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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRIENDS ***

FRIENDS

BY

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, CORK STREET

M CM XVI

BY THE SAME WRITER

(Uniform with FRIENDS)

BATTLE (1915).
THOROUGHFARES (1914).
BORDERLANDS (1914).
FIRES (1912).
DAILY BREAD (1910).
AKRA THE SLAVE (1910).
STONEFOLDS (1907).

TO THE MEMORY
OF
RUPERT BROOKE

*He's gone.
I do not understand.
I only know
That as he turned to go
And waved his hand
In his young eyes a sudden glory shone:
And I was dazzled by a sunset glow.
And he was gone.*

23rd April, 1915.

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RUPERT BROOKE

I.

Your face was lifted to the golden sky
Ablaze beyond the black roofs of the square,
As flame on flame leapt, flourishing in air
Its tumult of red stars exultantly,
To the cold constellations dim and high;
And as we neared, the roaring ruddy flare
Kindled to gold your throat and brow and hair
Until you burned, a flame of ecstasy.

The golden head goes down into the night
Quenched in cold gloom--and yet again you stand
Beside me now with lifted face alight,
As, flame to flame, and fire to fire you burn...
Then, recollecting, laughingly you turn,
And look into my eyes and take my hand.

II.

Once in my garret--you being far away
Tramping the hills and breathing upland air,

Or so I fancied--brooding in my chair,
I watched the London sunshine feeble and grey
Dapple my desk, too tired to labour more,
When, looking up, I saw you standing there,
Although I'd caught no footstep on the stair,
Like sudden April at my open door.

Though now beyond earth's farthest hills you fare,
Song-crowned, immortal, sometimes it seems to me
That, if I listen very quietly,
Perhaps I'll hear a light foot on the stair,
And see you, standing with your angel air,
Fresh from the uplands of eternity.

III.

Your eyes rejoiced in colour's ecstasy
Fulfilling even their uttermost desire,
When, over a great sunlit field afire
With windy poppies, streaming like a sea
Of scarlet flame that flaunted riotously
Among green orchards of that western shire,
You gazed as though your heart could never tire
Of life's red flood in summer revelry.

And as I watched you little thought had I
How soon beneath the dim low-drifting sky
Your soul should wander down the darkling way,
With eyes that peer a little wistfully,
Half-glad, half-sad, remembering, as they see
Lethean poppies, shrivelling ashen grey.

IV.

October chestnuts showered their perishing gold
Over us as beside the stream we lay
In the Old Vicarage garden that blue day,
Talking of verse and all the manifold
Delights a little net of words may hold,
While in the sunlight water-voles at play
Dived under a trailing crimson bramble-spray,
And walnuts thudded ripe on soft black mould.

Your soul goes down unto a darker stream
Alone, O friend, yet even in death's deep night
Your eyes may grow accustomed to the dark,
And Styx for you may have the ripple and gleam
Of your familiar river, and Charon's bark
Tarry by that old garden of your delight.

Night after night we two together heard
The music of the Ring,
The inmost silence of our being stirred
By voice and string.

Though I to-night in silence sit, and you
In stranger silence sleep,
Eternal music stirs and thrills anew
The severing deep.

TENANTS

Suddenly, out of dark and leafy ways,
We came upon the little house asleep
In cold blind stillness, shadowless and deep,
In the white magic of the full moon-blaze.
Strangers without the gate, we stood agaze,
Fearful to break that quiet, and to creep
Into the home that had been ours to keep
Through a long year of happy nights and days

So unfamiliar in the white moon-gleam,
So old and ghostly like a house of dream
It seemed, that over us there stole the dread
That even as we watched it, side by side,
The ghosts of lovers, who had lived and died
Within its walls, were sleeping in our bed.

SEA-CHANGE

Wind-flicked and ruddy her young body glowed
In sunny shallows, splashing them to spray;
But when on rippled, silver sand she lay,
And over her the little green waves flowed,
Coldly translucent and moon-coloured showed
Her frail young beauty, as if rapt away
From all the light and laughter of the day
To some twilit, forlorn sea-god's abode.

Again into the sun with happy cry
She leapt alive and sparkling from the sea,
Sprinkling white spray against the hot blue sky,
A laughing girl ... and yet, I see her lie
Under a deeper tide eternally
In cold moon-coloured immortality.

All day the mallet thudded, far below
My garret, in an old ramshackle shed
Where ceaselessly, with stiffly nodding head
And rigid motions ever to and fro
A figure like a puppet in a show
Before the window moved till day was dead,
Beating out gold to earn his daily bread,
Beating out thin fine gold-leaf blow on blow.

And I within my garret all day long
Unto that ceaseless thudding tuned my song,
Beating out golden words in tune and time
To that dull thudding, rhyme on golden rhyme.
But in my dreams all night in that dark shed
With aching arms I beat fine gold for bread.

THE OLD BED

Streaming beneath the eaves, the sunset light
Turns the white walls and ceiling to pure gold,
And gold, the quilt and pillows on the old
Fourposter bed--all day a cold drift-white--
As if, in a gold casket glistening bright,
The gleam of winter sunshine sought to hold
The sleeping child safe from the dark and cold
And creeping shadows of the coming night.

Slowly it fades: and stealing through the gloom
Home-coming shadows throng the quiet room,
Grey ghosts that move unrustling, without breath,
To their familiar rest, and closer creep
About the little dreamless child asleep
Upon the bed of bridal, birth and death.

TREES

(To LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE)

The flames half lit the cavernous mystery
Of the over-arching elm that loomed profound
And mountainous above us, from the ground
Soaring to midnight stars majestically,
As, under the shelter of that ageless tree
In a rapt dreaming circle we lay around
The crackling faggots, listening to the sound
Of old words moving in new harmony.

And as you read, before our wondering eyes
Arose another tree of mighty girth--
Crested with stars though rooted in the earth,
Its heavy-foliaged branches, lit with gleams

Of ruddy firelight and the light of dreams--
Soaring immortal to eternal skies.

OBLIVION

Near the great pyramid, unshadowed, white,
With apex piercing the white noon-day blaze,
Swathed in white robes beneath the blinding rays
Lie sleeping Bedouins drenched in white-hot light.
About them, searing to the tingling sight
Swims the white dazzle of the desert ways
Where the sense shudders, witless and adaze,
In a white void with neither depth nor height.

Within the black core of the pyramid
Beneath the weight of sunless centuries
Lapt in dead night King Cheops lies asleep;
Yet in the darkness of his chamber hid
He knows no black oblivion more deep
Than that blind white oblivion of noon skies.

RETREAT

Broken, bewildered by the long retreat
Across the stifling leagues of southern plain,
Across the scorching leagues of trampled grain,
Half-stunned, half-blinded, by the trudge of feet
And dusty smother of the August heat,
He dreamt of flowers in an English lane,
Of hedgerow flowers glistening after rain--
All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet.

All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet--
The innocent names kept up a cool refrain--
All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet,
Chiming and tinkling in his aching brain,
Until he babbled like a child again--
"All-heal and willow-herb and meadow-sweet."

COLOUR

A blue-black Nubian plucking oranges
At Jaffa by a sea of malachite
In red tarboosh, green sash, and flowing white
Burnous--among the shadowy memories
That haunt me yet by these bleak northern seas
He lives for ever in my eyes' delight,
Bizarre, superb in young immortal might--
A god of old barbaric mysteries.

Maybe he lived a life of lies and lust:
Maybe his bones are now but scattered dust
Yet, for a moment he was life supreme
Exultant and unchallenged: and my rhyme
Would set him safely out of reach of time
In that old heaven where things are what they seem.

NIGHT

Vesuvius, purple under purple skies
Beyond the purple, still, unrippling sea;
Sheer amber lightning, streaming ceaselessly
From heaven to earth, dazzling bewildered eyes
With all the terror of beauty; thus day dies
That dawned in blue, unclouded innocence;
And thus we look our last on Italy
That soon, obscured by night, behind us lies.

And night descends on us, tempestuous night,
Night, torn with terror, as we sail the deep,
And like a cataract down a mountain-steep
Pours, loud with thunder, that red perilous fire...
Yet shall the dawn, O land of our desire,
Show thee again, re-orient, crowned with light!

THE ORPHANS

At five o'clock one April morn
I met them making tracks,
Young Benjamin and Abel Horn,
With bundles on their backs.

Young Benjamin is seventy-five,
Young Abel, seventy-seven--
The oldest innocents alive
Beneath that April heaven.

I asked them why they trudged about
With crabby looks and sour--
"And does your mother know you're out
At this unearthly hour?"

They stopped: and scowling up at me
Each shook a grizzled head,
And swore; and then spat bitterly,
As with one voice they said:

"Homeless, about the country-side
We never thought to roam;
But mother, she has gone and died,
And broken up the home."

THE PESSIMIST

His body bulged with puppies--little eyes
 Peeped out of every pocket, black and bright;
And with as innocent, round-eyed surprise
 He watched the glittering traffic of the night.

"What this world's coming to I cannot tell,"
 He muttered, as I passed him, with a whine--
"Things surely must be making slap for hell,
 When no one wants these little dogs of mine."

?

Mooning in the moonlight
 I met a mottled pig,
Grubbing mast and acorn,
 On the Gallows Rigg.

"Tell, oh, tell me truly,
 While I wander blind,
Do your peepy pig's eyes
 Really see the wind--

"See the great wind flowing
 Darkling and a gleam,
Through the fields of heaven,
 In a crystal stream?

"Do the singing eddies
 Break on bough and twig,
Into silvery sparkles
 For your eyes, O pig?

"Do celestial surges
 Sweep across the night,
Like a sea of glory
 In your blessed sight?

"Tell, oh, tell me truly!"
 But the mottled pig
Grubbing mast and acorns
 Did not care a fig.

THE SWEET-TOOTH

Taking a turn after tea
Through orchards of Mirabelea,
Where clusters of yellow and red

Dangled and glowed overhead,
Who should I see
But old Timothy,
Hale and hearty as hearty could be--
Timothy under a crab-apple tree.

His blue eyes twinkling at me,
Munching and crunching with glee,
And wagging his wicked old head,
"I've still got a sweet-tooth," he said.
"A hundred and three
Come January,
I've one tooth left in my head," said he--
Timothy under the crab-apple tree.

GIRL'S SONG

I saw three black pigs riding
In a blue and yellow cart--
Three black pigs riding to the fair
Behind the old grey dappled mare--
But it wasn't black pigs riding
In a gay and gaudy cart
That sent me into hiding
With a flutter in my heart.

I heard the cart returning,
The jolting jingling cart--
Returning empty from the fair
Behind the old jog-trotting mare--
But it wasn't the returning
Of a clattering, empty cart
That sent the hot blood burning
And throbbing through my heart

THE ICE CART

Perched on my city office-stool,
I watched with envy, while a cool
And lucky carter handled ice...
And I was wandering in a trice,
Far from the grey and grimy heat
Of that intolerable street,
O'er sapphire berg and emerald floe,
Beneath the still, cold ruby glow
Of everlasting Polar night,
Bewildered by the queer half-light,
Until I stumbled, unawares,
Upon a creek where big white bears
Plunged headlong down with flourished heels,
And floundered after shining seals
Through shivering seas of blinding blue.

And as I watched them, ere I knew,
I'd stripped, and I was swimming, too,
Among the seal-pack, young and hale,
And thrusting on with threshing tail,
With twist and twirl and sudden leap
Through crackling ice and salty deep--
Diving and doubling with my kind,
Until, at last, we left behind
Those big, white, blundering bulks of death,
And lay, at length, with panting breath
Upon a far untravelled floe,
Beneath a gentle drift of snow--
Snow drifting gently, fine and white,
Out of the endless Polar night,
Falling and falling evermore
Upon that far untravelled shore,
Till I was buried fathoms deep
Beneath that cold white drifting sleep--
Sleep drifting deep,
Deep drifting sleep...

The carter cracked a sudden whip:
I clutched my stool with startled grip,
Awakening to the grimy heat
Of that intolerable street.

TO E. M.

(IN MEMORY OF R. B.)

The night we saw the stacks of timber blaze
To terrible golden fury, young and strong
He watched between us with dream-dazzled gaze
Aflame, and burning like a god of song,
As we together stood against the throng
Drawn from the midnight of the city ways.

To-night the world about us is ablaze
And he is dead, is dead ... Yet, young and strong
He watches with us still with deathless gaze
Aflame, and burning like a god of song,
As we together stand against the throng
Drawn from the bottomless midnight of hell's ways.

10th June, 1915.

MARRIAGE

Going my way of old,
Contented more or less,
I dreamt not life could hold
Such happiness.

I dreamt not that love's way
 Could keep the golden height
Day after happy day,
 Night after night.

ROSES

Red roses floating in a crystal bowl
You bring, O love; and in your eyes I see,
Blossom on blossom, your warm love of me
Burning within the crystal of your soul--
Red roses floating in a crystal bowl.

FOR G.

All night under the moon
 Plovers are flying
Over the dreaming meadows of silvery light,
Over the meadows of June,
 Flying and crying--
Wandering voices of love in the hush of the night.

All night under the moon,
 Love, though we're lying
Quietly under the thatch, in silvery light
Over the meadows of June
 Together we're flying--
Rapturous voices of love in the hush of the night.

1915

HOME

I. RETURN

Under the brown bird-haunted eaves of thatch
The hollyhocks in crimson glory burned
Against black timbers and old rosy brick,
And over the green door in clusters thick
Hung tangled passion-flowers, when we returned
To our own threshold: and with hand on latch
We stood a moment in the sunset gleam
And looked upon our home as in a dream.

Rapt in a golden glow of still delight
Together on the threshold in the sun
We stood rejoicing that we two had won
To this deep golden peace ere day was done,

That over gloomy plain and storm-swept height
We two, O love, had won to home ere night.

II. CANDLE-LIGHT

Where through the open window I could see
The supper-table in the golden light
Of tall white candles--brasses glinting bright
On the black gleaming board, and crockery
Coloured like gardens of old Araby--
In your blue gown against the walls of white
You stood adream, and in the starry night
I felt strange loneliness steal over me.

You stood with eyes upon the candle flame
That kindled your thick hair to burnished gold,
As in a golden spell that seemed to hold
My heart's love rapt from me for evermore...
And then you stirred, and opening the door,
Into the starry night you breathed my name.

III. FIRELIGHT

Against the curtained casement wind and sleet
Rattle and thresh, while snug by our own fire
In dear companionship that naught may tire
We sit--you listening, sewing in your seat
Half-dreaming in the glow of light and heat,
I reading some old tale of love's desire
That swept on gold wings to disaster dire
Then rose re-orient from black defeat.

I close the book, and louder yet the storm
Threshes without. Your busy hands are still;
And on your face and hair the light is warm,
As we sit gazing on the coals' red gleam
In a gold glow of happiness, and dream
Diviner dreams the years shall yet fulfil.

IV. MIDNIGHT

Between the midnight pillars of black elms
The old moon hangs, a thin, cold, amber flame
Over low ghostly mist: a lone snipe wheels
Through shadowy moonshine, droning; and there steals
Into my heart a fear without a name
Out of primæval night's resurgent realms,
Unearthly terror, chilling me with dread
As I lie waking wide-eyed on the bed.

And then you turn towards me in your sleep
Murmuring, and with a sigh of deep content
You nestle to my breast and over me

Steals the warm peace of you; and, all fear spent,
I hold you to me sleeping quietly,
Till I, too, sink in slumber sound and deep.

* * * * *

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By Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

BATTLE. Crown 8vo. 1s. net. [*Third Thousand*]

Some Extracts from early Press Notices

"With the exception of Rupert Brooke's five sonnets, '1914,' 'Battle' contains, we think, the only English poems about the war--so far--for which anyone would venture to predict a future on their own merits."--*The Athenæum*.

"Among the many books which the war has drawn forth it may safely be said that none contains more concentrated poignancy than the tiny pamphlet of verses which Mr. Gibson entitles 'Battle.' Sympathy and irony strive for the palm throughout. The little book is a monument to the wantonness of it all, to the cheapness of life in war, the carelessness as to the individual, the disregard alike of promise and performance, the elimination of personality. When war is declared, said Napoleon, there are no longer men, there is only a man. Napoleon spoke for the clear-sighted general in command; Mr. Gibson speaks for the perplexed soldier under orders, and, doing so, illustrates the other side of the medal. In war, he says, in effect, there are no longer men, there is no longer man, there are only sports of chance, pullers of triggers, bewildered fulfillers of instructions, cynical acceptors of destiny."--*The Times*.

"Each separate vision, though realised in the particular case, has universal range--that is where the greatness of the art lies."--GERALD GOULD in *The Herald*.

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worth as psychological documents is not the main thing about them. The main thing about them is just that they are extraordinary poems; by means of their psychology, no less and no more than by means of their metre, their rhyme, their intellectual form and their concrete imagery, they pierce us with flashing understanding of what the war is and means--not merely what it is to these individual pieces of ordinary human nature who are injured by it and who yet dominate it, but, by evident implication, what the war is in itself, as a grisly multitudinous whole. It seems to us beyond question that Mr. Gibson's 'Battle' is one of the most remarkable results the war has had in literature."--*The Nation*.

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