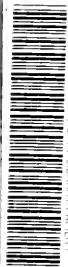


WAGABOND VERSES

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Vagabond Verses



VAGABOND VERSES BY CROSBIE GARSTIN



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To
MY MOTHER AND FATHER



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A number of these verses have appeared in the pages of *Punch* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and one each in the *Spectator*, the *Westminster Gazette*, the *Sphere*, the *Pall Mall Magazine*, *Pearson's Magazine* and the *Novel Magazine*. I am indebted to the Proprietors and Editors for kindly giving me permission to reprint the verses here.



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THE VAGABOND.

I've seen the wizard Northern lights,
With swords and spears and flags unfurled,
Streaming across the polar nights,
Ghost armies of a shadow world.

I've slept beneath the Southern Cross
Sheep-shearing on the Great Karroo,
I've seen the flung Sierras toss
Like a white wave against the blue.

With *gauchos* in the Argentine—
All *ponchos*, spurs and greasy curls—
I've ridden, diced, and rolled in wine,
And fought them for their powdered girls.

I've seen the painted rice-junks flock
Like gulls before the south monsoon,
I've warped free of a 'Frisco dock
And wind-jammed round the Horn—in June.

I've seen the sunrise strike upon
The nitrate clippers, and the dawn
Tinting their canvas till they shone
Like lilies on an emerald lawn.

I've traded guns for ivory,
I've traded square-face gin for pelts,
I've had a posse after me
With forty-fives loose in their belts.

I've pulled an idol from its perch,
And picked the rubies from its eyes,
I've left fogged cruisers in the lurch,
And clubbed the Behring rookeries.

I've been a king—a flower-crowned chief—
And held a brown queen in my arms,
Heard the surf booming on the reef,
The warm Trade rattling in the palms.

I've found the bones of miners pinned
In self-hewn graves by rocks of gold,
I've kicked their skulls because they grinned,
And felt my own sweat dropping cold.

I've run mad through a screaming hail
Of bullets—stabbed my bayonet red,
And heard our sunset bugles wail
Victory to the fields of dead.

I've picked Life to the empty shell ;
I've wrought and fought with fist and gun,
Won fortunes—gambled them to Hell,
I've drunk my whack and had my fun.

Now and again I wander home ;
I like to see the distant Weald's
Blue back above the orchard's foam
Of blossom and the cowslip fields

Where the sleek cattle browse, and where
The slow stream winds, a thread of glass
Cool under willows—it was there
That I, a lad, first kissed a lass.

And there beside that moonlit stream
I and the keepers came to grips,
And there I used to mope and dream
Of coral isles and clipper ships.

My brother keeps my father's farm
Near by the bell-chimed country town ;
Said he, " Old son, your place is warm,
Come, stop with us and settle down."

'Twas good to see my father's house,
Its stone face set 'gainst tears and time,
Its window-eyes with eaves for brows,
Its roof gone grey with lichen rime.

'Twas good o' wintry nights to lie
In my warm bed, come home at last,
And hear the wind go moaning by,
The rain whipped shivering on the blast ;

To sit at dusk in some brown inn
Where bumpkin politicians vied,
And fill their pewters up, and spin
Them yarns till they gaped, goggle-eyed ;

To see the bronze cock-pheasants hide
Deep in the coppery bracken fronds
Of coverts, and the mallards ride
Blue-necked on jade-green lily ponds ;

To see the tumbling pigeons wheel
About their cots, to hear the caw
Of black rooks in the elms, to feel
Spring budding through the winter's thaw.

'Twas good to see the crocuses'
Pale candle-flames lit in the woods,
And the star-white anemones
Like shy nuns peeping through their hoods.

May hedges frothing into flower
The scent of ploughed fields after rain—
England, Old England at her hour !
Yet my boy-dreams came back again . . .

Rattle of winches whipping freight,
Blue Peters cracking at the fore,
Mates bawling—belchings from the great
Stained funnels—salt whiffs from the Nore ;

Mule bells that clanked through dizzy hours
As pack-trains scaled the hanging track,
Where the great glaciers soared like towers
And flashed the fires of sunset back ;

Blue shadows in cool *patios*,
Clicked castanets and twanged guitars,
The rush and dust of *rodeos*,
Lone camp fires under lonelier stars ;

The roped convolvulus in bloom,
The strong Trade droning through the palms,
Along the reef the breaker's boom,
A sun-girl with her golden arms ;

The yellow moon o'er jungle swamps
Where tom-toms thumped a devil dance
To haunted mists,—the Stampede Camps—
The lure, the lust, the Gambler's chance ;

Chanties of shellbacks hauling brails,
Odours of copra, tar and brine,
Wide billowy skies and open trails . . .
By God, they tugged this heart of mine !

In Kent the green sap surged to head,
And ploughboy lovers clumped to meet
Their milkmaid loves where white thorns spread
Bridal confetti at their feet.

By lilac bowers, down flowery walks
Swung droning, honey-drunken bees ;
The daffodils danced on their stalks,
Swayed by the ballet-master breeze.

Pale jasmines lit the garden close
With wide-eyed stars. In airy flight
Danced butterflies from rose to rose,
Like wind-blown petals red and white.

Through the green hills the Medway flowed,
With brown-sailed barge and drifting wherry—
Under green hills the Pilgrims' Road
Curled on to Holy Canterbury.

Life in our midst went shod and shawled ;
Time was a drowse of Arcady—
Yet all day long the prairies called,
And all night long I heard the sea.

I said good-bye to farm and field,
Then at the old inn's mullioned pane
Drank Kent ale to the Kentish Weald,
And whistling faced the road again.

A FANTASY.

TO STELLA.

If you were a white rose Columbine
 And I were a Harlequin,
I'd leap and sway on my spangled hips,
And blow you a kiss with my finger tips,
And woo a smile to your petal lips
 With every glittering spin.

If I were a pig-tailed Buccaneer
 And you were a Bristol girl,
A-rolling home from over the sea
I'd give you a hug on the landing quay,
A hook-nosed parrot that swore like me,
 And a brooch of mother-o'-pearl.

If you were a Dona of old Castile
 And a Troubadour were I,
I'd sing at night beneath your room,
And weave your dreams in a minstrel's loom
With rainbow tears and the roses' bloom
 And star-shine out of the sky.

If I were a powdered Exquisite
 And you were a fair Bellairs,
I'd press your hand in the gay pavane,
And whisper under your painted fan
As I bowed you into your blue sedan
 At the old Assembly stairs.

If you were a Watteau shepherdess
 And I were a gipsy lad,
I'd teach you tunes that the blackbird trills,
And show you the dance of the daffodils,
The white moon rising over the hills,
 And night in her jewels clad.

If you were the queen of Make-Believe
 And I were the Prince o' Dream,
We'd dress the world in a rich romance
With Pans a-piping and queens that dance,
With mantle and plume and rapier glance
 And Beauty's eyes a-gleam.

If I were a Poet, sweet, my own,
 And you were my Lady true,
I'd hymn your praise by night and morn
With golden notes through a silver horn,
That unborn men in an age unborn
 Might thrill with a dream of you.

RONDEAU.

On Newlyn Hill the gorse is bright ;
Upon the hedgerows left and right
Song-dizzy birds the Spring-time greet ;
The bluebells weave a purple sheet ;
Primroses star the lanes' green night.

Across the Bay each moorland height
Glowes golden in the evening light,
And Dusk walks violet-eyed and sweet
 On Newlyn Hill.

A swarm of lights, pearl-soft and white,
A fairy-lamp-land exquisite,
Opens its star-eyes at the feet
Of hills where shore and wavelets meet ;
Then dreams come, mystic, infinite,
 On Newlyn Hill.

A DREAM SHIP.

O, I wish I had a clipper ship with carvings on
her counter,
With lanterns on her poop-rail of beaten copper
wrought !
I'd dress her like a lady in the whitest cloth, and
mount her
With a long bow-chasing swivel and a gun at
every port.

I'd sign me on a master who had solved Mer-
cator's riddle,
A nigger cook with earrings who neither chewed
nor drank,
Who wore a red bandanna and was handy on the
fiddle ;
I'd take a piping bos'un, and a cabin-boy to
spank.

Then some clear summer morning when the
Falmouth cocks were crowing,
I would set my capstan spinning to the chant-
ing of all hands,
And the milkmaids on the uplands would lament
to see me going,
As I beat for open Channel and away to
foreign lands.

Singing : *Fare ye well, O lady mine !*
Fare ye well, my pretty one,
For the anchor's at the cat-head and the voyage
is begun.
The wind is in the mainsail, we're slipping
from the land,
Hull-down and all sail making, close-hauled with
the white-tops breaking,
Bound for the Rio Grande,
Fare ye well !

With the flying-fish around us and a porpoise
school before us,
Full crowded under royals to the south'ard
we would sweep.
We would hear the bull-whales blowing and the
mermaids sing in chorus,
And, perhaps, the white seal mummies hum
their chubby calves to sleep.

We would see the hot towns paddling in the surf
of Spanish waters,
We would prowl beneath dim balconies and
twang discreet guitars,
We would sigh our adoration to Don Juan's
lovely daughters
Till they lifted their mantillas and their dark
eyes shone like stars.

We would cruise by fairy islands where the
 gaudy parrot screeches,
 And the turtle in his soup-tureen floats basking
 in the calms ;
We would see the fireflies winking in the bush
 above the beaches,
 And a moon of honey-yellow drifting up
 behind the palms.

We would crown ourselves with garlands, we
 would tread a frolic measure
 With the nut-brown island beauties in the
 firelight by the huts ;
We would give them rum and kisses ; we would
 hunt for pirate treasure,
 And bombard the apes with pebbles in ex-
 change for cocoanuts.

When we wearied of our wand'rings 'neath the
 blazing southern heaven,
 And dreamed of Kentish orchards fragrant-
 scented after rain—
Of the cream there is in Cornwall, and the cider
 brewed in Devon—
 We would crowd our yards with canvas and
 sweep foaming home again.

Singing : *Cheerily, O lady mine !*
Cheerily, my sweetheart true,
For the blest Blue Peter's flying and I'm
rolling home to you ;
For I'm tired of Spanish ladies and of tropic
afterglows,
Heartsick for an English Spring-time, all afire
for an English Ring-time,
In love with an English rose,
Rolling Home !

THE RAILWAY STATION.

The sky is like some beggar prince's cloak,
All crimson rags and tattered cloth of gold,
Hung with the ruby of a sun grown old,
Smouldering low amid the city's smoke.

The station lamps—festoon on long festoon
Of molten pearls—glow in the valley mist,
The signals shine emerald, amethyst.
Night is Aladdin's Cave all jewel-strewn.

Charleroi.

MARCHONS.

We'll set our feet to the broad highroad.
With never a care, with never a load,
 No guide but the stars a-high ;
Perchance we'll come to the Amazon,
To the golden kingdom of Prester John,
To El Dorado or Babylon—
 Jaquot, Jeannette and I.

M'sieu the Sun will laugh with light,
Madame the Moon will smile by night,
 Silver rose o' the sky.
We'll rouse the world with a roundelay,
With an old cracked fiddle to cheer the way,
And a bottle of wine at close of day—
 Jaquot, Jeannette and I.

AN ISLAND GARDEN.

Among the green and golden leaves,
A jewelled lizard slips ;
Along the cool verandah eaves,
The blue wistaria drips.

Billows of red geraniums pour
Over a sunlit wall ;
Foam-broidered on the sounding shore
The deep sea breakers fall.

The sea wind shakes the jealousies,
And up the garden blows
Scents of the flowery almond trees,
Magnolia, and rose.

Fortuna in a hammock swings,
Gazing the blue above,
She picks a mandolin, and sings
A madrigal of love—
“ Tra lirra, lirra, lirra ! ”—
A lazy song of love.

Grand Canaries.

THE FIGURE HEAD.

There was an ancient carver who fashioned a
saint ;
But the parson wouldn't have it, so he took a
pot of paint,
And changed its angel-garments for a dashing
soldier-rig,
And said it was a figure-head and sold it to a
brig.

The brig hauled her mainsail to an off-shore
draught,
Then she shook her snowy royals and the Scillies
went abaft,
And cloudy with her canvas she ran before the
Trade,
Till she came to the Equator where she struck a
merry-maid.

A string of pearls and conches were all of her
togs,
But the porpoises and flying-fish they followed
her like dogs ;
She had a voice of silver and lips of coral red ;
She climbed the dolphin-striker and kissed the
figure-head.

The captain wore his blue coat with buttons of
brass ;
The mate he greased his forelock at the cabin
looking-glass ;
The bos'un paced the fo'castle and coughed
" Ah ha, ahem ! "—
But the merry-maid she turned her back and
wouldn't look at them.

And every starry evening she'd swim in the foam
About the bows a-singing like a nightingale at
home.
She'd call to him and sing to him as sweetly
as a bird,
But the wooden-headed effigy he never said a
word.

And every starry evening in the Doldrum calms
She'd wriggle up the bob-stay and throw her
tender arms
About his scarlet shoulders, and fondle him
and cry,
And stroke his curly whiskers, but he never
winked an eye.

She couldn't get an answer to her tears or
moans,
So she went and told her daddy, told the ancient
Davy Jones.

Old Davy damned his eyesight, and puzzled of
his wits—

Then he whistled up his hurricanes and tore
the brig to bits.

Down on the ocean-bed, green fathoms deep,
Where the wrecks lie rotting and the great sea-
serpents creep,

In a gleaming grotto all built of sailors' bones
Sits the handsome figure-head, listening to Miss
Jones.

Songs o' love she sings him the live-long day,
And she hangs upon his bosom and sobs the night
away,

But he never, never answers, for beneath his
soldier paint

The wooden-headed lunatic still thinks that he's
a saint.

BALLADE OF SEPTEMBER.

When the streets are hot, and the dusty trees
 Throw quivering shadows all in a row,
When the flies persist, and the bumble bees
 Hum drowsy canticles as they go ;
When the mowers glisten as they mow,
And ripe's the year to the golden prime,
 Then show me the way that leads Westward
 Ho !
And hey for the sea in September time !

I ask but little—to loaf at ease
 Down a shining sapphire road I know,
An idle tiller between my knees,
 While the lazy jibs slat to and fro,
 The ripples cluck to the keel below,
And sunbeams high in the cabin climb,
 Till the last coast fades in a golden glow—
Oh, it's hey for the sea in September time !

There's a beat of bells on the off-shore breeze
 And out of the purple, stately slow,
Like a white ship sailing on silver seas,
 The moon drifts over the starry bow ;

The wheeling beams of the Longships throw
A wink at the Wolf, and a peace sublime
Creeps up as the whispering waters flow ;
Oh, it's hey for the sea in September time !

Envoi.

Sir Prince, whenever dog-roses blow
And good blood beats to a languid rhyme,
Then seize whatever the Fates bestow,
And hey for the sea in September time !

Scilly Isles.

SOUTH SEAS.

Glassy billows heave and sink
'Neath the white hot glare of noon,
'Tween-decks in the first saloon
Siphons hiss, and glasses clink.

Flying fishes skim the swell,
Like a flight of silver spears ;
Fat men wake and cock their ears,
Listening for the luncheon bell.

Some hair-oily Hebrew sparks
Yarn of 'igh life on the Rand ;
Lovers dreaming hand in hand
Say, " Oh, look—the pretty sharks " !

Overside in bobbing files
Cruise frail, pink-sailed nautili,
Fairy galleons drifting by
To enchanted coral isles.

ASHORE.

Letter come to hand, mate—so you're off again,
Booming down the old trail, Horn and Frisco
bound,

Thrashing round the Fastnet in the sou'west
rain,

“ Carry on ! ” then “ All hands ! ”—Lord, I
know the round !

Miles and miles o' green seas, leagues and leagues
o' blue ;

Day by day, the timbers grunt the same old
tune ;

Night by night the same stars cock their eyes
at you ;

Not a girl to flirt with, save the same old
moon.

Round about my ears, mate, shuffle weary feet,
While I sit here drudging in the City's heat ;

But somewhere from the clamour, a small
voice calls to me—

“ Dipping o'er the Mersey bars, with the sun-
light on her spars,

There's a white ship running out to sea.”

Then I seem to see you, shaking out the cloth,
Balanced on a foot-rope, while the ship
beneath
Drags her lee-rail under, snouts the flying froth,
And tramples down the blue seas, with a
bone in her teeth.
Twenty shellbacks singing some out-bounder's
chant—
“Rio Grande” or “Ranzo”—brace and
stay and shroud
Humming like a great harp; shining decks
aslant,—
West-sou'-west she rushes like a sunbright
cloud.

While I lie here tossing through the sleepless
nights,
Taxi-cabs a-hooting, sky all hazed with lights,
Then a voice comes taunting, soft and sly to
me—
“With the curled foam at her breast, with her
jibboom pointing west,
There's a white ship running out to sea.”

FOG.

Over the oily swell it heaved, it rolled,
Like some foul creature, filmy, nebulous.
It pushed out streaming tentacles, took clammy
hold,
Swaddled the spars, wrapped us in damp and
cold,
Blotted the sun, crept round and over us.

Day long, night long, it hid us from the sky—
Hid us from sun and stars as in a tomb.
Shrouded in mist a berg went groaning by.
Far and forlorn we heard the blind ships cry,
Like lost souls wailing in a hopeless gloom.

Like a bell-wether clanging from the fold,
A codder called her dories. With scared
breath
The steamer syrens shrieked; and mad bells
tollled.

Through time eternal in the dark we rolled
Playing a game of Blind-Man's-Buff with
Death.

Grand Banks.

THE BOBBERY PACK.

Andy Hartigan's dead and gone
Over the hills and further yet,
But he drank good port and his red face shone
Like a cider apple of Somerset.

Ten strange couple o' hounds he had,—
Gaunt old brutes that had hunted fox
Back in the days when Noah was a lad—
Touched in the bellows and gone at the hocks.

Hounds he'd stole from a Harrier pack,
Hounds he'd borrowed and begged and found,
Grey and yellow and tan and black—
Every conceivable kind o' hound.

He called them "Harriers," and a few
Were harriers—back when the world began ;
But they weren't particular where they drew,
And they weren't particular what they ran.

I mind him once of a bygone morn,
Ruddy and round on his flea-bit horse,
Twanging a tune on his battered horn,
And capping them into the Frenchman gorse.

They pushed a brown hare out of her form,
And swung on her line with a crash of tongues,
But a vixen crossed and her scent was warm,
So they ran her, screeching to burst their
lungs.

They ran her into M'Lord's demesne,
Where M'Lady's fallows were grazing free ;
They picked a stag and followed again,
Singing like souls in ecstasy.

They chased the stag up over the ridge,
With lolling tongues and with heaving flanks,
They lost him down by the Cluddlah Bridge
But killed an otter on Cluddlah's banks.

They had no pace and they had no style,
Their manners were bad and their morals
slack,
They were noisy—but wonderful versatile—
Andy Hartigan's Bobbery Pack.

HOMeward BOUND.

We hauled her down the river,
And we let her tow-rope go,
We felt her heave and shiver
With the sea-lift down below.
We dipped our colours gravely
To the rosy Rio Grande,
As she bowed and swaggered bravely
To the purple line of land.
The sun went down behind her,
Like a lantern red and round,
And oh, lass ! hullo, lass, we're bowling Home-
ward bound.

*For it's Home, love, Home, that is calling in the
breeze,
Oh, it's Home, love, Home, that she smells beyond
the seas,
With the old moors, the gold moors,
The hawthorns flashing snow,
Where the daffodils are blowing,
And the gilly-flowers are growing,
In a valley that we know !*

She sniffed the trade winds coldly,
Till we spread her wings of sail,

Then she climbed the surges boldly,
As a sea bird breasts the gale,
And the blue seas broke around her
In a wreath of twisting whey,
And the charging breakers crowned her
In a rainbow veil of spray
But she swooped, and drooped, and battled,—
Aye, and leapt them like a hound—
For, oh, lass ! hullo, lass, we're bowling Home-
ward bound !

*For it's Home, love, Home, that is calling in the
breeze,
Oh, it's Home, love, Home, that she smells beyond
the seas,
With the grey house and the grey boughs,
Where the apple blossoms grow,
'Tis the very place for roaming,
In the starshine or the gloaming,
Is a valley that we know !*

Aye, she's coming, coming, coming,
Though the way is lone and long,
You can hear the waters drumming
To her heart's eternal song ;
'Tis an old road that she's treading
With every stitch unfurled,

By moon and stars she's threading
Her path across the world.
Through shine and storm she's heading
For a hill-locked western sound ;
For oh, lass ! hullo, lass, we're bowling Home-
ward bound !

*For it's Home, love, Home, that is calling in the
breeze,
Oh, it's Home, love, Home, that she smells beyond
the seas,
With the dear hills and the clear rills,
And the gorses all aglow,
For the little birds are mating
And a brown-eyed lass is waiting
In a valley that we know !*

HUNTIN' WEATHER.

(1915.)

There's a dog-fox down in Lannigan's spinney
 (An' Lannigan's wife has fowls to mourn);
The hunters stamp in their stalls and whinney,
 Soft wid' leisure and fat wid' corn.

The colts are pasturin' bold and lusty,
 Sleek they are wid' their coats aglow,
Ripe to break—but the bits grow rusty,
 An' the saddles sit in a dusty row.

Old O'Dwyer was here a' Monday,
 Wid' a few grey gran'fathers out for a field
(Like the ghostly hunt of a dead an' done day)—
 They an' some lassies that giggled an' squealed.

The houn's they rioted like the devil
 (They ran a hare an' they killed a goose);
I cursed "Caubeen" but he looked me level—
 "The boys are away, so what's the use?"

The mists lie clingin' to bog an' heather,
 The haws hang red on the silver thorn,—
'Tis huntin' weather, aye, huntin' weather. . .
 But the trumpets an' bugles have beat the
 horn.

TO A FOX CUB.

(1915.)

When the market-cob is housed,
And the cabin lamp is doused,
And the banshee owl hoots through the silver
 birches,
When the sheep-dogs are asleep,
Then creep, Rufus, creep,
For the cockerels sit drowsing on their perches.

Where the willows lean beyond,
There are ducklings on the pond,
Worm-fed and to be had with little trouble,
And the Pheasants feed at ease,
For the Squire went overseas—
His gun will bark no more across the stubble.

You may flesh your crescent claws,
You may glut your tawny jaws,
When the evil Poacher's moon is up and beckon-
 ing,
So revel, Rufus, revel,
Prowl, pounce, and play the devil,
But remember there will come a day of reckoning.

For some grey-eyed winter morn
You will hear a twanging horn
And whimpers of hound-music swell and slacken,

T'will be evident and plain
That the men are home again,
And Doom is crashing on you through the
bracken.

MADAME.

'Er bloke's out scrappin' with the rest,
Pushin' a bay'nit in Argonne.
She wears 'is photo on 'er breast—
“ Mon Jean,” she sez, the French for John.

'E isn't one o' them that slings
The ink with ease, 'e cannot spell,
So sends 'er bits o' shell and things
To let 'er know that all is well.

She 'ears the guns boom night an' day
She sees the shrapnel burstin' black,
The sweaty columns march away,
The stretchers bringin' of 'em back.

She 'aint got no war-leggings on ;
'Er picture's never in the Press ;
Out scoutin'—she finds breeks “ no bon,”
An' carries on in last year's dress.

She don't sell flags—she ain't that kind ;
Ten pleecemen couldn't make 'er sit
In Tablow Veevongs for the Blind ;
But all the same she does 'er bit.

At dawn she tows a spotty cow
To munch upon the village green ;
She plods for miles be'ind a plough,
An' takes our washin' in between.

She tills a plot o' spuds besides,
An' burnt like copper in the sun,
She tosses 'ay all day, then rides
The 'orse 'ome when the job is done.

The times is 'ard—I got me woes
With blistered feet an' this an' that,
An' she's got 'er's—the good Lord knows,
Although she never chews the fat.

But when the Bosche 'as gulped 'is fill,
An' crawled 'ome to 'is bloomin' Spree,
We'll go upon the bust, we will,
Madame an' Monseer Jean an' me.

Artois, 1915.

CANADIAN REMOUNTS.

Bronco dams they ran by, on the ranges of the
prairies,
 Heard the chicken drumming in the scented
 Saskatoon,
Saw the jewelled humming-birds, the flocks of
pale canaries,
 Heard the coyotes dirging to the ruddy
 northern moon.
Woolly foals, leggy foals, foals that romped and
wrestled,
 Rolled in beds of golden-rod and charged in
 mimic fights,
Saw the frosty Bear wink out, and comfortably
nestled
 Close beside their vixen dams beneath the
 wizard Lights.

Far from home and overseas, older now—and
wiser,
 Branded with the arrow brand, broke to
 trace and bit,
Tugging up the grey guns “to strafe the bloomin’
 Kaiser,”
 Up the hill to Kemmell where the mauser
 bullets spit :

Stiffened with the cold rains, mired and tired
and gory,

Plunging through the mud-holes as the bat-
teries advance,

Far from home and overseas, but battling on to
glory,

With the English eighteen pounders and the
soixante-quinzes of France.

MALBROUCK—ET NOUS.

When the Great Duke Marlborough took the
field

The ladies waved and the belfries pealed,
The cottars shouted from roofs and ricks,
The drum-boys flourished their polished sticks,
The cymbals clashed and the trumpets played
A brazen clarion fanfaronade.

Behind the lumbering cannon paced
The scarlet infantry, frogged and laced.
In velvets, ruffles and crimped perukes
The noble gentlemen of the Duke's
Terrible cavalry jingled by
With banners splendid against the sky.

War is not what it was of yore.

Our trumpets lie in the Depot store,
Our colours hang in the Depot Mess,
We're not conspicuous in our dress ;
Leather and khaki, drab and tan,
Is the *dernier cri* for a fighting man.

But we like our noise, and we make a band
Of any old thing that comes to hand,
And we throw our chests and we shift our
shins

To penny whistles and biscuit tins. . .
Though we drum to war on a biscuit lid,
We'll do as the great Duke Marlborough did.

Flanders, 1915.

PICKET.

The clouds stampede across the moon.
Like mad grey mares. Along the plain
Sweep the chill lances of the rain.
Drear in the trees the nigh-winds rune.

The white sword of a searchlight splits
The sky in twain, then, quivering, falls
On a black waste of shattered walls
Of bare-rib roofs and crater-pits.

Far in the north the guns begin
To grumble. Up the leaden sky,
Ashen of face and bleared of eye,
Dawn, like a ghost, creeps shivering in.

Flanders.

THE FLYING MAN.

When the still, shivery dawn uprolls,
And all the world is standing to,
When young lieutenants damn our souls
Because they're feeling cold and blue ;

The bacon's trodden in the slush
The baccy's wet, the stove gone wrong—
Then purring on the morning's hush
We hear his cheerful little song.

The shafts of sunrise strike his wings
Tinting them like a dragon-fly ;
He bows to the ghost moon, and swings
Flame-coloured up the rosy sky.

He dips, he darts, he jibes, he luffs ;
Like a great bee he drones aloud ;
He whirls above the shrapnel puffs,
And laughing ducks behind a cloud.

He rides aloof on god-like wings
Taking no thought of wire and mud,
Sap, smells or bugs—the mundane things
That sour our lives and have our blood.

Beneath his sky-patrolling car
Toy guns their mimic thunders clap ;
Like crawling ants whole armies are
That strive across a coloured map.

The roads we trudged with feet of lead,
The shadows of his pinions skim ;
The river where we piled our dead
Is but a silver thread—to him.

“ God of the eagle-winged machine
What see you where aloft you roam ? ”—
“ Eastward *die Schlossen von Berlin*,
And West the good white cliffs of home.”

Flanders, 1915.

THE CORNER BOY.

His soft grey eyes were full of guile
And laughed as at some private jest.
He met all fortunes with a smile
Because a smile came easiest.

With foes he fought, with friends he drank,
He ' burnt ' for salmon in the black
Wet nights—got gaoled and scrubbed his
plank,
Had scarce a whole coat to his back.

War came—God knows what drove him on,
What spur of poverty or pluck,
But one fine day our rogue was gone.
We wondered, winked, and wished him luck.

At Messine Ridge he faced the shell,
And ' stopped one ' fairly in the head.
He plunged a few blind yards and fell
Quivered a little and was dead.

The boys drink in the old shebeen,
The salmon swim the brawling burn.

Beneath the Flemish sod serene
He slumbers on, beyond concern.

No niche of Fame his memory fills,
But yet, perchance, when stars have lit
Some valley of the Galway hills
A lone girl weeps—a little bit.

THE TROOPER.

I've hollowed my back in the Riding School,
Broken my neck and been damned for a fool ;
Learnt to parry and point and guard
Till my arm was lead and my wrist went dead ;
Wisped my fidgetting, long-faced pard
Till he shone with a silky shine :

Learnin' " how " in the Cavalry,
The jaunty, jinglin' Cavalry,
That rides on the right o' the Line.

Now here am I like a blinded mole—
Toil in a furrow and sleep up a hole—
Dug in a grave twelve foot by three,
My strappings bust and my spurs all rust,
With nothin' but two mud walls to see,
Sluiced with the drivin' sleet :

Me ! that was in the Cavalry,
The saucy, swaggerin' Cavalry,
Sloggin' my two flat feet !

I longs all day and I dreams all night
Of a slap-bang, Tally-ho open fight ;
One fair chance on the open plain,
Then knee to knee like a wave o' the sea

We'll blood our irons again and again
In thunderin' squadron-line.

We'll give 'em a taste of the Cavalry
(Guards and Lancers, Hussars, Dragoons),
The only original Cavalry,
And gallop 'em over the Rhine.

Artois, 1915.

IN VANCOUVER.

She drifted down the roaring street
 Between the clanging, crashing cars,
 The flaring stores and brawling bars,
On tiny black-silk-slipped feet.

Her face—a smooth and yellow pearl—
 Seemed all devoid of joy or fear ;
 A waxen rose above each ear
She wore, this slender Chinese girl.

Of rosy silk her trousers were,
 Edged with a tinsel silver braid ;
 Each button was of carven jade ;
A jade comb held her polished hair.

She wandered down that western way
 Dreaming—beyond the din and mud
 A little attar-scented bud,
Blown from the garden of Cathay.

IN MONTREAL.

The steel sky dims and the shadows fall,
Dusk steals cloaked through the frozen town ;
The low sun hangs like a copper ball
'Mid domes and spires, then smoulders down.

Like Pompadours in a day long lost,
The stately trees in the square below
Have hung their tresses with gems of frost,
And decked their heads with the powdered
snow.

The sleigh lamps glide, and a musical
Tinkle of bells peals up to me ;
'Tis the march of a goblin carnival
In a palace of gleaming ivory.

IN THE ROCKIES.

The stars withdraw, a wind of morning drags
Grey smoking mists along the gulches. . . .

Pines

In shaggy armies storm the blackened crags
Up through the streaming vapours to the
timber-lines.

Then suddenly the piled clouds fill with light,
Billow and swell, a pure and dazzling white.
Opal and pearl and rose the glacier shines.

Washed by a foam of clouds the great peaks
gleam,

High worlds apart from shadowed woods and
vales

Below. Dream islands magical they seem
Coasted by silver ships with silken sails,
Or brazen towers of a dragon-keep
Where witches spin and lost princesses sleep,
In golden cities from old Fairy tales.

IN THE SELKIRKS.

There are sun-lit glaciers flashing
Above the timber-lines
And amber sun-beams splashing
The red bark of the pines.
There are willows green and limber
Where white-haired freshets flow,
In the twilight of the timber
There are dog-wood stars aglow.

But perfect as the earth is,
A-gleam with sun and dew,
Yet scant I find its worth is,
Because it lacks for you.
There's not an hour that slips, love,
But I look to see you there,
Laughter on your red lips, love,
And sunshine in your hair.

British Columbia.

THE DREAMERS.

Rough-housed beneath the northern light
We lay, and heard the blizzard whine,
Ice-tongued, across the tossing pine,
 Among the mountain gorges crying.
The red stove hissed, the pipe smoke curled
Thick round the lamp, and each man told
What he would do if he struck gold,
“The yellow dirt”, and found the world
 His for the buying.

Each had his dreams—in God knows what
Forgotten ends of earth conceived ;
In Yukon wastes where bare peaks cleaved
 The wild Aurora's lonely splendour,
By brawling camps and desert fires,
Each saw his star above the strife
Through the brutalities of Life,
Each in his heart kept some desires
 Cherished and tender.

“Big Dutch” would drink his mighty fill
Among the vineyards of the Rhine ;
Le Roi but asked a little pine
 Cabane beside the Aux Sables River ;

“ Slim ” called for jewelled women, song,
Perfumes, the glowing lights that gild
A city’s nights ; while Pete would build
A cot in Cornwall, where the long
Atlantic surges shiver.

“ Red ” saw the Yorkshire dales again,
He heard the blackcock’s whirring wing ;
Down green-hung coppices in spring
Sniffed primroses, saw pheasants mating.
Dreams ! Dreams ! Before Fate fills our hand
With fortune, pride and hope will shake ;
Many a back and heart will break
And many girls in many lands
Grow old in waiting.

British Columbia.

DEAD.

Dead !—in his hut of rough-split shingles lying :
Two miners' candles spear the waving gloom.
Mourned by the mountain pines' wind-ruffled
sighing
And thresh of rain without the barren room.
Its sense of peace and dreamless sleep despoiling,
A gash burns raw across the quiet head,
The black hair matted still with sweat of toiling—
Dead !

Dead !—and an end to him who heard the crying
Of scent-hot hounds across the dewy shires,
Who saw the golden dust of evening lying
On that fair city of the dreaming spires,
Who thrilled to violins and warmed the glances
Of gracious women, seized life, jewelled, red,
And flung, gay, gallant through her devil
dances—
Dead !

Dead !—and an end to all the bruised soul's
tauntings,
To hells of memory that wake and blaze ;

Dead, and an end to all the night-long hauntings
Of loves long lost and buried yesterdays :
An end to all the passion and the squandering
To loneliness, to squalor, to the dread
Of hopeless morrows, to the toiling and the
wandering—

Dead !

British Columbia.

THE LUMBER JACK.

He's logged from Rainy River round the Crow's
Nest and Spokane,
The Rockies and the Coast he's logged, from
Newfoundland to Maine ;
He's logged it North, he's logged it South, he's
logged it East and West,
He's a hulking, backwoods gipsy, the plaything
of unrest.
He'll scale a log with half a glance, he'd build
a tight log-shack ;
He's tackled every kind of stick, from spruce
to tamarack.
He rips the tall Coast timber down, and hauls
it round like straws,
" I'll give 'em guts, them big blue butts ! "
Says Mr. Mackinaws.

Upon the skidway, cant-hook armed, he'll catch
a runaway
And roll it back. He'll ride a log, thro' rapids
swept with spray.
He'll fall a redwood Titan down precisely where
desired,
And chop it into Chippendale—if such should be
required.

He'll set and file a ten-foot saw that rips out
worms of dust,
He'll oil it when it's resin-clogged, and work it
clean of rust.
He's not an ornamental thing, this hard old
bunch of claws,
But in the woods he's "all the goods,"
Is Mr. Mackinaws.

Then suddenly his old unrest comes o'er him at
a burst,
He draws his "time" and hits for town, develop-
ing a thirst :
The tin-horn artist ropes him in, and lifts his
sweat-earned stake,
The bar draws toll, and what that leaves the
painted women take.
Then fogged, and thick, and parched, and sick,
his head a buzz of pain,
He rolls his old grey blankets up, and seeks the
bush again.
A plain, unvarnished Pagan he, this slave of
axe and saws,
But tough and rough, he's good enough,
Is Mr. Mackinaws.

Columbia River.

ALONE.

The wind moans round my little shack,
And whimpers through each hole and crack ;
Poor homeless soul ! The gusty rain
Shatters its lances on the pane,
Without, night stands, blind-eyed and black.

Beyond the insufficient light
Of my one lamp, half hid from sight,
Dim shadows crouch ; the wandering ghosts,
Pale murdered chiefs of bygone hosts,
Creep in for shelter from the night.

Upon the wind there comes the drear,
Faint, yap of wolves ; from corners peer
Dark shapes, and round about me press
The fitting ghouls of loneliness
That whisper madness in my ear.

North West Territories.

SPECIAL OFFICER.

I struck his sign on Beaver Creek,
Then through the foot-hills back and forth,
And to and fro for nigh a week
I followed—then he headed north.

I followed up the mountain trail,
I followed 'cross the river swamps,
By here a hoof-scratch on the shale,
And there the ashes of his camps.

He dodged and doubled—'twern't no use,
He couldn't bluff me with those cards.
At length I piped him in the spruce
And opened at six hundred yards.

I plugged him somewhere in the chest,
He left his saddle for the ground,
And coughed the gravy down his vest—
The low, black-hearted murd'rous hound !

I closed and watched him twisting there,
He coughed out something—"Treat her
well"—

(I guess he meant his buckskin mare)—
Then choked and coughed away to Hell.

The sheriff shook me by the hand,
The boys applauded quite a lot,
And shouted drinks to beat the band—
It *was* a kinder pretty shot.

The parson said I done the right
To clean the countryside.—*But he*
Comes crawling to my fire at night
And coughs and coughs away at me.

North West Territories.

THE TRAPPER.

Las' moon, Eloise, *ma femme*, go die.
Ah burn ze candle for 'er soul.
Say Father Pierre, "Come dry ze eye,
She'm wit' ze angel-bunch on 'igh,
Eloise she'm safe in 'eavenly fol'."

Eloise she'm wit' good companee,
She cook no more for hungree man ;
Ze col' an' snow no trouble she—
Ah wondaire do she tink of me
Left 'ere alone in ole *cabane* ?

Eloise she'm gone, an' roun' ze place
She seeng no more "*La belle fontaine*,"
Nor kiss ze frost-marks on my face.
But when ze nor' win' 'owl an' chase,
Forgotten voices call again.

When in ze blanket warm Ah lie,
Ah 'ear ze win' make grand stampede ;
Ze stove 'e wink 'm small red eye
An' *doux* ze leetle voices cry :
"What do you 'ere, beeg lazy breed ?"

Ze shadows move an' through them slinks
 A stripey coon ; then in ze draf'
 Ah 'ear ze cat-purr of a lynx.
 Along ze beam sit duskee minks,
 An' soft ze leetle voices laugh.

" In willow brush lie birch canoe,
 Remembraire 'ow she kiss ze stream ?
 'Ow light in portage ? 'Ow she flew
 Through foamin' rapeeds, 'ow on blue
 Still *lacs* she dreeft like sheep o' dream ?

" Yon buckskin shirt 'ang on ze wall,
 Yon gun an' snowshoe 'ang below,
 Ze caribou run fat this Fall,
 Ze bull-moose by ze swamp-edge call"—

.
 " By Gar, Ah tink Ah'll go ! "

North Thompson River.

THE SOCIAL.

Little red shoes, so light an' swiftly twinklin' ;
Little white hands, so soft an' warm to hold :
Bonnie bright hair above her eyebrows crinklin',
Piled on the small head in coils o' polished
gold.

Red was her mouth, an' it hovered just before me,
Scented her breath, and it touched my
thrillin' cheek ;
My arm she held, an' down the shining floor we
Swept, music-led—I too plumb-dazed to
speak.

Gladly an' madly sang Paddy Heenan's fiddle
(Old grey head a-noddin', tappin' toe an'
heel),
Steppin' an' circlin', an' crossin' up the middle,
" Baldy " of the 2-Bar a-callin' off the reel—

*Birdie jump out, an' Hockie jump in,
Hockie jump out, an' give her a spin,
Then hands round, now go it ag'in,
Sassy up, gents, throw a little more style.*

Homewards I ride, the pale dawn slowly liftin',
Mile after mile my pony lopes along.
Back through the night, my rosy thoughts go
driftin',
Tremblin' my heart, an' in my head a song.

Little red mouth, an' gold hair brightly gleamin',
Warm was her breath, an' soft the touch o' her.
How went that tune? Oh, what's the use o'
dreamin',
Me, a common cowboy, what earns but
"forty per."

North West Territories.

VELD DAWN.

The breezes whisper and the grasses stir,
Up the chill sky pale tides of morning run.
Over far flame-tipped kops the "Vorlooper"*
Leads up the golden wagon of the sun.

A jackal barks, the pert green parrots scream,
A hawk wheels up and down the eastern slope ;
With curved horns high and sable hide a gleam,
With fires of morning springs an antelope.

Tati Concessions.

* *Vorlooper*—ox-leader, Boer name for the Morning Star.

OUTSPAN.

Sky and horizon meet
Fused in a blurr of heat.
Dust devils whirr and spin,
Dazzle of rock and sand,
Burnt bush and weary land.
Shrilly the locusts din.

In the dry river bed
Trek oxen, white and red,
Stand 'neath the brazen noon.
Drip, drips the water bag,
On a bald kopje crag
Barks a hoarse old baboon.

Panting the dogs are laid
On purple webs of shade.
Listless the ponies browse,
With dreams of far snows fraught
One dazzling cloud hangs caught
In black mimosa boughs.

Old Zambesi Road.

IN EXILE.

The palms rock in the landward breeze,
Blue dusk comes sweeping overseas.
The harbour lights have hung a bright
Gold necklace on the throat of night.
 The ricksha bells go tinkling past—
 Another day is done at last.

Her port-holes pinpricks in the dark,
Her red port light a ruby spark,
I watch her moving out to sea.
Beyond the dancing buoys is she ;
 Beyond the booming bar's grey blurr
 Of breakers, sail my dreams with her.

For she shall see the coasters thrash
Down Channel, and the shore lights flash
Their welcome, and beyond the foam
The white cliffs and green hills o' home.
 While I shall drone here in the sun
 And thank God as the days are done.

Durban.

A MEMORY IN TIME OF DROUGHT.

A wailing wind that plays
 Aeolian lays
Along the postal wires ;
Dun packs of swollen cloud,
Storm-herded mists that shroud
 The day's last fires.
Wind-crouched beside the track
Moan withered hawthorn trees,
 Like witches old and black . . .
 To think of these !

The west a yellow slit,
 Great raindrops spit
And hiss where puddles be,
No hint of moon or star,
But wind-borne from afar
 The drums at sea.
My hat-brim blows and drips,
Wet cloth clings at my knees,
 Chill raindrops thrill my lips . . .
 To think of these !

The wet road winding still
 By dip and hill,
A point of orange light
The harbour light at last !
What count the long miles past ?
 What recks a dirty night ?
When waits a bracken blaze,
Brown ale, and hunks of cheese,
 A chair in which to laze . . .
 To dream of these !

Khama's Country.

THE OLD MEN.

We are old men, very old,
Our bones are stiff and cold,
Life miserably lingers.
We crawl from out the *kyas*,
And crouch around the fires,
Warming our shaking fingers.

With years and sorrows fuddled,
In bald karosses huddled,
We waste here in the sun,
While the kids frisk in the kraals,
And along the dagga walls
The lizards run.

Heads a-nod and blind eyes leaking,
Drowsing, coughing, never speaking,
Bowed upon withered thighs.
Yet once we looted women, slaves and cattle,
Shouted "Gee Gwaza!" made the bull-shields
rattle,
Swept, a dark wave of impis, to red battle
Stabbing wet assegais.

Matabeleland.

NOCTURNE.

The red flame flowers bloom and die,
The embers puff a golden spark.
Now and again a horse's eye
Shines like a topaz in the dark.

A prowling jackal jars the hush,
The drowsy oxen chump and sigh.
The ghost moon lifts above the bush
And creeps across the starry sky.

Low in the north the " Cross " is bright,
And sleep comes dreamless, undefiled,
Here in the blue and silver night,
In the Star-Chamber of the Wild.

Khama's Country.

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