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Title: Poems - Second Series

Author: Sir John Collings Squire

Release date: October 26, 2011 [EBook #37861]
Most recently updated: January 8, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Al Haines

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POEMS - SECOND SERIES ***

POEMS

SECOND SERIES

By J. C. Squire

London:
William Heinemann Limited
1922

TO
EDWARD SHANKS

PREFACE

Three years ago I published a volume called *Poems: First Series*, which contained a collection of what I had written between 1905 and March, 1918.

The present collection contains all that I have written since then. *The Birds* and nine shorter poems were published in a small booklet in 1919; *The Moon* was separately published in 1920; but the majority of the poems here printed appear in book form for the first time, and twelve have never previously been published.

The poems are as nearly as possible in chronological order, except that the group called *An Epilogue* should have been dated 1917.

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THE BIRDS

(To Edmund Gosse)

Within mankind's duration, so they say,
Khephren and Ninus lived but yesterday.
Asia had no name till man was old
And long had learned the use of iron and gold;
And æons had passed, when the first corn was planted,
Since first the use of syllables was granted.

Men were on earth while climates slowly swung,
Fanning wide zones to heat and cold, and long
Subsidence turned great continents to sea,
And seas dried up, dried up interminably,
Age after age; enormous seas were dried
Amid wastes of land. And the last monsters died.

Earth wore another face. O since that prime
Man with how many works has sprinkled time!
Hammering, hewing, digging tunnels, roads;
Building ships, temples, multiform abodes.
How, for his body's appetites, his toils
Have conquered all earth's products, all her soils;
And in what thousand thousand shapes of art
He has tried to find a language for his heart!

Never at rest, never content or tired:
Insatiate wanderer, marvellously fired,
Most grandly piling and piling into the air
Stones that will topple or arch he knows not where.
And yet did I, this spring, think it more strange,
More grand, more full of awe, than all that change,
And lovely and sweet and touching unto tears,
That through man's chronicled and unchronicled years,
And even into that unguessable beyond
The water-hen has nested by a pond,
Weaving dry flags into a beaten floor,
The one sure product of her only lore.
Low on a ledge above the shadowed water
Then, when she heard no men, as nature taught her,
Flashing around with busy scarlet bill
She built that nest, her nest, and builds it still.

O let your strong imagination turn
The great wheel backward, until Troy unburn,
And then unbuild, and seven Troys below
Rise out of death, and dwindle, and outflow,
Till all have passed, and none has yet been there:
Back, ever back. Our birds still crossed the air;
Beyond our myriad changing generations
Still built, unchanged, their known inhabitations.
A million years before Atlantis was
Our lark sprang from some hollow in the grass,
Some old soft hoof-print in a tussock's shade;
And the wood-pigeon's smooth snow-white eggs were laid,
High amid green pines' sunset-coloured shafts,
And rooks their villages of twiggy rafts
Set on the tops of elms, where elms grew then,
And still the thumbling tit and perky wren
Popped through the tiny doors of cosy balls
And the blackbird lined with moss his high-built walls;
A round mud cottage held the thrush's young,
And straws from the untidy sparrow's hung.
And, skimming forktailed in the evening air,
When man first was were not the martins there?
Did not those birds some human shelter crave,
And stow beneath the cornice of his cave
Their dry tight cups of clay? And from each door
Peeped on a morning wiseheads three or four.

Yes, daw and owl, curlew and crested henn,
Kingfisher, mallard, water-rail and tern,
Chaffinch and greenfinch, wagtail, stonechat, ruff,
Whitethroat and robin, fly-catcher and chough,
Missel-thrush, magpie, sparrow-hawk and jay,
Built, those far ages gone, in this year's way.
And the first man who walked the cliffs of Rame,
As I this year, looked down and saw the same
Blotches of rusty red on ledge and cleft
With grey-green spots on them, while right and left
A dizzying tangle of gulls were floating and flying,
Wheeling and crossing and darting, crying and crying,
Circling and crying, over and over and over,
Crying with swoop and hover and fall and recover.
And below on a rock against the grey sea fretted,
Pipe-necked and stationary and silhouetted,
Cormorants stood in a wise, black, equal row
Above the nests and long blue eggs we know.

O delicate chain over all the ages stretched,
O dumb tradition from what far darkness fetched:
Each little architect with its one design

Perpetual, fixed and right in stuff and line,
Each little ministrant who knows one thing,
One learned rite to celebrate the spring,
Whatever alters else on sea or shore,
These are unchanging: man must still explore.

A DOG'S DEATH

The loose earth falls in the grave like a peaceful regular breathing;
Too like, for I was deceived a moment by the sound:
It has covered the heap of bracken that the gardener laid above him;
Quiet the spade swings: there we have now his mound.

A patch of fresh earth on the floor of the wood's renewing chamber:
All around is grass and moss and the hyacinth's dark green sprouts:
And oaks are above that were old when his fiftieth sire was a puppy:
And far away in the garden I hear the children's shouts.

Their joy is remote as a dream. It is strange how we buy our sorrow
For the touch of perishing things, idly, with open eyes;
How we give our hearts to brutes that will die in a few seasons,
Nor trouble what we do when we do it; nor would have it otherwise.

A POET TO HIS MUSE

Muse, you have opened like a flower.

* * * * *

Long ago I knew that brown integument,
Like a dead husk, had dormant life within it,
And waited till a first white point appeared
Which shot into a naked stiff pale spike
That grew.
I knew this was not all;
Nothing I said as greener you grew and taller,
But dreamed alone of the day when your bud would unsheathe,
And silently swell, and at last your crown would break
Filling the air with clouds of colour and fragrance,
Radiant waves, odours of immortality.

* * * * *

In a pot of earth I watered and tended you,
Breaking the clods and soaking the earth with water
That fed your roots and eased your way to the light.
I gave you the sun and the rain
But saved you from scorching and drowning:
You are mine, and only I know you,
And the ways of your growth, and the days.

* * * * *

But you are not from me.
I am but a pen for a hand,
A bed for a river,
A window for light.
And I bow in awe to that Power
That made you a flower.

PROCESSES OF THOUGHT

I

I find my mind as it were a deep water.

Sometimes I play with a thought and hammer and bend it,
Till tired and displeas'd with that I toss it away,
Or absently let it slip to the yawning water:
And down it sinks, forgotten for many a day.

But a time comes when tide or tempest washes it
High on the beach, and I find that shape of mine,
Or I haul it out from the depths on some casual rope,
Or, passing over that spot in quiet shine,

I see, where my boat's shadow makes deep the water,
A patch of colour, far down, from the bottom apart,
A wavering sign like the gleam from an ancient anchor,
Brown fixing and fleeting flakes; and I feel my heart

Wake to a strange excitement; so that I stop,
Put up my paddles and dredge with a careful net:
And I catch it, and see it stir, and feel its weight,
And pull till it nears and breaks from the water wet.

And my eyes dwell on that old abandoned thing
Recovered by chance. For the shape I had found so dull
Has crusted and changed in secrecy and silence,
And its surface shines like a pearl, most beautiful.

II

In bed I lie, and my thoughts come filing by,
All forms and faces, cheerful, serene and sad:
Some clear, some mistily showing and fragmentary,
Some altered in size or shape since last they were seen.

But O last, you group of merry ones!
Lord knows when I saw you before, but I met you once,
The whole collection of you, impudent-eyed;
And now, rosy and grinning, with linked arms
You go swingingly by, turning your faces to mine,
I laugh aloud; you bad lots; you are a secret,
That nobody else knows.

And you it was that made me break the procession
(While memory gave me still the power of summons),
And call up all I could of a half-hour's thoughts
To parade them across this proscenium of my skull
In the order they came in, more carefully recognising
The old, and remarking which have developed or changed.
And as for you, you rogues, I am almost certain
There are one or two more of you now than once there were.

* * * * *

Good-bye! Good-bye! Dance through the dark door
In to the life that somewhere else you lead.
And one day I shall all unwittingly call
Some word you know as a signal, or you'll see
Someone else coming my way; you'll suddenly follow,
And you'll appear again, quite possibly
Bringing new friends—who are sure to be just as bad.

III

Into the pits of my heart and brain,
My eyes, ears, nose, tongue, fingers, like five gardeners
Are shovelling sights, sounds, odours, savours, contacts,
While I, their master, casually nod, and most times

Stand idly by, looking at something else,
Forgetting that the work is going on
And only fully conscious of my servants
When something they move is consonant with my mood
And draws my notice; or some other thing,
More strange than usual or stronger in its impact,
Makes them exclaim and call to bid me watch.

And then in a ground of more than our dimensions
Those quietly flowing cascades of things are hid.
They are buried in those illimitable fields,
And ever as they are swallowed by the earth
The steady hours passing in procession
Walk over them and trample them well down
Out of sight, levelling all the soil.

Then some time my returning feet uncover them
(My slaves are all agog with recognition)
Or else perhaps I come and idly dig
To see what thing I can find, and out there comes
Some old form buried twenty years ago
Now called a memory.

Or marking well the place where one was put
Find it and more, drawn thither under the ground,
Tangled with others as flower-roots with roots
Into a new festoon, or one old image,
Wearing others like gems. And that's creation.

AIRSHIP OVER SUBURB

A smooth blue sky with puffed motionless clouds.

Standing over the plain of red roofs and bushy trees
The bright coloured shell of the large enamelled sky.

Out of the distance pointing, a cut dark shape
That moves this way at leisure, then hesitates and turns:
And its darkness suddenly dies as it turns and shows
A gleaming silver, white against even the whitest cloud.

Across the blue and the low small clouds it moves
Level, with a floating cloud-like motion of its own,
Peaceful, sunny and slow, a thing of summer itself,
Above the basking earth, travelling the clouds and the sky.

THE INVOCATION OF LUCRETIVS

BOOK I

Mother of Rome, delight of gods and men,
Beloved Venus, who under the fleeting stars
Fillest the freighted sea and earth's ripe fields,
O since through thee alone all forms of life
Are born, and climb into the sun's sweet light,
Goddess, before whose lovely advancing feet
The winds and towering clouds scatter and flee,
And the labouring earth discloses odorous flowers,
And the sea falls into a shining calm,
And the assuaged heavens mellow with light.
For when the spring-like face of day awakes,
And the West Wind, unloosed, flies procreant forth,
Then first the coursing birds, smitten at heart,
Betray, Lady, thy entrance and thy power,

And then the beasts caper in happy pastures
And swim swift floods; so all created things,
Captive to thee, drawn by their own desire,
Stray through the world where'er thy presence leads.
Through all the seas and hills and swelling streams,
Wing-fluttering woods and green, luxuriant plains,
Thou harryest them with lust, that none shall fail
To carry their eternal races on.

Since then thou art sole queen of all that Is,
And without thee to help can nothing rise
To cross the glorious frontiers of the light,
And nothing grow in gentleness or grace,
Thee do I pray to aid my labouring verse,
Now that of all that Is I strive to sing,
Lady, for my dear Memmian heir, whom thou
Hast blest with every constant excellence;
For his sake, chiefly, fill my words with life.

AN EPILOGUE

I. THE FLUKE

For two years you went
Through all the worst of it,
Men fell around you, but you did not fall.
On the Somme when the air was a sea
Of contesting flashes and clouds of smoke,
Your gunners fell fast but you got never a scratch.
And once when you watched from a village tower
(At Longueval, was it?) between our guns and theirs
As men fought in the houses below,
A shell from an English battery came
And tore a hole in the tower below you,
But you were not hurt and remained observing.

And now,
A casual shell has come
And pierced your head,
And the men who were with you, uninjured,
Carried you back,
And you died on the way.

II. THE CONVERSATION

When we've greeted each other again,
And you've filled your pipe and sat down and stretched your legs,
You will look in the fire for a minute
And then you will say, with a yawn,
"Well, when do you think this damned war will be over?"
And I shall say nothing, or something as empty as nothing.
But I am forgetting.
We shall not greet each other again;
You will not ask that question again.

III. THE DEAF ADDER

Well, it's no good brooding.
The past cannot return.
They have killed him and buried him.
Many men as good as he have gone:
They were good men even if one never knew them.
It is a just and honourable war.
He went in readily at the start, though he hated it,
And one would not have had him do otherwise.

And, thank God, he did the job well
That had to be done.
He has suffered with millions of others
For the sake of the future's peace,
And ungrudgingly laid down his life
In the cleanest of England's wars.
There is no room for regret here, only for pride.

* * * * *

*Heart, you fool, lie down.
Cannot you hear
My excellent reasoning?*

IV. THE LANDSCAPE

You said, that first winter,
That the landscape around Ypres
Reminded you of Chinese paintings:
The green plain, striped with trenches,
The few trees on the plain,
And the puffs of smoke sprinkled over the plain.
You said, when the war was over,
That you would record that green desolation
In flat colours and lines
As a Chinese artist would.
That is what you were going to do.
The plain is still there.

V. ANOTHER HOUR

How many days we spent together!
Thousands.
And now I would give anything,
Anything,
For another, or even for one hour:
An hour, were it only of aimless lounging,
Or a game of billiards in a pub.

AN IMPRESSION RECEIVED FROM A SYMPHONY

There was a day, when I, if that was I,
Surrendered lay beneath a burning sky,
Where overhead the azure ached with heat,
And many red fierce poppies splashed the wheat;
Motion was dead, and silence was complete,
And stains of red fierce poppies splashed the wheat,

And as I lay upon a scent-warm bank,
I fell away, slipped back from earth, and sank,
I lost the place of sky and field and tree,
One covering face obscured the world for me,
And for an hour I knew eternity,
For one fixed face suspended Time for me.

O had those eyes in that extreme of bliss
Shed one more wise and culminating kiss,
My end had come, nor had I lived to quail,
Frightened and dumb as things must do that fail,
And in this last black devil-mocking gale,
Battered and dumb to fight the dark and fail.

FEN LANDSCAPE

Wind waves the reeds by the river,
Grey sky lids the leaden water.
Ducks fly low across the water,
Three flying: one quacks sadly.

Grey are the sky and the water,
Green the lost ribbons of reed-beds,
Small in the silence a black boat
Floats upon wide pale mirrors.

MEDITATION IN LAMPLIGHT

What deaths men have died, not fighting but impotent.
Hung on the wire, between trenches, burning and freezing,
Groaning for water with armies of men so near;
The fall over cliff, the clutch at the rootless grass,
The beach rushing up, the whirling, the turning head first;
Stiff writhings of strychnine, taken in error or haste,
Angina pectoris, shudders of the heart;
Failure and crushing by flying weight to the ground,
Claws and jaws, the stink of a lion's breath;
Swimming, a white belly, a crescent of teeth,
Agony, and a spirting shredded limb
And crimson blood staining the green water;
And, horror of horrors, the slow grind on the rack,
The breaking bones, the stretching and bursting skin,
Perpetual fainting and waking to see above
The down-thrust mocking faces of cruel men,
With the power of mercy, who gloat upon shrieks for mercy.

O pity me, God! O God make tolerable,
Make tolerable the end that awaits for me,
And give me courage to die when the time comes,
When the time comes as it must, however it comes,
That I shrink not nor scream, gripped by the jaws of the vice;
For the thought of it turns me sick, and my heart stands still,
Knocks and stands still. O fearful, fearful Shadow,
Kill me, let me die to escape the terror of thee!

A tap. Come in! Oh, no, I am perfectly well,
Only a little tired. Take this one, it's softer.
How are things going with you? Will you have some coffee?
Well, of course it's trying sometimes, but never mind,
It will probably be all right. Carry on, and keep cheerful,
I shouldn't, if I were you, meet trouble half-way,
It is always best to take everything as it comes.

HARLEQUIN

Moonlit woodland, veils of green,
Caves of empty dark between;
Veils of green from rounded arms
Drooping, that the moonlight charms.
Tranced the trees, grass beneath
Silent....

Like a stealthy breath,
Mask and wand and silver skin,
Sudden enters Harlequin.

Hist! Hist! Watch him go,

Leaping limb and pointing toe,
Slender arms that float and flow,
Curving wand above, below;
Flying, gliding, changing feet;
Onset fading in retreat.
Not a shadow of sound there is
But his motion's gentle hiss,
Till one fluent arm and hand
Suddenly circles, and the wand
Taps a bough far overhead,
"Crack," and then all noise is dead.
For he halts, and a space
Stands erect with upward face,
Taut and tense to the white
Message of the moon's light.

What is he thinking of, you ask;
Caught you the eyes behind the mask?
Whence did he come, where would he go?
Answers but the resuming flow
Of that swift continuous glide,
Whispering from side to side,
Silvered boughs, branches dim,
All the world's a frame for him;
All the trees standing around
On the fascinated ground,
See him swifter, swifter, sweep,
Dazzling, till one wildest leap...
Whisht! he kneels. And he listens.
How his steady silver glistens!

He was listening; he was there;
Flash! he went. To the air
He a waiting ear had bent,
Silent; but before he went
Something somewhere else to seek,
He moved his lips as though to speak.

And we wait, and in vain,
For he will not come again.
Earth, grass, wood, and air,
As we stare, and we stare,
Which that fierce life did hold,
Tired, dim, void, cold.

WINTER NIGHTFALL

The old yellow stucco
Of the time of the Regent
Is flaking and peeling:
The rows of square windows
In the straight yellow building
Are empty and still;
And the dusty dark evergreens
Guarding the wicket
Are draped with wet cobwebs,
And above this poor wilderness
Toneless and sombre
Is the flat of the hill.

They said that a colonel
Who long ago died here
Was the last one to live here:
An old retired colonel,
Some Fraser or Murray,
I don't know his name;
Death came here and summoned him,
And the shells of him vanished
Beyond all speculation;

And silence resumed here,
Silence and emptiness,
And nobody came.

Was it wet when he lived here,
Were the skies dun and hurrying,
Was the rain so irresolute?
Did he watch the night coming,
Did he shiver at nightfall
 Before he was dead?
Did the wind go so creepily,
Chilly and puffing,
With drops of cold rain in it?
Was the hill's lifted shoulder
So lowering and menacing,
 So dark and so dread?

Did he turn through his doorway
And go to his study,
And light many candles?
And fold in the shutters,
And heap up the fireplace
 To fight off the damp?
And muse on his boyhood,
And wonder if India
Ever was real?
And shut out the loneliness
With pig-sticking memoirs
 And collections of stamps?

Perhaps. But he's gone now,
He and his furniture
Dispersed now for ever;
And the last of his trophies,
Antlers and photographs,
 Heaven knows where.
And there's grass in his gateway,
Grass on his footpath,
Grass on his door-step;
The garden's grown over,
The well-chain is broken,
 The windows are bare.

And I leave him behind me,
For the straggling, discoloured
Rags of the daylight,
And hills and stone walls
And a rick long forgotten
 Of blackening hay:
The road pale and sticky,
And cart-ruts and nail marks,
And wind-ruffled puddles,
And the slop of my footsteps
In this desolate country's
 Cadaverous clay.

A FAR PLACE

(To K. Wigram.)

Sheltered, when the rain blew over the hills it was,
Sunny all day when the days of summer were long,
Beyond all rumour of labouring towns it was,
But at dawn and evening its trees were noisy with song.

There were four elms on the southward lawn standing,
Their great trunks evenly set in a square
Of shadowed grass in spring pierced with crocuses,
And their tops met high in the empty air.

Where the morning rose the grey church was below us,
If we stood by the porch we saw on either hand
The ground falling, the trees falling, and meadows,
A river, hamlets and spires: a chequered land,

A wide country where cloud shadows went chasing
Mile after mile, diminishing fast, until
They met the far blue downs; but round the corner
The western garden lay lonely under the hill.

* * * * *

And closed in the western garden, under the hillside,
Where silence was and the rest of the world was gone,
We saw and took the curving year's munificence:
Changing from flower to flower the garden shone.

Early its walks were fringed with little rock-plants,
Sprays and tufts of blossom, white, yellow, and blue,
And all about were sprinkled stars of narcissus,
And swathes of tulips all over the garden grew.

White groups and pink, red, crimson and lemon-yellow,
And the yellow-and-red-streaked tulips once loved by a boy;
Red and yellow their stiff and varnished petals,
And the scent of them stings me still with a youthful joy.

And in the season of perfect and frailest beauty,
Pear-blossom broke and the lilacs' waxen cones,
And a tranced laburnum trailing its veils of yellow
Tenderly drooped over the ivied stones.

The lilacs browned, a breath dried the laburnum,
The swollen peonies scattered the earth with blood,
And the rhododendrons shed their sumptuous mantles,
And the marshalled irises unseptried stood.

And the borders filled with daisies and pied sweet-williams
And busy pansies; and there as we gazed and dreamed,
And breathed the swooning smell of the packed carnations,
The present was always the crown of all: it seemed

Each month more beautiful sprang from a robe discarded,
The year all effortless dropt the best away
And struck the heart with loveliness new, more lavish;
When the clambering rose had blown and died, by day

The broad-leaved tapering many-shielded hollyhocks
Stood like pillars and shone to the August sun,
The glimmering cups of waking evening primroses
Filled the dusk now the scent of the rose was done.

* * * * *

A wall there was and a door to the rose-garden,
And out of that a gate to the orchard led,
And there was the last hedge, and the turf sloped upward
Till the sky was cut by the hill's line overhead.

And thither at times we climbed, and far below us
That world that had made the world remote was seen,
Small, a huddle of russet roofs and chimneys,
And its guard of elms like bushes against the green:

One spot in the country, little and mild and homely,
The nearest house of a wide, populous plain...
But down at evening under the stars and the branches
In the whispering garden we lost the world again.

* * * * *

Whispering, faint, the garden under the hillside...
Under the stars... Is it true that we lived there long?
Was it certainly so? Did ever we know that dwelling,
Breathe that night, and hear in the night that song?

LATE SNOW

The heavy train through the dim country went rolling, rolling,
Interminably passing misty snow-covered plough-land ridges
That merged in the snowy sky; came turning meadows, fences,
Came gullies and passed, and ice-coloured streams under frozen bridges.

Across the travelling landscape evenly drooped and lifted
The telegraph wires, thick ropes of snow in the windless air;
They drooped and paused and lifted again to unseen summits,
Drawing the eyes and soothing them, often, to a drowsy stare.

Singly in the snow the ghosts of trees were softly pencilled,
Fainter and fainter, in distance fading, into nothingness gliding,
But sometimes a crowd of the intricate silver trees of fairyland
Passed, close and intensely clear, the phantom world hiding.

O untroubled these moving mantled miles of shadowless shadows,
And lovely the film of falling flakes, so wayward and slack;
But I thought of many a mother-bird screening her nestlings,
Sitting silent with wide bright eyes, snow on her back.

SONG

You are my sky; beneath your circling kindness
My meadows all take in the light and grow;
Laugh with the joy you've given,
The joy you've given,
And open in a thousand buds, and blow.

But when you are sombre, sad, averse, forgetful,
Heavily veiled by clouds that brood with rain,
Dumbly I lie all shadowed,
I lie all shadowed,
And dumbly wait for you to shine again.

SONG

The heaven is full of the moon's light,
The earth fades below.
In this vast empty world of night
I only know

Pale-shining trees and moonlit fields,
The bird's tune,
And my night-flowering heart that yields
Her fragrance to the moon.

OLD SONG

My window is darkness,
The sighs of the night die in silence;
The lamp on my table
Burns gravely, the walls are withdrawn;

And beneath, in your darkness,
You are sleeping and dreaming forgetful,
But I think of you smiling,
For I'm wakeful and now it is only an hour to the dawn.

When the first throb of light comes
I shall rise and go out to the garden,
And walk the lawn's verdure
Before the wet gossamer goes;
And when you come down, sweet,
All singing and light in the morning,
Delight will break ambush
With your garden's most fragrant and softest and reddest red rose.

EPITAPH IN OLD MODE

The leaves fall gently on the grass,
And all the willow trees, and poplar trees, and elder trees
That bend above her where she sleeps,
O all the willow trees, the willow trees
Breathe sighs upon her tomb.

O pause and pity, as you pass,
She loved so tenderly, so quietly, so hopelessly;
And sometimes comes one here and weeps:
She loved so tenderly, so tenderly,
And never told them whom.

THE MOON

(To Maurice Baring)

I waited for a miracle to-night.
Dim was the earth beneath a star-swept sky,
Her boughs were vague in that phantasmal light,
Her current rippled past invisibly.
No stir was in the dark and windless meadows,
Only the water, whispering in the shadows,
That darkened nature lived did still proclaim.
An hour I stood in that defeat of sight,
Waiting, and then a sudden silver flame
Burned in the eastern heaven, and she came.

The Moon, the Summer Moon, surveys the vale:
The boughs against the dawning sky grow black,
The shades that hid those whispering waters fail,
And now there falls a gleaming, lengthening track
That lies across the wide and tranquil river,
Burnished and flat, not shaken by a quiver.
She rises still: the liquid light she spills
Makes everywhere quick sparkles, patches pale;
And, as she goes, I know her glory fills
The air of all our English lakes and hills.

High over all this England will she ride;
She silvers all the roofs of folded towns,
Her brilliance tips the edge of every tide,
Her shadows make soft caverns in the downs;
Even now, beyond my tree serenely sailing,
She clothes far forests with a gauzy veiling,
And even as here, where now I stare and dream,
Standing my own transfigured banks beside,
On many a quiet wandering English stream
There lies the unshifting image of her beam.

Yes, calm she mounts, and watching her, I know
By many a river other eyes than mine
Turn up to her; and, as of old, they show
Their inward hearts all naked to her shine:
Maids, solitaires, sick and happy lovers,
To whom her dear returning orb discovers
For each the gift he waits for: soft release,
The unsealing of imagination's flow,
Her own sweet pain, or other pain's surcease,
The friendly benediction of her peace.

I too am held: as kind she is, as fair,
As when long since a younger heart drank deep
From that sweet solace, while, through summer air,
Her lucid fingers hushed the world to sleep.
O as I stand this latest moon beholding,
Her forms unresting memory is moulding;
Beneath my enchanted eyelids there arise
Visions again of many moons that were,
Fair, fleeting moons gathered from faded skies,
Greeted and lost by these corporeal eyes.

Unnumbered are those moons of memory
Stored in the backward chambers of my brain:
The moons that make bright pathways on the sea,
The golden harvest moon above the grain;
The moon that all a sleeping village blanches,
The woodland moon that roves beyond the branches,
Filtering through the meshes of the green
To breast of bird and mossy trunk of tree;
Moons dimly guessed-at through a cloudy screen,
The bronze diffusion shed by moons unseen;

Moons that a thin prismatic halo rings,
Looking a hurrying fleecy heaven through;
The fairy moons of luminous evenings,
Phantoms of palest pink in palest blue;
Large orange moons on earth's grey verge suspended,
When trees still slumber from the heat that's ended,
Erect and heavy, and all waters lie
Oily, and there is not a bird that sings.
All these I know, I have seen them born and die,
And many another moon in many a sky.

There was a moon that shone above the ground
Where on a grassy forest height I stood;
Bright was that open place, and all around
The dense discovered tree-tops of the wood,
Line after line, in misty radiance glistened,
Failing away. I watched the scene and listened;
Then, awed and hushed, I turned and saw alone,
Protruding from the middle of the mound,
Fringed with close grass, a moonlit mottled stone,
Rough-carven, of antiquity unknown.

A night there was, a crowd, a narrow street,
Torches that reddened faces drunk with dreams,
An orator exultant in defeat,
Banners, fierce songs, rough cheering, women's screams;
My heart was one with those rebellious people,
Until along a chapel's pointing steeple
My eyes unwitting wandered to a thin
Crescent, and clouds a swift and ragged sheet;
And in my spirit's life all human din
Died, and eternal Silence stood within.

And once, on a far evening, warm and still,
I leant upon a cool stone parapet.
The quays and houses underneath the hill
Twinkled with lights; I heard the sea's faint fret;
And then above the eastern cape's long billow
Silent there welled a trembling line of yellow,
A shred that quickened, then a half that grew
To a full moon, that moved with even will.
The night was long before her, well she knew,
And, as she slowly rose into the blue,

She slowly paled, and, glittering far away,
Flung on the silken waters like a spear,
Her crispèd silver shaft of moonlight lay.
The lighthouse lamp upon the little pier
Burned wanly by that radiance clear and certain.
Waiting I knew not what uplifted curtain,
I watched the unmoving world beneath my feet
Till, without warning, miles across the bay,
Into that silver out of shadows beat,
Dead black, the whole mysterious fishing-fleet.

These moons I have seen, but these and every one
Came each so new it seemed to be the first,
New as the buds that open to the sun,
New as the songs that to the morning burst.
The roses die, each day fresh flowers are springing,
Last year it was another blackbird singing,
Thou only, marvellous blossom, whose pale flower
Beyond mankind's conjecture hath begun,
Retain'st for ever an unwithering power
That stales the loveliest stranger of an hour.

But O, had all my infant nights been dark,
Or almost dark, lit by the stars alone,
Had never a teller of stories bid me hark
The promised splendours of that moon unknown:
How perfect then had been the revelation
When first her gradual gold illumination
Broke on a night upon the conscious child:
My heart had stopped with beauty, seeing her arc
Climbing the heavens, so far and undefiled,
So large with light, so even and so mild.

Most wondrous Light, who bring'st this lovelier earth,
This world of shadows cool with silver fires,
Drawing us higher than our human birth:
To whom our strange twin-natured kind suspires
Its saddest thoughts, and tenderest and most fragrant
Tears, and desires unnameable and vagrant:
Watcher, who leanest quietly from above,
Saying all mortal wars are nothing worth:
Friend of the sorrowful, tranquil as the dove,
Muse of all poets, lamp of all who love.

Alone and sad, alone and kind and sweet,
But always peaceful and removed and proud,
Whether with loveliness revealed complete,
Or veiling from our vision in a cloud:
Our souls' eternal listener, could we wonder
That men who made of sun and storm and thunder
The awful forms of strong divinity,
Heard in each storm the noise of travelling feet,
Should, gazing at thy face with hearts made free,
Have felt a pure, immortal Power in thee?

Selene, Cynthia, and Artemis,
The swift proud goddess with the silver bow,
Diana, she whose downward-bending kiss
One only knew, though all men yearned to know;
The shepherd on a hill his flock was keeping,
The night's pale huntress came and found him sleeping:
She stooped: he woke, and saw her hair that shone,
And lay, drawn up to cool and timeless bliss
Lapt in her radiant arms, Endymion,
All the still night, until the night was gone.

By many names they knew thee, but thy shape
Was woman's always, transient and white:
A flashing huntress leaving hinds agape,
A sweet descent of beauty in the night:
Yet some, more fierce and more distraught their dreaming,
Brooded, until they fashioned from thy seeming,
A lithe and luring queen with fatal breath,
A witch the man who saw might not escape,
A snare that gleamed in shadowy groves of death,

The tall tiaraed Syrian Ashtoreth.

And even to-night in African forests some
There are, possessed by such a blasphemy;
Through branching beams thy fevered votaries come
To appease their brains' distorted mask of thee.
There in the glades the drums pulsate and languish,
Men leap and wail to dim the victim's anguish
In the sad frenzy of the sacrifice.
They are slaves to thee, made mad because thou art dumb,
And dumb thou lookest on them from the skies,
Above their fires and dances, blood and cries.

So these; but elsewhere, at such an hour,
In all the continents, by all the seas,
Men, naming not the goddess, feel thy power,
Adoring her with gentler rites than these:
The thoughts of myriad hearts to thee uplifted
Rise like a smoke above thine altars drifted,
Perpetual incense poured before thy throne
By those whom thou hast given thy secret dower,
Those in whose kindred eyes thy light is known,
Whom thou hast signed and sealed for thine own.

For thee they watch by Asian peaks remote,
Where thy snows gleam above the pointing pines;
Entranced on templed lakes is many a boat
For thee, where clear thy dropt reflection shines;
On the great seas where nothing else is tender,
Rising and setting, unto thee surrender
All lonely hearts in lonely wandering ships;
And, where their warm far-scattered islands float,
Through forests many a flower-crowned maiden slips
To gaze on thee, with parted burning lips.

O thus they do, and thus they did of old;
Our hearts were never secret in thy sight;
Ere our first records were thy shrine was cold
That speechless eyes went seeking in the night;
Beyond the compass of our dim traditions
Thou knewest of men the pitiful ambitions,
Their loves and their despair; within thy ken
All our poor history has been unrolled;
Thou hast seen all races born and die again,
The climbing and the crumbling towers of men.

Black were the hollows of that Emperor's eyes
Who paced with backward arms beyond his tents,
Lone in the night, and felt above him rise
The ancient conqueror's sloping, smooth, immense,
Moon-pointing Pyramid's enduring courses,
Heard not his sentries, nor his stamping horses,
But thought of Egypt dead upon that air,
Fighting with his moon-coloured memories
Of vanished kings who builded, and the bare
Sands in the moon before those builders were.

Restless, he knew that moon who watched him muse,
Had seen a restless Cæsar brood on fame
Amid the Pharaohs' broken avenues.
And, circling round that fixed monition, came
Woven by moonlight, random, transitory,
Fragments of all the dim receding story:
The moonlit water dripping from the oars
Of triremes in the bay of Syracuse;
The opposing bivouacs upon the shores,
That knew dead Hector's and Achilles' wars.

He saw fall'n Carthage, Alexander's grave,
The tomb of Moses in the wilderness,
The moonlight on the Atlantean wave
That covered all a multitude's distress:
Cities and hosts and emperors departed
Under the steady moon. And sullen-hearted
He turned away, and, in a little, died,
Even as he who hunted from his cave

And struck his foe, and stripped the shaggy hide
Under the moon, and was not satisfied.

For in the prime, thy influence was felt;
When eyes first saw, thy beauty was as this;
Thy quiet look bade hope, fear, passion melt
Before men dreamed of empire. The abyss
Of thought yawned through their jungle then, as ever
Dark past, dark future, menaced their endeavour:
Yet, on thy nights, stood some by hill and sea
Naked; and blind impulsive spirits knelt,
Not questioning why they knelt, feeling in thee
Thought's strangest, sweetest, saddest mystery.

Still Moon, bright Moon, compassionate Moon above,
Thou shinedst there ere any life began,
When of his pain or of his powerless love
Thou heardest not from heart of any man;
Though long the earth had shaken off the vapour
Left by the vanished gleams of fire, the shaper,
Old, old, her stony wrinkled face did grow
Whilst only her blind elements did move;
Dumb, bare, and prayerless thou saw'st her go,
And afterwards again shalt see her so.

A time there was when Life had never been,
A time will be, it will have passed away;
Still wilt thou shine, still tender and serene,
When Life which in thy sister's yesterday
Had never flowered, will have drooped and faded;
Passed with the clouds that once her bosom shaded.
She will be barren then as not before,
Bared of her snows and all her garments green;
No darkling sea by any earthly shore
Will take thy rays: thy kin will be no more.

Pale satellite, old mistress of our fires,
Who hast seen so much and been so much to men,
Symbol and goal of all our wild desires,
Not any voice will cry upon thee then;
Dreamer and dream, they will have all gone over,
The sick of heart, the singer and the lover,
An end there will have been to all their lust,
Their sorrow, and the sighing of their lyres;
O all this Life that stained Earth's patient crust,
Time's dying breath will have blown away like dust.

Gone from thine eye that brief confused stir,
The rumours and the marching and the strife;
Earth will be still, and all the face of her
Swept of the last remains of moving life;
The last of all men's monuments that defied them,
Like those his valiant gestures that denied them,
Into the waiting elements will fade,
And thou wilt see thy fellow traveller,
A forlorn round of rocky contours made,
A glimmering disk of empty light and shade,

Ah, depth too deep for thought therein to cast;
The old, the cold companions, you will go,
Obeying still some long-forgotten past,
And all our pitiful history none will know;
Still shining, Moon, still peaceful, wilt thou wander,
But on that greater ball no heart will ponder
The thought that rose and nightingale are gone,
And all sweet things but thou; and only vast
Ridges of rock remain, and stars and sun;
O Moon, thou wilt be lovely alone for none.

And so, pale wanderer, so thou leavest me,
Passing beyond imagination's range,
Away into the void where waits for thee
Thy inconceivable destiny of change;
And after all the memories I have striven
To paint, this picture that thyself hast given
Lives, and I watch, to all those others blind,

Thy form, gliding into eternity,
Fading, an un conjectured fate to find,
The last, most wonderful image of the mind.

THE HAPPY NIGHT

I have loved to-night; from love's last bordering steep
I have fallen at last with joy and forgotten the shore;
I have known my love to-night as never before,
I have flung myself in the deep, and drawn from the deep,
And kissed her lightly, and left my beloved to sleep.
And now I sit in the night and my heart is still:
Strong and secure; there is nothing that's left to will,
There is nothing to win but only a thing to keep.

And I look to-night, completed and not afraid,
Into the windy dark where shines no light;
And care not at all though the darkness never should fade,
Nor fear that death should suddenly come to-night.
Knowing my last would be surely my bravest breath,
I am happy to-night: I have laughed to-night at death.

CONSTANTINOPLE

"I suddenly realise that the ambition of my life has been—since I was two—to go on a military expedition against Constantinople."—Letter from Rupert Brooke. (Died at Scyros, April 23rd, 1915.)

JUSTINIAN.

Does the church stand I raised
Against the unchristened East?
Still do my ancient altars bear
The sacrificial feast?

My jewels are they bright,
My marbles and my paint,
Wherewith I glorified the Lord
And many a martyred Saint?

And does my dome still float
Above the Golden Horn?
And do my priests on Christmas Day
Still sing that Christ was born?

EUROPE.

Though dust your house, Justinian,
Still stands your lordliest shrine,
But the dark men who walk therein,
Know not of bread nor wine.

They fell long since upon your stones,
And made your colours dim,
Their priests who pray on Christmas Day
They sing no Christmas hymn.

But a voice at evening goes
From every climbing tower,
Crying a word you never heard,
A name of desert power.

For seven hundred years
 We gripped a weakening blade,
 Keeping the gateway of the West
 With none to give us aid.

Till at the last they broke
 What Constantine had built,
 And by the shattered wall the blood
 Of Constantine was spilt.

Do men remember still
 The manner of my death,
 How after all those failing years
 I at the last kept faith?

EUROPE.

They know it for a bygone thing
 True but indifferent,
 For many a fight has come to pass
 Since to the wall you went.

Westward and northward, Emperor,
 Poured on that bloody brood,
 Till those must turn to save themselves
 Who had known not gratitude.

One fought them on the Middle Sea,
 One at Vienna's gate,
 And then the kings of Christendom
 Watched the red tide abate.

Till in the end Byzantium
 Heard a returning war;
 But still a Mehmet holds your tomb...
 Keep silence ... ask no more.

ELEGY

I vaguely wondered what you were about,
 But never wrote when you had gone away;
 Assumed you better, quenched the uneasy doubt
 You might need faces, or have things to say.
 Did I think of you last evening? Dead you lay.
 O bitter words of conscience
 I hold the simple message,
 And fierce with grief the awakened heart cries out:
 "It shall not be to-day;

It is still yesterday; there is time yet!"
 Sorrow would strive backward to wrench the sun,
 But the sun moves. Our onward course is set,
 The wake streams out, the engine pulses run
 Droning, a lonelier voyage is begun.
 It is all too late for turning,
 You are past all mortal signal,
 There will be time for nothing but regret
 And the memory of things done!

The quiet voice that always counselled best,
 The mind that so ironically played
 Yet for mere gentleness forbore the jest.
 The proud and tender heart that sat in shade
 Nor once solicited another's aid,
 Yet was so grateful always
 For trifles lightly given,
 The silences, the melancholy guessed

Sometimes, when your eyes strayed.

But always when you turned, you talked the more.

Through all our literature your way you took
With modest ease; yet would you soonest pore,
Smiling, with most affection in your look,
On the ripe ancient and the curious nook.
Sage travellers, learned printers,
Divines and buried poets,
You knew them all, but never half your lore
Was drawn from any book.

Stories and jests from field and town and port,
And odd neglected scraps of history
From everywhere, for you were of the sort,
Cool and refined, who like rough company:
Carter and barmaid, hawker and bargee,
Wise pensioners and boxers
With whom you drank, and listened
To legends of old revelry and sport
And customs of the sea.

I hear you: yet more clear than all one note,
One sudden hail I still remember best,
That came on sunny days from one afloat
And drew me to the pane in certain quest
Of a long brown face, bare arms and flimsy vest,
In fragments through the branches,
Above the green reflections:
Paused by the willows in your varnished boat
You, with your oars at rest.

Did that come back to you when you were dying?
I think it did: you had much leisure there,
And, with the things we knew, came quietly flying
Memories of things you had seen we knew not where.
You watched again with meditative stare
Places where you had wandered,
Golden and calm in distance:
Voices from all your altering past came sighing
On the soft Hampshire air.

For there you sat a hundred miles away,
A rug upon your knees, your hands gone frail,
And daily bade your farewell to the day,
A music blent of trees and clouds asail
And figures in some old neglected tale:
And watched the sunset gathering,
And heard the birdsong fading,
And went within when the last sleepy lay
Passed to a farther vale.

Never complaining, and stepped up to bed
More and more slow, a tall and sunburnt man
Grown bony and bearded, knowing you would be dead
Before the summer, glad your life began
Even thus to end, after so short a span,
And mused a space serenely,
Then fell to easy slumber,
At peace, content. For never again your head
Need make another plan.

Most generous, most gentle, most discreet,
Who left us ignorant to spare us pain:
We went our ways with too forgetful feet
And missed the chance that would not come again,
Leaving, with thoughts on pleasure bent, or gain,
Fidelity unattested
And services unrendered:
The ears are closed, the heart has ceased to beat,
And now all proof is vain.

Too late for other gifts, I give you this,
Who took from you so much, so carelessly,
On your far brows a first and phantom kiss,
On your far grave a careful elegy.

For one who loved all life and poetry,
Sorrow in music bleeding,
And friendship's last confession.
But even as I speak that inner kiss
Softly accuses me,

Saying: Those brows are senseless, deaf that tomb,
This is the callous, cold resort of art.
"I give you this." What do I give? to whom?
Words to the air, and balm to my own heart,
To its old luxurious and commanded smart.
An end to all this tuning,
This cynical masquerading;
What comfort now in that far final gloom
Can any song impart?

O yet I see you dawning from some heaven,
Who would not suffer self-reproach to live
In one to whom your friendship once was given.
I catch a vision, faint and fugitive,
Of a dark face with eyes contemplative,
Deep eyes that smile in silence,
And parted lips that whisper,
"Say nothing more, old friend, of being forgiven,
There is nothing to forgive."

WARS AND RUMOURS, 1920

Blood, hatred, appetite and apathy,
The sodden many and the struggling strong,
Who care not now though for another wrong
Another myriad innocents should die.
At candid savagery or oily lie
We laugh, or, turning, join the noisy throng
Which buries the dead with gluttony and song.
Suppose this very evening from on high
Broke on the world that unexampled flame
The choir-thronged sky, and Thou, descending, Lord;
What agony of horror, fear, and shame,
For those who knew and wearied of Thy word,
I dare not even think, who am confest
Idle, malignant, lustful as the rest.

TO A MUSICIAN

Musician, with the bent and brooding face,
White brow and thunderous eyes: you are not playing
Merely the music that dead hand did trace.

Musician, with the lifted resolute face,
And scornful smile about your closed mouth straying,
And hand that moves with swift or fluttering grace,
It is not that man's music you are playing.

The grave and merry tunes he made you are playing,
Each march and dirge and dance he made endures,
But changed and mastered, and these things you're saying,
These joys and sorrows are not his but yours.

You take those notes of his: you seize and fling
His music as a dancer flings her veil,
Toss it and twist it, mould it, make it sing,
Whisper, shout savagely, lament and wail,

Rush like a hurricane, pause and faint and fail:
And as I watch, my body and soul are bound
Helpless, immovable, in thongs of sound.

Lonely and strange musician, standing there,
Your bent ear listening to your own soul speaking,
I hear vibrating on the smitten air
The crying of your suffering and your seeking.

Agonised! raptured! frustrate! you are haunted,
Pursued, beset, beleaguered, filled, possessed
By all you are, all things you have lost and wanted,
Things clear, too clear, things only to be guessed.

I do not know what earlier scenes you knew,
What sweet reproachful memories you hold
Of broken dreams you had before you grew
So conscious and so lonely and so old.

I do not know what women's words have taught
Your heart, and only dimly know by name,
The many wandering cities where you have sought
Splendour, and found the hollowness of fame,

Or where your sad and gentle reveries pass
To family and home—who have for signs
Of all your childhood, only the imagined grass
Of a bright steppe, the wind running in lines,

And only some old fairy-tale of sleighing,
Dark snow-deep forests, endless turning pines,
Bells tinkling, and wolves howling, and hounds baying.

Vague is your past, yet as your violin sings,
Its wildness held in desperate control,
I know them all, that world of bygone things
That have left their wounds and wonders in your soul.

Out in all weathers you have been, my friend,
Climbed into dawn, stood solitary and stark
Against the ashen quiet of twilight's end,
Brooded beneath the night's unanswering dark;

Through battering tempests you have blindly won,
And lived, and found a medicine for your scars
In resolution taken from the sun
And consolation from the unsleeping stars.

And here, in this crowded place an hour staying,
Your dim orchestra measuring off your bars,
So pale and proud, you stand your secrets flaying,

Resolving the tangle, pouring through your song
All your deep ache for Beauty, calm above
Your bitter silent anger and the strong
Ferocity and tenderness of your love,

Loud challenges and sweet and cynic laughter,
Movements of joy spontaneous and pure,
Remorse, and the dull grief that glimmers after
The obstinate sins you know you will not cure.

I see you subtly lying, soberly weighing
Gross questions, jesting at the things you hate,
In apathy, and wild despair, and praying
Bowed down before the shadowy knees of Fate,

And fearfully behind the visible groping
And standing by the heart's bottomless pit, and shrinking,
Who have known the lure and mockery of hoping,
The comic terrible uselessness of thinking.

O gay and passionate, gloomy and serene,
Your quivering fingers laugh and weep and curse
For all the phantoms you have ever been.
Yet would you wish another universe?

Let peace come if it will: your last long note
Dies on the quiet breast of space; and now
They clap: I see again your square frock coat,
Dark, foreign fiddler, you have stopped: you bow.

THE RUGGER MATCH

(OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE—QUEEN'S—DECEMBER)

(*To Hugh Brooks*)

I

The walls make a funnel, packed full; the distant gate
Bars us from inaccessible light and peace.
Far over necks and ears and hats, I see
Policemen's helmets and cards hung on the ironwork:
"One shilling," "No change given," "Ticket-holders only";

Oh Lord! What an awful crush! There are faces pale
And strained, and faces with animal grins advancing,
Stuck fast around mine. We move, we pause again
For an age, then a forward wave and another stop.
The pressure might squeeze one flat. Dig heels into ground
For this white and terrified woman whose male insists
Upon room to get back. Why didn't I come here at one?
Why come here at all? What strange little creatures we are,
Wedged and shoving under the contemptuous sky!

All things have stopped; the time will never go by;
We shall never get in! ... Yet through the standing glass
The sand imperceptible drops, the inexorable laws
Of number work also here. They are passing and passing,
I can hear the tick of the turnstiles, tick, tick, tick,
A man, a woman, a man, shreds of the crowd,
A man, a man, till the vortex sucks me in
And, squeezed between strangers hurting the flat of my arms,
I am jetted forth, and pay my shilling, and pass
To freedom and space, and a cool for the matted brows.
But we cannot rest yet. Fast from the gates we issue,
Spread conelike out, a crowd of loosening tissue,
All jiggling on, and making as we travel
"Pod, pod" of feet on earth, "chix, chix" on gravel.
Heads forward, striding eagerly, we keep
Round to the left in semi-circular sweep
By the back of a stand, excluded, noting the row
Of heads that speck the top, and, caverned below,
The raw, rough, timber back of the new-made mound.
Quicker! The place is swarming! Around, around
Till the edge is reached, and we see a patch of green,
Two masts with a crossbar, tapering, white and clean,
And confluent rows of people that merge and die
In a flutter of faces where the grand-stand blocks the sky.
We hurry along, past ragged files of faces,
Flushing and quick, peering for empty places.
I see one above me, I step and prise and climb,
And stand and turn and breathe and look at the time,
Survey the field, and note with superior glance,
The anxious bobbing fools who still advance.

II

Ah! They are coming still. It is filling up.
It is full. They come. There is almost an hour to go,
Yet all find room, the dribbles of black disappear
In the solid piles around that empty green,
We are packed and ready now. They might as well start,
But two-forty-five was their time, and it's only ten past,

And it's got to be lived through. I haven't a newspaper,
 I wish I could steal that little parson's book.
 I count three minutes slowly: they seem like an hour;
 And then I change feet and loosen the brim of my hat,
 And curse the crawling of time. Oh body, body!
 Why did I order you here, to stand and feel tired,
 To ache and ache when the time will never pass,
 In this buzzing crowd, before all those laden housetops,
 Around this turf, under the lid of the sky?
 I fumble my watch again: it is two-twenty:
 Twenty-five minutes to wait. One, two, three, four,
 Five, six, seven, eight: what is the good of counting?
 It won't be here any quicker, aching hips,
 Bored brain, unquiet heart, you are doomed to wait.
 Why did I make you come? We have been before,
 Struggling with time, fatigued and dull and alone
 In all this tumultuous, chattering, happy crowd
 That never knew pain and never questions its acts...
 Never questions? Do not deceive yourself.
 Look at the faces around you, active and gay,
 They are lined, there are brains behind them, breasts beneath them,
 They have only escaped for an hour, and even now
 Many, like you, have not escaped; and away
 Across the field those faces ascending in tiers,
 Each face is a story, a tragedy and a doubt;
 And the teams where they wait, in the sacred place to the right,
 Are bewildered souls, who have heard of and brooded on death,
 And thought about God. But this is a football match;
 And anyhow I don't feel equal to thinking,
 And I'm certain the teams don't; they've something better to do.
 It is half-past two, and, thank Heaven, a minute over.
 We are all here now. The laggards have all booked seats
 And stroll in lordly leisure along the front.
 What a man! Six foot, silk hat, brown face, moustache!
 What a fat complacent parson, snuggling down
 In the chair there, among all his cackling ladies!
 I have seen that youth before. My neighbour now
 On my left shouts out to a college friend below us,
 "Tommy! Hallo! Do you think we are going to beat 'em?"
 My watch. Twenty-to-three. That lot went quickly;
 Five minutes more is nothing; I'm lively now
 And fit for a five-mile run. One, two, three, four...
 It isn't worth bothering now, it's all but here,
 Here, here; a rustle, a murmur, a ready silence,
 A billowing cheer—why, here they come, running and passing,
 The challenging team! By God, what magnificent fellows!
 They have dropped the ball, they pause, they sweep onward again,
 And so to the end. Here are the rest of them,
 Swingingly up the field and back as they came,
 With the cheers swelling and swelling. They disappear,
 And out, like wind upon water, come their rivals,
 With cheers swelling and swelling, to run and turn
 And vanish; and now they are all come out together,
 Two teams walking, touch-judges and referee.
 And they all line up, dotted about like chessmen,
 And the multitude holds its breath, and awaits the start.

III

Whistle! A kick! A rush, a scramble, a scrum,
 The forwards are busy already, the halves hover round,
 The three-quarters stand in backwards diverging lines,
 Eagerly bent, atoe, with elbows back,
 And hands that would grasp at a ball, trembling to start,
 While the solid backs vigilant stray about
 And the crowd gives out a steady resolute roar,
 Like the roar of a sea; a scrum, a whistle, a scrum;
 A burst, a whistle, a scrum, a kick into touch;
 All in the middle of the field. He is tossing it in,
 They have got it and downed it, and whurry, oh, here they come,
 Streaming like a waterfall, oh, he has knocked it on,
 Right at our feet, and the scrum is formed again,
 And everything seems to stop while they pack and go crooked.

The scrum-half beats them straight with a rough smack
While he holds the ball, debonair.... How it all comes back,
As the steam goes up of their breath and their sweating trunks!
The head low down, the eyes that swim to the ground,
The mesh of ownerless knees, the patch of dark earth,
The ball that comes in, and wedges and jerks, and is caught,
And sticks, the dense intoxicant smell of sweat,
The grip on the moisture of jerseys, the sickening urge
That seems powerless to help; the desperate final shove
That somehow is timed with a general effort, the sweep
Onward, while enemies reel, and the whole scrum turns
And we torrent away with the ball. Oh, I know it all....
I know it.... Where are they? ... Far on the opposite line,
Aimlessly kicking while the forwards stand gaping about,
Deprived of their work. Convergence. They are coming again,
They are scrumming again below, red hair, black cap,
And a horde of dark colourless heads and straining backs;
A voice rasps up through the howl of the crowd around
(Triumphant now in possession over all the rest
Of crowds who have lost the moving treasure to us)—
"Push, you devils!" They push, and push, and push;
The opponents yield, the fortress wall goes down,
The ram goes through, an irresistible rush
Crosses the last white line, and tumbles down,
And the ball is there. A try! A try! A try!
The shout from the host we are assaults the sky.

Deep silence. Line up by the goal-posts. A man lying down,
Poising the pointed ball, slanted away,
And another who stands, and hesitates, and runs
And lunges out with his foot, and the ball soars up,
While the opposite forwards rush below it in vain,
And curves to the posts, and passes them just outside.
The touch-judge's flag hangs still. It was only a try!
Three points to us. The roar is continuous now,
The game swings to and fro like a pendulum
Struck by a violent hand. But the impetus wanes,
The forwards are getting tired, and all the outsides
Run weakly, pass loosely; there are one or two penalty kicks,
And a feeble attempt from a mark. The ball goes out
Over the heads of the crowd, comes wearily back;
And, lingering about in mid-field, the tedious game
Seems for a while a thing interminable.
And nothing happens, till all of a sudden a shrill
Blast from the whistle flies out and arrests the game.
Half-time ... Unlocking ... The players are all erect,
Easy and friendly, standing about in groups,
Figures in sculpture, better for mud-stained clothes;
Couples from either side chatting and laughing,
And chewing lemons, and throwing the rinds away.

IV

The pause is over. They part from each other, sift out;
The backs trot out to their stations, the forwards spread;
The captains beckon with hands, and the ball goes off
To volleys and answering volleys of harsher cheers;
For the top of the hill is past, we course to the close.
We've a three-point lead. Can we keep it? It isn't enough.
We have always heard their three-quarters were better than ours,
If they once get the ball. They have got it, he runs, he passes,
The centre dodges, is tackled, passes in time
To the other centre who goes like a bird to the left
And flings it out to the wing. The goal is open;
He has only to run as he can. No, the back is across,
He has missed him; he has him; they topple, head over heels,
And the ball bumps along into touch. They are stuck on our line;
Scrum after scrum, with those dangerous threes standing waiting,
Threat after threat forced back; a save, a return;
And the same thing over again, till the ball goes out
Almost unnoticed, and before we can see what is done,
That centre has kicked, he has thought of the four points,
The ball soars, slackens, keeps upright with effort,

Then floats between posts and falls, ignored, to the ground,
Its grandeur gone, while the touch-judge flaps his flag,
And the multitude becomes an enormous din
Which dies as the game resumes, and then rises again,
As battle of cry of triumph and counter-cry,
Defiant, like great waves surging against each other.
They work to the other corner, they stay there long;
They push and wheel, there are runs that come to nothing,
Till the noise wanes, and a curious silence comes.
They lead by a point, their crowd is sobered now,
Anxious still lest a sudden chance should come,
Or a sudden resource of power in mysterious foes
Which may dash them again from their new precarious peak,
Whilst we in our hearts are aware of the chilling touch
Of loss, of a fatal thing irrevocable,
Feel the time fly to the dreaded last wail of the whistle,
And see our team as desperate waves that dash
Against a wall of rock, to be scattered in spray.
Yet fervour comes back, for the players have no thought for the past
Except as a goad to new effort, not they will be chilled:
Fiercer and faster they fight, a grimness comes
Into shoving and running and tackling and handing off.
We are heeling the ball now cleanly, time after time
Our half picks it up and instantly jabs it away,
And the beautiful swift diagonal quarter-line
Tips it across for the wing to go like a stag
Till he's cornered and falls and the gate swings shut again.
Thirty fighting devils, ten thousand throats,
Thundering joy at each pass and tackle and punt,
Yet the consciousness grows that the time approaches the end,
The threat of conclusion grows like a spreading tree
And casts its shadow on all the anxious people,
And is fully known when they stop as a man's knocked out
And limps from the field with his arms round two comrades' necks.
The gradual time seems to have suddenly leapt....
And all this while the unheeded winter sky
Has faded, and the air gone bluer and mistier.
The players, when they drift away to a corner
Distant from us, seem to have left our world.
We see the struggling forms, tangling and tumbling,
We hear the noise from the featureless mass around them,
But the dusk divides. Finality seems to have come.
Nothing can happen now. The attention drifts.
There's a pause; I become a separate thing again,
Almost forget the game, forget my neighbours,
And the noise fades in my ears to a dim rumour.
I watch the lines and colours of field and buildings,
So simple and soft and few in the vapoury air,
I am held by the brightening orange lights of the matches
Perpetually pricking the haze across the ground,
And the scene is tinged with a quiet melancholy,
The harmonious sadness of twilight on willowed waters,
Still avenues or harbours seen from the sea.
Yet a louder shout recalls me, I wake again,
Find there are two minutes left, and it's nearly over,
See a few weaklings already walking out,
Caring more to avoid a crush with the crowd
Than to give the last stroke to a ritual of courtesy
And a work of intangible art. But we're all getting ready,
Hope gone, and fear, except in the battling teams.
Regret ... a quick movement of hazy forms,
Oh quiet, oh look, there is something happening,
Sudden one phantom form on the other wing
Emerges from nothingness, is singled out,
Curving in a long sweep like a flying gull,
Through the thick fog, swifter as borne by wind,
Swerves at the place where the corner-flag must be,
And runs, by Heaven he's over! and runs, and runs,
And our hearts leap, and our sticks go up in the air
And our hats whirl, and we lose ourselves in a yell
For a try behind the posts. We have beaten them!

Outside; and a mob hailing cabs, besieging the station,
 Sticks, overcoats, scarves, bowler hats, intensified faces,
 Rushes, apologies, voices: "Simpson's at seven,"
 "Hallo, Jim," "See you next term," "I've just seen old Peter."
 They go to their homes, to catch trains, all over the city,
 All over England; or, many, to make a good night of it,
 Eat oysters, drink more than usual, dispute of the match.
 For the match is all over, and what, being done, does it matter?
 What happened last year? I was here; I should know, but I don't.
 Next year there will be another, with another result,
 Just such another crowd, just as excited.
 And after next year, for a year and a year and a year,
 Till customs have changed and things crumbled and all this strife
 Is a dim word from the past. Why, even to-night,
 When the last door has been locked, the last groundsman will go,
 Leaving that field which was conquered and full of men,
 With darkened houses around, void and awake,
 Silently talking to the silent travelling moon:
 "The day passed. They have gone again. They will die."
 To-night in the moon the neighbouring roofs will lie
 Lonely and still, all of their dwellers in bed;
 The phantom stands will glisten, the goal-posts rise
 Slanting their shadows across the grass, as calm
 As though they had never challenged an eager swarm,
 Or any ball had made their crossbars quiver.
 Clouds will pass, and the city's murmur fade,
 And the open field await its destiny
 Of transient invaders coming and going.
 What was the point of it? Why did the heart leap high
 Putting reason back, to watch that fugitive play?
 Why not? We must all distract ourselves with toys.
 Not a brick nor a heap remains, the more durable product
 Of all that; effort and pain. Yet, sooner or later,
 As much may be said of any human game,
 War, politics, art, building, planting and ploughing,
 The explorer's freezing, the astronomer's searching of stars,
 The philosopher's fight through the thickening webs of thought,
 And the writing of poems: a hand, a stir and a sinking.
 And so, no more, of the general game of the Race,
 That cannot know of its origin or its end,
 But strives, for their own sake, its courage and skill
 To increase, till Frost or a Flying Flame calls "Time!"
 I have seen this day men in the beauty of movement,
 A gallant jaw set, the form of a hero that flew,
 Cunning, a selfless flinging of self in the fray,
 Strength, compassion, control, the obeying of laws,
 Victory, and a struggle against defeat.
 I think that the Power that gave us the bodies we have,
 Can only be praised by our use of the things He gave,
 That we are not here to turn our backs to the sun,
 Or to scorn the delight of our limbs. And for those who have eyes
 The beauty of this is the same as the beauty of flowers,
 And of eagles and lions and mountains and oceans and stars,
 And I care not, but rather am glad that the thought will recur
 That in Egypt the muscles moved under the shining skins
 As here, and in Greece where Olympian champions died,
 And in isles long ago, where never a record was kept.
 And now I'll go home, and open a bottle of port,
 And think upon beauty and God and the wonder of love,
 That laughs at the shadow of Death, and my vanished youth,
 And the throbbing heart that beats its own drum to the grave,
 Returning absurdly again to the fact that we won,
 Content to let darkness deepen, and stars shine.

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