

A Chant Of Doom and Other Verses

Brennan, Christopher (1870-1932)

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A Chant Of Doom

And Other Verses

Sydney

Angus and Robertson

1918



Christopher Brennan

Dedication

TO MY BROTHER

PHILIP

5304 SGT. 2nd AUST. MACHINE-GUN BATTN

NOTE

THANKS are due to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, *Anzac Memorial*, and *Lone Hand*, for printing and giving permission to reprint these fugitive verses.

The temptation was strong, when some of these numbers had given just and proper offence, to corroborate, deepen and intensify the offence. But the tone of the booklet suffers nothing added of malice afore- or after-thought, and the new matter has been jettisoned.

My publisher asks me — and thinks that others may ask — who were the “Lookers-on” in the Stadium. They were gathered to see a prize-fight. But beforehand their chosen leaders, of Government and Opposition, tried to make a recruiting speech, and were howled down.

C. B.

Oct. 8, 1918.

Sonnets And Stanzas

Quis Pro Domino?

I

VENGEANCE is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay —
Ay, verily: and by ministry of such men
As did His will upon the Saracen:
And Christendom owns not that man to-day
Who deems it not the holiest task to slay,
So utterly, that they rise not again,
Yon blatant heathenrie, past human ken
Outlaw'd to Death, its raving spawn and prey.

And thou hast lit one flame of love and wrath,
Who all unterrified, didst take thy stand,
And tear the Beast, and baulk him of his spring,
O noble Belgium, lion in the path;
An inch of sword holding a foot of land;
A folk of men, showing a man for King.

May 5

II

The metaphysic Death-in-Death that lurks
Within our world, and from its grisly haunt
With breath of chill misgiving seeks to daunt,
In vain, the immortal mind its challenge irks,
Incarnate for this time of power, murks
Our human heaven, whereo'er its banners flaunt
Annihilation, while its legions vaunt
Destruction. As their creed is, so their works.

And ev'n so be their doom, themselves have thought,
Who, past the living, warr'd upon those dead
Who, being dead, yet spake thro' that they wrought —
So fierce their hate against the soul they dread!
Ev'n so their doom: that Death's dead spawn may cram
Her maw, and, there corrupting, slay their dam.

May 11

(*Sydney Morning Herald*,
May 13, 1915, for Belgian Day)

“Lookers-On”

Stadium, July 31, 1915

WHAT shame is this, that foemen mock
And brothers doubt our birth?
The groundlings' noisome benches rock
Impatient for their mirth.

Their hirelings fight: who dubs it vice
To batten on the view?
Sweet friends, and whence so high your price
That men should die for you?

Nay, street-bred minds and poster-souls,
Ye need not be adread;
Their race is run to other goals:
Ye profit by these dead.

The garbage-bucket's brood is free
To buzz in summer air:
They give their all for Liberty,
And you shall have your share.

Aug. 2, 1915

Irish To English

April 26, 1916

I AM not of your blood;
I never loved your ways:
If e'er your deed was good
I yet was slow to praise.

Irish and rebel both,
And both unto the end —
And here I pledge you troth,
And here I stand your friend.

This scum that blights our fame,
This mildew on our land —
The murrain on their name:
My spittle on their hand.

The gates of Hell assail:
Look on yon stricken trench —
There dies the loyal Gael:
Let not your talkers blench.

*(Sydney Morning Herald,
April 27, 1916)*

[Lions of war . .]

LIONS of war, our noblest and our best,
Who won the desperate beach and death-lash'd crest
And look'd on Fate's most awful face unhid,
Poorly our praise may match the thing you did,
Who, from these ultimate isles and warless seas,
Bade Hellespont and golden Chersonese
Wake from their dream of perish'd glory and thrill
To know the heart of valour flaming still:—
We, irk'd and shamed to sit only and hear
In homes your wild devotion makes more dear,
Whether ye sleep upon your fiery height
Or fortune, maiming, bar you from the fight
Or, gracious and consenting, so befriend
To stride the road of victory to the end
And smite to hell yon ravening bulk of sin —
Humble and proud, we greet and claim you kin.

(Anzac Memorial)

Kitchener

A COLD and choking death in tumbling seas,
Track'd down by enemies' eyes towards bitter night,
With the first stars to witness his last fight —
This was his end, whose life forswore all ease:
Witness, ye Orient sands and burning breeze,
That train'd his patient manhood to the might
Ye mourn with us, whelm'd now by Fortune's spite
Where the great surge sets past the Orcades.

England, he forged thy sword: take thou and smite
As he would bid, nor, till victorious right,
Hold thou with yonder sly and murderous beast
Or truce or parley; that, of all our slain,
Even from this greatest down unto the least
Nor he, nor any, shall have died in vain.

June 10
(Sydney Morning Herald,
June 17, 1916)

The Second Anniversary Of War

TWO years, since heaven was blotted from our sight
In swirling storm; two years, that forced the cry
Of pain, to watch our friend and kinsman die;
And doubt, and dread, and rumour of the night —
And patience in our goddess, angry-bright,
Erect and sure against that weltering sky,
Till the collected lightning of her eye
Leap forth and slay the banded foes of right.

For hers our cause is, hers, whose voice the Greek
First heard, the call that hallow'd man to wreak
God's doom upon the wrong that earth abhors:
Whence yet the freeman hath prerogative,
And faith, and strength, and victory:— “Whoso wars
On Justice, to deny her, must not live.”

July 31

(Sydney Morning Herald, Aug. 4, 1916:
Read in Great Hall, University of Sydney, same date)

Thersites

“ . . . still wars and lechery!” Troilus and Cressida

THEY whined their scannel warning to the young:

“Lo, all your dream of glory, how it lies!

Was this its promise then, the dust and dung,

The stench of blood, and cloud of sexton flies?”

Even such we knew, some worm o' the cesspit stung,

Who rail'd on fair love's arrogant emprise

Because no breath from heaven made broad their lung

And mire of flesh dwelt in their abject eyes.

But how could glory be, save that she must

Stoop from her sphere to quicken sordid dust

Turning to rapture our inflicted need?

Poor souls! to have never known the immortal will

That never owns defeat, the heroic deed

Whose doing is its only glory still.

1917

(Sent, by request, to the Australian Soldiers' Gift Book, but rejected by V.W.A.)

France

To Mademoiselle A. Soubeiran

*TO you, that have the blessed right
To love your France, even to tears,
From one, who saw her sacred light
Shine steadfast thro' the storm of fears,
These, which her worshipp'd soul endears,
Since they found favour in your sight.*

At Verdun

SCANT the battle's breathing-space:
Scant (ah, sorrowful) for her
Station'd in the direful place,
Where the smoky legions whir
Boiling upward from the pit,
Wings that drip and maws that spit,
Craving to defile her grace.
Hush! Your pity does her wrong:
For she asketh not "How long?"
For her spirit shall not grieve
Tho' till dim and doubtful morn
Fires of bale, with no reprieve,
Make the murk about her heave.
What! Would you bewail her case,
Risk her glance of radiant scorn?
Lift your eyes to see her stand,
Smiling with immortal face,
Wielding in unwearied hand
Storm and levin of her brand,
Crushing there to sordid dust
Crest and mail of reptile lust,
Woman-soul and goddess-fire,
Shining love and blasting ire,
Bride of all the soul's desire,
France, a star to every land.

Love and worship be your gift,
Humbly brought: and look you keep
With your utterance pious thrift;
Tho' your hearts be high uplift,
Be your silence reverent deep.
Song she needs not, who can turn
From the deed of dreadful fire
Where her joyful children burn,
To the vast and splendid lyre
Where our secret chords conspire.
She, that makes her music now
On the smitten dragon's brow,
From his broken heads shall give
Streams of song whereby we live.
Love would hymn her? Let it be:
Love must rest rebuked, for she
Little needs our minstrelsy.

Must we stay content to bring
Ne'er a word of thanksgiving
Irk'd with silence, bosom-bound?
Once, when men that knew dismay
Rose from out the bitter clay,
Thus, of old, the word was found:

“Nisi quia Dominus

(Even now let Israel say)

Save the Lord had been with us
When our foes were gather'd thick,
They had sure devour'd us quick,
Or the waters whelm'd our soul.”

Even so let freemen say,

Whom her chivalry kept whole:

“Nisi quia Domina!”

Save for her we had been scourged,
Stripp'd and spoil'd and broken quite:
Home and freedom, love and light —
These the gold she brought us, purged
In that crucible of fight.

Lady of Deliverance,

Mistress of our spirit's sight,

Thus we humbly thank thee, France!

(Daily Telegraph, July 14, 1916)

For France's Day

WORN, but not wasted, mournful, yet with crest
Still unsubdued;
She holds the perilous gate, her lance in rest
'Gainst that fell brood
She knows of old, that mark'd her long ago,
In evil glee,
An easy prey, and on her overthrow
Saw Liberty
A smoking victim and the world its grave:
So plann'd and will'd
The powers that dream no servant but the slave
And cannot build.

Always their hate pursued her and their lust
Her beauty irk'd
The sluggish nerve beneath their saurian crust
Where envy lurk'd;
Always her grace and laughing ease reprov'd
Their Orson ways;
Careless, they saw her, free, yet all-belov'd;
Their thirst for praise
Grew, maddening to a monstrous calenture,
And malice stung,
What jaw might rend not, to defile past cure
With slavering tongue.

She hath been terrible in bygone times,
So burning red,
None knew, if dawn from heaven, or with her crimes,
A Maenad head;
Yet, even in her madness, we divined
And half adored
A splendid harsh archangel of the mind,
With flaming sword
Waved towards some Eden where the souls of men
Might draw free air,
And hate and tyranny desert our ken,
And life be fair.

Therefore, in this her hour of martyrdom —
Prolong'd, renew'd! —
Where English speech makes music, there is dumb
The ancient feud;
And clear her light in all their hearts who sing
O'er sundering foam,

Knowing she makes her battle but to bring
Her children home;
Only to gather them in fold beneath
Her wings of peace;
Only to reap that field of dragon's teeth
That hate may cease.

By her long suffering and hope deferr'd,
When friends betray;
By all that hope of youth that sleeps interr'd
Deep in her clay;
By those our sons that stand with hers and strive,
By those that fell,
Her sons and ours, to keep our souls alive,
And found it well:
Give of your store, and let your giving be
Or great or small,
What matter, be it joyous, loving, free —
She hath given all.

July 8
(*Sydney Morning Herald*,
July 13, 1917)

A Chant Of Doom

*FOR of them that shed much blood the gods
are not unregardful: such an one, tho' he
thrive without righteousness, yet in time the dark
Hounds of Hell, with luck-reversing brunt of life,
wear him to a shade; and there is no strength of
him left, for his end is among the things that are
seen not. — AESCHYLUS, Agamemnon.*

A Chant Of Doom

*HA, the doom begins, begins!
Ay, the hour is well begun
When the Babel of his sins
Topples on the evil one:
Malediction, crime, and sword —
These his harvest, bride, and hoard;
These to gladden, hous'd and stored,
His eternal bed and board!*

Ah, the waiting, since the stroke
Of his foul conceiving broke
Thro' the crystal dome of sky
Where our Quiet hover'd shy!
Here I sat and even here,
From my casement, saw the dear,
Hesitating, virgin Spring,
Bridal-gauzy, visiting
Waters silken with delight,
Little happy beaches, white
Where her argent footprint fell —
And the world drove fast on hell.
Follow'd then the month of dread:
Spring might woo in vain; we read
How the hosts of darkness burst,
Ravishing, thro' Belgium first,
Then with gather'd wrath amain
Sweeping on the storied Seine,
Sworn to wreck and ravin, drove
On that city of our love,
Queen of arms, and Queen of light,
Queen of delicate delight,
Queen of venturous art and song,
Unavenged of the foul wrong
Done her twice in hundred years
When she saw, thro' wrathful tears,
How the fathers of these swine
Nuzzled in her glorious wine.
Darkness settled round the spring:
Narrower we felt the ring
Whence from earth and sky and sea
Breath was drawn to keep man free:
Where might Freedom dwell secure
If that city must endure
One shame more, the worst and last? —

But the time of terror pass'd:
Ended was the month of dread
When the Marne and Aisne ran red:
Hope was ended for our foes
When the muddy Yser rose,
Swoln with corpses, swirling thick:
Ah, but heart and hope grew sick
As the moon, changed times a score,
Still beheld the evil sore
All unlanced and German bale
Lording it o'er hill and vale
Of the pleasant land of France —
Let the flags of doom advance.

*Yser, noble, faithful ditch,
Yser, name of Teuton dread,
Tho' Skamander boast it rich
With its silt of golden dead,
More shall Yser be renown'd,
Where the German hope was drown'd.*

VENGEANCE finds him, late but full:
Man shall thrust and hell shall pull
Till the pit has claim'd its own.
Flanders shall forget her moan
Underneath that bestial hoof,
Rheims rebuild its haughty roof:
Where of late the tocsin knell'd
And the reeling spires beheld
Monstrous rout of order'd sin,
Let the carillons begin.
Bruges, ring the tale to Ghent,
Shatter'd Ypres, make concert:
Let the glad and clashing peal
Reach the towers of captive Lille;
All ye martyr'd steeples, sing,
All ye bells of freedom, ring —
Ring the Belgian lion, dour,
Ranging on the carrion spoor
Of the evil bird that came
Northward, for Germania's shame,
Dastard, prowling with the fox
Since it left the Suabian rocks —
Ring the English leopards gaunt
Anger'd at the Prussian vaunt
O'er the fields of war they know
Hallow'd by a nobler foe —
Ring the shining soul of France,

Steel and pennon on the lance
Levell'd in the Maiden's hand
Riding yet to save her land —
Ring the stubborn Muscovite
Lock'd in truceless weltering fight,
Serb and Tchernagoran sworn
By their sorrows nobly borne
Yet to turn and rend the breast
Of their black two-headed pest —
Ring the sunrise colours flown
O'er the Alpine winter's throne
Where Italia's sons redeem
All her ancient lingering dream —
Ring the cross that comes again
To the Holy Wisdom's fane
From the skies that Dante saw,
Where the sons of freedom's law
Do the last crusaders' work
On the bastard Teuton-Turk —

*Ring the victory, ring the rout,
Ring the night of evil out —
Ring deliverance, ring the doom
(Cannon, cannon, cannon, boom)!*

DOOM we utter, doom we will;
Head shall judge, and hand must kill
— Whom? Behold him: eye in eye
Mark him, ere we bid him die.

Yon self-righteous bulk, 'tis he,
The world's giant Pharisee;
Prophet, scribe, Emmanuel
Of the evangel he must tell
How his virtue should make whole
All the world's phrenetic soul,
Honesty, to slake its drouth,
Flowing from that well-wiped mouth:
Truth: it was his very thought,
Justice, whatsoever he wrought,
Never yet on earth dispens'd
Save in homes his arms had fenced.
Honour — 'twas his look and word.
Heedless, many a year we heard,
Fools and blind, we heard and laugh'd:
This was Hamlet, wisdom-daft,
This the school's jack-pudding, sent
For our easy merriment

As we watch'd him, heavy-shod,
Cumbrous-tortuous, writhe and plod
To and from his primal lie:
"Truth and right and love am I:
Human virtue hath no worth
Save it own a German birth:
German virtue stands alone,
Incommunicable, unknown" —
Vain the long-drawn litany,
Still uncrook'd our stubborn knee;
So the homily turn'd grave:
"I with all the world to save,
I whose pure unselfish might
Gives the earth a newer right,
If these Gentiles will not yield
To God's will in me reveal'd,
Threaten'd in my highest good,
Dare I heed (an if I would)
Parchment bonds that vex and irk,
Hampering the appointed work?"
Hark! the ruffian guns of Liège
Bark refusal: holy rage
Seizes on the baffled priest —
And the world beholds the Beast.
Liège is loud on German truth;
Flanders cries on German ruth;
Rheims and Senlis swell the tale
Of the wilful German bale:
Nay, what boots it to prolong
All the sickening list of wrong?
Pharisee, thou whited tomb,
Mankind hath decreed thy doom.

*Chime his fame and chime his name;
Rhyme his title, rhyme his shame:
German faith and German trust;
German hate and German lust:
— Bring the Beast unto the dust.*

AY, but this has been of old.
Earth remembers in its mould
All her motherhood defiled
By the frenzy of her child.
Man has match'd with beast and won.
Was there aught till now undone
Of the crimes ye make his charge,
Aught that bids us not enlarge
This one criminal, the worst

— If ye will — but not the first?

— This has been: 'tis written deep.
Nerve and bone of mankind keep
Chronicle of shame that still
Bids our flesh and fibre thrill
With the fear that lurks behind
All the reptiles of the mind.
Treason, sacrilege and rape,
Murder in its foulest shape,
When the beast ran loose in man
These have been:— but give them plan,
Bid the brute and angel kiss
Sworn and pledg'd in brutehood — this,
This is he that will'd the Beast,
Will'd the world to be its feast;
All its valour, worth and will,
All its hoard of ventured skill,
Ay, and generous youth, unwrought,
With its wealth of ardent thought,
Dreams, and native heroism,
Warp'd unto his warlock-schism,
All a Moloch-sacrifice
To the devil-brain of ice
Plotting hell to gain the world:
Lo, his flag of doom unfurl'd!
Rend the veil: he stands unscreen'd,
Monster-birth of man and fiend,
Where of human we descry
Only this — that he can die.

“Die, and die, and die, and die!”
Shot and shell and steel reply:
Hoarser yet the cannon cry
“He hath sinn'd and he must die!”

FOR his sins the man must die.
Sick, convuls'd to bear him, Earth
Rends the charter of his birth:
She, enduring in the right,
Shudders from the demon-blight:
She, the patient and the kind,
Loyal in her darkling mind
To the law that bids her yield
Foison from the wounded field:
She, corrupted in her womb,
Urged the primal slayer's doom
With the voice that cried on Cain

— Here is more than Abel slain.
Yet with her even Cain hath found
That last hostel of the mound:
In her lap her child may rot
— Even Cain: but this may not.

Exile of the human grave!
Earth resumes but what she gave.
Shall the pit receive him? Nay:
Hell hath yet its word to say.
Hell, and were it seven times seven
Heated, yet is kin to heaven:
Eden-bliss and Hinnom-fire
Are but man's produced desire,
Holy or unholy, still
Lit by his immortal will;
So in Hell the soul that sins
Neither dies, nor yet begins
Penal fasts, but wantons free
In its evil revelry:
Save by the enduring soul
Neither Hell nor Heaven is whole.
— But the monster that we judge —
Hell might harbour not such grudge,
Deep, inexpiable, immane,
Nor the serpent breed such bane
As the man's saturnine will,
Bitter, bleak, morose, to kill
Even the soul, suborn'd and won
To its self-sworn malison.
Think ye Hell shall rise for him,
Stirring from their seats the dim
Majesties of surceas'd wrong?
Shall not Malebolge throng,
Huddled close in human dread,
From his vast appalling tread?
And Giudecca's lord shall fold
His eternal vans of cold,
Crouching fearful lest they ply,
Till the horror passes by.

*Quicklime for the felon's pit,
Pledge of fires his forfeit lit!
Earth nor Hell yields this no grace:
Where shall be his resting-place?*

FAR beyond the northern cold,
Where the Muspell-lords of old,

Bedded in their lasting state,
Sleep upon their glutted hate
Of the life whereon they warr'd,
Gray, vindictive bulks abhorr'd
— Odin's spear no more shall wake
Fenris-wolf or Midgard-snake—:
Farther, where the roots of night
Plunge in wells beyond all sight;
Where the execrate caverns are,
Sunk beneath the last dim star
And its sisters' quickening breath;
There the hag-wife Death-in-Death
In her rigid sinful womb,
Self-accurst, hath made him room.
Let the Evil lie by her
Straiten'd in that sepulchre,
Where the evil round him craves
Utter death to fill its graves,
Doomed to feed, by its own law,
On the ravening of its maw.
As he goes to that long home
Where no wakening shall come,
Silence falling, vast and dread,
Be his pomp of martial tread;
Silence whelming, tense and lone,
All his pomp of music blown;
And, for corpse-flares round his bier
Passing up the aisle of fear,
Writhing cores of densest gloom
See the vampire to his tomb,
There to live, seal'd fast and stark,
One with all the unhallow'd dark.

*Cast the carrion to the dark
With its sin for shrouding-sark;
Raze his name and raze his birth:
Give the spring-time back to Earth!*

1915
(*The Lone Hand* August 1, 1916)

Doom

DEAD night, unholy quiet, doom, and weird
Are heavy on its roof,
The palace-keep that prosperous Evil rear'd
Defiant, heaven-proof.

Founded in fraud, mortar'd with blood, and clamp'd
With clutching iron hands,
It frown'd down right, its flaunted scutcheon ramp'd
Above the abject lands.

And now, the sentinels have left that gate
Nor bar protects, nor pin,
But high and wide the portal yawns, till Fate
And Judgment enter in.

A groaning trembles thro' the massive vaults,
A muttering down the halls,
As closer still the impending thunder halts
Nor yet the levin falls.

A panic whispering round the galleries
Runs twittering: then the hush,
And in the dimmest nooks divining eyes
See blackness throned and crush.

Palsied, with fix'd and writhen face, high Sin
Stares from the shrouded throne
With glassy eyes whose gaze is turn'd within
— Where at the last are known

Ate and Ruin, each Erinys-shape
Dire, ineluctable,
From whom nor death nor madness brings escape
— And least, the House of Hell.

* * * * *

This is their doom, deserv'd, complete and due,
That they themselves must know
Whose witless hand it was that overthrew
With self-inflicted blow

Their monstrous dream; to know their own the sword
That smote them from the skies,
That stretch'd in dust the Dagon they adored,
And shatter'd their emprise;

Their own the skill that most industrious built
This pit of their despair
Star-high, smooth-rounded, baffling, where their guilt
Must find eternal lair.

The enginery they wrought, whose maw they fed
With fume and fire of hate,
To break his house above their neighbour's head,
Hath left theirs desolate.

And Evil knows at last, all overtoil'd,
The law whereby it must,
By self stupidity and dulness foil'd,
Still labour for the Just.

This is their punishment: there is no worse;
What have they left to dread
Who reck not of the living orphan's curse,
The slow wrath of the dead?

* * * * *

Tho' for a while, lest from the festering lie
Our air drink poison-shade,
The scavengers of Justice yet must ply
Their stern and simple trade,

(For sword and rope are hungry, axe and block
Demand their grim repast,
Whereof who would defraud them, shakes the rock
On which his house stands fast)

Our vengeance now is full: what else must fall
Can add no best, no worst;
The cup is brimm'd whence they have drunken gall,
Where we have slaked our thirst.

Our vengeance is complete, deserv'd, and won,
And sevenfold seventyfold
The retribution on the guilty one
Is levied, summ'd, and told.

We that have suffer'd with the suffering right —
For all our doubts and fears,
For all our anguish in the muttering night,
For all our blood and tears,

For dread and for dismay, and that foul rape
Man's spirit but scarce withstood
When from the Pit, in our usurped shape,
The Abominable was spew'd —

Lo, their cold agony and icy sweat,
Their self-damnation known!
Let justice come: What need we vengeance yet?
Its wreaking was their own.

Nov. 3-4
(*Sydney Morning Herald*,
November 9, 1918)
