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MICE

& OTHER POEMS

by Gerald Bullett



*With a General Note by
Sir Arthur Quiller Couch*

ONE FLORIN

1921



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MICE
AND OTHER POEMS



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MICE

& OTHER POEMS

by Gerald Bullett

Perkin Warbeck
9 Market Hill
Cambridge

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Uniform with this volume

HOME-MADE VERSES
BY D. B. HASELER AND
R. H. D'ELBOUX

LAUGHING GAS AND
OTHER POEMS
BY MARGUERITE FEW

GERALD BULLETT
IS THE AUTHOR OF
THE PROGRESS OF KAY
PUBLISHED BY
CONSTABLE & CO. LONDON

NOTE

IF the mental attitude of any critic has ever, in his approach to a first book of verse, been conciliated by an appreciative notice from some older pen, I should say (speaking out of no little experience) that either the author was dead and the fact advertised in the preface, or, alternatively, that the critic was possessed by a gentler spirit than mine. I am sure at any rate that artistic work, great or small, should be sternly judged on what it *is* rather than on what it promises. The late J. Comyns Carr, in the days when he wrote dramatic criticism, let loose this restive truth in a couple of short sentences—‘We are told that So-and-so is a promising young actor. Personally I don’t care how much he promises so long as he never again performs.’

Let me, then, pass over Mr Gerald Bullett’s verses with the simple remark that I believe in them (he himself calls them ‘MICE’—no overweening title, however boldly printed. Yet mice were dear to Apollo Smintheus, and his proper emblem): and let me come to the general purpose of this Note.

It is meant to preface a series of small volumes of verse by young writers, mostly Cambridge men. That, since the War, young men in extraordinary numbers have taken to expressing themselves in verse is a plain fact, not to be denied: that they choose, as often as not,

to express themselves in 'numbers' extraordinary to us can as hardly be contested. But the point is, they have a crowding impulse to say something; and to say it with the emotional seriousness proper to Poetry. For my part, I love the discipline of verse: but I love the impulse better. Time will soften—I hope not too soon, lest it sugar down and sentimentalise—a certain bitterness of resentment observable in this booklet and its next followers: but, as nothing in verse is nobler than true tradition, anything is more hopeful than convention.

So these booklets have been planned to give youth its chance to make spoons or spoil horns. If anyone object that the print and page over-dignify the content of any one volume in the proposed series, why, that must be a particular criticism, which cannot honestly (I think) be enlarged to blame the publisher's wish, and the care he has taken, that what pretends, however modestly, to be a work of the Muse, should step forth to the public in honourable dress.

ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH

C O N T E N T S

Mice	9
Rest	10
‘The Strength, the Mellow Music, and the Laughter’	11
Ashes	12
‘Du bist wie eine Blume’	13
Home	14
‘Maître de Ballet’	15
The Grudge	16
Wedding Day	17

Crucifixion	18
Spring in Winter	19
The Exile	20
Sonnet for Helen	21
Song	22
Musings	23
The Poet	24
'If all the trees were magic trees'	26
'Alone with these my poems...'	28

'The Exile' is reprinted by courtesy of the Proprietors of Punch

Mice

I *SEE* the broken bodies of women and men,
Temples of God ruined; I see the claws
Of sinister Fate, from the reach of whose feline paws
Never are safe the bodies of women and men.

Almighty Cat, it sits on the Throne of the World,
With paw outstretched, grinning at us, the mice,
Who play our trivial games of virtue and vice,
And pray—to That which sits on the Throne of the World!

From our beginning till all is over and done,
Unwitting who watches, pursuing our personal ends,
Hither and thither we scamper....The paw descends;
The paw descends and all is over and done.

Rest

HERE is tranquillity and silvan shade;
For now, emerging from that waste of sand
Which was my life, I reach a fruitful glade,
A pool of water in a thirsty land.

Your gentle soul a well of beauty is,
And crystal clear the sunlit deeps thereof;
And from that fountain of unmeasured bliss
I draw the living water of your love.

Here is the goal of all my wandering,
Here is oblivion of my bitterness,
And here the temple where my heart shall sing
Your eyes that light me and your lips that bless.

*The strength, the mellow music,
and the laughter*

THE steadfast beauty of her eyes is balm,
And in her touch there's healing for my hurt;
She is unshaken as a vessel girt
Mid waters of unutterable calm.

The years grow fragrant with her fragrance: they,
Sipping her sweetness, leave her yet more sweet.
Laden with divers colours, at her feet
They shed their motley silks and go their way

Like withered dreams. So youth must follow after,
Youth that is brief and beauty that is grass;
But from her gentle soul shall never pass
The strength, the mellow music, and the laughter.

Ashes

BURY the ashes. The life, the gleam
Of love is gone: we have killed with kisses
The fragile soul of rapture: this is
Only the hollow husk of a dream,
The bitter waking, the end thereof.
Come, bury the ashes of love.

The music falters; the flame is spent;
The vision is gone, the splendour faded,
Leaving only a pitiful jaded
Half-desire, and a discontent.
The end of love is a weary kiss—
Surely hate were better than this!

Du bist wie eine Blume

So like a flower, so gentle,
So fair, so pure thou art,
That musing on thy beauty
Brings sadness to my heart.

I lay my hands, in spirit,
Upon thy gleaming hair,
Praying that God may keep thee
So sweet, so pure, so fair.

From the German of Heine

Home

FIVE weary days . . . and I shall creep
Into the shadow of her hair
And of her loveliness drink deep

And lose my desolation there,
Feeling her cool lips quench my own.
Lying so still, we shall not dare

To let one murmur like a stone
Into the pool of silence fall.
All senses will be fused in one:

Peace will surround us with a wall
Of visible music, moments go
Melodiously by, and all

The stillness brim with beauty; so
Our hearts will whisper, throbbing fast:
'Must time undeviating flow
And bear this fragile moment past?'

Maître de Ballet

ON a gossamer thread
Of light that stretches
From dark to dark
Over the void
We giddily jig
To the mad music
The Master makes.

From the Green Room
He calls us forth,
Sensitive puppets,
Live automata,
And with a gesture
Sets us jerkily
Dancing the tightrope.

From a seat in the stalls
Of the cosmic theatre
Silently
He watches our antics.

When we call to him
'Master, Master!
Help, we are falling!'
Out of the darkness
Comes no word
. . . . Only a chuckle.

The Grudge

*We grudged not those that were dearer than all we possessed,
Lovers, brothers, sons.*

Our hearts were full, and out of a full heart

We gave our beloved ones.

(Laurence Binyon)

WE are of baser quality: we have been
Tried by fire and judged a spurious gold.
We are little of soul; and yet in our pigmy way
We have suffered and loved with a love that cannot be told.

Being less than you, we did not eagerly quaff
The cup of gall: we prayed that it might pass.
We are not gods: we are pitiful human stuff;
And the blood of our passion has stained Gethsemane's grass.

We were not blind to the vision. We heard the call
And followed, or watched our beloved steadfastly go.
But our grief is naked, and shivers, and will not be soothed
By splendid phrases, or clothed in a moral glow.

We cannot say for our comfort: 'Losing them,
We gain a glimpse of noble terrible heights,
A cleansing exquisite pain, a sacred grief,
A dream to cherish'—we think of the vanished lights;

We think of the fine nerves shattered, the warm blood chilled,
The laughter silenced, the zest and the beauty gone,
The desolation of wasted wonderful dreams
That will never be lived, of work that cannot be done.

Wedding Day

WAS it for this we loved: to settle down
 (Having once paid the necessary fee)
 In some nice suburb not too far from town,
 To eat and sleep and kiss complacently,
 Loving by rote as decent people do:
 Was it for this we hungered, I and you?

A lover's vows are gossamer, they say;
 But we have registered our mutual vow
 For seven and sixpence, dearest. Yesterday
 There was but love to bind our hearts, but now
 We owe it to the Vicar to be good
 And love each other as we said we would.

That promise at the altar is a link
 (Which only death can break) between us two;
 For every time I kiss you I shall think:
 'How this would please the Vicar if he knew!'

And we shall put our youthful dreams to bed,
 And so live on—long after we are dead.

We are made one. One mind will serve us both.
 ('Oh yes, we think Locke's novels rather sweet!')
 In ever-living witness of our troth
 You'll serve the vegetables, I the meat . . .
 O happiness! It is our wedding day!
 Embrace me, dear: the Prayer Book says you may.

Crucifixion

WE wage eternal war on the losing side;
Ever defeated we by the sinister foe
That only pathetic piety seeks to hide
In a theological costume of long ago.

The goal we seek to attain will never be ours:
All our hopes will end in ashes and dust;
All our dreams will be dead desolate flowers,
Plucked by the pitiless Hand we were taught to trust.

Doomed to eternal defeat in the endless strife,
Scornful of Chance the Almighty, we worship with pride
The divine, frail, terrible Beauty of Life
On the Cross of Fate incessantly crucified.

Spring in Winter

MY memories of you are singing birds
In the green forest of my mind, where I
May roam, recapturing your whispered words,
Or on a bank of glowing bluebells lie,
Listening for ever. Spring is come again
In all her glory; the erst withered trees
That creaked, like living skeletons in pain,
Defying the wind, have donned green garments: these
New shoots, these blossoms and these buds, the springing
Grass, and the sky where many colours blend,
My songsters by the magic of their singing
Have in a moment made. My thoughts of you
Are music which to all my spirit's rue
Is the ineffable answer and the end.

The Exile

Now I return to my own land and people,
Old familiar things so to recover,
Hedgerows and little lanes and meadows,
The friendliness of my own land and people.

I have seen a world-frieze of glowing orange,
Palms painted black on the satin horizon,
Palm-trees in the dusk and the silence standing
Straight and still against a background of orange;

A gorgeous magical pomp of light and colour,
A dream-world, a sparkling gem in the sunlight,
The minarets and domes of an Eastern city;
And in the midst of all the pomp of colour

My heart cried out for my own land and people;
My heart cried out for the lush meadows of England,
The hedgerows and little lanes of England,
And for the faces of my own people.

Sonnet for Helen

WHEN you're very old, when in the candlelight your hair
 Silver shews—when by the fire you spinning sit and weaving,
 You will croon my verses, but in wonder, scarce believing
 'Ronsard hymned my beauty in the days when I was fair.'

Never servant could you have, tho' half-asleep she were,
 But would rouse herself to listen to your lyric grieving,
 Wake to hear my name and your glory, my achieving,
 My immortal praise of your beauty past compare.

I shall be beneath the earth, an unsubstantial shade;
 Where the myrtles throw their shadow will my bones be laid.
 You will be a squatting crouching sighing by the fire,

Sighing for the love you scorned, recalling it with sorrow.
 Live, O live and love to-day; delay not till the morrow:
 Gather now the roses of youth and desire.

From the French of Ronsard

Song

How did we dim that wistful dream,
That shy first love without caress,
That breathless wonder, that supreme
Vision of all love's loveliness?

For surely had we parted then,
Kissed once with tears and said Good-bye,
We had been speaking truly when
We said our love could never die.

Because we did a moment cling,
With trembling senses cling and kiss—
Does it not seem a bitter thing
That bliss should die of too much bliss?

Love is a fair and fragile flower
Which Youth must needs, poor foolish boy,
Pluck greedily...Within the hour
He weeps to see his withered joy.

Musings

BE calmer, O my Grief, be quieter:
The dusk you craved enfolds us; everywhere
The twilight veil of blue-grey gossamer
Falls, bringing peace to some, to others care.

While thralls of Pleasure, that most merciless
Of tyrants, hasten to his board (although
His wine is gall, and his fruit, bitterness),
Come with me, O my Grief, and let us go

Far from them. See the bygone years that throng
Heaven's balconies; see smiling Sorrow, strong
In fortitude, rise from the waters; see

The dying sun, low sinking, disappear
Beyond the verge. The rustling mystery
Of night approaches—hear, beloved, hear.

From the French of Baudelaire

The Poet

WHERE the flowers are most tall,
Heedless of his mother's call,
Wooden sword in his hand
Tightly clasped, I see him stand.

He is pondering with eyes
Full of four-year-old surmise
Two great hollyhocks that sway
This way, that way,
Till they almost touch his cheek.
Queer, solemn souls they seem,
Spell-bound, lost in dream,
Always just about to speak . . .

Then he with thirsty eyes
Drinks the intoxicating skies.
Done with earth, he bestrides
The galloping white horses, rides
The blue valleys and the red hills
Of sunset, and his pocket fills
With golden apples. Days pass,
Long full days . . .

The grass
Suddenly stirs, and he plunges
Into the perilous wood and lunges
Stoutly at the dragon's head
Till the fiery beast is dead . . .

Now that dusk is fast falling
He'll obey his mother's calling.
Out of Fairyland with slow
Thoughtful steps he turns to go.
Yet there's just time to float
In the water-butt his boat
Made of cork and spent matches:
So, at the last he snatches
Great adventure from the dread
Unrelenting jaws of Bed.
Round the magic world rides he,
And lives a breathless Odyssey.

If all the trees were magic trees

IF all the trees were magic trees
And talked among themselves,
If kings could sleep in daffodils
And bishops danced on window-sills,
If all the valleys changed to hills
And all the tens to twelves,
 The world would be nonsensical,
 And we should all be elves.

If every street in Camden Town
Were paved with precious stones,
If modest souls began to drape
Their table-legs in decent crape,
If every squirrel wore a cape
And had the name of Jones,
 I'd weave a robe of beetles' eyes
 And jellyfishes' bones.

If kingcups blossomed in the sky
And fell like golden rain
In grey half-light shot through and through
With shafts of green and shafts of blue,
If pink and purple chickweed grew
On every window pane,
 All truly tidy folk would deem
 The universe insane.

If we were sensible enough
To hear the bluebells ring,
Were sight so true and hearts so wise
That we could see with glowing eyes
Enchantment flaming from the skies
And joy in everything,
 Then every girl a queen would be,
 And every boy a king.

Alone with these my poems . . .

ALONE with these my poems, when night is still,
Earth seems but a speck of fluttering dust,
Moth-like, in a waste of eternity.

Alone with these symbols of human thought,
All our measureless system of whirling worlds
Seems itself a symbol, a chance phrase
In a poem wrought by the hand of a brooding god,
Where we ourselves are less than commas and dots.
And had he smeared out with careless thumb
All life, from its first birth in the waters
To the ultimate dissolution of stars and suns,
He had made no more than an ill-timed caesura.

Alone with these my poems, when night is still,
I am less than a speck of dust on the wing of a moth
Fluttering in a waste of eternity.

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