

# **Burden of Tyre: Fifteen Poems**

**Brennan, Christopher (1870-1932)**

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All quotation marks retained as data  
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**Burden of Tyre**

Sydney

**Harry F. Chaplin**

1953

These poems were conceived &, for the main part, written between September 1900 & May 1901; the exception being number XIII, which was composed recently. The revision & copying were completed this day Monday, the eighth of June, 1903.

Chris Brennan

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— RIG VEDA

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# Prologue

## Prologue

If by decay from God (we ask'd)  
and sovranly still more forgot,  
or as a fire and burning mask'd  
in time, and time perceiv'd it not,

this world arose; or Edom yet,  
warring thro' all the ages, long  
for Him, the truce and Sabbath set,—  
this was our business. We were wrong.

— Our sloth, our sloth alone hath bound  
in reason'd links the worlds that glance  
and vanish as new dreams abound  
each moment, in the eternal trance;

(the dreams who are we, ages of men,  
and the thought wherein we thrive or ail,  
and, passing out thro' us again,  
this world, our fair demesne or gaol):

yet, since each moment's dream for us  
expands to an age of tardy earth  
and time enspheres it, fabulous,  
in bubble-glints and tales of birth,

and none will chide, whiche'er we assume,  
for none is false and none is true  
and that first thought which was our doom  
is broken into their shifting hue:

therefore, lest Eden suffer shame,  
the thought gladdens me, that our world  
(so plain the spirit's oblivion) came  
of senseless dust conflicting whirl'd

or clinging, not thro' love, but just  
thro' that which later was in man  
a greed to clutch the paltry dust  
and grasp the tribes in iron ban:

since that was fable, how these hordes  
of paynim slaves that rage and chafe  
were number'd by the angel-swords.

— Dream then of Eden: she is safe.

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# **THE GOD**

## **(They said, For us the deeps were stirr'd)**

..lest we forget

They said, For us the deeps were stirr'd  
in the first, and us the groping mood  
went forth to seek, the intended word  
whom Edens, ineffectual, woo'd!

— whereof all time bears the plain proof:  
for is not earth our own to hold?  
before our shod and mailed hoof  
have all not fall'n, however bold?

— A lord of war, our God on high  
sits throned, and other none beside;  
and evermore beneath His eye  
greater we wax, His stay and pride.

His tent is spread about the suns,  
and all the hoary abyssms around  
(if grace was theirs to bear such sons)  
they are empty of God, they lie discrown'd.

If thence a threat to gulf us break,  
we reckon not: death is ever vain:  
new-waked, they travail for our sake  
and His, the God's whom we maintain;

Whose heart within him swells or pines  
as homeward driven or forward set  
He views our wide-flung battle-lines  
— for He must pass, if we forget.

## **(The tyrant of the days and years,)**

The tyrant of the days and years,  
who bound man's soul with sin and law,  
who mock'd the old night with aimless spheres  
and bade look up to them with awe,

he once, winning a dazing glimpse  
of Eden, whole in myriad joy,  
summon'd his gnomes and spectre-imps,  
the tribes that, labouring, destroy.

Seven forges, anvils, clanking mills,  
much sweating, groaning, — so they wrought,  
compacting random bulks of ills,  
to body forth his famous thought,

which was, to outdo the eternal work  
in wondrous unity and raise  
a rival beauty from the mirk  
with added months and weeks and days.

— Behold his children, how they run  
hither and thither thro' their times  
and seek all lands beneath the sun  
and force their faith on softer climes

And slay and pile the stone, nor rest —  
else they must think upon their grave:  
for dream hath made the world unblest  
and sick; and they alone shall save.

## **(Beyond the deeps what silence broke?)**

Beyond the deeps what silence broke?  
the hour returns to whence it came,  
and gods of a departing folk  
fill all the west with stormy flame.

Their day was hot with war and lust;  
their wars were base with hate and greed;  
them-seem'd their sordid realm of dust  
was all the stainless deeps might breed.

Therefore the silence bids them home:  
yet once, ere their kingdom cease,  
their rage is slaked in bloody foam  
and still'd in broad and golden peace.

— Thou Tyre, shall such an end be thine?  
or shall thy gods in swinish sleep  
belch forth no soul and, undivine,  
leave nothing to the ancient deep?

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# **THE FOLK**

## **(It is the coming of the night)**

It is the coming of the night:  
they gather to their hearths; they light  
the scanty flame, and draw the chair  
closer, and warmth enchants their care.

Another day is dead and they  
have lived it not: such price they pay  
daily, to fend the hunger-dread,  
that death may find them in safe bed.

Pale wretches! yet this hour at least  
they spend, when yon dark hive releas'd,  
in dreams that soar beyond the night  
and cheer the heart to front the light:

for lo! each steadfast window fire;  
would you not say, tho' stars may tire  
and the heavens age, man yet maintains  
his watchfires o'er the homeless plains;

close worlds of love and hope, that glow  
more golden-soft for that they know  
that one undying fire in all  
burns, and the march harks to one call.

— Nay, the poor hearts of dust are proud:  
O wonderful, our might allow'd  
of God! and lo, His empire come!  
— and night is vast above them, dumb.

## **(They hunger? give them men to slay:**

They hunger? give them men to slay:  
they lack for light and air? then room  
is free, yonder, and chance of play,  
where the hill-scarring cannons boom.

The house is rotting? flags will mask,  
and trophies best, where damps intrude:  
lift lights and song, and none will ask  
(being fools) if this be to their good.

And they who fall will vex us not  
and those who stay shall feed full meal  
of glory: while their pride is hot  
no need to whistle them to heel.

These be your gods, O Israel!  
— And who am I to blame their law? —  
Nay, an they will not learn, 'tis well  
that fools should chew the husks and straw.

## (— Not this, not this my word to you!)

— Not this, not this my word to you!  
O you to whom our hope is bound  
and love, whoever brood anew,  
each age, on the dread lot you found,

seeing you in the dark of time  
forever that dumb battlefield,  
piteous, ignored, trampled, sublime,  
where God and Night struggle nor yield

till there be won that glorious birth  
that weds them, slain, embraced, and fused  
in man, the arisen soul of Earth  
— how many a time have ye refused!

Was this your faith to them whose trust  
urged within your flesh, your bone,  
compulsive, moulding — which ye must  
obey, or madden, all unknown —

to them that in the rearward dark  
bow'd them above the clod and fed  
the brooding earth with dream, with stark  
sweat, and with sorrow of their dead;

and laid them in her lap, content  
to pass, if so her sacred morn  
might show some time the grave-clothes rent  
around the Saviour, Easter-born:

and that high sorrow of the stars,  
long-sunder'd, suffering, shall it help  
nothing against the hate that mars?  
and this, your street-long bloodhound-yelp,

shall this be all the note our earth  
sends outward to the night to greet  
her sisters, bound in mutual dearth?  
— Is Eden nought but the loud street?

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# **THE PROPHETS**

## **(Because ye sicken of thought (if e'er))**

Because ye sicken of thought (if e'er  
indeed ye have dared to affront the waste  
that stares within your heart) to dare  
all else and cross the world with haste

and haste backwards again, and daze  
your soul with doing — why, this had been  
honestly to live out your ways,  
considering not what things might mean.

But, because Eden lives by strife  
of loving powers that all may reach  
the plenitude of beauty and life,  
single, distinct, and whole in each;

and since the nations' frontiers stand  
sunder'd that so each voice might chime  
pure in the perfect concert plann'd  
to unfold the divine image in time;

to prate and cant that we, the more  
we hate and slay, the more are we  
law-doers, is this not to whore  
with vision, most abominably?

---

**ONE APART.**

## **(Let them devour and be devour'd!)**

Let them devour and be devour'd!  
so spake my anger yesternight  
and watch'd where the loud city tower'd,  
black, reddening all the western night

because their men of war had done  
some little deed of blood and fame:  
my anger watch'd till night was run  
and lit a sombre answering flame.

For I was fall'n into their mood  
and slew my peace with wrathful lips:  
Ah, when the East shall come in blood,  
I triumph'd, and the howling ships!

I spoke, who knew that every morn  
against our sunken sloth arrays  
a radiant and maiden scorn  
and the heroic love that slays

straightway, with stainless eyes that pierce  
the heart of hate that lurks and dies;  
whose wrath forgot that mine own fierce  
torn heart should pray, Let no sun rise!

For this was heralded in gold  
and orient pearl: Eden increas'd:  
I crept to slumber, sick and cold:  
there was no red in all that east.

## **(Ere quite the westward shadow fade)**

Ere quite the westward shadow fade  
and the steep noon drink up the dew  
that lingers on in the brief shade  
and holds the enleaguer'd morning new,

I will sit down and watch the shine  
steep all the halcyon height and steep  
the cup that slumbering smiles, divine,  
and earth in Sabbath, heaven-deep.

'Tis ten days now since I could dare  
thus to rejoice in the calm sun  
because somewhere — I know not where —  
men fell, knowing injustice done.

In sooth, I had flung my peace away,  
foolish, and changed for the dull woe  
that numbs and the rage that can but slay  
inwardly, that recurrent throe.

— This little mirth of day may keep  
the shining veil of azure drawn  
o'er the outer night, where many a deep  
shudders with the last horrible dawn.

## (Why are these streets aflame? — Today)

..as thou hast love'd me  
Why are these streets aflame? — Today  
we are born a folk. — What love begot?  
— Our mother's need. — Whither? — To slay:  
see now wherewith our hand is hot.

The old harlotry of right and wrong!  
one thrives whereby another ails:  
the little jealous gods are strong;  
the Divine Image fades and pales.

Then count not me of yours: I stand  
alone, save for whose gaze I meet  
like mine in yearning for that land  
that ne'er may rest our questing feet.

Or had I here to choose a kin  
I think, tho' scant my hardihead,  
I would not stand with you who win;  
rather with them, the sore bested,

whose land is where they carry still  
stout heart and sorrow and ready hand  
and their indomitable will  
to live and die as men who stand,

and, for all warmth at heart and light,  
thought of the hearth they last saw burn  
that eve they rode to war, nor might  
rekindle, even if they return:

with them in heart at least, since here  
I sicken, seeing the driven herd  
run with dropp'd eye and craven ear:  
— O people, and was this thy word?

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# **Wind and Wave**

## **(Night: and I lean where the sea sings)**

Night: and I lean where the sea sings.

There shall be nought of all these things  
that vex my rest nor seem to tire  
tho' my winds buffet in their wings  
and waves spurn them with lips of ire.

When will they howl, the ships of Tyre?

There shall be nought of all these lands  
nor shall their insolence endure:  
surely I waste them with no hands  
and change to something secret, pure.

When will the world be sea and pure?

There shall be nought but my dim glass  
that dreams at peace till time be o'er  
and the dread nuptial lightning pass  
once, and there shall be sea no more.

O When will there be sea no more?

## **(The herded waves are drifting, dark)**

The herded waves are drifting, dark  
and dolent, towards no shoreward mark:  
the cope of night is dense; and hard  
in bronze the eastern gate is barr'd.

Their clamour dwindled long ago  
to a hoarse murmur: yet they go  
— Tho' there be now no wind that drives —  
sullen, a witless doom of lives.

They have no hope of any light  
save that red glare within the night  
that tells the ending of despair:  
look! thins not yon the dismal air?

## **(When all the ways the worlds have trod)**

When all the ways the worlds have trod  
are gather'd up in Brahm, who goes  
homeward to silence, nor with God  
the star-pierced night is faint nor throes,

then all this coil shall fall and sleep:  
but then, when seven eternities  
are lifted from the awaking deep,  
shall then the ways be just as these?

— Wavewise the world is driven for aye,  
each gulf the old renewing night,  
and evermore each crest (they say)  
flings dayward our unwearied might.

So: time should mumble, uninspired,  
a crone's burthen, and the divine  
triumph on other ways, untired?  
that were the world's shame and not mine —

nor anyone's, for none should come  
again nor see what he had seen:  
to have lived and treasured not the sum  
in chemic mind is not to have been.

— A jest! the world was never more  
than one attempt if time should yield  
some fruit of gold to the great store  
or dung to enrich some happier field:

and this shall end and none regret:  
hope still: the tranced abyssms imprison  
so many names unutter'd yet,  
so many dawns that have not risen.

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# **EPILOGUE**

## **(O life, O radiance, love, delight)**

O life, O radiance, love, delight,  
O nuptial rose and valley of bliss,  
renew'd in maiden bloom and bright  
with morn each time thou stoop'st to kiss,

Eden, whence only life is whole  
and healing, when thy angel-flowers  
sigh the dew's silence into our soul,  
what hast thou with these wars of ours?

We slay and die: thou art not scarr'd  
nor dimm'd with battle-smoke; the din  
stirs thee as little as when the hard  
god spoke the foolish word of sin

o'er foolish souls of men that fear'd,  
but thou didst shine in changeless glee  
and joy of fruitful strife, endear'd:  
and yet our wars are all from thee.

Thou torturing, when thy love invades,  
this body of death and hate and greed  
gibbers and writhes, and frantic raids  
break over it, and the nations bleed:

and I, who love thee, how oft have I  
dream'd of that foolish spirit of ire  
riding the mass'd prophetic sky  
that breaks in sleet and hail of fire

above the hated citadels;  
or done the holy abysms this wrong  
to array their ghost, the voids and hells,  
against the turrets of the strong;

nor minded me that thou, when spite  
and hate have won all they may win,  
changing thy shape to death and night  
(for these and thou are subtle kin),

resumest all our waste and new  
conceiving, bring'st to better birth  
in thy glad lap where fire and dew  
wed in the war that brightens earth.

Thee, with whose name in bitter jest  
these songs began, to thee at the end

I turn that, all their hate confest  
as worthless, yet, if thou befriend,

some note of love crying in pangs  
of wrath and grief may echo higher  
than the derided bow that twangs  
against the spectre walls of Tyre.

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