

BRITANNIA VICTRIX

(By Robert Bridges, in the 'Times', London).

Careless wast thou in thy pride,
Queen of seas and countries wide,
Glorying on thy peaceful throne:—
Can thy love thy sins atone?
What shall dreams of glory serve,
If thy sloth thy doom deserve,
When the strong relentless foe
Storm thy gates to lay the low?

Careless, ah! he saw thee leap
Mighty from thy startled sleep,
Heard afar thy challenge ring:
'Twas the world's awakening.

Welcome to thy children all
Rallying to thee without call
Oversea; the sportive sons
From thy vast dominions!
Stern in onset or defence,
Terrible in their confidence.

Dauntless wast thou, fair goddess,
Neath the cloud of thy distress;
First and mirthful wast thou seen
In thy toil and in thy teen;
While the nations looked to thee,
Spent in world-wide agony.

Oft, throughout that long ordeal
Dark with horror-stricken duty,
Nature on thy heart would steal
Beckoning thee with heavenly beauty,
Heightening ever on thine isle
All her seasons' tranquil smile;
Till thy soul anew converted,
Roaming o'er the fields deserted
By thy sorrow sanctified,
Found a place wherein to hide.

Soon fresh beauty lit thy face,
Then thou stood'st in Heaven's high grace:—
Sudden in air on land and sea
Swell'd the voice of victory.

Now when jubilant bells resound
And thy sons come laurel crown'd,
After all thy tears of woe
Thou no longer canst forego,
Now thy tears are loos'd to flow.

Land, dear land, whose sea-built shore
Nurseth warriors evermore,
Land, whence Freedom far and lone
Round the earth her speech has thrown
Like a planet's luminous zone,—
In thy strength and calm defiance
Hold mankind in love's alliance.

Beauteous art thou, but the foes



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Of thy beauty are not those
Who lie tangled and dismay'd:
Fearless one, be yet afraid
Lest thyself, thyself condemn
In the wrong that ruin'd them.

God, who chose thee and unpraised
'Mong the folk, (His name be praised!)
Proved thee then by chastisement
Worthy of His high intent,
Who, because thou could'st endure,
Saved thee free and purged thee pure,
Won thee thus His grace to win,
For thy love forgave thy sin,
For thy truth forgave thy pride,
Queen of seas and countries wide,—
He who led thee still will guide.

Hark! thy sons, those spirits fresh
Dearly housed in dazzling flesh,
Thy full brightening buds of strength,
Ere their day had any length
Crush'd, and fallen in torment sorest,
Hark! the sons whom thou deplorest
Call;—I hear one call; he saith:
'Mother, weep not for my death!
'Twas to guard our home from hell,
'Twas to make thy joy I fell
Praising God, and all is well.
What if now thy heart should quail
And in peace our victory fail!
If low greed in guise of right
Rout and rive thy gather'd might,
And thy power mankind to save
Fall and perish on our grave!
On my grave, whose legend be
Fought with the brave and joyfully
Died in faith of victory.
Follow on the way we won!
Thou hast found, not lost thy son.