

The Burning Marl

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Melbourne

Fellowship

1919

TO ALL WHO HAVE FOUGHT NOBLY

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The Burning Marl

War

I.

THE beast exultant spreads the nostril wide,
 Snuffing a sickly hate-enkindling scent;
Proud of his rage, on sudden carnage bent,
He leaps, and flings the helpless guard aside.
Again, again the hills are gapped and dyed,
 Again the hearts of waiting women spent.
Is there no cooler pathway to content?
Can we not heal the insanity of pride?

Silence the crackle and thunder of battling guns,
 And drive your men to strategy of peace;
 Crush ere its birth the hell-begotten crime;
Still there's a war that no true warrior shuns,
 That knows no mercy, looks for no surcease,
 But ghastlier battles, victories more sublime.

II.

Envy has slid in silence to its hole,
 And Peace is basking where the workers meet,
 And fire has purged the fever of the street
Where raucous tradesmen grinned and gave and stole.
Yet louder now the tides of battle roll,
 With cheer or sob of charge or stern retreat,
 And sullen thud and rumble of cannon beat
About the heights and passes of the soul.

Not only that amid the hush we hear
 The sounds that once were blurred by market cries,
 Or classes wrangling in affairs of state:
But forces now set free from sordid fear
 No longer work as Mammon's murdering spies,
 But storm the very citadels of hate.

Belgium

THE Blatant Beast saw meadows, made for peace,
Sunlit and gently asway, and held them light,
Till each green blade grew rigid in the night
And ruddied with a glorious morn's increase.
Thou hast suffered; nor till Freedom find release
And set for ever on the shining height
The eternal rolling banner of her might
Shall thy great gift of strife and suffering cease.

We, bred of one small island in the west,
A little shrine of Freedom, far away
— We, who can bow at no strong tyrant's hest,
Bend low our heads in pride to thee to-day,
For all unknown, a smiling babe at rest,
Within thy lowly manger Freedom lay.

ANZAC

WITHIN my heart I hear the cry
Of loves that suffer, souls that die,
And you may have no praise from me
For warfare's vast vulgarity;
Only the flag of love, unfurled
For peace above a weeping world,
I follow, though the fiery breath
Of murder shrivel me in death.
Yet here I stand and bow my head
To those whom other banners led,
Because within their hearts the clang
Of Freedom's summoning trumpets rang,
Because they welcomed grisly pain
And laughed at prudence, mocked at gain,
With noble hope and courage high,
And taught our manhood how to die.
Praise, praise and love be theirs who came
From that red hell of stench and flame,
Staggering, bloody, sick, but still
Strong with indomitable will,
Happy because, in gloomiest night,
Their own hearts drummed them to the fight.

For Valour

HAIL to you, comrades, who have won,
Where the torn lines of battle run
 By tattered town and ruined mead,
The honour that men give with pride
To those who, daffing death aside,
 Have done the valorous deed.

And has the war, then, brought to birth,
As flowers that spring from western earth
 At summons of the pelting rain,
The courage that can force its way,
And hold the shadowing wings at bay,
 And smile at lingering pain?

And is it true that only now
Life lifts from her heroic brow
 The smothering shroud of deadly peace,
And laughs to sniff the morning air,
And bids a thousand bonfires flare
 The news of her release?

Hell's throat may swallow down its lie,
For men knew how to live and die
 And take the gifts of motley fate,
Before the fiends of fear and greed,
Clasping, engendered from their seed
 The hissing brood of hate.

Are they not sightless fools who crave
The sombre splendours of the grave
 To prove that man is more than dust;
Who dabble fingers in the side
Of him who lives because he died,
 Believing, when they must?

Light Loss

“OUR loss was light,” the paper said,
“Compared with damage to the Hun”:
She was a widow, and she read
One name upon the list of dead
— Her son — her only son.

Death

HE, born of my girlhood, is dead, while my life is yet young in my heart
—Ere the breasts where his baby lips fed have forgotten their softness, we part.
We part. He was mine, he was here, though he travelled by land and by sea,
My son who could trample on fear, my babe who was moulded in me.
As I sat in the darkness, it seemed I could still feel his touch on my head;
He came in the night as I dreamed, and he knelt at the side of my bed;
He murmured the words I had taught when his lips were the lips of a child,
Ere the strength of his arm had been bought and the love that upheld him defiled;
Then my faltering spirit grew bold, and my heart had forgotten its drouth,
And I crooned little songs as of old, till I woke at his kiss on my mouth.
Now waking and sleeping are pain. Nevermore will he kiss, nevermore
Shall I hear his low whistle again at the gate, or his step on the floor,
For to-night he was here while I slept, and this is the end of it all.
Now that welter of darkness has swept us apart, can he come if I call?
Can he come, little chap with the eyes that brought light out of heaven to earth?
Can he come, though the soul of me cries for the joy that I bought by his birth?
I can see but the horror that bids the heart of the mother despair,
The vision that burns on my lids, the face that will always be there,
For he holds out his hands to me, red, and his eyes tell the truth as he stands.
He is dead. He is dead. He is dead. He is dead, with the blood on his hands.

Trade

WHERE yonder ruddy-misted star
 Is tumbling down the placid sky
 The people's aims were not so high
As our heroic motives are;
To love and trust they set a bar,
 And "Profit" was their only cry;
 They paid but little heed how nigh
Came thundering the iron car.

It rushed upon them and it passed
 Leaving a ghost of pain and fear
 To haunt the ruin it had made.
But surely they have learnt at last?
 What far faint murmur can we hear
 Of frantic howling? Listen! . . . "TRADE."

The Power Of Hell

“THERE is no place,” he said,
“For love or pity here;
We dread and only dread
The moods that once were dear.

“We break the ancient spell,
And arm to take our part
Against the power of Hell.”
And Hell was in his heart.

The War After The War

I.

YONDER, with eyes that tears, not distance, dim,
With ears the wide world's thickness cannot daunt,
We see tumultuous miseries that haunt
The night's dead watches, hear the battle hymn
Of ruin shrieking through the music grim,
Where the red spectre straddles, long and gaunt,
Spitting across the seas his hideous taunt
At those who nurse at home the unwounded limb.

What shall we say, who, drawing indolent breath,
Mark the quick pant of those who, full of hate,
Drive home the steel or loose the shrieking shell,
Heroes or Huns, who smite the grin of death
And laugh or curse beneath the blows of fate,
Swept madly to the thudding heart of hell?

II.

O peace, be still! Let no drear whirlwind sweep
Our souls about the vault, that groans or yells
In travail of the brood of Fear, and swells
Stupendous with new monsters of the deep.
This is no day to wring the hands and weep,
No hour for hopeless tolling and clash of bells.
Faith is no faith if god or demon quells
One hope or drugs it to uneasy sleep.

What you have shed man's blood for, fight for still
In world-wide conflict, joining hand with hand;
Hate fear and hatred and the seed thereof,
And, since you have struck for Freedom, do her will
And smash the barriers parting land from land,
Unfaltering armies of immortal love.

Hymn To The God Of War

FROM every quarter we,
Who bent the trembling knee
And cowered or grovelled prostrate day and night,
Now come once more to sing
A dirge before thee, King,
Once more with earnest heart to do thee right.

Have we not hailed thee God?
Our weary feet have trod
The vasty barren sands and treacherous ice,
With many a bitter cry,
To pile thine altar high
With pallid human hearts in sacrifice.

We hated thee and came
With eyes of shifty shame,
With heavy steel above the craven breast,
Yet evermore we did
The ill thy servants bid,
For everywhere thy might was manifest.

At thy sibilant word
We were filled with distrust,
And we glared on each other,
All horribly stirred
Against sister and brother;
Our green hopes were wilted and riven, our red-running blood was as dust.

And a foul poison ran
Through the veins of the world,
And we waited and wondered.
By magical ban
We were cruelly sundered,
Then a maniac hatred upcaught us and deep into hell we were hurled.

We have crept to thee, God,
In the day of thy wrath,
We have wept, we have fasted,
We have crimsoned the sod
That thy worship has blasted,
And have seen thee stalk pale and triumphant where nations fell flat in thy path.

Yet out of the dust and the flame,
The squalor and muddle of crime,
A red waving blossom there came
And a scent on the tempest of time.

Heroic and splendid, we threw
Our lives to be oil in the fire,
But a marvel of fellowship grew
As the blaze bickered broader and higher,
And the soul of a people stood up, and spoke to us all from the pyre.

And lo, we are come to thy shrine,
O God, but we ask for no grace,
For our hearts are made glad with a wine
That is death to the craven and base,
And thy shrine shall be burnt for our mirth
And thine altar be turned to thy bier,
For, if Love be our Lord upon earth,
What corner is left for thee here?
The veil of thy temple is rent — and behold, thou hast vanished, O Fear!

The Patriot

*THE patriot from his walls of brass
Is singing loudly as I pass;
With fearless heart and open eyes,
He shouts the ancient battle cries;
And, where I pause to hear him sing,
A silent crowd is listening.*

My country, God bestows by thee
The glory of the world to be
—The glory thou alone canst give
To last amid things fugitive.

My country, an ideal form
I see thee splendid in the storm,
Directress of the power divine
That makes the expectant future thine.

My country, all the world shall bow
Before thy peace-conceiving brow,
And all the peoples humbly stand
Submissive to thy blessing hand.

My country, yea, the foes who raise
A tyrant flag shall learn to praise
Thy steadfast love that dares to fight
The horde of Satan for the right.

My country, loveliest, strongest, best,
Thou hast a mission to the rest,
And greater wealth and love shall be
The guerdon of thy ministry.

*In every land I hear him sing;
In every land I see him fling
His country's flag against the skies
And gaze aloft with dazzled eyes;
And then his loud applause rings round
His walls of brass with brazen sound;
And deep below his cheering loud
I mark the murmur of the crowd.*

Kretschmann

LOVE may trace his echoing footsteps, yet we never more shall meet
Rugged Kretschmann, the musician, plodding down a Sydney street,
Never see the low broad figure, massive head and shaggy mane
And the quiet furrowed features, never hear his voice again.

But from many a home there rises many a note that lingering rings
Ever since his cunning fingers touched and drew it from the strings;
All our land is full of noises; happy phantom fields of scent,
Bright with sunlit blossoms, echo birdlike music where he went.

He was old and grey and weary, death and he were long at grips,
Evil whispers hissed behind him, German to the finger-tips,
War's wild fury snarled about him, so he gently stepped aside,
Loving us and loving Germans, heavy-hearted, and he died.

Crusted shells, by ocean battered, taken from the barren shore
Bear within their hearts a murmur of the sea's eternal roar;
Who shall say what vital music, all unheard by duller ears,
Swept the soul of good old Kretschmann to his home amid the spheres?

Harmony was all his being, and he held the music sweet
Welling up in baby voices, beaten out by tiny feet;
Still with playthings in his pockets, rest and solace may he know,
Welcomed gladly to the kingdom where the little children go.

What Of The Night?

THE doom is imminent of unholy hate.

Hail to the light that glimmers where the leaves
Are shaken by winds of dawning, and the sheaves
Of hemlock swirl and scatter in the spate!

Love, that has learned in faith to sorrow and wait,
Sings loud his glorious charm and subtly weaves
The spell subduing madness that receives
The madman at his own mad estimate.

Ah, but the ponderous horror! Nay, not yet
The cloud of sorrow leeward growls and rolls;
The eyes that meet the morn are heavy and wet.
The loss the military mind enscrolls,
Spilt blood and battered bones, we may forget,
But not the wastage of beloved souls.

Transports

BEHIND us lay the homely shore
 With youthful memories aureoled;
A sky of dazzling blue before,
 We sailed a sea of molten gold.

To our old haven we return;
 By smoky hills as grey as mud
We see the sullen sunset burn
 Malignant on a lake of blood.

Yes, we return: but memory roams
 A foul, bleak age of pain that yields
The smoke and flame of ruined homes,
 The muck of cannon-pitted fields.

The Wounded

STUPIDITY and Selfishness and Fear,
Who hold enslaved the intellect of Man,
Have found their victims here.

We saw them go, alert to seek the van
Where phantom Glory showered her withering leaves;
Now they return who can.

Slowly, full-fraught with pain, the vessel heaves
From labouring seas, and creeps along the bay
To where the city grieves.

Happy are those who limp the dusty way;
And those whose eyes can meet the loving glance,
Happy indeed are they.

But mock them not with babble of romance:
They have glared at death across the orient rocks
Or in the mire of France.

O welcome to your land of herds and flocks
And fields that pray toward a fairy sky
That promises and mocks.

Welcome! our eyes are strained and sorrow-dry,
Watching for peace and you, and every heart
Would fain, but cannot, cry.

For you who, led by love, have borne your part
Where war's black ploughshare turns the bloody sand
And crops of hatred start —

For you and by your help, heroic band,
We swear by love and labour to make this
A lovelier, worthier land.

Nor shall we let the home-bred serpent hiss
Unscotched upon our hearth, if ever here
Our hope and fortune kiss.

The workers of the battered world draw near,
Scorning a foeman's name. The heart of Man
In every land is dear.

The Dead

HAIL and farewell to those who fought and died,
Not laughingly adventurous, nor pale
With idiot hatred, nor to fill the tale
Of racial selfishness and patriot pride,
But merely that their own souls rose and cried
Alarum when they heard the sudden wail
Of stricken freedom and along the gale
Saw her eternal banner quivering wide.

Farewell, high-hearted friends, for God is dead
If such as you can die and fare not well
—If when you fall your gallant spirit fail.
You are with us still, and can we be adread
Though hell gape, bloody-fanged and horrible?
Glory and hope of us who love you, Hail!

The Fugitive

HIS shatter'd Empire thunders to the ground:

 A myriad hearts peal laughter as it falls,
 While red flags flutter on its ruined walls
And living joy darts all the world around.
The imperial criminal, naked and uncrowned,
 Breathing a shuddering air of curses, crawls,
 Baffled and beaten, from his gorgeous halls,
While Vengeance halloos lapdog, cur and hound.

Behold the arrogant humbled, and rejoice

 The grasping hand holds naught but flying dust,
 And Envy meets the pitiless grin of Fate.
Take warning of your own heart's inward voice,
 Bid your own soul be humble and distrust
 The yelping promises of greed and hate.

The Dirge

January, 1918

OUT of the pregnant darkness, where from fire
To glimmering fire the watchword leaps,
The dirge floats up from those who build the pyre
High and still higher
That yet shall blaze across the verminous deeps.

*Farewell, O brother-heart,
Yet we shall not forget;
Though hand from hand must part,
Your hope is with us yet.
The clank of the swaggerer's sword
And clink of the grasper's gold
Are not so loud as the lover's word
In a thousand echoes rolled.*

The lords of the tottering order sit and plot,
With cunning courtesy haggling still:
The insistent chorus cannot be forgot —
Its words are shot
Like summoning rockets from the eastern hill.

*You, it was you who showed
How Murder made his pact
In busy Greed's abode,
Preparing for the act.
To save the fatherland
They bade your comrades die,
And full in their path you took your stand
To kill the patriot lie.*

Now, lest their flags and bags be lost in flame.
The desperate pair have summoned those
Whose love is moderate and whose life is tame
To quench in shame
The light that streams where wind of warning blows.

*The ranks of freedom swell,
The flag of love rolls out:
The efficient ranks of hell
Close up in deadly doubt.
Moulded in battle's mire,
The bullet found its mark;
A living spirit, winged with fire,*

Flares homeward from the dark.

The Peace Of God

THE seeking souls, by baleful fires made blind,
Torn by entrapping brambles, thirsty and mad,
Hear on the lonely waste the stealthy pad
And half-held breath of glaring beasts behind;
Then soft hands lead them where the weary find
A refuge from thought's hunting and are glad.
Why to their certain misery should they add?
They rest secure, to freedom's loss resigned.

So, in the bitter years when love and age
Sneered at the youth whose sturdy heart withheld
His hand from slaughter, till, in desperate plight,
He flung into the trampling equipage,
I have heard him mutter, as the music swelled,
“The peace of God is on me. They were right.”
