

NESBIT EDITH

SONGS OF
LOVE AND
EMPIRE

Edith Nesbit
Songs of love and empire

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E. Nesbit

Songs of love and empire

I

TO THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND

[June 22, 1897]

Come forth! the world's aflame with flags and flowers,
The shout of bells fills full the shattered air,
This is the crown of all your golden hours,
More than all other hours august and fair;
This did the years prepare,
A triumph for our Lady and our Queen,
More rich than any king in any land hath seen.

Clothed are your streets with scarlet, gold, and blue,
Flowers under foot and banners over head,
And while your people's voice storms Heaven for you
About your way are voiceless blessings shed,
And over you are spread

Wide wings of love, free love, tamed to your hand,
Love that gold cannot buy, nor Majesty command.

Not these mere visible millions only, share
Your triumph – here all English hearts beat high,
Nations far off your royal colours wear,
And swell with unheard voice this loyal cry
That strikes the English sky:
A cloud of unseen witnesses is here
To testify how great is England's Queen, and dear.

From out the grey-veiled past, long years away,
Come visionary faces, vision-led,
And splendid shapes that are not of our day,
The spirits of the mute and mighty dead,
To see how Time has sped
The fortunes of their England, and behold
How much more great she is than in the days of old.

The world can see them not; but you can see —
You the inheritor of all the past
Wherein the dead, in noble heraldry,
Blazoned the shield of England, and forecast
The charge it bears at last —
More splendid than the azure and the or
Of the French lilies lost – long lost and sorrowed for.

Here be the weaponed men, the English folk,
Who in long ships across the swan's bathfared,

In whose rude tongue the voice of Freedom spoke,
In whose rough hands the sword was bright and bared —
The men who did and dared,
And to their sons bequeathed the fighting blood
That drives to Victory and will not be withstood.

Here, in your ordered festival, O Queen,
Mixed with the crowd and all unseen of these,
On their long swords the wild Norse rovers lean
And watch the progress of your pageantries,
And on this young June breeze
Float the bright pennons of the Cressy spears —
Shine shadowy shafts that fell, as snow falls, at Poitiers.

Here flutter phantom flags that once flew free
Above the travail of the tournament;
Here gleam old swords, once wet for Liberty;
Old blood-stiff banners, worn with war and rent,
Are with your fresh flowers blent,
And by your crown, where love and fame consort,
Shines the unvanquished cloven crown of Agincourt.

Upon your river where, by day and night,
Your world-adventuring ships come home again,
Glide ghostly galleons, manned by men of might
Who plucked the wings and singed the beard of Spain;
The men who, not in vain,
Saved to the children of a world new-trod
The birth-tongue of our land, her freedom, and her God.

Princes who lived to make our England great,
Poets who wreathed her greatness with their song,
Wise men who steered her heavy ship of State,
Brave men who steered her battle-ships along,
In spectral concourse throng
To applaud the consummated power and pride
Of that belovèd land for which they lived and died.

The thousand un-named heroes who, sword-strong,
Ploughed the long acre wherein Empire grows
Wide as the world, and long as Time is long —
These mark the crescence of the English rose
Whose thorny splendour glows
O'er far-off subject lands, by alien waves,
A crown for England's brow, a garland for her graves.

And faces out of unforgotten years,
Faces long hidden by death's misty screen,
Faces you still can scarcely see for tears,
Will smile on you to-day and near you lean,
O Mother, Wife, and Queen!
With whispered love too sacred and too dear
For any ear than yours, Mother and Wife, to hear.

Lady, the crowd will vaunt to-day your fame,
Daughter and heir of many mighty kings,
The Queen of England, whose imperial name
From England's heart and lips tumultuous springs

In prayers and thanksgivings,
Because your greatness and her greatness shine
Merged each in each, as stars their beams that intertwine.

Yet in the inmost heart, where folded close
The richest treasures of the poorest lie,
Love, whose clear eyes see many secrets, knows
A nobler name than Queen to call you by,
And breathes it silently;
But, 'mid His listening crowd of angels, One
Shall speak your name and say, "Faithful and good, well
done!"

AFTER SIXTY YEARS

Ring, bells! flags, fly! and let the great crowd roar
Its ecstasy. Let the hid heart in prayer
Lift up your name. God bless you evermore,
Lady, who have the noblest crown to wear
That ever woman wore.
A jewel, in the front of time, shall blaze
This day, of all your days commemorate;
With Time's white bays your brows are laureate,
And England's love shall garland all your days.

* * * * *

When England's crown, to Love's acclaim, was laid
On the soft brightness of a maiden's hair,
Amid delight, Love trembled, half afraid,
To give that little head such weight to bear, —
Bind on so slight a maid
A kingdom's purple – bid her hands hold high
The sceptre and the heavy orb of power,
To give to youth and beauty for a dower
Care and a crown, sorrow and sovereignty.

But from our hearts sprang an intenser flame
When loyal Love met tender Love half way,
And, in love's script, wrote on the scroll of fame,
Entwined with all the splendour of that day,
The letters of her name.

Then as fair roses grow 'mid leaves of green,
Love amid loyalty grew strong and close,
To hedge a pleasance round our Royal rose,
Our sovereign maiden flower, our child, our Queen.

The trumpets spake – in sonorous triumph shout,
Their speech found echo in the hundred guns;
From countless towers the answering bells rang out,
And England's heart spoke clamorous, through her sons,
The exulting land throughout.

Down streets ablaze with light the flags unfurled,
Along dark, lonely hills the joy-fires crept,
And eager swords within their scabbards leapt
To guard our Lady and Queen against the world.

Those swords are rusted now. Good men and true
Dust in the dust are laid who held her dear;
But from their grave the bright flower springs anew,
Which for her festival we bring her here,
The long years' meed and due;
The bud of homage grafted on chivalry.
God took the souls that shrined the jewel of love,
But made their sons inheritors thereof,
In endless gold entail of loyalty.

Time, compensating life, the fruit bestowed
When in spent perfume passed the flower of youth;
Her feet were set upon the upward road,
Her face was turned towards the star of truth
That in her soul abode.

With youth the maid's bright brow was garlanded
But richer crowns adorn the dear white hair;
The gathered love of all the years lies there,
In coronal benediction on her head.

She is of our blood, for hath not she, too, met
The angels of delight and of despair?
Does not she, too, remember and forget
How bitter or how bright the lost days were?
Her eyes have tears made wet;
She has seen joy unveiled even as we,
Has laid upon cold clay the heart-warm kiss,
She has known Sorrow for the king he is;
She has held little children on her knee.

Mother, dear Mother, these your children rise
And call you blessèd, and shall we not, too,
Who are your children in the greater wise,
And love you for our land and her for you?
The blessing sanctifies
Your children as they breathe it at your knees,
And, bringing little gifts from very far,
Where the great nurseries of your Empire are,

Your children's blessings throned from over seas.

On Love's spread wings, and over leagues of space,
Homage is borne from far-off sun-steeped lands;
From many a domed mysterious Eastern place,
Where Secrecy holds Time between her hands,
The children of your race
Reach English hands towards your English throne;
And from the far South turn blue English eyes,
That never saw the blue of English skies,
Yet call you Mother, and your land their own.

Where 'mid great trees the mighty waters flow
In arrogant submission to your sway,
In fur of price your northern hunters go,
And shafts of ardent greeting fly your way
Across the splendid snow;
And isles that with their coral, safe and small,
Rock in the cradle of the tropic seas,
In soft, strange speech join in the litanies
That pride and prayer breathe at your festival.

All round the world, on every far-off sea,
In wind-ploughed oceans and in sun-kissed bays,
By every busy wharf and chattering quay,
Some cantle of your Empire sails or stays —
Flaunts your supremacy
Against the winds of all the world, and flies
Your flag triumphant between blue and blue,

Blazons to sun and star the name of you,
And spreads your glory between seas and skies.

There is no cottage garden, sunny-sweet,
There is no pasture where our shepherds tend
Their quiet flocks, no red-roofed village street,
But holds for you the love-wish of a friend,
Blent with high homage meet;
No little farm among the cornfields lone,
No little cot upon the uplands bare,
But hears to-day in blessing and in prayer
One name, Victoria, and that name your own.

From the vast cities where the giant's might,
Pauseless, resistless, moves by night and day,
From hidden mines where day is one with night,
From weary lives whose days and nights are grey
And empty of delight,
From lives that rhyme to sunshine and the spring,
From happiness at flood and hope at ebb,
Rose the magnificent and mingled web
That floats, your banner, at your thanksgiving.

Throned on the surety of a splendid past,
With present glory clothed as with the sun,
Crowned with the future's hopes, you know at last
What treasure from the years your life has won;
Behold, your hands hold fast
The moon of Empire, and its sway controls

The tides of war and peace, while in those hands
Lies tender homage out of all the lands
Against whose feet your furthest ocean rolls.

How seems your life, looked back at through the years?
Much love, much sorrow, dead desires, lost dreams,
A great life lived out greatly; hidden tears,
And smiles for daily wear; strong plans and schemes,
And mighty hopes and fears;
War in the South and murder in the East,
And England's heart-throbs echoed by your heart
When loss, and labour, and sorrow were her part,
Or when Fate bade her to some flower-crowned feast.

Red battle-fields whereon your soldiers died,
Green pastoral fields saved by the blood of these,
Duty that bade mere sorrow stand aside,
And love transforming anguish into ease;
Long longing satisfied,
Great secrets wrenched from Nature's grudging breast,
The fruit of knowledge plucked for all to eat, —
These have you known, Life's circle is complete,
And, knowing these, you know what is Life's best:

The dear small secrets of our common life,
The English woods and hills, the English home,
The common joys and griefs of Mother and wife,
Joy coming, going – griefs that go and come,
Soul's peace amid world's strife;

Hours when the Queen's cares leave the woman free;
Dear friendships, where the friend forgets the Queen
And stoops to wear a dearer, homelier mien,
And be more loved than mere Queens rise to be.

And, in your hour of triumph, when you shine
The centre of our triumph's blazing star,
And, gazing down your long life's lustrous line,
Behold how great your life-long glories are,
Yet, in your heart's veiled shrine,
No splendour of all splendours that have been
Will brim your eyes with tremulous thanksgivings,
But little memories of little things —
The treasures of the woman, not the Queen.

Yet, Queen, because the love of you hath wound
A golden girdle all about the earth,
Because your name is as a trumpet sound
To call toward you men of English birth
From the world's outmost bound,
Because old kinsmen, long estranged from home,
Come, with old foes, to greet you, friend and kin,
With kindly eyes behold your guests come in,
See from afar the long procession come!

No Emperor in Rome's Imperial days
Knew ever such a triumph day as this,
Though captive kings bore chains along his ways,
Though tribute from the furthest isles was his,

With pageant and with praise.
For you – free kings and free republics grace
Your triumph, and across the conquered waves
Come gifts from friends, not tributes wrung from slaves,
And praise kneels, clothed in love, before your face.

Ring, bells! flags, fly! and let the great crowd roar
Its ecstasy! Let the hid heart in prayer
Lift up your name! God bless you evermore,
Lady, who have the noblest crown to wear
That ever monarch wore.
For, 'mid this day's triumphal voluntaries,
Your name shines like the splendour of the sun,
Because your name with England's name is one,
As Hers, thank God! is one with Liberty's.

TRAFALGAR DAY

Laurels, bring laurels, sheaves on sheaves,
Till England's boughs are bare of leaves!
Soon comes the flower more rare, more dear
Than any laurel this year weaves —
The Aloe of the hundredth year
Since from the smoke of Trafalgar
He passed to where the heroes are,
Nelson, who passed and yet is here,
Whose dust is fire beneath our feet,

Whose memory mans our fleet.
Laurels, bring laurels, since they hold
His England's tears in each green fold,
His England's joy, his England's pride,
His England's glories manifold.
Yet what was Victory since he died?
And what was Death since he lives yet,
Above a Nation's worship set,
Above her heroes glorified? —
Nelson, who made our flag a star
To lead where Victories are!

A SONG OF TRAFALGAR

Like an angry sun, like a splendid star,
War gleams down the long years' track;
They strain at the leash, the dogs of war,
And who shall hold them back?
"Let loose the pack: we are English bred,
We will meet them full and fair
With the flag of England over our head,
And his hand to keep it there!"

So spake our fathers. Our flag, unfurled,
Blew brave to the north and south;
An iron answer we gave the world,
For we spoke by the cannon's mouth.
But he who taught us the word to say
Grew dumb as his Victory sang,
And England mourned on her triumph day,
And wept while her joy-bells rang.

Long hour by hour, and long day by day,
The swift years crept apace,
The patient, the coral-insect way,
To cover the dear dead face.
O foolish rabble of envious years,
Who wist not the dead must rise,
His name is music still in our ears,

His face a light to our eyes!

Bring hither your laurels, the fading sign
Of a deathless love and pride;
These cling more close than the laurels twine,
They are strong as the world is wide:
At the feet of Virtue in Valour clad
Shall glory and love be laid,
While Glory sings to an English lad,
Or Love to an English maid.

Wherever the gleams of an English fire
On an English roof-tree shine,
Wherever the fire of a youth's desire
Is laid upon Honour's shrine,
Wherever brave deeds are treasured and told,
In the tale of the deeds of yore
Like jewels of price in a chain of gold
Are the name and the fame he bore.

Wherever the track of our English ships
Lies white on the ocean foam,
His name is sweet to our English lips
As the names of the flowers at home;
Wherever the heart of an English boy
Grows big with a deed of worth,
Such names as his name have begot the same,
Such hearts will bring it to birth.

They say that his England, grown tired and old,
Lies drunk by her heavy hoard;
They say her hands have the grasp of the gold
But not the grip of the sword,
That her robe of glory is rent and shred,
And that winds of shame blow through:
Speak for your England, O mighty Dead,
In the deeds you would have her do!

Small skill have we to fight with the pen
Who fought with the sword of old,
For the sword that is wielded of Englishmen
Is as much as one hand can hold.
Yet the pen and the tongue are safe to use,
And the coward and the wise choose these;
But fools and brave were our English crews
When Nelson swept the seas.

'Tis the way of a statesman to fear and fret,
To ponder and pause and plan,
But the way of Nelson was better yet,
For that was the way of a man;
They would teach us smoothness, who once were rough,
They have bidden us palter and pray,
But the way of Nelson was good enough,
For that was the fighting way.

If Nelson's England must stoop to bear
What never honour should brook,

In vain does the tomb of her hero wear
The laurel his brow forsook;
In vain was the speech from the lips of her guns,
If now must her lips refrain;
In vain has she made us, her living sons,
Her dead have made her in vain.

So here with your bays be the dear head crowned,
Lay flowers where the dear dust lies,
And wreath his column with laurel round
To point his fame to the skies;
But the greenest laurel that ever grew
Is the laurel that's yet to win;
Crowned with his laurels he waits for You
To bring Your laurels in!

WATERLOO DAY

[June 18]

This is the day of our glory; this is our day to weep.
Under her dusty laurels England stirs in her sleep;
Dreams of her days of honour, terrible days that are dead,
Days of the making of story, days when the sword was red,

When all her fate and her future hung on the naked blade,
When by the sword of her children her place in the world was
made,
When Honour sounded the trumpet and Valour leapt to obey,
And Heroes bought us the Empire that statesmen would sell
to-day.

England, wanton and weary, sunk in a slothful ease,
Has slain in her wars her thousands, but her tens of thousands
in peace:
And the cowards grieve for her glory; their glory is in their
shame;
They are glad of the moth in her banners, and the rust on her
shining name.

Oh, if the gods would send us a balm for our sick, sad years,

Let them send us a sight of the scarlet, and the sound of the
guns in our ears!
For valour and faith and honour – these grow where the red
flower grows,
And the leaves for the Nation's healing must spring from the
blood of her foes.

A SONG OF PEACE AND HONOUR

[December, 1895]

TO THE QUEEN

Lady and Queen, for whom our laurels twine,
Upon whose head the glories of our land
In one immortal diadem are met,
Embodied England, in whose woman-hand
The sceptre of Imperial sway is set,
Receive this song of mine!
For you are England, and her bays grow green
To deck your brow, your goodness lends her grace,
And in our hearts your face is as Her face;
The Mother-Country is the Mother-Queen.

* * * * *

We, men of England, children of her might,
With all our Mother's record-roll of glory,

Great with her greatness, noble by her name,
Drank with our mothers' milk our Mother's story,
And in our veins the splendour of her fame
Made strong our blood and bright;
And to her absent sons her name has been
Familiar music heard in distant lands,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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