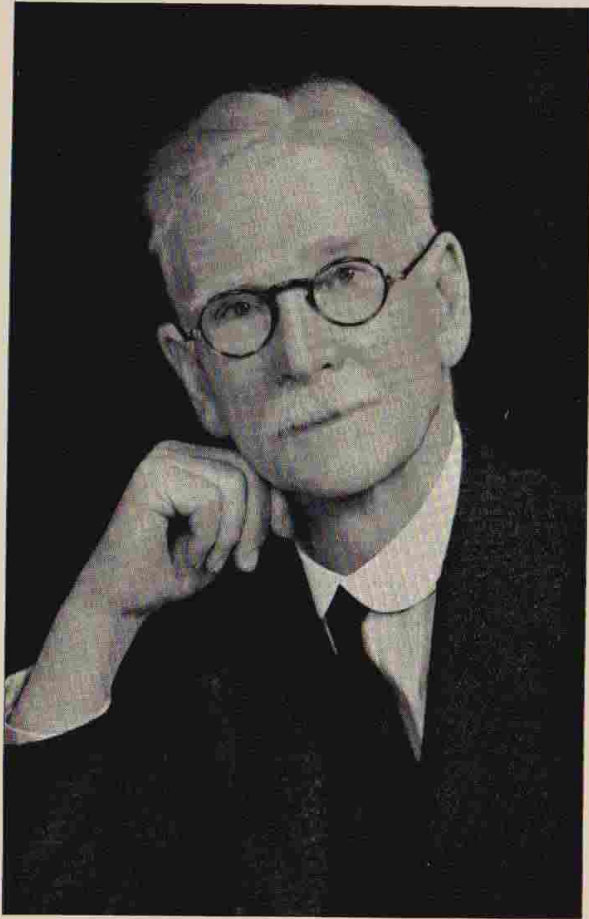




Dickinson-Monteath Studio

Bernard O'Dowd

THE POEMS OF BERNARD O'DOWD

COLLECTED EDITION

With an Introduction by
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POETRY MILITANT

(1909)

AN AUSTRALIAN PLEA FOR THE POETRY OF PURPOSE

It is hardly surprising that commercialism, the passport to physical prosperity, should be the prevalent ideal of an age, when, through the disintegration of class-rule, prosperity is for the first time in history possible for all; nor is it surprising that the masses, stupefied from time immemorial in the cavern of Pain, hereditary and inescapable Pain, should, when released at last a little, drink some madness from the unaccustomed sun, and follow, as they do to-day, Pleasure for Pleasure's sake, even over the precipice: nor, moreover, is it surprising that the vast majority of the people, educated, though it be but with a smattering, for the first time in history, should not yet to any great extent be partial to poetry, the final flower of the human intellect.

But one of the functions of a lover of literature in a community hypnotized by commercialism, and the guiding motif of whose leisure-life is "Pleasure for Pleasure's sake", is, when he can, to re-state with emphasis, fanatic emphasis if necessary, the claims of the intellectual and spiritual powers of the mind to due consideration. It seems therefore not inappropriate that one who holds the calling of the literary man sacred, should, since a due occasion has arisen, stress the note of the importance of that calling, examine the theories of artistic conduct practised by those who follow that calling, and try to summon from the wilderness where they wander, often unheard, often unconscious, those fitted to assume the robes and strike the high harp of that calling.

In the dislocations of a transition period, when the power of the theologian over the masses is waning, and the stars of other dogmatists, possibly more dangerous, because more superficially rational, are rising above the horizon, the function of the poet, as permeator of the masses with the high ideals communicated to and communicable by him, grows more important. It is mainly by him, for instance, I contend, that the discoveries of science and the contributions of philosophy are made emotionally digestible for the people. He too, moreover, is the most potent disinterested watchman for awakening the people to a sense of the wrongs they endure or inflict; and thus he is the Baptist of his epoch, preparing in its wilderness the Way of the Lord.

I should say now that I am speaking here of the creative poet, and not of the mere singer of word-tunes, the mere verbal tickler of jaded ears. The latter occupies an interesting enough subordinate position among the caterers of the minor pleasures of the world, but the creative poet is the only one that really matters as an enduring factor in progress.

I hold that the real poet must be an Answerer, as Whitman calls him, of the real questions of his age: that is to say, that he shall deal with those matters which are, in the truest sense, interesting, and in the noblest sense useful, to the people to whom he speaks. It is a heresy of the modern stylist that has done a lot of harm and deprived the people of guidance necessary for them, that subjects in which they are intensely interested, such as politics, religion, science, sex and social reform, are not usually fit subjects for poetic treatment. Is it any wonder that poetry is not read nowadays, when subjects that are the staple of the interesting mental life of practically everybody are ignored by so many of the most technically accomplished poets?

In the literature of the Church we frequently find the state of the Church on earth and its subsequent state when the scroll of matter shrivels, referred to as The

Church Militant and The Church Triumphant. I claim of poetry, too, that it has its stages, one while we are on our pilgrimage, and one when we have attained the goal, Eternal Beauty—that is to say, there is a Poetry Militant and a Poetry Triumphant. One complaint I have against the disciples of the “Art for Art’s sake” shibboleth, for instance, is that they demand the Triumphant stage without carrying out the duties of the Militant stage. We have indeed in a fighting age a little too much of the Poetry Triumphant, Poetry for Poetry’s sake, and not at all enough of Poetry Militant, the poetry that helps man to win the battles that constitute the days of his pilgrimage. Poetry Triumphant, Poetry for Poetry’s sake, both mean Poetry Absolute, and, in the age of the philosophy of the relativity of all things human, I need hardly say that there is no such thing as Poetry Absolute. Indeed, an important fallacy in the doctrine of “Art for Art’s sake” lies in this implication of the possibility on earth of Art Absolute, Poetry Absolute. What the upholders of the doctrine really mean, however, is that we should pursue Art for Past Art’s sake, pursue Poetry for Past Poetry’s sake; that we should examine the Art of the past, the Poetry of the past, glean from the forms which that Art and that Poetry found most apt for its expression a series of rules, apply those rules to all subsequent creations of the artistic or poetic imagination, and damn beyond appeal every creator brave enough, artistic enough, poetic enough to dare to express a new thought, or frame a new form. My reply to that is simply that I decline to allow the right of the infant Past to govern the growth of the adolescent Present and the adult Future.

You will thus see the relation between the doctrine of “Art for Art’s sake”, and what I subsequently refer to as the “Yoke of the Classical”, and will also understand why I call “Art for Art’s sake” a useful dogma for the student, the beginner in art and poetry, but not at all a necessary or even advisable doctrine for the artist or poet in the real work of his life.

It is Poetry Militant I preach, and, as far as I can, wish to practise, and when, at times—tempted mayhap by the sight of Australian Claude Lorraine picnic girls playing “drop the handkerchief” on a lush green meadow ringed by the fairy gold of the whispering wattle trees—I turn from the macadam to rest in a nook in a paddock, dainty with maidenhair and festooned with “supple-jack”, and attempt to lilt a fragment of the melodies of Poetry Triumphant, I have a very uneasy feeling that I am loafing and embarrassing the vanguard by an unwarrantable self-indulgence!

Poetry Militant has chief regard to the end in view, the furtherance of the best interests of the human race by means of the subtle artillery entrusted to it—that is to say, it denies that the Useful is forbidden entrance into Poetry; nay, it claims that Poetry without the Useful in it, disguised may be but there, is not in this stage of our race's progress poetry at all. But the doctrine of “Art for Art's sake” lingers so persistently in spite of the fiat of the moralists and the practice of the greater poets and artists, that one is compelled to examine it to see if after all there is a truth in it. I think that there is a truth in it at two points in the career of the artist, namely (1) in his school life when he is learning the methods adopted by practitioners of his art in the past, and (2) in the other world—if there indeed he has no longer any need to use Art to make this world better, and may accordingly without qualm of conscience pursue it for its own beautiful sake.

The earth-life of the artist has two stages, the school or apprentice stage, and the adult or master stage. This brochure is partly a protest against the undue intrusion of the disciplinary dogmas of the school into the adult work of the artist, and partly a call to Australian literary folk that it is time to leave school and get to work.

What do we do at school?

We learn five finger exercises, and woe to the pupil who digresses into the Marseillaise!

We chloroform a simple word into a predicate, or an attribute, or a participle, or a nominative absolute, and woe to the pupil who cries “Mumbo Jumbo”!

We comb the hairs of our mistress's eyebrow with the fourteen jewelled teeth of a sonnet, but woe to the pupil who glances reproachfully at the dead heron in her hat!

We chop the logs of yesteryear into regulation ballade lengths, and pile them before the throne of the Prince of Nowhere-in-Particular, but woe to the pupil who would dare suggest to a real prince, say, the reprieve of a condemned criminal in, say, a Ballade of the Hanged!

The laws of the schoolroom, necessary for the student, may be baneful, if dogmatically practised to the letter in real life. The work of the student is how to use tools; the work of real life is to use them, not for the sake of using them, but for the furtherance of life. In the schoolroom, form is our object and is consciously pursued, so that we may learn to use it automatically; but in real life, form consciously pursued produces but baby toys, “Teddy Bears”. The high seriousness rightly demanded of the true poet is hardly possible in writing beautiful poems that say nothing. Dead five-finger exercises teach the hand to play spontaneously, without thought of five-finger exercises, sonatas, and nocturnes, which are life. Do not let us, however, make the be-all and end-all of poetic life mere five-finger exercises! “Art for Art's sake”, that useful standard of the schoolroom, ignores utility, so that beauty of handling shall become automatic. But Parthenons that shelter, Madonnas that soothe, Aphrodites that inflame us to physical robustness, Macbeths that terrify the furtive ambitions from our souls, Miltonic Samsons that pull our Philistine pillars down, and Norman Lindsay leers that remind us so pitilessly of the fearful skeletons left by the Past in our own cupboards: these are no products of the slaves of the schoolroom lamp—they are for use!

One reason why I am raising this question of Poetry Militant is because (admitting, of course, a number of

important exceptions) I think that contemporary poetry is saying nothing in a multitude of beautiful words, phrases and forms. And while the poets are making of poetry a charming morass of ferny forms, mossy forms and fungoid forms, accessible, by the way, only to the very few, there is nothing solid in it to sustain any but the incorporeal wayfarer. The misdirected energies of too many modern verse-writers are being wasted in making crazy quilts out of pretty words; while a hungry and thirsty world, deprived of so many of its traditional nurses, is languishing for the help the poets can give it.

The poet is the true Permeator, the projector of cell-forming ideals into the protoplasmic future. He is a ferment who alters for the better the ordered, natural, inert sequences of things. He is a living catalyst in the intellectual laboratory, and does in a moment what in the regular order would take us an age to do. He is the necessary hurrier of the evolution process. Science and Ethics reveal the Brute Will of the world in operation, Poetry is the Idea that deflects that Will and rides it to new and better operation.

And at no time in the history of the world was the need for the Permeator poet, the projector of ideals, the Poet Militant, greater than in the present reconstruction of all things beneath the wand of Evolution theories, and in no place greater than in this virgin and unhandicapped land of social experiments, embryonic democracy, and the Coming Race, Australia!

Evolution has commanded the bones that have been parching in the valley for ages to come together again, to be knitted with sinews and clothed with flesh and a skin; but the poet is needed too, the poet who is the wind of God to breathe life into the limp bodies there! And he neglects his duty if he is merely content, in however faultless fashion, to sing of the glory of bones.

And Australia, besides her own building operations, her own routine housekeeping work, her own joy in the fact of existence, and her own caution to ensure the

continuance of that joy, has this big work for her poets to do, namely, to report, as Whitman would say, all things that have been and are elsewhere from an Australian point of view, both for her own benefit and guidance and for the benefit of the others.

The fact of evolution and the fact of Australia make Australian poets, if they will, essentially poets of the dawn—poets whose function is to chart the day and make it habitable—marching poets, working poets, poets for use, poets militant.

Some people tell you that the poet is functionless nowadays, that only in the dawn of the world had he a place and a message. It may be so, but in any case this is the dawn of a new world—a newer, stranger vista stretches before us, since Darwin's great message reached us, than opened before Ossians of the Pleistocene, or Homers of the thawing glacial epoch. All, all is being thrown, has to be thrown, into the crucible of re-valuation, customs, morals, religions, laws, institutions, classes, castes, politics, philosophies: all, for at that apocalyptic word, "Evolution", a new Jerusalem descended on the mental world, the old heavens and the old earth passed away, and it depends mostly, I contend, on the poet, the custodian of the innate prophetic wisdom of the world, the naturally sensitized plate for the reception of the intimations of the unseen Cosmos—it depends on him more than all whether a Millennium or a Pandemonium is to follow the pouring of the vial and the descent of the New City!

Do not imagine I intend to imply that this world-work of the poet is being or to be done by the poets who happen to publish their poetry in books. They are only a few, not always the best, of the poetic host silently, obscurely, maintaining its poetic attitude to all people and things, singing its song, uttering the Word that shines in the Darkness though the Darkness comprehend it not. Indeed publishing poets, by the fact of publication, show a trace of defect in their poetic constitutions, a trace of vanity as well as a trace of lack of

secreted in its mighty folds, appeared the Bhagavad Gita, the Song Celestial, that "Sermon on the Mount" of the Orient, perfect in form, jewelled in phrase of the purest poetical water, and yet a complete treatise on morality and duty, and a sublime justification of the ways of God to man.

When in the Italy of the city states men's interests were in Catholic theology, and, to bloodshed point, in bitter party politics, tempered by the tendency of the time to dream of ideal loves, of what did its great poet sing? Why, of hell, purgatory and heaven, Beatrice, Aristotle's philosophy suitably Bowdlerized, and curious astronomies, and of the Mr. Deakin of the period fusing in Purgatory, the Mr. Fisher assessing the unimproved value of the Elysian fields in Paradise, and Mr. Someone Else cooking in the cauldrons or lost in the forests of the Inferno, almost exactly where the partisans of Dante's particular political colour vehemently wanted them to be. In a word, Dante dealt in an interesting manner with matters absorbingly interesting to his period, and accordingly, being also a poet, he was the greatest poet of that age, so great that he is interesting yet.

Elizabethan England, interested in the great new worlds opened by the Renaissance and by Columbus, interested in magnificence, in spectacles, in the glories of England and of Elizabeth, gave us the spacious stage of Shakespeare, the Faery Queen of Spenser, and the lesser glories, each a star in its own right. But the gentleman with an axe walked abroad so frequently those days, as you remember, that even poets dared not write much of politics or of religion. Unfortunately, the example of Shakespeare and the others, forced on them by the stern necessities of the time, has been the chief argument for those who contend to-day that poetry is no place for either religion or politics, that they are hardly fit staple for poetry at all. Fortunately Milton didn't think so, or he could never have written the epic of that theology in which Puritan England was so in-

terested that it killed a king and built a commonwealth to commemorate its interest.

And so with Faust: philosophy, theology, science, mysticism, ethics, Hellenism—all, in fact, that the German Illumination stood for, all that awakening Germany was vitally interested in, are embodied in that great poem of her greatest poet.

I contend, therefore, that, as in the past the great poet has been the illuminating Answerer of the great and interesting questions of his day, whenever there were such great questions, or whenever any man dared to answer them, so must the poet of our age, to fill his part as a social artillerist, answer the great and really interesting questions of our day.

"Why should poetry be militant nowadays?" I hear some ask. Because, in the first place, this is an age of Revolt and of Reconstruction, because the Poet is the father and mother of wise rebellion, and because he, being in touch with the Infinite, the Permanent, is the most potent and far-seeing stimulator of reconstruction. He is Brahma the Creator and Siva the Destroyer in one, and this is not so much the Age of Vishnu the Preserver, as it is the age of Destroying Siva and Re-creating Brahma.

Partly through the readjustments necessary everywhere in religion, politics, ethics, as well as in thought generally, on account of the advent of evolution doctrines; partly on account of the spread of education and of a little justice to the masses, as a result of the world-movement of which the French Revolution and the Turkish revolution were symptoms; and partly on account of the failure of old ideals and teachers to guide, owing to the operation of the factors just mentioned: the world of thought, of conduct and of action is in a state of chaos, out of which man can, I contend, only be permanently led by his naturally endowed teacher, jurist, philosopher and theologian, the poet. For originally the poet is all these, and through all time, however the principle of the division of labour

may have affected his work, has potentially been all of these, besides being poet pure and simple. And when, for any reason, these fail in their functions, the race depends on the still surviving matrix of them all, the poetic quality or capacity, to evolve a new race, suited to the new conditions, a new race of teachers, jurists, philosophers and theologians. Indeed it is from a strong belief in the essential truth of this position that I hold two men, one of whom would be denied right to the name of poet by millions, and the other of whom would be denied that right almost unanimously, to be the two greatest poets of this age of the Evolution Dawn. Those two poets, Destroyers and Creators, are Walt Whitman and Frederick Nietzsche. If you want a third, I do not object to add the author of *Brand*; yea, if you like, and will forgive my want of logic, the sublime symphonist of the "Legend of the Ages"; and one who, by some strange miscarriage of the Earth-Spirit, was born a century before his due time, William Blake! But that is a digression!

Poetry should be militant nowadays because the call of the growing new world is to battle. Foes to the progress of the species are alert to-day, and subtly active, too, to a most dangerous extent. Democracy, the surely destined ruler of the near future, is upon us, an infant king, untaught as yet in the duties of kingship. Prosperity in his train, prosperity with glowing eyes, but deaf, deaf ears, beckons her myriads to callous revelry, faded garlands and suicide. Wealth accumulates, wastes, tyrannizes, corrupts, degrades, and worst of all, forces his grovelling gods into the altars of the cleaner divinities we once adored, substitutes his base commandments for the Decalogues our apathy repeals. Old castes may be disappearing, but coteries of the intellectually proud, the spiritually proud, the artistically proud, segregate themselves from the intellectually, spiritually, artistically hungry and thirsty masses of the people to whom they belong, and threaten to form a caste-system more subtly odious than ever,

where the prevailing characteristics shall not be the physical luxury and physical starvation of the previous epochs, but intellectual, artistic and spiritual starvation among the masses, and among the new castes intellectual, artistic and spiritual gluttony.

Why should poetry be militant nowadays? Look around you in your cities of vapid pleasures, and of eruptions of mob emotionalism, now for prize-fighting, now for anti-gambling, now for the religion of the God of war, now for the religion of the God of peace; where a myriad envies and what Carlyle called preternatural suspicion affect like a gangrene the body of the rising working classes; and where our fearful complacency tolerates the existence of the square miles of foul rookeries where the children that are to be our future nation are being devitalized, and where their mothers are living with wonderful courage their drab and painful lives! Look around you in your country districts, where intellect, lofty emotion, the vigour of youth, the promise of childhood—everything—are being sacrificed daily to the cult of the cow, the usury of the mortgagee, the lure of the bank-balance, the avarice of the eater of acres! Look around you at so many of your newspapers, the only universal guides and consciences of your people, yet framing their ideals of what is fitting and proper, in ethics as in politics, in taste and in culture, upon, not the highest that is in their writers, or even their owners, but upon the bad average of the biggest mob's envy, half-cooked sentimentalism and materialistic ignorance. So with too many of your preachers, your politicians, even with too many of the very few of them that know any better.

Everywhere it is the mob that rules, the rich mob, the poor mob, the bell-topped mob, the ragged mob, the rude mob, the cultured mob, but always the insensate, the complacent, the selfish, the unethical mob—and the mob is the danger-spot in Democracy's lungs! Surely, if ever there were a time when the poet should fight, the poet who is essentially one who dare face any

mob, whose greatest function is to turn a mob into a people, to exorcise the mob-spirit out of the people; surely, I say, if ever there were a time when poetry should be militant, relentlessly militant, it is now when, failing a remedy, Democracy may have to turn again to despotism for aid to rescue her from the soulless materialism and hysteric passions of the mob that afflict her!

My call in what I have said herein and elsewhere is to the poets hidden among the people, the young and appointed saviours of the people, to come out into the open with the other soldiers of reform, social and spiritual reform, and to play their parts, using the peculiar ordnance of their corps, to make this our country in every way fit to live in, worth dying for. I know they have technical power which any people's poets might envy, but I see evidences of lack of knowledge, of disinclination to do the hard preliminary work necessary for the poet's equipment, and of a tendency to waste their power on mere prettiness, mere payable poetry. They can do more than any to plant civic unselfishness, to encourage the "forward view", and to fan that zeal for nothing less than the best and most just which must burn in the people before they can fully earn the right to the root-and-branch social reforms necessary enough; and they can do more than even the clergy, I think, if they have a mind, to keep burning that love in the hearts of the people without which the harvest of the gospel of social reform would be choked with strife, hate, envy and all uncharitableness. Indeed, to the silent influence of good poetry for permanent good there are absolutely no bounds. It is the true nation-maker; yea, mayhap, at the Last Day the nations shall be judged by the poets they have produced!

And I do not call for the mere sake of calling, but because Australia has specific work for them to do, namely, to take their sides for or against the causes of Progress or Inertia, according to their knowledge; to build soundly every storey of this great Australia or

to shatter what is built and erect more wisely, by their poetry; to make of poetry a renewing social force or a preserving social force, the generator of the new Dynamic, or the reservoir of the old Inertia, which religion was once in turns in most countries, but can no longer be, which war and conquest were often in the awful past, but which, let us hope, they need no longer be.

To answer my call, which, after all, is but the voicing of the clear call of our age and country, will mean self-sacrifice, perhaps poverty, perhaps obloquy, certainly loneliness, misunderstandings, discomfort, hard work, ingratitude, and little or no visible result, perhaps, in a lifetime. But in the halls of the Spirit, too, the same call is being made, and they of the Spirit shall hear it, and it is the law of the Spirit that, reward or no reward, he who hears its call is by the fact of hearing put on his honour to answer it. And the disciples of the Spirit must ungrudgingly leave the pleasant studios where the glories of Form seem a visible translation of the harmony of the spheres, the studios where they had been sent to school, to see, at the beginning of their pilgrimage, adumbrations of the perfect forms that shall welcome them at its triumphant ending. Yea, they must leave those studios for the Pilgrimage Militant, leave all, friends, home, dear delights, dear beliefs, leave all and follow—the Spirit.

I cannot better conclude this plea for the formative poet, and for Poetry Militant, than by quoting a passage, which, but for my own deficiencies, would summarize my case, from Walt Whitman's "The Answerer":

The words of the true poems give you more than poems,
They give you to form for yourself poems, religions,
politics, war, peace, behaviour, histories, essays,
daily life, and everything else,
They balance ranks, colours, races, creeds, and the
sexes,

They do not seek beauty, they are sought,
Forever touching them, or close upon them follows
beauty, longing, fain, love-sick.

They prepare for death, yet are they not the finish, but
rather the outset;
They bring none to his or her terminus, or to be content
and full;
Whom they take, they take into space, to behold the
birth of stars, to learn one of the meanings,
To launch off with absolute faith, to sweep through the
ceaseless rings, and never be quiet again.

DAWNWARD?

“WITHOUT EDIFICES OR RULES OR ANY ARGUMENT
THE INSTITUTION OF THE DEAR LOVE OF COMRADES.”

To
YOUNG DEMOCRACY

AUSTRALIA

*Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?
Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race?
Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?*

*The cenotaphs of species dead elsewhere
That in your limits leap and swim and fly,
Or trail uncanny harp-strings from your trees,
Mix omens with the auguries that dare
To plant the Cross upon your forehead sky,
A virgin helpmate Ocean at your knees.*

DAWNWARD?

THAT reddish veil which o'er the face
Of night-hag East is drawn
Flames new disaster for the race?
Or can it be the Dawn?

Those mutterings horizonward
What destinies are there?
Do organed Hopes triumphant chord,
Or thunders roar "Despair"?

What gifts are those the clouds release
As far ahead they scud?
Are they the genial rains of Peace,
Or deluges of blood?

* * *

Our motley masses struggle slow
'Mid wilderness, through sands;
Our flags with fetish watchwords glow
Above the gloomy bands.

Three watchwords! Will they glorify,
Or weave us fates more stark?
Lead downward from this lowering sky,
Or downward to the dark?

Will "Freedom!" over Athens' scrolls
Our greater glory carve?
Or prove mere choice to sell our souls
To Mammon or—to starve?

Content with Freedom's forms, shall we
Real tyranny caress,
Through sybaritic apathy
Or mad forgetfulness?

"Equality!" Will each a king
Become, a seer, a sage?
Or will it ruthless all men fling
In cosmic helotage?

Will crucibles, wherein, tho' great
With primal vice, we pour
Equalities, precipitate
Napoleons—as before?

"Fraternity!" Will black and white
As brothers mingle, or,
Surcharged with lust of carnage, plight
The bloody troths of war?

While prudent churches neutral watch
The conflict of the twain,
Will Wealth his brother Want despatch,
An everlasting Cain?

* * *

While heedless on our masses move,
Their sad-eyed mystics see
On rushing Cloudland's stage above
Dark hints of what may be.

Palladium and Shibboleth
Pose on each misty dome:
Red Crisis' tableaux blotch with death
Smug Order's monochrome.

Race-ogres here on vulture-cloud,
And there race-fathers hie;
And Then and Now and Will-Be crowd
The pantomimic sky.

Prophetic 'mid the whirlwind flow
These cryptic figures steal:
Are they to be for further woe,
Or may they be for weal?

Will turbaned Shem, revived, through sweet
White women filtered long,
With sober scowl triumphant meet
The drunken Western throng?

Will Ham, acquit of servile strain,
Of art and craft compact,
A loathing Europe's pallor stain—
Democracy in *fact*?

Will Japhet still his brothers lead
Unto the shambled tryst,
With tentacles of trading greed
And drivel of his Christ?

Will Gog, awaked, his Huns outpour
At empire-breaking time,
To sluice away our fame and lore,
Our features and—our crime?

* * *

Scrolls, written "Debt", and "Wanton War",
And "Sterile Love", flare high;
Are these our *Mene! Mene!* or
Illusions of the sky?

"Majority!" Divorced from wise,
Sad Conscience, will he prowl
Through tender, human heresies
With Torquemadan scowl?

And "Comfort!" Will her siren song
To narcotizing shades
Seduce our veterans, while Wrong
Our weaker frontiers raids?

Will "Sport" educe a virile pith?
Our pulses teach to throb?
Or weary earth re-saddle with
A Nika-riot mob?

Will centre-seeking "Culture" hold
Tangential Passion's bolt?
Yield orbits of an Age of Gold,
Or comets of Revolt?

* * *

Yet, foodless oft and homeless, we
Not hopeless, loveless, plod—
Whither? To Failure's midnight sea
Or dawnward? Ay, to God?

THE CAMP-FIRES OF THE LOST

Who will may see, on plains around,
By scanty rivers crossed,
Where only weedy growths abound,
The camp-fires of the Lost.

To feed the flame, the twigs and cones
From dying Hopes we tear;
And wolfish Angers gnaw the bones
Of dead Ideals there.

To drown your glory in the dark,
O children of the Light!
The frail, the crushed, the fell, the stark
Deploy their hosts to-night.

Anon a stern-lipped watcher flings
Remorseless to the flame
The effigies of sacred things
Or brie-a-brac of Fame.

Grim scouts o'erleap your city's walls,
Cast potions in your wells,
With leprous patches taint your halls,
And mine your citadels.

Your timid treasurers await
The onset of our need:
The myriad tramp his lonely hate
Is whetting on his greed.

Your serfs grimacing flout your cries
Of "honour", "law", and "trust",
Your lily women recognize
The prowling lips of lust.

Your veil of Art, by free winds tossed,
Is rending as you look—
Your Art—which claimed to love the Lost,
And jeered them, and forsook.

Your brutal Science sends a corps
Of derelicts to train
With formulas of lethal lore
Our nascent rebel brain:

And scavengers of learning there,
And outcast lords of rhyme,
Compose us anthems of despair
And polyglots of crime:

And godless phalanxes assist
Our priesthood celebrate
A diabolic eucharist
With chalices of hate.

Your system's ripened fruits appear
In psychopath and sot:
The tiger women wait you here
You soiled and left to rot.