

# THEY KISSED THE FLAG

When it became known, late at night, that the first British expeditionary force had sailed, Belgian men and women in — asked the British consul to show them the British flag. When this was done, they filed past, till early morn, kissing it.—*London Daily Telegraph*.

NIGHT, and the stars of night, afar in their ancient splendor,  
Cold and serene look down on earth with its passing turmoils,  
So have they gazed unmoved while kingdoms crumbled to ruin,  
And, in the halls of kings, the slinking jackal prowling  
Finds but the drifting sands, and the black bat's ghostly pinions,  
Winds of the sunny south are breathing of purpling grape vines  
Drooping at drowsy noon anear to the sea's blue gleaming.  
Little those vagrant winds, that flutter the flags uplifted,  
Know of the anxious souls who wake through the long night hours,  
Dreading the coming day that brings the proud foe still nearer.  
Restless they walk the streets and mutter with white lips trembling—  
"What will the morrow bring and where is our strength to meet it?  
Under their iron heels the feet of the Hun-like foemen  
Trample our hapless land, and leave but a smoking shambles.  
Where shall we look for aid? Will Britain in just wrath rising  
Help us avenge our wrongs, and, striking the pow'r crazed eagle,  
Drag from his cruel claws our bleeding and helpless country?  
How long! O God, how long! We wait while our hopes grow fainter,  
Watching through darkest night for help like a star to beacon."

Suddenly came a thrill: then sounds of a mighty cheering,  
Wild huzzahing that broke because of the strangled sobbing.  
"Britain has put to sea—her thousands of gallant soldiers  
Hurry to take their stand beside our sons and our brothers.  
Nobly they kept the faith; their honor is not for barter:  
Theirs is the will to dare, and theirs is the power to do.  
Show us the British flag, the flag of our noble ally."

Then from the balcony, the British consul full proudly  
Lowered the silken folds in reach of the hands uplifted.  
Many the lips that pressed the flag with its triple crosses,  
Many the tears that fell in benison on its colors.  
All the long night was heard the sound of succeeding footsteps,  
Youth and manhood and age they came to honor the standard—  
Mothers lifting their babes, that tiny fingers might touch it.  
"This is the flag," they cried, "that drives from our throats the strangling  
Fear, that there is for us that fate of all fates the saddest,  
Crushed by brute force to live, a people without a country,  
Bowing shamed, sullen brows before the insolent victor.  
God, we thank Thee, that now our day-star of hope is rising."

Pale stars faded and fled before the breeze of the morning;  
Grey dawn grew to amber, then glowed to a rose whose glory  
Gave to the sentient soul the pain of too great a beauty.  
Peace seemed to spread her wings in healing over the people.  
Then, with uplifted brows, renewed hope lighting their faces,  
Quietly home they moved, in patience to wait the future.