

**GILBERT
BERNARD**

REBEL VERSES

Bernard Gilbert

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Rebel Verses

The Rebel

I live in music, in poetry, and in the life reflective.

I seek intellectual boldness in man, I worship mental swiftness in women.

I have no love for lawyers, priests, schoolmasters, or any dogmatic men.

I am with poor against rich, labour against employer, women against men; I fight beside all strikers, mutineers, and rebels.

I welcome foes; I desire criticism.

I loathe prejudice, either social or national; I repudiate all claims.

I demand freedom of action and leisure for reflection.

Facing Death, I would say: 'I have tasted all, tried all, dared all, suffered all, and I repent nothing.'

Song of Revolt

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

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

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

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

Men shall be slaves no more!

From sea to sea

That Word of hope unspeakable succour brings;

The day dawneth when there are no more Kings:

And the People, the People shall be free!

There Aint no God

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

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

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

I say it!
Dost hear me ... Thou?
There aint no God!

'The Night is Dark'

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

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

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

Our ancient enemy – now brother —

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

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

Poets and prophets darkly sang;
Unheeded then the tocsin rang;
But now the sky is grey and dim,
Your enemy is stern and grim,
Your leaders slow;
And, though you realise it not ...

You may lie low:
For, though to fight one son is bold,
Another hides, amassing gold;
The strain falls not in equal measure:
Whilst some lie cold —
Others distil their blood for treasure,
And that – Old England – if unchecked,
Shall see your ancient Empire wrecked.

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

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

Not arms, nor weapons forged, nor serried forces,
Nor stout Allies nor multiplied resources
The victory giveth;
Not ships afar, nor numbers gradual tale,
Nor all your might, oh Britain! shall avail:
Only the Spirit liveth!
Yet this our hope (a hope unsaid),

And still our faith (though faith be dead),
That, as of old, you may awake,
Cast off your senile mood, and shake
Irresolution to the wall;
Bid equal sacrifice from all;
That each surrender to the state
A measured offering to fate,
Till Unity of Will, controlled
Shines through the nation, manifold:

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

Return

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

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

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

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

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

Nietzsche

In the silence of the night-time
Startled, we can hear a murmur
As of someone tapping, tapping,
Tapping at the breasts of idols
With an auscultating hammer,
Sounding all their hollow vitals
As they helplessly endeavour
To evade with vain pretences
Or atone:
Yes, we hear the distant thunder
Of an earthquake that convulses;
Poor old Mother Earth is shaken,
Sorely tried and whirled asunder,
Shaken by a fierce invader;
Where grim and slow you creep below,
Digging, digging, digging deep,
Troglodyte, untiring miner
All alone!
As you climb upon the mountains,
Glaciers, icy precipices,
Toward the lonely lightning-blasted
Peak that towers above in silence,
Plunging into deep crevasses
Where the frozen water falls:

Monotone:

And at last we wake from nightmare —

Wake, to find ourselves denuded

Naked, lonesome, 'mid our fellows

Lacking father, wife, or mother,

Lacking neighbour, child or brother:

All disown.

Still our eyes are fixed steadfastly

Where you soar above the heavens,

Spurning with your mighty pinions

Countless deities and angels,

Shattering our fondest visions

With your own:

Ever on your knees you creep,

Where the way is wild and steep.

Digging, digging, digging deep,

Whilst the priests and idols weep.

Sacrament

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

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

There is no holding back, no base endeavour,
The cup of true communion is filled,
The sacrament prepared as we have willed;
Hand joined to hand in clasp that none can sever;
Our quittance sure, our resolution taken,
With vows fulfilled we face the world unshaken;
And each to each we pledge ourselves for ever.

Fightin' Tomlinson

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

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

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

I fought an' danced an' carried on,
Razzlin 'igh an low;
I drank as long as I could see,

It made no difference to me,
I wor a match for any three:
'Tis sixty year ago.

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

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

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

Aye – them wor roughish times – my word!
'Tis sixty year ago;
Our heads wor hard, our hearts as well,
I wonder as we niver fell,

Into the burnin' pit of hell,
Wheer dreadful fires glow.

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

The Labourers' Hymn

We have slaved for you long days and nights of bent and weary lives;

Giving the strength of our muscles, our sweat, and our sons and wives;

With less food than your horses, and homes less warm than your hives.

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

We have gathered in your grain and raised the 'Harvest Home' for you,

Who gave starvation pay to us and kept from us our due.

We asked for land and freedom, the right to till our own;

To harvest and to garner for ourselves, what we had sown;

We sought the fruit of our labour; you granted us a stone.

Who gave our lives to your children? Who pledged our souls to thine?

Who made you Lord and Master and placed us with the kine?

Who gave you leave to drink our sweat and mix our blood with wine?

To save the land for your children, who denied their country's

wage,

Our sons have left their homes to fight, to guard your heritage;
When they return – Ah! woe to you before their righteous
rage.

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

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

Oliver Cromwell

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

'Tis this that makes him groan with agony,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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