

COAL AND CANDLELIGHT
BY HELEN PARRY EDEN

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Helen Parry Eden

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Transcriber's Notes.

Every effort has been made to replicate this text as faithfully as possible. I have taken the liberty of adding an additional reference to the CONTENTS page in order to provide a direct link to the "By the Same Author" information at the end of the book. The indentation of the lines of the poem "Coal and Candlelight" reverse at lines 12/13. This is an obvious typographical error and has been corrected.



COAL AND CANDLELIGHT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR
BREAD AND CIRCUSES
THE BODLEY HEAD

COAL AND CANDLELIGHT AND OTHER VERSES BY HELEN PARRY EDEN

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
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TO E. A. P.

*B*EYOND all boundaries and pales
You led me hillward. With the clouds
We two were driven and the gales
That filled your soul's delightful sails
Shook my faint spirit's shrouds.

*There where the æons still emboss
Cromlech and cairn and tufa crown
With lichen cold and stag-horn moss
And callous suns cross and recross,
You paused, and I looked down*

*And saw the straight strait Roman road,
The entangling lanes, our wayward track
And vestiges of all who strode
On the old quest with the old load
Beckoned me back and back.*

*Sweet wood-smoke climbing up the fell
Met me half-way as down I won,
And met me too the climbing bell
That bids the world kneel to a knell,
A knell ascending to the sun.*

*The holy bell shall tune my note,
The stars shall touch my thatch at night,
Within my spirit's dark stream shall float
A planet, meek as a child's boat,
That mocked your utmost height.*

*Yet I am yours—your pace is stamped
On mine, o'er mine your spirit broods—
Who tread the sanctuary hushed and lamped*

*With strides that took the heath and tramped
Your hopeless altitudes.*



NOTE

THESE verses have been, for the most part,
already printed in England or America.

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the proprietors of *Punch*. All published in England
concerning the war are reprinted in their
original order.

P. E.

1918.



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COAL AND CANDLELIGHT

THE DISTRACTION

BETSEY, 'tis very like that I shall be—
When death shall wreak my life's economy—
Repaid with pains for contemplating thee

Unwisely out of season. With the rest
We knelt at Mass, not yet disperst and blest,
Waiting the imminent "*Ite missa est.*"

And I, who turned a little from the pure
Pursuit of mine intention to make sure
My child knelt undistracted and demure,

Did fall into that sin. And ere the close
Of the grave Canon's "*Benedicat vos ...*"
Had scanned her hair and said, "How thick it grows

Over the little golden neck of her!"
So doth the mother sway the worshipper
And snatch the holiest intervals to err.

Nor piety constrained me, nor the place;
But I commended, 'gainst the light's full grace,
The little furry outline of her face.

SIR BAT-EARS

SIR BAT-EARS was a dog of birth
And bred in Aberdeen,
But he favoured not his noble kin
And so his lot is mean,
And Sir Bat-ears sits by the alms-houses
On the stones with grass between.

Under the ancient archway
His pleasure is to wait
Between the two stone pine-apples
That flank the weathered gate;

And old, old alms-persons go by,
All rusty, bent and black
"Good day, good day, Sir Bat-ears!"
They say and stroke his back.

And old, old alms-persons go by,
Shaking and wellnigh dead,
"Good night, good night, Sir Bat-ears!"
They say and pat his head.

So courted and considered
He sits out hour by hour,
Benignant in the sunshine
And prudent in the shower.

(Nay, stoutly can he stand a storm
And stiffly breast the rain,
That rising when the cloud is gone
He leaves a circle of dry stone
Whereon to sit again.)

A dozen little door-steps
Under the arch are seen,
A dozen agèd alms-persons
To keep them bright and clean;

Two wrinkled hands to scour each step
With a square of yellow stone—
But print-marks of Sir Bat-ears' paws
Bespeckle every one.

And little eats an alms-person,
But, though his board be bare,
There never lacks a bone of the best
To be Sir Bats-ears' share.

Mendicant muzzle and shrewd nose,
He quests from door to door;
Their grace they say, his shadow grey
Is instant on the floor—
Humblest of all the dogs there be,
A pensioner of the poor.

COAL AND CANDLELIGHT

... ἔχω δέ τοι ὅσσ' ἐν ὀνείρῳ φαίνονται.—
THEOCRITUS, ix. *Idyll*.

BEFORE they left their mirth's warm scene
And slept, I heard my children say
That moonlight, like a duck's egg, green,
Outside the enfolding curtains lay.
But hearth-bound by maternal choice,
The fire-side's eremite, I know
The nightfall less by sight than voice—
How wake the huffing winds, and how
More full the flooded stream descends,
In unarrested race of sound,
The lasher where the river bends
To circle in our garden ground.
Within I harbour, hap what hap
Without, and o'er my baby brood:
Who, newly slumbering on my lap,
Stirs in resentful quietude.
Her little shawl-swathed fists enfold
One cherished forefinger of mine;
Her callow hair with Tuscan gold
Is pencilled in the candle-shine;
Her cheeks' sweet heraldry, exprest
Each evening since her happy birth,
Is argent to her mother's breast
And gules to the emblazoning hearth;
Only the lashes of her eyes
Some ancient discontent impairs,
Which, for their abdicated skies,
Are pointed with forgotten tears.
And so, as simple as a bird,
She nestles—there is no child else

To rouse her with a reckless word
Or clink her rattle's fallen bells:
All, long dismissed with wonted prayers,
Such apostolic vigils keep,
No sound descends the darkened stairs
To question the allure of sleep.
Only their fringed towels veil
The fender's interwoven wire,
And, parted in the midst, exhale
Domestic incense towards the fire.
Betwixt the hobs (their lease of light,
But not of heat, devolved to dark)
The elm-logs simmer, hoary white
Or ruddy-scaled with saurian bark.
'Twas the third George whose lieges planned
That grate, and all its iron caprice
Of classic garlands, nobly spanned
By that triumphant mantelpiece—
A very altar for the bright
Tame element its pomp installs
'Twixt flat pilasters, fluted, white,
And lion-bedizened capitals.
Here portly toppers met of old
To serve their comfortable god
And praise the heroes wigged and jowled,
Of that pugnacious period.
Now in their outworn husk of state
Our frugal comfort oddly dwells—
(As recluse crabs accommodate
Their contours to discarded shells)
A dozen childish perquisites
Await my liberated hands
And lovelier usurpation sits
Enthroned above the fading brands,
Two lonely tapers criss-cross rays
Cancel the dusky wall and shine
To halo with effulgent haze
The Genius of this Georgian shrine.
Mary, who through the centuries holds

Her crown'd Son in her hand, amid
Her mantle's black Byzantine folds
More tenderly displayed than hid,
O'er this tramontane hearth presides
Oracular of Heaven and Rome—
Where Peter is the Church abides,
Where Mary and Her Son, the home.
All day she blesses my employ
Where surge and eddy round my knee,
Swayed by a comfit or a toy,
The battles of eternity.
And that regard of Hers and His,
Hallowing the truce of night, endows
The weariest vigilant head with bliss;
And sanctifies such sleeping brows
As hers I carry from the haunt
Of waning warmth, the empty bars,
Up the great staircase, 'neath the gaunt
North window with its quarrelled stars,
To the quiet cradle. Slumber on,
Small heiress of celestial peace,
The glitter of the world is gone,
Et lucet lux in tenebris.

TREES

I WANDER in the open fields
Amazed, for there is no one by,
To see the bowery-hanging trees
So sympathetic with the sky;

Where sheets of daisies on the grass
Lie like Our Lord's discarded shrouds,
Whence He is risen grow the elms
And etch their verges on the clouds.

But when I walk the causey'd town
Whose citizens with tedious breath
Make certain day by day that tomb
Which shuts the Godhead underneath,

I sorrowing tread the cobbled way
Their strait-rankt chestnut-rows between,
Where myriad blossoms hardly light
One sombre pyramid of green.

SIMKIN

To the sheer summit of the town,
Up from the marshes where the mill is,
The High Street clambers, looking down
On willows, weirs and water-lilies;
What goblin homes those gradients bear,
Doors that for all their new defacements
Date darkly, windows that outwear
The centuries shining on their casements!

When Simkin shows you up the street
To pay a bill or post a letter,
Your urgency infects his feet,
He speeds as well as you, or better;
Moulding his Lilliputian stride
To your swift footfall's emulation
He walks unwavering by your side
Until you reach your destination.

Simkin, the urchin with the shock
Of curls rush-hatted, plainly preaches
The Age of Reason in a smock
And Liberty in holland breeches,
Yet all obediently he'll ramp
Against the counter, pressing closer
To watch you lick a ha'penny stamp
Or see you settle with the grocer.

But once your steps retrace the town
And "Home's" the goal your folly mentions
A thousand projects of his own
Engage the sum of his attentions—
As when, precariously superb,
He mounts with two-year-old activity

The great stone horse-block by the kerb
Time-worn to glacial declivity.

Then debonair and undebarr'd
By the old hound, its casual sentry,
He dallies in "The Old George" yard
And greets the jackdaw in the entry;
Retracted to the street, he gains
A sombre door no sunshine mellows,
The smithy, where there glows and wanes
Fire, at the bidding of the bellows.

A-tip-toe at the infrequent shops
Toys or tin kettles he appraises,
Seeds in bright packets, lollipops,
Through the dim oriels' greenish glazes:
Then with two sturdy hands he shakes
The stripling sycamore that dapples
With shade the side-walk and awakes
Some ancient memory of apples.

Next he rejoins, beneath a sky
With willow-leaves and gnats a-quiver,
The dapper martins where they ply
A clayey traffic by the river;
Watches the minnows in the warm
Near shallows with a smile persuading—
He could not come to any harm
On such a heaven-sent day for wading!

Home's gained at last. At last they cease,
Coaxes, entreaties, threats, coercions;
An old gate's iron fleurs-de-lis
Shut upon Simkin's last diversions.
The garden crossed, the door stands wide,
And, pouting like a wronged immortal,
But passive as a Roman bride,
Simkin is lifted through the portal.



A BALLAD OF LORDS AND LADIES

"At Wycombe County Court ...
as Lords and Lady of the Manor of Turville ..."

A SECOND spring came round when fell
To save our land (men said) from Hell
Of Teuton tyranny her sons—
On what strange soil, to what strange guns.
And here on English sward where some
Unsacrificed remained at home
The mild commenting sage saw pass
The insensate strife of class with class
Men lived in England side by side
As sweetly as their brethren died
In Flanders, said the Optimist.

One instance to augment his list ...
In England, when the tranquil spring
Bought and endowed with suffering
Began, and the heroic year's
New wheat shot up through blood and tears
Of sacrifice its slender shoots;
When every elm-tree, its great roots
Confirmed in English agony,
Shook its red buds against the sky;
In April, when the country lifted
Its winter-smitten face and shifted
From sombre tenderness to smiles
The sun-swept champaign's miles on miles
And melody made the morning rich—
Then Lords and Ladies lined the ditch
With the same spear-shaped leaves that stood,
Noble and meek, beneath the Rood,
Dappled with Jesus Christ His Blood.
As emulous of those unfurled swords
One noble Lady and two Lords—

Whose names the chronicler rejoice,
One Mrs. Nairne and Lord Camoys
And Mr. Hewitt—did consort
To sue in Wycombe County Court
"A cottager," one Walter West:
And did from that tribunal wrest
A strong injunction to affray
The man from "cutting thorn or may
Or trespassing" where the Manor's hand
Lay on "the waste or common land
Of Turville." With the noble Three's
Victory went the lawyers' fees—
"Costs, and one shilling damages."

Now, even in war-time, when one-half
Our ink wells forth in epitaph
And every quill their fate commends
Who lay down lives to save their friends,
There should be gall enough for those
Who lay down laws to snare their foes;
A little monument or cairn
For my Lord Camoys, Mrs. Nairne
And Mr. Hewitt, who, while hosts
Of English cottagers on coasts
Unknown went down to death, effaced
One cottager from Turville Waste;
Conserving in this world of scorns
Their brambles for the Crown of Thorns.

A PRAYER FOR ST. INNOCENT'S DAY

WISDOM, be Thou
The only garland of my burdened brow,

The nearest stage
And vowed conclusion of my pilgrimage,

Shade whence I shun
The untempered supervision of the sun,

Planet whose beams
Dispel the desperate ambushade of dreams;

Through the Red Sea
Of mine own passion, Wisdom, usher me.

For this I pray
The four austere custodians of to-day,

Urge mine intent—
Nazarius, Celsus, Victor, Innocent.



THE PRIZE

WITH ivy wreathed, a hundred lights
Shone out; the Convent play was finished;
The waning term this night of nights
To a few golden hours diminished.

Again the curtain rose. Outshone
The childish frocks and childish tresses
Of the late cast that had put on
Demureness and its party dresses.

Rustled a-row upon the stage
Big girls and little, ranged in sizes,
All waiting for the Personage
To make the speech and give the prizes.

And there, all rosy from her *rôle*,
Betsey with sturdy valiance bore her,
Nor did she recognize a soul
But braved the buzzing room before her

With such resolve that guest on guest,
And many a smiling nun behind them,
Met her eyes obviously addressed
To proving that she did not mind them.

(So might a kitchen kitten see—
Whose thoughts round housemaids' heels are centred—
The awful drawing-room's company
He inadvertently has entered.)

Swift from her side the girlish crowd,
With lovely smiles and limber graces,
Went singly, took their prizes, bowed,

Returning quietly to their places.

Then "Betsey Jane!" and all the rout,
Sweet postulant and nun pedantic,
Beheld that little craft put out
Upon the polished floor's Atlantic.

The Personage bestowed her prize,
And Betsey, lowly as the others,
Bowed o'er her sandals, raised her eyes
Alight with pride—and met her mother's!

She thrust between the honoured row
Before her in her glad elation;
Her school-mates gasped to see her go;
The nuns divined her destination;

The guests made way. Clap following clap
Acclaimed Convention's overleaping,
As Betsey gained her mother's lap
And gave the prize into her keeping.



TO WILFRID MEYNELL

His Friend complains of Prose that would never
serve her.

THRICE foolish I that, to portray
For you apart my heart and mind,
Bid foolish Prose the gift convey—
No thrall of mine and proved unkind—
Who flung both heart and mind away.

He never did my hests with joy
On deftest feet with fleetness shod,
But lagged in byways o'er some toy
More meet for babyhood. A rod
Reward my graceless errand boy!

On many a fair suit swiftly sent
He still hath stayed nor weighed the cost,
Reluctant to your door he bent,
The string of my thoughts' parcel lost
And gone the gist of mine intent.

Wherefore that ruffian lad I curse,
For 'tis his guilt hath spilt my sense,
For you, lest you should take for worse
His lack of wit, this evidence
Of my regard I send by Verse.

"SIDERA SUNT TESTES ET MATUTINA PRUINA"

THE stars are witness and the morning frost,
The shuttered inn, the icy lane, the hoar
Alley transmuted at the keen moon's cost
To silver birch from leaden sycamore,
The shivering steps, the door that barely stands
Ajar, the altar's weekday thrift of gold,
The hasty breath that dews my helpless hands,
At what white heat I come through this white cold:
How before day blows up the smouldering sun
I feed my ashen hope with kindling phrase,
Cast fuel on my faith, watch the flame run
From brand to brand of love and by that blaze
Pillow my head upon His Heart whereon
Lay but last night the lovelocks of St. John.

TO A. W.: A MOTHER

WHEN beside you to your bed
Comes the little Catkin-head
(For she surely boasts some fair
Down or beech-leaf coloured hair
Your endowing aspects taught her,
His and yours, this first-born daughter)
Think how many, blessed two,
Babe and mother, prayed for you.

And when you hold appeased and warm
The Dear and Greedy on your arm,
Or laugh among the pillows piled,
All-sufficient to your child,
Pray sometimes for all exiled
(And maybe wistful) from these good
Earliest days of Motherhood.

THE ASCENT

HERE, where of old they sowed the mustard-seed,
A-branch like candelabra lit with flowers,
Above the slim young wheat-spears towers the weed
Burning the sunshine through these ardent hours;

And I, late pent in a small chintz-hung room
With all the bicker of a little town
About my window, I have burst my tomb
And stand assumed to the imperial down.

From the warm-breathing vale as from a prison,
From last year's plashy oak-leaves to the austere
Summits of chalky plough-land, I have risen
And sloughed my skin of sloth and heavened me here.

Past gardens laden with lilac and slow streams
Where the black-flowering rush renews its ranks
Where willow-drills lave in a mist of dreams
Their whispering leaflets, past the roadside banks

All white with daisies as green tide with surf,
(No star-bedizened belt of white Orion's
Holds lovelier constellations than this turf)
Past little closes set with dandelions

(And set so full that yellow ousts the green
And brags of victory shouting to the sun)
I urged me till beneath the sky's hot sheen
These heights of stony solitude were won.

Here on the crack'd white clods I stand elated
Whose iron verge scarce crumbles at my heels
So hath the effulgent ether indurated

The slot of horse-hoofs and the track of wheels;

And now, and now, the spirit no longer spent
In ease that overtops itself, takes grace,
Cleansed by the sweat of that divine ascent,
Exulting in the harsh unshaded place.

For here where God hath been so hard to shackle
The martyred earth He hath His first acclaim,
Still the parched flowers burn round His tabernacle,
The unwatered hills are vocal with His Name.



APRIL IN ABINGDON

WHEN milder days are well begun,
And window-sills are warm in the sun,
And grannies in white mufflers meet
Friends at the turn of every street,

When at the doctor's door you dread
Upon his spaniel's ears to tread
Who by the scraper lays to doze
His ginger lovelocks and his nose,

When the oldest alms-folk rise and peer
Out of their painted doors, to hear
The bellman's speech ere he be gone—
Then April comes to Abingdon.

AN IDOL OF THE MARKET PLACE

DECORUM and the butcher's cat
Are seldom far apart—
From dawn when clouds surmount the air,
Piled like a beauty's powdered hair,
Till dusk, when down the misty square
Rumbles the latest cart

He sits in coat of white and grey
Where the rude cleaver's shock
Horrid from time to time descends,
And his imposing presence lends
Grace to a platform that extends
Beneath the chopping-block.

How tranquil are his close-piled cheeks,
His paws, sequestered warm!
An oak-grained panel backs his head
And all the stock-in-trade is spread,
A symphony in white and red,
Round his harmonious form.

The butcher's brave cerulean garb
Flutters before his face,
The cleaver dints his little roof
Of furrowed wood; remote, aloof,
He sits superb and panic proof
In his accustomed place.

Threading the columned County Hall,
Midmost before his eyes,
Alerter dog and loitering maid
Cross from the sunlight to the shade,
And small amenities of trade

Under the gables rise;

Cats of the town, a shameless crew,
Over the way he sees
Propitiate with lavish purr
An unresponsive customer,
Or, meek with sycophantic fur,
Caress the children's knees.

But he, betrothed to etiquette,
Betrays nor head nor heart;
Lone as the Ark on Ararat,
A monument of fur and fat,
Decorum and the butcher's cat
Are seldom far apart.



PETER PIGEON

THE pigeons dwell in Pimlico; they mingle in the street;
They flutter at Victoria around the horses' feet;
They fly to meet the royal trains with many a loyal phrase
And strut to meet their sovereign on strips of scarlet baize;
But Peter, Peter Pigeon, salutes his cradle days.

The pigeons build in Bloomsbury; they rear their classic homes
Where pedants clamber sable steps to search forgotten tomes;
They haunt Ionic capitals with learned lullabies
And each laments in anapaests and in iambics cries;
But Peter, Peter Pigeon, how sleepily he sighs!

The pigeons walk the Guildhall; they dress in civic taste
With amplitude of mayoral chain and aldermanic waist;
They bow their grey emphatic heads, their topknots rise and fall,
They cluster in the courtyard at their midday dinner call;
But Peter, Peter Pigeon, he nods beneath my shawl.

The pigeons brood in Battersea; while yet the dawn is dark
Their ready aubade ripples in the plane-trees round the park;
They light upon your balcony, a brave and comely band,
Till night decoys their coral feet, their voices low and bland;
But Peter, Peter Pigeon, his feet are in my hand.

"I AM GLAD THE MARTINS ARE BUILDING AGAIN...."

I AM glad the martins are building again,
They had all departed
From the old deserted
House by the stream;
Its windows were black to the snow and the rain
And the sky and the sun,
And the river sobbed on,
Like a child in a dream,
Under the unlopped sycamore boughs
That stifled the old stone house.

Now the axe-edge is blue on the sycamore rind,
By the workers huzza'd
Till the ashlar'd façade
Outpeers its disguise;
Now little white curtains flap out to the wind
Across the grey sills
And summer instils
The peace of the skies
And the zest of the sun into every old room
So given to grief and gloom.

And the children who wake the green walks with their mirth
And lift the shy heads
Of the flowers from their beds,
By a strange cry stirred—
Desert their dear pastime, look up from the earth,
Up, up, through the leaves
Where under the eaves
Clings the back of the bird:
And his nest-mate white-throated regards the new day

From her arch of inverted clay.



A PARLEY WITH GRIEF

GRIEF, let us come to terms! Your strict siege narrows
In on the final citadel of my soul,
Perish the outworks in a storm of arrows,
Mangonel, mace and battleaxe gain their goal.
Yet have we still provision and caparison,
You will not brook, nor we admit, defeat—
Take then the broken fort not grudge the garrison
Generous safe-conduct and a proud retreat.
Granted, O Grief? So am I saved disbanding,
Even in my end, the powers which called me chief—
Sick Memory, weak Will and Understanding
Wounded to death. Marvellest thou, chivalrous Grief,
Seeing us slink into the eternal distance,
A foe so faint should make such long resistance?

LEVÉE DE RIDEAU

HE rode upon the sorrel horse and led the dapple grey,
They passed below the gables mute soon after dawn of day,
Before the bell had chimed for Mass, while yet the sunless air
Lifted the straws of yesterday about the sleeping square.

I recked not of his name and fate nor yet did I surmise
Whose were the steeds whose locks were blown betwixt their spacious eyes,
The finches fluttered from their hoofs, I stayed to mark the ease
Of him who led the grey and swayed the sorrel with his knees.

They passed. Uprose the rural sun and spake his prologue clear
Across the world for suburbs sleek and linkèd slums to hear—
"Come hither, hither, where are played the interludes of light
And day enacts her dearest parts for your abusèd sight!"



AN AFTERTHOUGHT ON APPLES

WHILE yet unfallen apples throng the bough,
To ripen as they cling
In lieu of the lost bloom, I ponder how
Myself did flower in so rough a spring;
And was not set in grace
When the first flush was gone from summer's face.
How in my tardy season, making one
Of a crude congregation, sour in sin,
I nodded like a green-clad mandarin,
Averse from all that savoured of the sun.

But now throughout these last autumnal weeks
What skyey gales mine arrogant station thresh,
What sunbeams mellow my beshadowed cheeks,
What steely storms cudgel mine obdurate flesh;
Less loath am I to see my fellows launch
Forth from my side into the air's abyss,
Whose own stalk is
Grown untenacious of its wonted branch.

And yet, O God,
Tumble me not at last upon the sod,
Or, still superb above my fallen kind,
Grant not my golden rind
To the black starlings screaming in the mist.
Nay, rather on some gentle day and bland
Give Thou Thyself my stalk a little twist,
Dear Lord, and I shall fall into Thy hand.

RECRUITS ON THE ROAD TO OXFORD

THEY passed in dusty black defile
Along the burning champaign's edge
Where English oaks for many a mile
Dripped acorns o'er the berried hedge,

With valorous smiles on faces soiled
Out of the autumn's heat and light
These who on English earth had toiled
Came forth for English earth to fight,

Round their descending flank outspread
The country like a painted page—
God's truth, a man were lightly dead
For such a golden heritage!

But these, the surging centuries' wrack
Beyond all tides auspicious thrown,
Doomed with bowed head and threadbare back
To till the land they might not own,

Reft of the swallow's tranquil lease,
Reft of the scrap-fed robin's dole—
How have these reared in starving peace
This flaming valiancy of soul?...

O England, when with fluttered breath
You greet the victory they earn
And when with eyes that looked on death
The remnant of your sons return,

On your inviolate soil repent
And give the guerdon unbesought—
To these whose lives were freely lent

Some share of that for which they fought!



A VOLUNTEER

HE had no heart for war, its ways and means,
Its train of machinations and machines,
Its murky provenance, its flagrant ends;
His soul, unpledged for his own dividends,
He had not ventured for a nation's spoils.
So had he sighed for England in her toils
Of greed, was't like his pulse would beat less blithe
To see the Teuton shells on Rotherhithe
And Mayfair—so each body had 'scaped its niche,
The wretched poor, the still more wretched rich?
Why had he sought the struggle and its pain?
Lest little girls with linked hands in the lane
Should look "You did not shield us!" as they wended
Across his window when the war was ended.

ARS IMMORTALIS

BETSEY, when all the stalwarts left
Us women to our tasks befitting,
Your little fingers, far from deft,
Coped for an arduous week with knitting;
And, though the meekness of your hair
Drooped o'er the task disarmed my strictures,
The Army gained when in despair
You dropped its socks to paint it pictures.

I, knowing well your guileless brush,
Urged that there wanted something subtler
To put Meissonier to the blush
And snatch the bays from Lady Butler;
And so your skies retained their blue,
Nor reddened with the wrath of nations,
To prove at least one artist knew
Her public and her limitations.

A dozen warriors far away
Craved of your skill to keep them posted,
With coloured pictures day by day,
In aught of note their birthplace boasted;
Hence these "Arriving Refugees"
(Cheerful in burnt sienna) hurry
To soothe your uncle's hours of ease
In some congested hut in Surrey.

I hear that Nurse's David gets
(His valour is already French's)
Your "Market" with the cigarettes
His sister forwards to the trenches;
This "Cat" (for Rupert in the East),
Limned in its moments of inertia,

You send that he may show the beast
To its progenitors in Persia.

Daily your brush depicts a home
Such as our duller pens are mute on;
Squanders Vermilion, Lake and Chrome
And Prussian Blue—that furious Teuton
Paper beneath your fingers calls
For forms and figures to divide it,
Colours and cock-eyed capitals
And kisses cruciform to hide it.

Till brushes sucked and laid apart,
And candles lit and daylight dying
And you asleep, your works of art
Ranged on the mantelpiece and drying—
We elders (older when you're gone)
Muse on our country's gains and losses ...
Ah, Betsey, is it you alone
Who send your kisses shaped like crosses?

THE ADMONITION: TO BETSEY

*REMEMBER, on your knees,
The men who guard your slumbers—*

And guard a house in a still street
Of drifting leaves and drifting feet,
A deep blue window where below
Lies moonlight on the roof like snow,
A clock that still the quarters tells
To the dove that roosts beneath the bell's
Grave canopy of silent brass
Round which the little night winds pass
Yet stir it not in the grey steeple;
And guard all small and drowsy people
Whom gentlest dusk doth disattire,
Undressing by the nursery fire
In unperturbed numbers
On this side of the seas—

*Remember, on your knees,
The men who guard your slumbers.*

THE GREAT REBUKE

"May those at war soon lay down the sword and
so end the slaughter which is dishonouring Europe
and humanity."—BENEDICT XV.

"PUT up thy sword." So Peter found
Rebuke upon his weapon's aid,
The High Priest's servant of his wound
Was healed, and the disciple's blade
Rebidden to its scabbard. See,
O World, the lovely evidence—
True lesson of Gethsemane—
That Heaven on Earth disdained defence.
For still the hostile ages pass,
And force may strive for right, but know,
You cannot cut at Caiaphas
But the hired servant bears the blow;
And still the apostle, he who dies
In thought to stem Christ's Passion, falls
Short of his fervour and denies
His Master in the High Priest's halls ...
Forth leaps the sword upon the same
Innocent pretexts—little homes
Childhood and womanhood wronged, the Name
Of this rebuking Christ: hence comes
A votive fury that begins
All conflicts, and the justest pride
Is first the stalking-horse of sins
And then deserted and denied.
Despots, diplomatists, dark trades
Set men unceasingly at strife,
Usurp the war-cries of crusades,
Divert each God-devoted life;
Never, Oh never yet, will war,

Howe'er so poisonous root and stem,
Lack the assurance of a star
Outdazzling His of Bethlehem
Till Truth and Innocence reprove
Their ghastly champions with His word—
Who chid the violence even of love—
"Put up thy sword." "Put up thy sword."

A CHAIRMAN OF TRIBUNAL

"I am joined with ... nobility and tranquillity,
burgomasters and great oneyers such as ... pray
continually to their saint the commonwealth."—

I *Henry IV*, ii. 1.

SO ringed about with sparrow-hawks and owls,
Bloodhounds and weasels, triplicated jowls,
Complaisant dewlaps and uneasy eyes,
He sits—this President of Destinies—
Fingers his papers, strokes his creasy chin,
Bellows beneath his borrowed baldaquin.
Cocytus still sobs past him, on its brink
He lays nice odds which souls emerge or sink,
Paddles his bovine hoofs in the spilt bliss
Of Love, and in the tearfullest abyss
Angles for little jests. He knows no ruth—
Though even Pilate was concerned for Truth
And Caiaphas for Forms—his scarlet thumb
Was born reversed: and Innocence is dumb
Bound by the implication of his dream,
Unholy revenant of a dead régime,
Who made red War ere God made me and you
And now, God willing, thinks to see it through.

AFTER THE STORM

ALONG the silent lane I found—

Where all night long the wind blew Hell—
The chestnut trees had heaped the ground
With ruthless spoil of nut and shell.

So shall we see our night's grim tolls—

When dawn displays the insensate dusk's
Ravage—the unnumbered, fallen souls,
The unnumbered, vacant, mangled husks.



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"O fiery popular spirits," re-create
Some sparkle of your ashes. Let us see
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