done,
Good or bad judgments, battles lost or won;
There, in procession wide, all who had died
Under his rule, either by civil law,
Or by the swifter penalty of war,
Passed mournfully, their faces ghastly pale,
Their gaping wounds accusingly did rail;
And last of all, stately, refined, and meek,
The 'Martyr King,' the obstinate and weak,
The strangest mixture England ever saw
Upon her throne (And yet, poor man, he wore
His crown with piteous regal dignity,
Whilst from his hands there slowly dripped the blood
Of countless thousands who in loyalty
Perished beneath his vacillating mood).
Then from those twitching lips there fell again
'Have I done well?' The agonizing pain
Was clear to those around his bed, and one
Answered, astonished, with beseeching tone:
'But surely, General, you have done well,
You over all of us have done most well.'

[19]

But Cromwell with a twisted smile replied
'No!'—as he fought for breath—'I—only—tried!'
Then closed his eyes, smiled quietly, and died.

[20]

Anywhere but Here

Anywhere but here, Ned,
Any bloomin hole,
Golly! if it aint like tearin
Body from yer soul!
War's a bloomin sight too wearin:
Home for William Towl!

Once I uster think our village
Took the prize for dead,
Now I know it wor a Para-
-dise around me head;
Don't I wish as I could see it—
Just a minute—Ned!

Did I iver cuss my luck
Fer comin' fore the Bench;
Doin what I did fer poachin,
Arter this ole trench
Would be like a holiday
At seaside wi' a wench.

This is Hell, boy, don't ferget it,
Hell wi'out the fun,
Let me see a plough agen
An you can ev my gun;

The East Wind

The Spring was mild, the air was warm,
All green the things upon the farm,
The corn put forth its tender sprout,
The daffodils came bursting out;
Above the hedge, in skimming flight,
The blackbird hardly touched the light,
Whilst in the meadows lush and green
The lambs and foals at play were seen;
When suddenly the wind turned round
And blew across from 'Deadman's Ground'
(Where Farmer Rogers caught his wife
And killed her with a carving knife)
The oldest labourers about,
Who read the weather inside out,
Say, when it comes from out that quarter,
You know it's nothing else but slaughter;
For when it blows from there by night
It fills the animals with fright,
And when it blows from there by day
It drives your happiness away;
It nips the fruit, it starves the corn,
And everything that's newly born;
It sweeps the land with icy breath,
And strikes all growing things with death.
The farmer feels his liver growl,
And soon his children start to howl,
Until they wonder why the weather
Can fill a man wi' crazy blether;
He kicks his dog, then rushes out
To sack his foreman with a shout,
Growls at his wife, and scolds his daughter
Because the ducks have left the water;
He sees the wrack upon the wing,
And feels his life a wasted thing.
The labourers, with wrinkled faces,
Are keeping in the shady places,
Afraid of wind and master, too,
And very careful what they do.
Down in the fields, with backs all hunched,
The horses and the cattle, bunched,
Stand by the hedge to miss the blast
That wails and whines and whistles past;
Their coats are ruffled wrong way round,
Because it blows off 'Deadman's Ground';
Their tails are down, their eyes are dull,
And quiet is the angry bull.
But yet the sky is bright and blue
With everything of clearest hue,
The Wolds are close enough to feel:
Their trees and houses cut in steel:
The sun is tempting with a smile,
The wind is slaying with a knife,
(It aggravated Rogers' bile—
He killed himself upon his wife)
It kills the young, it kills the old,
It fells the timid with the bold;
Swift as a flash, hard as a stone,
Sharp as a flint, dry as a bone,
It pierces you without a sound,
The blast that comes from 'Deadman's Ground':
For when the wind is in the East

[22]

[23]

Peter Wray

No more I hear the waters roar,
Roused at the comin' of the bore,
No more the river turns agen,
To sweep across the level fen;
No more the winds in fury ride
Along the marshes wild and wide
Afore the risin' of the tide:
The waters roam no more.

No more I wade along the fen
For heron or for water hen,
Nor hug the bottom of my boat
As to the feeding ducks I'd float;
Nor ambushed laay wi' rovin' eye
To watch like specks agen the sky
The wild geese circlin' on high:
The waters roam no more.

No more I creep, nor crouchin', run,
Nor trail my owd long-barrelled gun
Nor listen 'ow the water laps
About my sunken fishin' traps;
'Tis eighty year sin, as a boy,
I first 'elped at the duck decoy,
An' now—I know but little joy:
The waters roam no more.

My feyther knew the hidden ways,
Across the waste and marshy maze,
He knew each haunt of bird an' fish,
An' how to find 'em at his wish;
While sometimes in his punt he'd sing
Until the reedy dykes'd ring,
But now's the end of everything:
The waters roam no more.

When, on a stormy winter's night
There stirs a noise, or sudden light,
I lay an' pant, to hear 'em shout
In panic 'coz the water's out;
For long I look, an' anxious strain;
Alas! my hope is allers vain,
An' sad I go to sleep again:
The waters roam no more.

No more the waters roam the land,
But hid away on every hand
Are led in channels to the sea,
Instead of flowin' fancy free,
Instead of roarin' fierce an' wild
The same as when I wor a child,
They creep imprisoned an' defiled:
The waters roam no more.

[25]

[26]

Oh Fools! who plough, with hunger faint;
Who reap the harvest, lacking grain;
Oh Sheep! who offer no complaint;
Oh Worms! who dare not turn again.

The farmer leads the best of lives,
His food pours in: abundant feast;
Full fed upon your sweat he thrives;
And you—and you—are but a beast!

Each day you tend the growing corn,
'The ox shall not be muzzled'—True!
All animals must have their turn;
But less than any beast are you!

The horse is stabled, dry and warm,
His food is measured, manger-full;
The sheep is valued on the farm,
A price is found for meat and wool.

You—you are but a working man!
Your wages run from day to day,
Your wife and brood live as they can;
They count for no return of pay.

Old age creeps o'er your wrinkled face,
Your shoulders droop toward the soil;
When, faltering, you leave the race,
The workhouse well repays your toil.

Oh piteous soul! with none to care,
At length they recognize your worth;
And England yields, herself, your share:
A pauper grave in Mother Earth.

[27]

[28]

Elfin Dancer

Beneath unfathomable seas,
Deeper than dreams,
Sounder than sleep,
Beyond the magic of the trees
Where never light nor gladness gleams,
Where neither life nor love can glow;
There, you lie low:
Frozen, encased in crystal shape,
Enwrapped, enmeshed by claws that gape;
And not until you start from sleep
May you be drawn from cavern deep,
And never till the earth has quaked
Can you from fairy trance be waked.

You dance!
You dance on tiptoe!
Up from the grave of withered fears,
The earth wind, rushing in your ears,
Spirit of joy and youth, most fair,
Crowned by your wonder-loosened hair;
You dance!
You dance on tiptoe!
The grass just bending at your feet,
The earth untouched, as fairy-fleet
Onward you go,
Upward you flow,
Up through the leaves, a spiral flame,
A tongue of fire, with arrow-aim,
Whose mystic essence inter-blending
Flows in a torrent never ending;
Through that strange tree whose blossoms pale

[29]

Wreathe, lily-like, a bridal veil!
(Mysterious tree, whose knotted base
Scarce bears the ardour of your chase!)
Emerging thence by rapture swayed
You rise from leafy ambushade
Poised in the ether, to and fro,
One moment, hesitating—so—
Flashing from elfin eyes one glance
Still on tiptoe
You dance!
You dance!

Oh! earth-born spirit!
Swift wonder child of flame;
The essence of your being,
Dull human eyes, unseeing,
Can never hope to tame;
You may be worshipped from afar!
By faith, by hope, we see the star
From whence, you came:
Fleet as the wind amongst the hills
Your spirit listeth as it wills;
Oh Pagan huntress, chaste and wild,
You dwell amongst us, undefiled!
But if we falter at your door
At one false step your shrine, before
One discord note, one word awry
You vanish straight from human eye:
The earth unfolds herself to seize,
Your laughter echoes in the trees;
And you are known no more.

[30]

A. G. Webster

(Painter, Rebel, and Lover of Music)

Like old Sebastian Bach, who went alone,
Working, unnoticed, with a single aim,
He lived and moved amongst you all unknown;
You gave him neither honour nor civic fame;
No Freedom of your city crowned his head;
No recognition of his genius came:
But—
Citizens of Lincoln—
I tell you that your greatest citizen is dead!

[31]

Oh, to be Home

Oh! to be home, now that the Autumn's coming,
Where the clover's nodding and the bees are humming,
Where the sun is scorching over fields of hay,
And the country's ready for the harvest day;
Where the bullocks stand knee-deep in meadows, browsing,
Or underneath the shady trees are drowsing,
Where the corn is turning colour, fit to reap,
And in the sun, the horses lie asleep.

Oh! to be home, now that the harvest's ready,
Now the hay is gathered and the weather's steady,

Now the reaper-sails across the fields are flying,
And the barley—white as driven snow—is dying;
When overhead, the harvest moon rides full,
And daybreak brings a touch of frosty wool;
While stackyards clear, are ready for their turn,
And farmers smile across the level Hurn.

Oh! to be home, now that the winter's nigh,
And swifts by millions, flit about the sky,
When thatchers all get busy with their pegs,
And horses, out at grass, can stretch their legs;
When inns at night, are full of tired men,
Who've had a bumping harvest in the Fen;
Tis then, tis then, none but a fool would roam;
Tis then, tis then, I wish I were at home.

[32]

Give Soldiers a Vote?

Give soldiers a vote?
Don't talk so blame silly!
They've gone to the War
To beat Kyzer Billy;
And till that be done
There's plenty of fun.

The war may be pressing
But—Politics first!
Let's keep up the Game,
Though the Heavens should burst;
Then we're sure of our pay,
Till the very Last Day.

Great Scott! Don't you see
How we stand on the brink?
Give soldiers a vote?
They would say what they think;
And from power and pay
We should rapidly sink.

So don't talk about it,
Don't mention it now;
Let the men go to war
And the women to plough;
We Statesmen will govern....
The Lord, He knows how!

[33]

Alone

How now my heart! At this most fell cross-road
The night far darker than a pit surrounds,
And only by the lightning's fitful stroke
Can'st see the perils that beset thy course;
Too clear they loom on searing eyeballs flashed;
Certain thy fate whatever twist or turn;
Deep tolls a bell beneath the tempest's roar,
And soon thy long-drawn struggle will be done.

Thou art too steeped in artifice, old heart!
So cunning that thou hardly art discerned:

In caverns never touched by light of day
Thou stirrest unbeknown;
At first as lusty
As any pliant sapling in the spring,
Soon as the lonely bull's dark hide
Art hard and bitter; weathered by the storms;
Cross-grained, bewildered, thy courage slowly failing;
Thou standest here: forlorn, dismayed, alone.

Thy years have passed away in that Great Search,
The quest that bruises hearts on hardest stone;
Seeking a refuge from dread loneliness,
Some haven where the soul is not bereaved;
Too often—my heart—hast thou been sorely bruised;
And now at last the truth confronts thy gaze,
Declared by flash against the pitiless night:
'The soul must die as it hath lived—alone.'
Alone! The shuddering echo dies away;
No subterfuge, no shelter is there ever,
There is no anodyne for weary hearts;
For him who stands alone at this cross-road
The only hope is death.

[34]

From nothingness to nothingness thou passest!
As thou wert born—
As thou hast lived, so shalt thou die!
Death is the only refuge: at his visage
All other spectres flee. Remorse that teareth
Like the undying worm, and Failure,
That sheeted gibberer, his brother,
Who like two hounds have haunted thy abode,
Must vanish at his touch:
And soon, thy journey done, thy trouble over,
Wrapped in the mantle of forgetfulness
Thou shalt sleep well.

[35]

Flesh of our Flesh

There is but one irrevocable bond,
Heart of my heart! None other counteth here,
All claims beside must fail, however fond,
But this is surety never to be broken
By us Beloved! the eternal token
Of love made manifest beyond our fear:
Of sweetest deepest draught the living bowl!
Although remorse should tear our hearts in twain,
The world, to part us, rageth now in vain
And life new-born through life doth bind us ever:
Strange incarnation! out of each made whole!
No prayer avails, no penances can sever:
The Holy Ghost—the Spirit—releaseth never
When flesh and blood and spirit beget a soul.

[36]

This Town is Hell

This town is Hell, and all the people in it
Are devils, roasting for their sins like cinders;
They've train and tram instead of lark and linnet,
For sun are lamps, for sky are only windows,

They have no air to breathe, no room to rove,
And crowd so closely that you cannot move;
Robbing each other whilst nobody hinders:
In towns, there is no Providence above.

If Providence there is above this city,
The fog and smoke must cover it from pity,
For folk are crazed, and run instead of walking,
To catch—they know not what—all nonsense talking.
Old farm! Old farm! I wish I hadn't left you!
And if my time came back, I wouldn't part:
You gave me pleasant thoughts to dwell upon,
And peaceful days and quietness of heart.

[37]

For here, no happiness can come at all,
The nights are cursed by idle folk at play;
Here is no sleepy smell of new mown hay,
Or soothing noise of cattle in their stall;
No scent of may in bloom, or beans in flower,
No drowsy sound of bees among the clover;
But only hooters, droning every hour;
With smoke and dirt and misery all over.

Sometimes, when dazed by this un-human place
I have remembered me the days so dear,
And seen again the horses out at plough,
Their shoulders pressing forward in the gear:
The smell, the sound, come back with strange surprise,
To think that I am down Long Martin Fen;
It brings the tears into my aching eyes,
To dream that I am farming once again.

[38]

Timberland Bells

I used to hear them faintly
Those evening bells for prayer,
Across the fields of Tilney,
Beyond the sunset's glare.

I heard them in my childhood,
Those bells of Timberland,
When I was always happy,
Holding my father's hand.

Enchanted in the distance,
They rode upon the air,
Seeming to float from Heaven;
I knew not how nor where.

All through life's dusty pathway,
I heard those bells ring out,
A chiming in the distance,
That sung, my path about.

My father—how I miss him—
Lies in the churchyard there,
He takes my hand no longer
He knows not how I fare.

But I would give up everything
To hold again his hand,
And hear across the meadows
The bells of Timberland.

[39]

'Dame Peach'

Old Dame Peach stuck like a leech to any good bargain what fell in her reach,
She never let slip what come in her grip: however they turned she was ready
for each;
She'd strip herself bare or sell you her hair, or put up a price for her best
china ware,
Her very own bed in which she was wed would be yours in a second, if only
you dare;
Of childer she'd lots and would lend you their cots, and although you'd have
backed her to lose in a race,
Yet at business she shone when the others wor done; and nobody ever could
stand in her place.

Among all the men she took care of her-sen and was never alarmed at the
roughest of tricks,
She'd sit in a bar suppin' ale from a jar, till a bargain was driven, her profit to
fix.
Folk knew her all round and none ever was found but at one time or other had
met her somehow,
A good stand-up fight it was all her delight: she would get up at midnight to
sell you a cow;
She bested the men what came out of the Fen, and the folk from the Wold
they found theirsens sold,
While them from the Heath they was allers beneath; for however they tried
they was out in the cold.

The top of the tree was our Mrs. P. at swapping a horse or a cargo of tea,
She'd purchase old wicks or a truckload of bricks or a house full of furniture,
just for a spree,
Though she's mounted on high somewhere up in the sky, wherever she is
there is business ahead,
But I wish she was back when we'd have a real crack on the friends that are
gone and the days that are fled;
When her shop was a store and a thousand things more; with her busy in-
gathering all she could reach:
A jewel, a treasure, a caution, a pleasure: Oh! sadly we miss her, our Old Mrs.
Peach.

[40]

[41]

Friends

Years ago,
Simply ages;
I don't know
How the deuce they go:
Like turning pages!

We're still friends at any rate;
Nothing can invalidate
The fun we had,
Good or bad,
Always together,
Not caring whether
Earthquake or thunder,
Over or under;
Joy in each heart;
Singing like thrushes
Young in bushes:
Now—we're apart.

I've never been so happy since then:
They talk of the love of women and men,
It's not half so true as that of friends;
Not passionate, not selfish,
Never ends ...
Not our fault to be forced away,
Destiny came:

A wedge:
We could not turn its edge;
And so it fell upon that bitter day.

[42]

We might have had such times!
But—No! No!
It wouldn't go;
And after that 'twas never the same;
I can't encompass it by rhymes,
Halting and tame;
There it lies—
Not to be altered by tears or sighs:
We meet, stealing;
Eyes on the door;
With banished feeling—
But—No more!

[43]

Charing Cross—1916

Round Charing Cross in carrion row
The crowd press in; a sight to see;
Their mouths agape, their eyes aglow,
With morbid curiosity.

Those twisted limbs, those bandaged faces!
Humanity all broken down!
The ghostly grim procession races:
Hell's handicraft in London Town.

The bestial throng with pampered eyes—
Faces of goat or sheep or bull—
All greedy with a glad surprise
Of ghoulish horror drinking full.

Heroic citizens, well nourished,
Who feast your eyes:—What sight to see?
By you the Coliseum flourished;
You thronged, as now, round Calvary.

[44]

Love not too much

Have you too greatly loved?
Sister take warning!
Once let your soul be moved,
Sable your mourning;
If he be satiate,
Then an ingratiate,
Waiteth the dawning.

Shew not the passion
That stirs in your veins,
Far more alluring
To handle the reins,
His love ensuring....
In masculine fashion
If certain—he wanes.

He the pursuer
Must ever press on,

Passionate wooer
Whilst you are a stone;
Shew but a touch,
Yet never too much
And the battle is won.

[45]

Man is a monster
Made to be stroked,
Close then your arms
Cover your charms;
Great the enticement
Of beauties when hidden,
Of passion well cloaked.

Crazed, he shall plead,
For what you yield gladly,
Fiercer his greed,
For what you give madly;
You may have measure
Of love's burning pleasure
And still hold your treasure....
Sister take heed!

[46]

Niccolo Machiavelli

From thy serene abode thou lookest down
With pitying eye upon a rabble rout
Who strive and plot and fight and turn about,
Endeavouring to seize some phantom crown,—
Whether of kingdom or of some small town,
Or village—or one single home—their own:
They stumble, and with hurried steps awry
Blindly they miss their opportunity;
Whilst, all the time, thy Golden Book is there,
Ripe with earth's wisdom; but they only stare
Or pass along with stupid scoff and curse,
Using thy name for 'scoundrelly' or worse.

Of all those who have striven to endow
The world with garnered knowledge, only thou
Hast for so long endured of thorns the crown;
Beneath the feet of swine thy name is thrown;
And in the streets thy priceless wit doth lie;
So that, alone, the stooping passer-by
Undaunted by an epithet, may find;
And treasuring like gold seven times refined,
Open the casket with exultant air
To see the Pearl of Wisdom lying there.

[47]

Remorse

Pierce you another, pleasure bent,
Or wound the helpless innocent;
The Holy Ghost shall not relent.

Beyond the tortured body's cry
Dread is the mind's dull misery;
Remorse, the worm, can never die.

'Oh to repay it,' Judas saith:
Who robs the innocent of breath,
Certain shall live to welcome death.

[48]

The Mandrake's Horrid Scream

Why ain't the Mester back?
Down these owd Fens there ain't noa neighbours,
An' when he's finished wi' his labours,
He gallops off full crack!
I sits aloan an' shaakes wi' fear
While he be rousin' at the 'Deer.'
Them what's in towns has niver tried
To live aloan, all terrified;
They talk about churchyards at night,
Or things wi' chains dressed up in white:
Why! Bless my soul! I'd gladly sleep
In any place what made them creep!
Coz allers they've a friend about
To hear if they should give a shout!
They dunno what it is to fear
But—here—
What's that?
Only the cat!
An' she's as black as Death's own self,
She squats all loathly on yon shelf,
Wi' one unwinkin' eye on me
I wish the Devil—

No!
Not *He!*
I didn't mean to mention names,
Nor interfere wi' others gaames:
They saay as cats is really witches,
Like Betty Williamson, now dead,
What uster wear her husband's breeches
An' ate the queerest food, foak said;
She set beside her open door
Wi' one foot allers off the floor,
Quietly knitting; one eye cast
To overlook you as you passed;
An' just the same, yon nasty critter
Stares at me now that soft an' bitter!
Oh Dear! I wish my man would came!
May ague twist, an' strike him dumb!
May fairies nip his liver out
An' leave him nare a tongue to shout.
Forsaking me, all loansome here
With iverything what's wrong and queer.

[49]

From out my winder, where I sit
I see the willows round yon pit:
Dark Pit where Moller Holmes was found
As some said,—accidental drowned!—
But I heard screechin', terrified,
About the time he must a died!
Having noa bottom, soa they say;
It's dreadful secrets there must stay
Until the Resurrection Day!
Oh where the Devil is that Tom?
I'll give him 'pub' when he gits hoam:
The wind is moanin' round that Pit
As if somebody wished to flit:
There's Things in there what stirs by night
An' if you see, yer hair turns white;
Around, they say, the Mandrake grows
What's pulled at dead of night by *those*
Who little care although it screams

[50]

To wake poor mortals from their dreams.
Our parson tells of Powers Evil:
(An' Providence can't beat the Devil)
Where should they laay, but in yon Pit?
What makes me squirl to think on it:
All gashly arms a-reachin' out
To clamber up yer water spout
An' reach you through—
Oh Lor!
Who's that?
'Tis something comin'
I hear *it* hummin'....

My dear good Tom! Thank God it's him!
I was afraid of something grim—
I've bin a-wantin' you soa long—
You lousy mawkin', stinkin' strong
Of beer an' bacca! Off to bed!
I'll larn yer, Thomas, who you've wed:
'Fore morn, you'll wish as you was dead.

[51]

One Day

I read you poems all the day,
And all the night I dreamed of you,
Wild nightmares riding sweet sleep through,
Whilst all the time I longed to say
More tenderly, my roundelay,
And ardently with verse to woo.

I read you poems all the day;
You gave them up again to me,
For all the night I seemed to see
Your face a vision on my way,
As with the murmuring of streams
Your voice commingled in my dreams.

I read you poems all the day;
Ah! would that you could hear me now!
Accepting the unuttered vow
My spirit yearned but dare not say:
Yet still though you are far away
I read you poems all the day.

[52]

No Wife

Tom! Tom! What yer think?
I've 'ed the Parson's wife
The first time in 'er life, acrost our door!

What for?

What for? Why Tom, you'd niver niver guess!
Not if you lived as old as Grammer Bess
What's lately swore
She's a hunder an' four—
She wants us two, to go off an' git spliced!

Oh Christ!

What's got 'er now:
The cow!

You well may swear;
Coz 'ow she dare—an' why—
Will make you swear agen, or laugh—surelie!
Just light yer pipe
Now you look comfortable—so
You're rough—old Tom—I know—
Black as a crow!
But I'm fond on yer lad
As any fool could see!
An' whether we're good or bad
You've bin maain good ter me.

But—blast 'er silly eyes!
What yer say to 'er, then?
I said a lot!
I telled 'er what!
A-comin' ere wi' 'er fancy airs,
'Er what's never known no cares,
Lookin' that wise—
Just coz she catched a Parson!
[An' noa great shaakes ayther—
She'd nowt of a feyther
While 'er half-brother run away to sea
An' took to blue water
Wi' their ole cook's daughter]
'You talk of "sin" an' "shame," I sez, 'to me?
You talks just like a fool
Or a silly bairn at school
Coz nobody about could doubt,
But what we're happy together him an' me;
Just look,' I sez, 'at any in this street
What couple can you find about to beat
My Tom an' me what's bin together years,
Happy an' comfortable;
Never noa serious trouble—
Nuthin' I mean to set us by the ears—
Good reason why!'
I sez—sez I—
'Coz we're a free an' equal pair;
We got to treat each other fair
Or else we part.'

Well said now Missus! That were smart!

'To part!' sez she, 'lookin' all down her noaz,
'Ow could you leave your hoam wi' childer three?'
I sez—sez I—'that dudn't bother me
Coz I can earn enough for food an' cloaz.
I can maintain 'em by mysen,' sez I,
'An' would at any time o' day.
I'm not a slave—an' anyway
I'd manage if I 'ed to do,
I'm not a slave,' I sez, 'like you!'

You didn't—Come!—

I did—I did!
I meant it too.
'If your man turns up stunt,' sez I,
'You can't goa off, or let him fly;
You can't maintain yoursen—not you!—
Lettin' aloan the bairns, you 'aint!'
(That made her squirm all down her back!)
"Ow could you wok up on a stack?
Or yok a hoss or bake or wesh;
If your man drinks or starts to thresh
You couldn't leave him coz he holds yer:
You're tied by laws and friends what scolds yer;
Yer ain't like me, as free as air.
I'm not afraid whoever stare,
Nayther is Tom!
We minds oursens
An' thinks noa more of foaks than hens,

[53]

[54]

Coz if I doant behave mysen—
Or him—
We parts!—
Why doant we?
Why?
Becoz we're free an' happy here,
Becoz we treats each other fair!

[55]

You giv 'er the rough o' yer tongue, old gel,
But—what a sell!

Comin' 'ere to ride rough shod
Coz she's a 'wife.'
Why—bless my life
She doesn't know she's born;
She couldn't find her own corn!
I sent 'er off wi' a flea in 'er ear!
An' will again if she dost come near!
But she weant!
The white faced critter—
Wi' a noaz like a knife
An' a smile that bitter
As if she would kill.
A wife!
What does she know of life?—
Nowt!
Nor ever will!—
But tomorrer's Sunday
An' we'll go to Church!

What?

Yes! Just for once; an' sit together,
Like birds of a feather!
We aint ashamed to show our faces
To them what thinks we be disgraces.
We'll goa together Tom—for sure
We'll goa this once an' then noa more—
If you be willin'?

[56]

Aye lass—I'm willin'—
I'll back you up as I've allers done,
Agen Parson's wife or anyone.
Aye; agen all the country round,
Coz you're as good as could be found—
An' now—old gel—it's omost eight,
Come on—yer know we moant be late,
Off to the Ship for our glass of aale;
This yarn of yourn'll make a taale!
What's that—yer bunnet?
All rate ... be quick—
I'll wait for yer agen the gate.

[57]

To an old Friend

A tongue of lambent living flame
Stirs lightly when I hear your name,
Your features delicate and rare,
Quiver with every thought you bear;
It ever was a strange delight
To see your charming face alight,
To sit with you awhile apart
And hear the beating of your heart,
Or watch the message from your brain
Into your eyes then back again.

And still it is my fairest dream—

That delicate ethereal gleam,
The fire that played behind your face,
Lighting it with such fairy grace;
Such intuition sweet and wild;
Why should you always be a child?

You cannot ever hope to grow
Into a woman; oh dear no!
The fairies never would allow
Such desecration; so that, now,
You must be reconciled to stay
For ever as you are to-day.
What an enchanting fate is this!
Eternally a child to be,
Laughing with that untroubled bliss
That only haunts the fancy free:
Yes, yours is happiness indeed;
Barefoot to roam the woodland vale,
All careless, though your feet should bleed
Because you hear the nightingale;
All heedless, though the thorns should tear,
And though the pain be fierce and wild,
For Nature gives to you her kiss;
And you will always be her child.

[58]

[59]

Is it Finished?

Well—Is it finished,
Is the long day-dream done?
The battle lost, and won?
Has love at length diminished
And night begun?

Do you pass to another?
Yet still I hold
Devotion all untold;
Although you mate a brother
And leave me cold.

My heart beats but for thee
And every thought is thine,
As flowers to the sun incline;
For once thou lovedst me
And all was mine.

Though destiny may banish,
My heart is still the same;
And thine is all my fame;
Although thy love may vanish,
True burns my flame.

And, thou mayst know
That shouldst thou call to me,
Where-ever I may be,
Like arrow from its bow
Straight I will fly to thee.

[60]

Oh, Lincoln, City of my dreams

As far away as childhood seems
Thou standest on thy Roman hill,
And memory holds thee frozen, still,
Engraved on steel where moonlight streams.

For leagues along the landscape mild
Thy towers twin the scene command,
Embattlements of fairyland;
Romance incarnate to a child.

Though other cities cast a spell,
Ever thou holdst my heart in chains;
And still I hear across the plains
At midnight's stroke that ancient bell

Whose giant throbbing scarcely seems
A mortal sound at Heaven's gate:
It echoes round the exile's fate—
Oh Lincoln! City of my dreams!

[61]

The Fool

What say?
Tharp?
Yis: Aaron Tharp lived theer!
Not quite sharp?
Not quite—I fear!
T'wer very sad!
Though theer wor summat—'tis hard to say—
But he come to his end and went away;
He'd a nice little place as his feyther made,
All gone to pot, I be much afraid.
Old Aaron built it in his day,
A worthy feller true an' sound,
Respected by the country round;
To think as his name should be forgotten!
If he'd known what a fool he had begotten!
He toiled an' moiled into his grave
To leave a lad what couldn't save!
Noa note of grace, noa sense of cash!
He lost his all be bein' rash!

An' for what!—
For what!—
To play the fiddle!
'Hey diddle diddle!
To make up tunes in his empty head
An' ruin his eyes wi' the books he read!
He raumed an' babbled all day long
About the way to sing a song!
Follered the lads at plough about
To hear 'em sing would make him shout!
He'd sit on the bar of the Ship at night:
To catch the tunes was his delight,
Or to play the fiddle about the town:—
An' all the while his trade went down!
That trade what poor old Aaron tended
It's fell to nowt an' can't be mended
Coz businesses is all the same
You've simply got to play the game
With all your soul an' all your heart
Or else you'll soon be in the cart.

[62]

He was encouraged by our parson!
T'wer wrong of parson!
It's very well for them to talk
To sing an' play and idle, walk,

But aren't they paid for doin' that?
They mind their bread is buttered fat.
Parsons is sensible you see,
O'most as cute as lawyers be,
Not quite—a course coz noa one could—
But very nigh—just as they should.
Parsons is sound at heart, I say,
They never quarrels wi' their pay,
Soa it wor wrong of Parson theer,
Coz Aaron nobbut lacked a cheer.

He made his tunes, he played about
An' none but Parson had a doubt
What he was bound for—poor young lad!
A course I'll own,—though he wor mad,—
Them tunes he played, them songs he sung,
They minded you of bein' young;
They took me back, a boy, agen
At work wi' Feyther down the Fen,
When all the birds they uster sing
At sunrise till the air would ring,
And sheep and cows would stir about
Wi' everything to make yer shout,
Yes it wor strange what he could do,
His fiddle seemed to mazzle you,
The labourers would catch a song—
An' they *was* catchy—all along;
They sing 'em yet; an' Georgy Bell
He plays 'em by the village well.

But all the while, trade didn't mend
Until at last ther' come the end.

They selled him up, lock stock an' stoan,
An' off he went away, aloan;
Because he sung but couldn't save.
I think his feyther in the grave
Must sure a-stirred, 'owever deep:
That smash would waken any sleep!
Young Aaron went—
I dunno where—
They say he's gone to Manchester,
An' there, mayhap, mid soot an' smoke,
Makes music for the city folk;
Plays on his fiddle, time, agen
Them tunes he larned down Martin Fen
From shepherds or from waggon-boys
Or men at plough,—or any noise:
He made his tunes out of the air,
From birds or beasts—he didn't care!
An' Parson, says he'll make a name
(Our Parson, what's the one to blame!)
As if he ever could agen
Find such a hoam as Martin Fen;
As if he could, by fiddle fad,
Get half the name his feyther had.

Lost in some smoky town he plays
An' thinks, I lay, on sunny days,
Of all the things what makes life dear
Like beans and bacon, cheese and beer;
A dreamy good-for-nothing lad,
Sure bound to lose all what he had.
He might a-riz, an' come to be
As high as *you*, or even *me*!
An' bin well known the country round
As comfortable, warm, an' sound.

His name *is* known for many a mile,
It raises far-an'-wide, a smile:
While folk they whisper 'Not right sharp!'
A fool! a fool! wor Aaron Tharp.

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