

BRIDGES ROBERT

OCTOBER AND OTHER
POEMS WITH
OCCASIONAL VERSES
ON THE WAR

Robert Bridges

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Occasional Verses on the War**

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PREFACE

This miscellaneous volume is composed of three sections. The first twelve poems were written in 1913, and printed privately by Mr. Hornby in 1914.

The last of these poems proved to be a “war poem,” and on that follow eighteen pieces which were called forth on occasion during the War, the last being a broadsheet on the surrender of the German ships. All of these verses appeared in some journal or serial. There were a few others, but they are not included in this collection, either because they are lost, or because they show decidedly inferior claims to salvage.

The last six poems or sonnets are of various dates.

R. B.

OCTOBER

April adance in play
met with his lover May
where she came garlanded.
The blossoming boughs o'erhead
were thrill'd to bursting by
the dazzle from the sky
and the wild music there
that shook the odorous air.

Each moment some new birth
hasten'd to deck the earth
in the gay sunbeams.
Between their kisses dreams:
And dream and kiss were rife
with laughter of mortal life.

But this late day of golden fall
is still as a picture upon a wall
or a poem in a book lying open unread.
Or whatever else is shrined
when the Virgin hath vanishèd:
Footsteps of eternal Mind
on the path of the dead.

THE FLOWERING TREE

What Fairy fann'd my dreams
while I slept in the sun?
As if a flowering tree
were standing over me:
Its young stem strong and lithe
went branching overhead
And willowy sprays around
fell tasseling to the ground
All with wild blossom gay
as is the cherry in May
When her fresh flaunt of leaf
gives crowns of golden green.

The sunlight was enmesh'd
in the shifting splendour
And I saw through on high
to soft lakes of blue sky:
Ne'er was mortal slumber
so lapt in luxury.

Rather—Endymion—
would I sleep in the sun
Neath the trees divinely
with day's azure above
When my love of Beauty
is met by beauty's love.

So I slept enchanted
under my loving tree
Till from his late resting
the sweet songster of night
Rousing awaken'd me:
Then! this—the birdis note—
Was the voice of thy throat
which thou gav'st me to kiss.

NOEL: CHRISTMAS EVE, 1913

Pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis

A frosty Christmas Eve
when the stars were shining
Fared I forth alone
where westward falls the hill,
And from many a village
in the water'd valley
Distant music reach'd me
peals of bells aringing:
The constellated sounds
ran sprinkling on earth's floor
As the dark vault above
with stars was spangled o'er.

Then sped my thought to keep
that first Christmas of all
When the shepherds watching
by their folds ere the dawn
Heard music in the fields
and marveling could not tell
Whether it were angels
or the bright stars singing.

Now blessed be the tow'rs
that crown England so fair
That stand up strong in prayer
unto God for our souls:
Blessed be their founders
(said I) an' our country folk
Who are ringing for Christ
in the belfries to-night
With arms lifted to clutch
the rattling ropes that race
Into the dark above
and the mad romping din.

But to me heard afar
it was starry music
Angels' song, comforting
as the comfort of Christ
When he spake tenderly
to his sorrowful flock:

The old words came to me
by the riches of time
Mellow'd and transfigured
as I stood on the hill
Heark'ning in the aspect
of th' eternal silence.

IN DER FREMDE

Ah! wild-hearted wand'rer
far in the world away
Restless nor knowest why
only thou canst not stay
And now turnest trembling
hearing the wind to sigh:
'Twas thy lover calling
whom thou didst leave forby.

So faint and yet so far
so far and yet so fain—
“Return belov'd to me”
but thou must onward strain:
Thy trembling is in vain
as thy wand'ring shall be.
What so well thou lovest
thou nevermore shalt see.

THE PHILOSOPHER AND HIS MISTRESS

We watch'd the wintry moon
Suffer her full eclipse
Riding at night's high noon
Beyond the earth's ellipse.

The conquering shadow quell'd
Her splendour in its robe:
And darkling we beheld
A dim and lurid globe;

Yet felt thereat no dread,
Nor waited we to see
The sullen dragon fled,
The heav'nly Queen go free.

So if my heart of pain
One hour o'ershadow thine,
I fear for thee no stain,
Thou wilt come forth and shine:

And far my sorrowing shade
Will slip to empty space
Invisible, but made
Happier for that embrace.

NARCISSUS

Almighty wondrous everlasting
Whether in a cradle of astral whirlfire
Or globed in a piercing star thou slumb'rest
The impassive body of God:
Thou deep i' the core of earth—Almighty!—
From numbing stress and gloom profound
Madest escape in life desirous
To embroider her thin-spun robe.

'Twas down in a wood—they tell—
In a running water thou sawest thyself
Or leaning over a pool: The sedges
Were twinn'd at the mirror's brim
The sky was there and the trees—Almighty!—
A bird of a bird and white clouds floating
And seeing thou knewest thine own image
To love it beyond all else.

Then wondering didst thou speak
Of beauty and wisdom of art and worship
Didst build the fanes of Zeus and Apollo
The high cathedrals of Christ.

All that we love is thine—Almighty!—
Heart-felt music and lyric song
Language the eager grasp of knowledge
All that we think is thine.

But whence?—Beauteous everlasting!—
Whence and whither? Hast thou mistaken?
Or dost forget? Look again! Thou seest
A shadow and not thyself.

OUR LADY

I

Goddess azure-mantled and aureoled
That standing barefoot upon the moon
Or throned as a Queen of the earth
Tranquilly smilest to hold
The Child-god in thine arms,
Whence thy glory? Art not she
The country maiden of Galilee
Simple in dowerless poverty
Who from humble cradle to grave
Hadst no thought of this wonder?

When to man dull of heart
Dawn'd at length graciously
Thy might of Motherhood
The starry Truth beam'd on his home;
Then with insight exalted he gave thee
The trappings—Lady—wherewith his art
Delighteth to picture his spirit to sense
And that grace is immortal.

Fount of creative Love
Mother of the Word eternal
Atoning man with God:
Who set thee apart as a garden enclosed
From Nature's all-producing wilds
To rear the richest fruit o' the Life
Ever continuing out from Him
Urgent since the beginning.

II

Behold! Man setteth thine image in the height of Heaven
And hallowing his untemper'd love
Crowneth and throneth thee ador'd
(Tranquilly joyous to hold
The man-child in thine arms)
God-like apart from conflict to save thee
To guard thy weak caressive beauty
With incontaminate jewels of soul

Courage, patience, and self-devotion:
All this glory he gave thee.

Secret and slow is Nature
Imperceptibly moving
With surely determinate aim:
To woman it fell to be early in prime
Ready to labour, mould, and cherish
The delicate head of all Production
The wistful late-maturing boy
Who made Knowing of Being.

Therefore art thou ador'd
Mother of God in man
Naturing nurse of power:
They who adore not thee shall perish
But thou shalt keep thy path of joy
Envied of Angels because the All-father
Call'd thee to mother his nascent Word
And complete the creation.

THE CURFEW TOWER

Thro' innocent eyes at the world awond'ring
Nothing spake to me more superbly
Than the round bastion of Windsor's wall

That warding the Castle's southern angle
An old inheritor of Norman prowess
Was call'd by the folk the Curfew Tow'r.

Above the masonry's rugged courses
A turreted clock of Caroline fashion
Told time to the town in black and gold.

It charmed the hearts of Henry's scholars
As kingly a mentor of English story
As Homer's poem is of Ilion:

Nor e'er in the landscape look'd it fairer
Than when we saw its white bulk halo'd
In a lattice of slender scaffoldings.

Month by month on the airy platforms
Workmen labour'd hacking and hoisting
Till again the tower was stript to the sun:

The old tow'r? Nay a new tow'r stood there
From footing to battlemented skyline
And topt with a cap the slice of a cone

Archæologic and counterfeited
The smoothest thing in all the high-street
As Eton scholars to-day may see:

They—wherever else they find their wonder
And feed their boyhood on Time's enchantment—
See never the Tow'r that spoke to me.

FLYCATCHERS

Sweet pretty fledgelings, perched on the rail arow,
Expectantly happy, where ye can watch below
Your parents a-hunting i' the meadow grasses
All the gay morning to feed you with flies;

Ye recall me a time sixty summers ago,
When, a young chubby chap, I sat just so
With others on a school-form rank'd in a row,
Not less eager and hungry than you, I trow,
With intelligences agape and eyes aglow,
While an authoritative old wise-acre
Stood over us and from a desk fed us with flies.

Dead flies—such as litter the library south-window,
That buzzed at the panes until they fell stiff-baked on the sill,
Or are roll'd up asleep i' the blinds at sunrise,
Or wafer'd flat in a shrunken folio.

A dry biped he was, nurtured likewise
On skins and skeletons, stale from top to toe
With all manner of rubbish and all manner of lies.

GHOSTS

Mazing around my mind like moths at a shaded candle,
In my heart like lost bats in a cave fluttering,
Mock ye the charm whereby I thought reverently to lay you,
When to the wall I nail'd your reticent effigys?

Ἐτώσιον ἄχθος ἀρούρης

Who goes there? God knows. I'm nobody. How should I answer?
Can't jump over a gate nor run across the meadow.
I'm but an old whitebeard of inane identity. Pass on!
What's left of me to-day will very soon be nothing.

HELL AND HATE

Two demons thrust their arms out over the world,
Hell with a ruddy torch of fire,
And Hate with gasping mouth,
Striving to seize two children fair
Who play'd on the upper curve of the Earth.

Their shapes were vast as the thoughts of man,
But the Earth was small
As the moon's rim appeareth
Scann'd through an optic glass.

The younger child stood erect on the Earth
As a charioteer in a car
Or a dancer with arm upraised;
Her whole form—barely clad
From feet to golden head—
Leapt brightly against the uttermost azure,
Whereon the stars were splashes of light
Dazed in the gulping beds of space.

The elder might have been stell'd to show
The lady who led my boyish love;
But her face was graver than e'er to me
When I look'd in her eyes long ago,
And the hair on her shoulders fal'n
Nested its luminous brown
I' the downy spring of her wings:
Her figure aneath was screen'd by the Earth,
Whereoff—so small that was
No footing for her could be—
She appeared to be sailing free
I' the glide and poise of her flight.

Then knew I the Angel Faith,
Who was guarding human Love.

Happy were both, of peaceful mien,
Contented as mankind longeth to be,
Not merry as children are;
And show'd no fear of the Fiends' pursuit,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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