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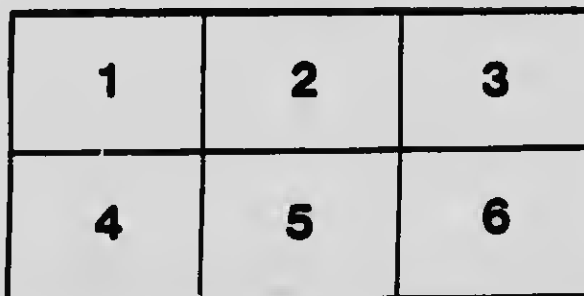
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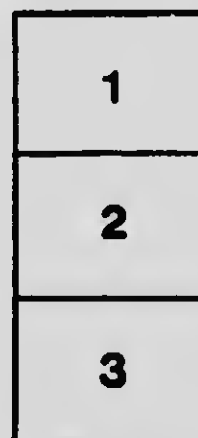
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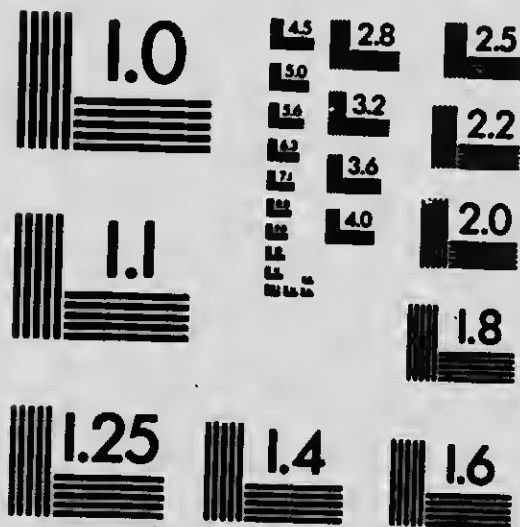
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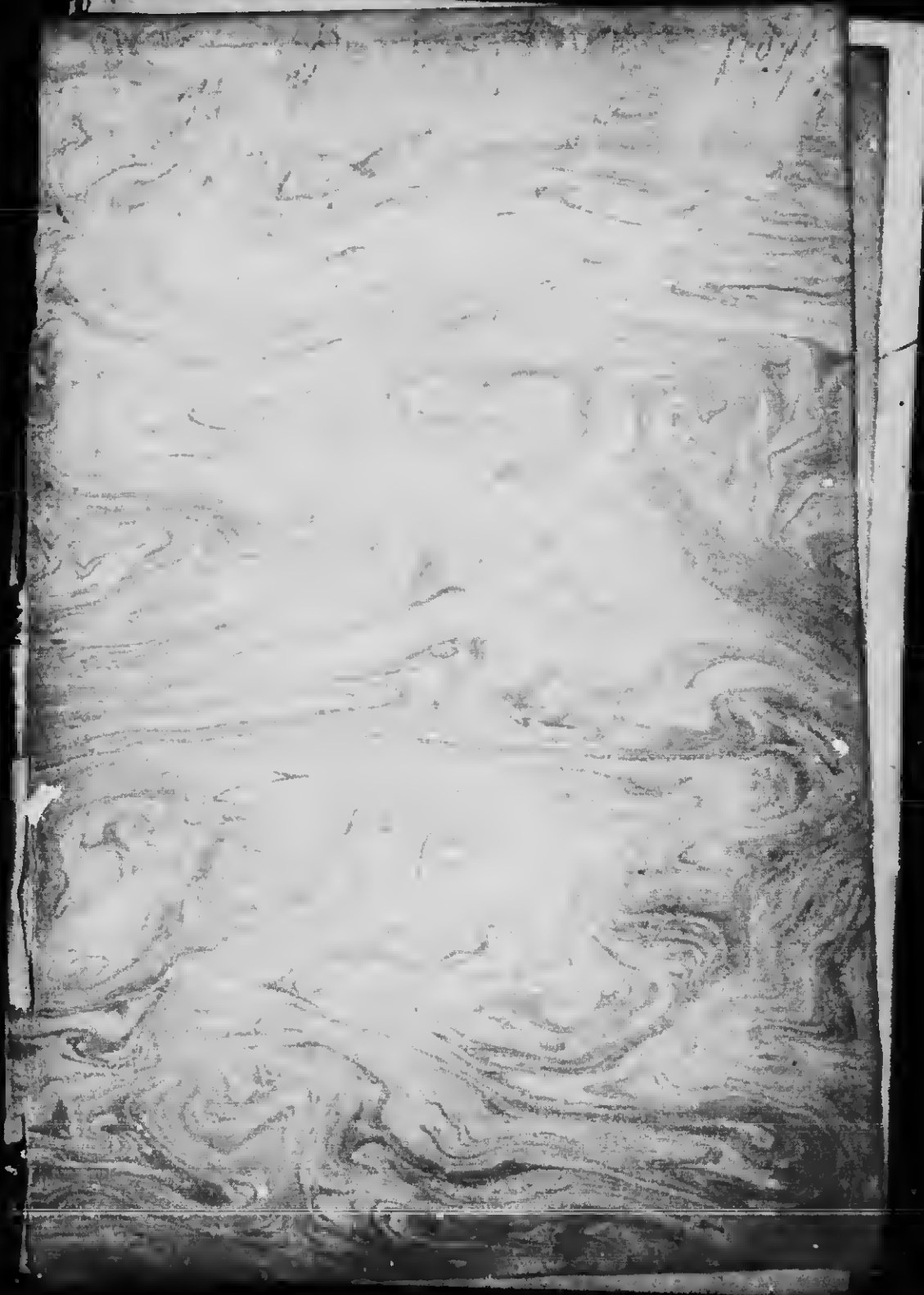
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**THE DAGONET AND
OTHER POEMS**

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
PRESS

THE DAGONET

AND OTHER POEMS

CONTAINING

THE DAGONET BALLADS

THE BALLADS OF BABYLON

THE LIFEBOAT AND OTHER POEMS

BY

GEORGE R. SIMS



TORONTO

THE MUSSON BOOK CO., LIMITED

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THE GILBERT AND SUTHER FORMS

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GEORGE R. SIMS

TORONTO

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THE DAGONET BALLADS

TOLD TO THE MISSIONARY.

Just look 'ee here, Mr Preacher, you're a-
goin' a bit too fur;

There isn't the man as is livin' as I'd let say
a word agen her.

She's a rum-lookin' bitch, that I own to, and
there *is* a fierce look in her eyes,

But if any cove sez as she's vicious, I sez in
his teeth, he lies.

Soh! gently, old 'ooman; come here now,
and set by my side on the bed;

I wonder who'll have yer, my beauty, when
him as you're all to 's dead!

'There, stow your perlayer a minit; I knows
as my end is nigh;

Is a cove to turn round on his dog, like, just
'cos he's goin' to die?

2 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Oh, of course, I was sartin you'd say it. It's
allus the same with you,
Give it us straight now, guv'nor,—what would
you have me do?
Think of my soul? I do, sir. Think of
my Saviour?—Right!
Don't be afeard of the bitch, sir; *she's* not
a-goin' to bite.
Tell me about my Saviour—tell me that tale
agen,
How he prayed for the coves as killed Him,
and died for the worst of men.
It's a tale as I always liked, sir; and, bound
for the 'ternal shore,
It thinks it aloud to myself, sir, and I likes it
more and more.
I've thumbed it out in the Bible, and I know
it now by heart,
And it's put like steam in my boiler, and made
me ready to start.
I ain't not afeard to die now; I've been a bit
bad in my day,
But I know when I knocks at them portals
there's One as won't say me nay.

TOLD TO THE MISSIONARY 3

And it's thinkin' about that story, and all as
He did for us,

As makes me so fond o' my dawg, sir, especially
now I'm wus;

For a-savin' o' folke who'd kill us is a beauti-
ful act, the which

I never heard tell on o' no one, 'cept o' Him
and o' that there bitch.

Yes, you may open yer eyes, sir—but I say by
the Lord it's true!

I ha' told the story often; sit 'e down, while I
tell it to you.

Dang this 'ere coughin', it stōps me—it's a cold
I caught last year,

As has tumbled my ninepins over, and lef me
a-dyin' here.

I was out on the drunk and caught it—lor,
what a cuss is drink!—

But there, when a cove's as I am, it don't do
him good to think.

I must cut it yer short, I reckon, for whenever
I tries to speak

I feels like a bloomin' babby—I gets so infernal
weak.

4 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"Twas five years ago come Chrismus, maybe
you remember the row,

There was scares about hydriphoby—same as
there be just now;

And the bobbies came down on us costers—
came in a reggerlar wax,

And them as 'ud got no licence was summerned
to pay the tax.

But I had a friend among 'em, and he come
in a friendly way,

And he sez, "You must settle your dawg, Bill,
unless you've a mind to pay."

The missus was dyin' wi' fever—I'd made a
mistake in my pitch,

I couldn't afford to keep her, so I sez, "I'll
drownd the bitch!"

I wasn't a-goin' to *loss* her, I warn't such a
brute you bet,

As to leave her to die by inches o' hunger, and
cold and wet;

I never said now't to the missus—we both on
us liked her well—

But I takes her the follerin' Sunday down to
the Grand Canell.

TOLD TO THE MISSIONARY 5

I gets her tight by the collar—the Lord forgive
my sin!

And, kneelin' down on the towpath, I ducks
the poor beast in.

She gave just a sudden whine like, then a look
come into her eyes

As 'ull last for ever in mine, sir, up to the day
I dies.

And a chill came over my heart then, and
thinkin' I heard her moan,

I held her below the water, beating her skull
with a stone.

You can see the mark of it now, sir—that place
on the top of 'er 'ed—

And sudden she ceased to struggle, and I
fancied as she was dead.

I shall never know how it happened, but goin'
to loose my hold,

My knees slipped over the towpath, and into
the stream I rolled;

Down like a log I went, sir, and my eyes were
filled with mud,

And the water was tinged above me with a
murdered creeter's blood.

6 THE DAGONET BALLADS

I gave myself up for lost then, and I cursed in
my wild despair,

And sudden I rose to the surfis, and a su'thing
grabbed my hair—

Grabbed at my hair, and loosed it, and grabbed
me agin by the throat,

And *she* was a-holdin' my 'ed up, and somehow
I kep' afloat.

I can't tell yer 'ow she done it, for I never
know'd no more,

Till somebody seized my collar, and giv' me a
lug a shore;

And my head was queer and dizzy, but I see
as the bitch was weak,

And she lay on her side a-pantin', waitin' for
me to speak.

What did I do with *her*, eh? You'd a hardly
need to ax,

But I sold my barrer a Monday, an' paid the
bloomin' tax.

That's right, Mr Preacher, pat her—you ain't
not afeard on her now!—

Dang this here tellin' o' stories—Look at the
muck on my brow!

TOLD TO THE MISSIONARY 7

I'm weaker, an' weaker, an' weaker; I fancy
the end ain't fur,

But you know why here on my deathbed I
think o' the Lord and her.

And He who by men's hands tortured uttered
that prayer divine,

'Ull pardon me linkin' Him like with a dawg
as forgave like mine.

When the Lord in His mercy calls me to my
last eternal pitch,

I know as you'll treat her kindly—promise to
take my bitch!

IN THE WORKHOUSE

CHRISTMAS DAY

It is Christmas Day in the Workhouse,
And the cold bare walls are bright
With garlands of green and holly,
And the place is a pleasant sight :
For with clean-washed hands and faces
In a long and hungry line
The paupers sit at the tables,
For this is the hour they dine.

And the guardians and their ladies,
Although the wind is east,
Have come in their furs and wrappers,
To watch their charges feast :
To smile and be condescending,
Put pudding on pauper plates,
To be hosts at the workhouse banquet
They've paid for—with the rates.

IN THE WORKHOUSE

9

Oh, the paupers are meek and lowly
With their "Thank'ee kindly, mum's"
So long as they fill their stomachs,
What matter it whence it comes?
But one of the old men mutters,
And pushes his plate aside :
"Great God !" he cries ; "but it chokes me !
For this is the day *she* died."

The guardians gazed in horror,
The master's face went white ;
"Did a pauper refuse their pudding ?"
"Could their ears believe aright ?"
Then the ladies clutched their husbands,
Thinking the man would die,
Struck by a bolt, or something,
By the outraged One on high.

But the pauper sat for a moment,
Then rose 'mid a silence grim,
For the others had ceased to chatter
And trembled in every limb.
He looked at the guardians' ladies,
Then, eyeing their lords, he said,
"I eat not the food of villains
Whose hands are foul and red :

10 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"Whose victims cry for vengeance
From their dank, unhallowed graves."

"He's drunk!" said the workhouse master.

"Or else he's mad, and raves."

"Not drunk or mad," cried the pauper,

"But only a hunted beast,

Who, torn by the hounds and mangled,

Declines the vulture's feast.

"I care not a curse for the guardians,

And I won't be dragged away."

Just let me have the fit out,

It's only on Christmas Day

That the black past comes to goad me,

And prey on my burning brain;

I'll tell you the rest in a whisper,—

I swear I won't shout again.

"Keep your hands off me, curse you!

Hear me right out to the end.

You come here to see how paupers

The season of Christmas spend.

You come here to watch us feeding,

As they watch the captured beast.

Hear why a penniless pauper

Spits on your paltry feast.

IN THE WORKHOUSE

11

“Do you think I will take your bounty,
And let you smile and think
You’re doing a noble action
With the parish’s meat and drink?
Where is my wife, you traitors—
The poor old wife you slew?
Yes, by the God above us,
My Nance was killed by you!

“Last winter my wife lay dying,
Starved in a filthy den;
I had never been to the parish,—
I came to the parish then.
I swallowed my pride in coming,
For, ere the ruin came,
I held up my head as a trader,
And I bore a spotless name.

“I came to the parish, craving
Bread for a starving wife,
Bread for the woman who’d loved me
Through fifty years of life;
And what do you think they told me,
Mocking my awful grief?
That ‘the House’ was open to us,
But they wouldn’t give ‘out relief.’

12 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"I slunk to the filthy alley—

'Twas a cold, raw Christmas eve—

And the bakers' shops were open,

Tempting a man to thieve ;

But I clenched my fists together,

Holding my head awry,

So I came to her empty-handed,

And mournfully told her why.

"Then I told her 'the House' was open ;

She had heard of the ways of *that*,

For her bloodless cheeks went crimson,

And up in her rags she sat,

Crying, 'Bide the Christmas here, John,

We've never had one apart ;

I think I can bear the hunger,—

The other would break my heart.'

"All through that eve I watched her,

Holding her hand in mine,

Praying the Lord, and weeping

Till my lips were salt as brine.

I asked her once if she hungered,

And as she answered 'No,'

The moon shone in at the window

Set in a wreath of snow.

IN THE WORKHOUSE 13

"Then the room was bathed in glory,
And I saw in my darling's eyes
The far-away look of wonder
That comes when the spirit flies ;
And her lips were parched and parted,
And her reason came and went,
For she raved of our home in Devon,
Where our happiest years were spent.

"And the accents, long forgotten,
Came back to the tongue once more,
For she talked like the country lassie
I woo'd by the Devon shore.
Then she rose to her feet and trembled,
And fell on the rags and moaned,
And, 'Give me a crust—I'm famished—
For the love of God!' she groaned.

"I rushed from the room like a madman
And flew to the workhouse gate,
Crying, 'Food for a dying woman !'
And the answer came, 'Too late.'
They drove me away with curses ;
Then I fought with a dog in the street,
And tore from the mongrel's clutches
A crust he was trying to eat.

14 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"Back, through the filthy by-lanes !

Back, through the trampled slush !

Up to the crazy garret,

Wrapped in an awful hush.

My heart sank down at the threshold,

And I paused with a sudden thrill,

For there in the silv'ry moonlight

My Nance lay, cold and still.

"Up to the blackened ceiling

The sunken eyes were cast—

I knew on those lips all bloodless

My name had been the last ;

She'd called for her absent husband—

O God ! had I but known !—

Had called in vain, and in anguish

Had died in that den—*alone*.

"Yes, there, in a land of plenty,

Lay a loving woman dead,

Cruelly starved and murdered

For a loaf of the parish bread.

At yonder gate, last Christmas,

I craved for a human life.

You, who would feast us paupers,

What of my murdered wife ?

“There, get ye gone to your dinners :

Don't mind me in the least ;

Think of the happy paupers

Eating your Christmas feast ;

And when you recount their blessings

In your smug parochial way,

Say what you did for *me*, too,

Only last Christmas Day.”

THE LEVEL CROSSING

THE eight o'clock up's just gone, sir—the
Lunnon express, you mean?

There ain't not another as stops here, not till
the nine-fifteen.

Got any luggage a-comin'?—Oh, only been
here for the day.

Yes, it's a quietish village; never was over-gay.
We're glad of a stranger sometimes, and a bit
of the Lunnon news;

It's lonely up here at the station, and easy to
get the blues.

For I'm on till the early morning; and many
and many a night.

There's never a human being as comes to bless
my sight.

For the last of the trains as stops here is the
parly at 10 P.M.,

And then I'm alone with my thoughts like, and
I ain't always fond o' them.

THE LEVEL CROSSING 17

Out yonder's a level crossing, and it's part o'
my work, you know,

To watch here at night for the waggon a-
travellin' to and fro.

Been any accidents? Bless you! we're a boon
to the local Press;

The Company has me stop here just to try for
to make 'em less.

Why, only las. year a farmer—but haven't you
heard the tale

How old Farmer Burton o' Birley was killed
by the Limited Mail?

I thought as you must ha' heard it, for it made
a regular fuss,

And they held an inquiry on it, and they laid
the blame on us.

We ought to ha' seen and ha' warned him,
so the chaps on the paper said;

But we none of us knew as he'd got there,
not till we see him dead.

They brought it in accidental, the jury as tried
the case;

But it was no accident neither, though it's rather
a likely place.

18 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Come and sit down in my shanty, you've nearly
an hour to wait,
If you care for the rest I can tell you the story
of Burton's fate.

Never mind how I know it—there's plenty o'
folks beside

As knows about Master Burton, and why he
came here and died ;

For the women ha' talked it over, and when-
ever that comes about,

Wherever there's secrets hidden, the women 'll
hunt 'em out.

They wagged their heads when he married
poor penniless Mercy Leigh

Right on the top of her hearin' as her lover
was drowned at sea.

Lord, how the women chattered—scandalous
things they said !

Hintin' she wanted a husband to hide her sin
with the dead !

This Mercy Leigh was the daughter of decentish
honest folks,

And Burton had made her an offer, but she
treated his words as jokes,

THE LEVEL CROSSING 19

For Mercy was barely twenty, and Burton
was sixty-two ;

He'd made a bit at the farmin,' and was
counted as well to do ;

He made it a joke himself like, his love for
"the pretty child,"

And if anyone chaffed him about it, that's what
he said, and smiled ;

But under his broad thick waistcoat, right in
his kind old heart,

I know as her nonsense pained him, though he
took it in right good part.

It was pretty well known in the village that
Mercy had set her cap

At the son of old Barnes, the builder, a dare-
devil sailor chap ;

And when he was off his cruises, and home for
a week or so,

You'd meet him and Mercy together wherever
you'd chance to go.

And the last time they parted he told her—
that's what the gossips say—

That he reckoned, with luck and weather, he'd
be but a month-away,

20 THE DAGONET BALLADS

And when he came back he'd wed her—he
pledged her his solemn word;—
He'd perished at sea with his vessel—that was
the next we heard.

Now, the very next day this Mercy was seen,
with a long white face,
A-makin' for Chumleigh Meadows—that was
old Burton's place—

And one of his people told me as she stayed
there half the day,

And they heard her a-cryin' and sobbin', and
moanin' her heart away.

But when they came out the farmer had gotten
her hand gripped tight,

And he kissed her, and said, "God bless you!
I'll speak to your folks to-night."

It was known on the morrow through Birley
that Mercy had promised to wed

The farmer of Chumleigh Meadows—but we
noticed her eyes were red.

'Twas plain as her heart was buried away in the
distant sea,

For I saw her the weddin' mornin', and her
looks had a tale for me.

THE LEVEL CROSSING 21

But she went through the service bravely, and
the farmer's big brown face

Was bright with his love for Mercy, though he
stood in a dead man's place.

I think they was happy at first, too, for he
worshipped the ground she trod,

And went here and there like a sheep-dog,
obeyin' her every nod.

Yet he'd given his name and honour to a woman
who'd told him—well,

What seldom to one who'd wed her a woman
has dared to tell.

They were married six months and over, when,
all of a sudden, flew

News through the streets of Birley, as nobody
thought was true,—

That Barnes had escaped the shipwreck, and
was back from a lengthened trip;

He'd been rescued and carried to Melbourne
aboard of a sailin' ship.

She heard it first at the station—I shall never
forget her cry.

We carried her into this room here—I thought
she was like to die;

22 THE DAGONET BALLADS

But she got all right in a minit, and, takin' her
 husband's arm,
She walked like a tipsey woman back thro' the
 fields to the farm.

In less than a month from that, sir, old Burton
 lay here dead ;
Here, at this level crossing—"Accident," so
 they said.

But I know, for the woman told me who'd
 seen her before the 'quest,
That for many a night he'd murmur, and talk
 in his troubled rest ;
And he'd wake in the night, and tell her, if it
 chanced that he should die,
That the hand of God would have freed her
 for a higher and holier tie.
And the eve as it happened he kissed her, with
 tears in his eyes, and said,
"Mercy, my darling! remember the *reason*
 that we were wed."

When he left her that night he told her he'd a
 lawyer to see in town.
He was crossing there for the platform when
 the engine struck him down.

THE LEVEL CROSSING 23

That's how the jury got it, but *I* know a thing
or two ;

And I say that night when he kissed her, he
knew what he meant to do ;

For his will was made, and it told her to marry
the sailor chap

If it pleased the Almighty to take him—accident
too, mayhap ?

She went away from the village, and the farm
and the house were sold,

And she'd married young Barnes ere her mourn-
ing was barely a fortnight old.

A cold-blooded thing to do, sir?—Not a bit of
it. She was right ;

For she knew what was wearing his heart out
when he went to his death that night.

He laid down his life that a father, cast up from
the jaws of the sea,

Might hallow before God's altar the mother of
one to be.

It was just a month to the day, sir, since Burton
was found here dead,

That the baby was born to Mercy.—Why,
bless us ! the lights are red !

24 THE DAGONET BALLADS

I must run to the box and change 'em. What
does that signal mean?

Why, that I must be saying good-night, sir, for
here is the nine-fifteen.

What
for

IN A CELLAR IN SOHO

Nor a word ! not a word, Marguerite !
It's the step of the priest on the stairs.
Hark ! he comes with his soft-falling feet,
Just to trap me, the wretch, unawares.
Put your hand on my mouth if I speak,
If I breathe but a word of the past ;
I can tell the old fox by his creak ;
Stand your back to the door—make it fast !

'Tis not he ! Now I breathe ! Give me air,
For I choke in this horrible stench ;
Let the hunted beast die in his lair
Like a beast that is human, and French.
Fling the door on its hinges, I say,
And keep back the walls, lest they crush
And encompass and mangle their prey,
For the fever consumes me—Hark ! hush !

26 THE DAGONET BALLADS

All my brain is aflame, and it reels,
And runs back to that terrible time,
And I know not whose figure 'tis kneels,
Or whose lips breathe the words of my clime.
Is it thou, O my love ! that I left
Dead and cold on the blood-sodden graves ?
Or art priest, of all honour bereft,
Come to spy on the outcast who raves ?

What was that ? 'Twas the roll of the drum.
Up and out, for our lives, Marguerite !
Seize the musket hung yonder, and come ;
For the troops of Versailles line the street.
See ! our comrades are rushing this way,
And the city is all in a blaze ;
We must fight for our lives, love, to-day,
In the kingdom of death—Père la Chaise.

Here, my own, 'mid the tombs of the dead,
Let us fight for the children of France.
In the wind wave our banners of red,
In the May sun our drawn sabres glance.
Now, O Liberty, goddess of men !
We are doomed, but we kneel at thy shrine.
We are one to the foul traitors' ten,
Let our blood lave thine altars divine.

IN A CELLAR IN SOHO 27

Kiss me here, 'mid the graves, Marguerite ;
Grip your sabre, and crouch by this tomb.

Cut them down as they pass at your feet—

Crying, "Traitors, you come to your doom !"

Do you see, love, the legends they bear ?—

These headstones that shelter us now—

And the yellow wreaths, too, "*A nos frères.*"

For our brothers, remember our vow !

For a tyrant our land was betrayed,

For a coward our heroes were slain,

Through our life-blood would Bonaparte wade

To the height of his glory again.

Though his throne has been hurled in the dust,

He has covered our banners with shame,

And our France is a prey to the lust

Of the fiends who dishonour and maim.

And the troops of Versailles, what are they ?

Tools of knaves who but plot his return.

Men of Paris, they're vipers to slay,

Send their souls into Hades to burn !

Wipe his stain from our honour, and rise

From this carnage ennobled and free.

God of justice, we cry to the skies,—

When have people been tortured as we ?

28 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Marguerite, are you there with your sword ?

Pretty wench ! Why, it's red to the hilt !

Oh, they fight like she-devils, this horde

Of fair women—young—slenderly built.

'Tis thy glory, O France, when our girls

And our women for thee give their lives,

When a weak arm the keen sabre whirls.

And aims straight at our Fatherland's gyves.

Now the balls come like hail on the stones,

We are pent in and caught by the foe ;

Do you hear me, sweetheart ? How she moans !

Creep away through the tombs—let us go !

Marguerite ! Marguerite ! Do you hear ?

Sweet, how bloody your hands are, and lips !

You are wounded, my brave Marguerite !

Curse the fiends ! It's her life-blood that drips !

You are dead, Marguerite, for our France,

And your name shall be writ on her scroll ;

When they find your poor body, perchance,

They will maul you, and dig you a hole.

I must fly—I have fought—we have lost.

Vive la Commune ! but still sauve qui peut.

Henceforth I'm a waif, tempest-tost,

But I fly, for Thiers' butchers pursue.

IN A CELLAR IN SOHO 29

Where's our crown—that poor girl's and my
own?

Where the laurels we won in the fight?
She is dead—I'm an outcast—alone,

Yet we fought for the people and right.
Now the land that I loved claims my life.

Were I known, even here in the street,
Men would shun me ; and as to my wife,
By what name would they call Marguerite !

Curse you, man—you're the priest after all !

Lo, the mist clears away from my eyes,
And if any strange words I let fall

In my ravings just now, they were lies.
But I'm ill, and I'm hungry—and, priest,

In this den I go mad, and at times,
When I rave, snarl, and snap like a beast,
You might fancy me tortured by crimes.

I'm a teacher of languages, please,

And a fever has stricken me down ;
All my papers are right—look at these,
There's my name and my age—How you
frown !

30 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Do you think I'm a ——— Curse you, you
know?

You'll betray me! Bah! what need I care?
Paris butchers can't kill in Soho.

Fling that door open wide! Give me air!

I'm a Communist, priest, at death's door,
Far away from the France that I love.

Just one boon, ere I die, I implore,—

As you hope for God's mercy above:
When my soul clasps my own Marguerite,
And my body man lays to its rest,
Put her name on the stone at my feet
And a clod of French earth on my breast.

SAL GROGAN'S FACE

THERE on the right's Sal Grogan, leaning
against the bar ;

Wait till she turns her head round—now you
can see the scar.

Isn't it something loathsome, that horribly
weird grimace?—

The burns that have blurred her features give
her a demon's face.

She's worse than the wandering leper, for
whenever she goes about

Folks shudder, and ask in anger, "Who lets
such monsters out?"

And yet if they knew her story, and how those
wounds were got,

I fancy the hardest-hearted would pity her
awful lot.

You wouldn't believe Sal Grogan, that poor,
distorted wretch,

Was ever a fine young woman, and reckoned
a decent catch,

32 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Shapely, and plump, and pretty,—and many a
good old pal,
Who lived in the court that she did, fell out
for the love of Sal,—
Fell out and had fearful quarrels; and many
and many a fight
There's been in this very gin-shop, for the hag
you see to-night.
But Sally, she turned her nose up, and flouted
the lot with pride.
Drink up your liquor, she hears us! I'll tell
you the rest outside.

I couldn't have stood it much longer—that
awful face of hers,
Those horrible wounds and wrinkles, that ghastly
mass of blurs!
It's a sickening sight to look at—did you see
how the features run?—
There, let me get on with my story,—Sal
flouted 'em ev'ry one:
Then all of a sudden she married a fellow called
Handsome Jack—
Went and got married one Sunday behind her
father's back.

SAL GROGAN'S FACE 33

A decent chap was her father, as folks in alleys
go,

And Sal had a very good reason for wishing
him not to know.

Grogan had got the credit of being a bit too
flash,

For nobody knew exactly how he got hold of
cash;

He was always in bed in the day-time, and
seldom went out till night,

And folks in the alley whispered, he *had* to
keep out of sight.

But Sal she worshipped the fellow, never a
doubt of that,

And if anyone spoke against him, she answered
'em plain and pat.

For a couple of years, or over, affairs went
smooth and well,

Then suddenly down the alley gossips had tales
to tell.

One had heard Grogan swearing, and had
caught the sound of blows

(The walls were of lath-and-plaster, and the
houses stood in rows);

34 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Another had seen Sal crying, and noticed a
bruise on her cheek,
And then the women remembered she'd stayed
indoors for a week.
But at last the whole court knew it, for the
sounds of the strife grew high,
And Sally ran out all bloody, with a big cut
over her eye;
Jack at her heels came swearing, and straight
at her throat he flew,
And beating her down he kicked her, splitting
her cheek in two.

Then some of the women hissed him, but he
gave her another kick
Right in the breast, and this time—— Faugh!
but it makes one sick
To tell of that deed inhuman—it's common
enough, they say,
And down in these courts it happens pretty
well every day.
Poor Sal was just like a dead thing, but they
let Jack slink away,
And when he was safe, policemen were beckoned
to where she lay.

SAL GROGAN'S FACE 35

They bundled her on to a stretcher, and carried
her off to Guy's:

She was out in about a fortnight, with the loss
of one of her eyes.

She yearned for her home and husband—for
through all the weary time

He'd never been near to see her; she fancied
he feared his crime.

She had sent him a gentle message, saying that
she forgave;

She worshipped the man, remember; she was
only his humble slave.

She came to her home, and entered, hoping to
find him there;—

And she found him there, with another—a
woman young and fair.

She knew the girl in a moment, 'twas a white-
faced, simpering jade

She'd seen before with her husband when the
seeds of strife were laid.

She looked in his eyes a second, as she stood at
the open door,

Then called on her God to witness he should
see her face no more.

36 THE DAGONET BALLADS

One glance of scorn and of loathing on the
shameless pair she hurled,
Then gasping for breath she staggered out on
the pitiless world.

Months slipped away, and Sal Grogan no more
in the court was met

Till one night she was seen near her father's,
talking to Hagan's Bet.

Her figure was shrunk and wasted, and her face
had grown so thin

That the scum of the alley saw it, and hushed
their infernal din.

But right on the sudden silence rang a woman's
piercing cry,

As flames from the crowded houses shot roaring
up in the sky.

It was but the work of a moment, the flames
rose higher and higher,

And spread till the crazy buildings were wrapped
in a sheet of fire.

The court was filled in an instant with the black
and blinding smoke,

And the crowd surged down the entry—an
easyish one to choke;

SAL GROGAN'S FACE 37

But high above all the uproar Sal heard a woman shout

That Jack was drunk in the building, and no one could get him out.

The white-faced wanton knew it—she'd left him there and fled ;

"She'd try to save him," she snivelled,—“he was tipsy, asleep on the bed,

She couldn't help it—she tried to—but her life was her life, you know ;

Let them as jawed so save him ; why, it was death to go ! ”

The light o' love spoke truly, the flames had spread and spread ;

Who went up that burning staircase might reckon themselves as dead.

Ha ! what is that ?—a woman ?—by Heaven, the fellow's wife !

She has leapt in the fiery furnace ! Sal Grogan ! back for your life !

Too late—she has gone for ever—up to an awful death.

Men strain their eyes in terror, and the great crowd holds its breath.

38 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"The roof is giving and melting!" As they
shout the lead falls fast

In beads of the brightest silver, hot from the
fiery blast.

Back went the crowd in a moment—it saw that
the end was near—

And then with a rush ran forward, raising a
deafening cheer.

For down through the falling timbers, down
through the smoke and flame,

Bearing her heavy burden, the brave Sal Grogan
came.

And just as she reached the bottom she stag-
gered, and moaned, and fell,

But they dragged her, scorched and senseless,
out of that burning hell.

She had paid a price for her daring, for full in
her face, poor lass!

The molten lead had fallen and left it a scalded
mass.

They thought that she'd die, but she didn't, for
she lived to be the sight—

The horribly blemished creature you saw in the
bar to-night.

SAL GROGAN'S FACE 39

She's taken to drink, they tell me. The husband? Oh, they say

He muttered a drunken "Curse you!" and went off to his wench next day.

Oh, who would shudder or sicken, if he knew of the deed of grace

Enshrined in the ghastly features of poor Sal Grogan's face!

IN THE SHIPKA PASS

Yes, it is over, the victory's won,
The smoke is beginning to roll away ;
Just for a little the fighting's done,
Still is the field of the fearful fray.
Draped on the arm with the badge of red,
Over the fields the searchers go,
Seeking the wounded among the dead,
And waving their lanterns to and fro.

A fair-faced woman is with the band—
Holiest hers of a woman's works !
" Sister Louise of the Gentle Hand,"
So she is called by the wounded Turks ;
And never such beautiful eyes, I ween,
Lighted a soldier's path to God,
And never a fairer dame was seen
Kneeling by death on the blood-stained sod.

English? Oh, yes! they can tell you that.
And wedded—she wears the emblem ring ;
A widow they guess, when the soldiers chat—
That is the most your questions bring ;

IN THE SHIPKA PASS 41

But the weight of an awful grief she bears
Hidden away in her heaving breast,
And ever the look on her face she wears
Of the soul that is weary and pines for rest.

But here in the Shipka Pass to-night,
Dropping behind in the surgeon's train,
She glides, like an angel of holy light,
Down through the rows of the gory slain—
Shutting the lids of the staring eyes,
Stretching the limbs for their last repose,
Catching the whispered word that lies
On the lips that the thrills of death uncloze.

Here, 'mid the wreck of a thousand braves,
Shattered and shot in a hopeless cause,
White and wan in the moonlight waves,
O'er a heap of slain see the sister pause—
Pause for a moment, and reel away,
Smitten as if by a sabre stroke,
For there at her feet two wounded lay,
Their faces black with the battle smoke.

She has gazed on death in a hundred shapes,
And the horrible wounds of the modern strife,
But now from her lips a cry escapes
As she bends her ear for the sounds of life.

42 THE DAGONET BALLADS

They live! they breathe—yet she turns to fly,
And her face is hot with a great white heat.
For there together these wounded lie,
Two loves betrayed, at her craven feet.

Husband and lover! O God above!
If mercy there be for the worst of sins,
Grant that her prayer to the throne of love
Some balm for her horrible anguish wins!
Husband and lover! and side by side,
With their life-blood flowing, a mingled stream.
What wonder the shivering woman cried—
“Wake me, O God! ’tis a ghastly dream.

“’Tis a dream—a dream of the long ago.
I am gay to-night in the giddy whirl;
And Raymond he follows me to and fro
With his ceaseless chiding of ‘Foolish girl!’
He is jealous, this burly lord of mine,
Jealous of rattlepate handsome Guy;
I am sure we are careful to draw the line,
But I like to tease him—I know not why.
“’Tis a dream—a dream; I have left *his* home—
He struck me, wounded my woman’s pride,
We are hiding in lodgings—abroad—in Rome,
And the tale of our flight is far and wide.

IN THE SHIPKA PASS 43

Guy hears from home ; he has trusty friends,
Who give us the news of my husband's quest ;
In a letter to-day one tidings sends,
My shame is safe in my husband's breast.

"I hate him now ! Had he sought the law,
The law would at least have set me free.

What was it stayed his hand ? *He saw
That Guy might have given his name to me.*

A fig for such love as his, I say,
It wasn't a thing to be named with Guy's ;
For me *he* has flung the world away,
And I am the world in his noble eyes.

"'Tis a dream—a dream. Do I hear aright ?

He has told my people 'twas his the blame,
And now he is going abroad to fight ;

With tears in his eyes he shields my fame !
Raymond ! my husband ! O God, I was mad,

Ever to torture a heart so true !
He is my husband—O that he had
Never a cause my love to rue !

"I have parted for ever from Guy to-day ;

Never again will I look on his face :
From the haunts of men I will wander away,
Hiding for ever my soul's disgrace.

44 THE DAGONET BALLADS

The glorious East is ablaze with war ;
In a mission of mercy may guilt atone—
I am Sister Louise, of the Ambulance Corps,
I am here with the dead to-night, alone.

“ Spare me my reason, O Lord, awhile !
The blast of the night wind cools my brow.
A wanton and wicked, am I too vile
For Thy cleansing fires to purge me now ?
'Tis a dream—a dream—blood has turned my
brain ;
I will not look at these things below ;
There are the lights of the surgeon's train—
Oh, but they hear me not—on they go !

“ How cold comes the blast of the icy north.
It seizes my throat and stops my breath :
Or has Thy merciful word gone forth ?
Are these the chills of the coming death ?
Husband and lover, or dying or dead,
Room, if your brave souls be not loth,
Room for the woman to lay her head,
Who ruined your lives, and loved you
both.

IN THE SHIPKA PASS 45

"Husband and lover—oh, speak one word,
Here in the gloom of the Eastern night!
They answer me not, they have not heard,
Or, hearing, they have not heard aright.
How came you lying here side by side,
Here in the ranks of the slaughtered Turks?
Speak to your mistress—tell your bride,
While still in my brain some reason lurks.

"Both of them dead! I am glad 'tis so,
For, taking a hand of each in mine,
I can kiss them both now they'll neither know,
And whisper their names to the King divine.
Husband and lover, here hand in hand
Our bodies will lie in the blood-stained grass;
And at dawn to-morrow the searching band
Will give us one grave in the Shipka Pass."

BILLY'S ROSE

BILLY's dead, and gone to glory—so is Billy's
sister Nell:

There's a tale I know about them were I poet
I would tell;

Soft it comes, with perfume laden, like a breath
of country air

Wafted down the filthy alley, bringing fragrant
odours there.

In that vile and filthy alley, long ago one
winter's day,

Dying quick of want and fever, hapless, patient
Billy lay,

While beside him sat his sister, in the garret's
dismal gloom,

Cheering with her gentle presence. Billy's path-
way to the tomb.

Many a tale of elf and fairy did she tell the
dying child,

Till his eyes lost half their anguish, and his
worn, wan features smiled.

BILLY'S ROSE

47

Tales herself had heard hap-hazard, caught
amid the Babel roar,
Lisped about by tiny gossips playing round
their mothers' door.

Then she felt his wasted fingers tighten feebly
as she told

How beyond this dismal alley lay a land of
shining gold,

Where, when all the pain was over—where,
when all the tears were shed—

He would be a white-frosted angel, with a
gold thing on his head.

Then she told some garbled story of a kind-
eyed Saviour's love,

How he'd built for little children great big
playgrounds up above,

Where they sang and played at hop-scotch and
at horses all the day,

And where beadies and policemen never
frightened them away.

This was Nell's idea of Heaven—just a bit of
what she'd heard,

With a little bit invented, and a little bit
inferred.

48 THE DAGONET BALLADS

But her brother lay and listened, and he seemed
to understand,

For he closed his eyes and murmured he could
see the Promised Land.

"Yes," he whispered, "I can see it—I can
see it, sister Nell;

Oh, the children look so happy, and they're
all so strong and well;

I can see them there with Jesus—He is playing
with them, too!

Let us run away and join them, if there's room
for me and you."

She was eight, this little maiden, and her life
had all been spent

In the garret and the alley, where they starved
to pay the rent;

Where a drunken father's curses and a drunken
mother's blows

Drove her forth into the gutter from the day's
dawn to its close.

But she knew enough, this outcast, just to tell
the sinking boy,

"You must die before you're able all these
blessings to enjoy.

You must die," she whispered, "Billy, and I
am not even ill ;

But I'll come to you, dear brother,—yes, I
promise that I will.

"You are dying, little brother,—you are dying,
oh, so fast ;

I heard father say to mother that he knew you
couldn't last.

They will put you in a coffin, then you'll wake
and be up there,

While I'm left alone to suffer, in this garret
bleak and bare."

"Yes, I know it," answered Billy. "Ah, but,
sister, I don't mind.

Gentle Jesus will not beat me ; He's not cruel
or unkind.

But I can't help thinking, Nelly, I should like
to take away

Something, sister, that you gave me, I might
look at every day.

"In the summer you remember how the mission
took us out

To a great green lovely meadow, where we
played and ran about,

50 THE DAGONET BALLADS

And the van that took us halted by a sweet
bright patch of land,
Where the fine red blossoms grew, dear, half
as big as mother's hand.

"Nell, I asked the good kind teacher what
they called such flowers as those,
And he told me, I remember, that the pretty
name was rose.

I have never seen them since, dear—how I wish
that I had one!

Just to keep and think of you, Nell, when I'm
up beyond the sun."

Not a word said little Nelly; but at night, when
Billy slept,

On she flung her scanty garments and then
down the stairs she crept.

Through the silent streets of London she ran
nimble as a fawn,

Running on and running ever till the night had
changed to dawn.

When the foggy sun had risen, and the mist
had cleared away,

All around her, wrapped in snowdrift, there
the open country lay.

She was tired, her limbs were frozen, and the
roads had cut her feet,

But there came no flowery gardens her poor
tearful eyes to greet.

She had traced the road by asking—she had
learnt the way to go ;

She had found the famous meadow—it was
wrapped in cruel snow,

Not a buttercup or daisy, not a single verdant
blade

Showed its head above its prison. Then she
knelt her down and prayed.

With her eyes upcast to heaven, down she sank
upon the ground,

And she prayed to God to tell her where the
roses might be found.

Then the cold blast numbed her senses, and her
sight grew strangely dim ;

And a sudden, awful tremor seemed to seize
her every limb.

“Oh, a rose !” she moaned, “good Jesus—
just a rose to take to Bill !”

And as she prayed a chariot came thundering
down the hill.

52 THE DAGONET BALLADS

And a lady sat there, toying with a red rose,
rare and sweet;
As she passed she flung it from her, and it fell
at Nelly's feet.

Just a word her lord had spoken caused her
ladyship to fret,
And the rose had been his present, so she flung
it in a pet.
But the poor half-blinded Nelly thought it
fallen from the skies,
And she murmured, "Thank you, Jesus!" as
she clasped the dainty prize.

Lo that night from out the alley did a child's
soul pass away,
From dirt and sin and misery to where God's
children play.
Lo that night, a wild, fierce snowstorm burst in
fury o'er the land,
And at morn they found Nell frozen, with the
red rose in her hand.

BILLY'S ROSE

53

Billy's dead and gone to glory—so is Billy's
sister Nell;

Am I bold to say this happened in the land
where angels dwell:—

That the children met in heaven, after all their
earthly woes,

And that Nelly kissed her brother, and said,
“Billy, here's your rose”?

ORINSKA

From northern lands the singer came,
I bade him strike his harp and try
The story that I knew by name,
Yet none may sing lest traitors spy—
For in that minstrel's native clime
The words are treason black as night.
Thus ran his song, in rugged rhyme,
With simple words and moral trite.

"I may not mention time or place,
I may not breathe my hero's name,
Lest one of his proud, haughty race
Should blush to find the story fame.
I would not sting the living cheek
To honour now the noble dead.
Let God above His vengeance wreak
If aught shall bow the guilty head.

"O'er mighty hordes his father reigned,
And he stood nearest to the throne,
And all his people's love he gained ;
Throughout the land his worth was known.

His speech was soft, and through his eyes
There shone a light serene and clear,
Good Nature's beacon, to apprise
The tempest-tost 'There's safety here.'

"Before the world he wore his rank
With majesty and regal mien ;
But far from men, he lowly sank,
And hid his head his hands between,
And cried, 'Oh, peasant in your cot !
Oh, weary hands that dig and toil,
I envy you your glorious lot,
Rough children of the grateful soil.'

"Harsh fetters were his princely chains,
They caged the noble heart that beat
To share his people's joys and pains
And walk the world with careless feet ;
To fling the mask of state aside,
And be God's noble work—a man !
Hemmed in and barred by pomp and pride,
He pined the stream of fate to span.

"For in his visions came two stars,
That shone and made his way seem fair ;
They gleamed between his prison bars,
And bade him seek the outer air.

56 THE DAGONET BALLADS

And those twin lights were maiden eyes,
Two sparks that set his soul astir.
A crown was his—a certain prize;
But he would give the world for her!

“For her, a peasant, lowly born,
A fair-faced, laughing, saucy girl,
Whom high-bred youth should shun or scorn—
The daughter of an unfreed churl.
‘Orinska,’ in his dreams he moaned,
‘I’d rather share a hut with thee
Than reign a despot high enthroned!
What cruel fate made prince of me?

“And so at last there came a day
When, flinging rank and name aside,
He sought the village far away,
And wooed and won a peasant bride.
Nor dreamed she of his high estate,
But thought it equal with her own,
And took him for her lawful mate
When faith had ripened—love had grown.
“Missed from his father’s court by few,
He travelled, so the gossip ran;
Yet where he dwelt the monarch knew,
And sent his spies the place to scan.

They brought him word ; their crafty hands
The skein untangled and unwound,
And showed the heir to mighty lands
In humble wedlock tied and bound.

“The sire’s fierce eyebrows met in rage,
And o’er his face black shadows passed ;
A solemn oath he did engage
That day the doves should coo their last.
His kingly blood ran chill to think
The issue of his loins should e’er
Look downward to the mud, and link
With beings bred and nurtured there.

“That eve a secret band set out
To seize and bring the recreant son—
The vile, debased, unprincely lout—
Who outrage on his rank had done.
They tore him, in the dead of night,
From pale Orinska’s wild embrace ;
And ere the dawning day was light
The sire and son stood face to face.

“ ‘What devil, boy,’ the monarch cried,
‘Hath urged thee to this deed of shame ?
To herd with peasants—seek a bride
From vermin all too foul to name ?

58 THE DAGONET BALLADS

'Tis treason, knave, against my throne :
 Dishonour to your princely grade ;
 But bitterly shall both atone—

The shameless son, the wanton jade !'

" 'Sire,' quoth the son, and bowed his head,

'I am a peasant, and no prince ;

My brother is your heir instead ;

I've shed the rank, nor craved it since.

A peasant, with a peasant wife,

I'll pass my days in healthy toil,

Rear hardy children to the life,

And claim my guerdon from the soil.'

" Poor fool, to think such joys can be !—

He knew not how Orinska lay

Stabbed to the heart—her murderers free,

Since but the monarch's tools were they

He knew at last, yet shed no tear,

But cried, ' Oh, curse of kingly sway !

E'en that he holds in life most dear,

A prince's love can only slay !

" ' My kiss was but the fierce, hot blast,

That scorched the rose and left it dead !

O sin, that e'er mine eyes were cast

To where it blossomed pure and red !

Had I but wooed my love in sport,
Or damned her soul to please a whim,
I had not sinned against his court
Or put this bloody deed on him.

“Farewell, O world! I cannot purge
The princely poison in my veins,
Yet from the grave we all emerge
To where one level rank remains.
There prince and peasant shall be one,
And there my dearest love doth wait.’
That night a daring deed was done,
And Cæsar wept his first-born’s fate.”

The singer ceased. I will not say
If I believe his story true;
And yet, I think, perchance they may
Who search the page of hist’ry through.
There have been kings whose lives were sad,
Who, all unwilling, played the part;
Since, like Orinska’s lord, they had,
O fatal gift—a human heart!

DURING HER MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

Who says I'm mad? The coward knaves
Who thought to save my woman's neck?
The murdered lie within their graves,
But sane I wrought the bloody wreck.
Hath not a mother right to shield
Her children from the yawning hell?
In mercy God the truth revealed,
And claimed the lives I loved too well.

Whence come you, man, to question me?
If that you be by Justice sent
To say that now my end shall be,
Because my judges' hearts relent,
I'll prove to you that I am sane;
Since life is torture, let me die;
For outraged laws I would be slain;
My children call me from on high.

DURING H.M.'S PLEASURE 61

He kissed my lips, and called me fair,
His fierce false eyes shone into mine;
The man-fiend lured me to his lair,
And I was drunk with love as wine.
Our hands were bound in Holy Church,
We had God's altar and a priest:
God gave a man my soul to smirch.
Man gave my body to a beast.

You think a woman mad who speaks
A language foul on woman's lips,
Where man, her master, simply seeks
For words of love in honeyed drips.
What godhead do you claim, O men,
To make our being serve your joys,
In prisoned space our lives to pen?
Are women but your sawdust toys?

I ask your pardon, stranger knight,
Who sought the captive in her gaol;
Believe you have not heard aright,
My lips shall frame a smoother tale:
I yield to fate—I rave no more—
I was the fool all women are;
No higher did my spirit soar
Than just to make a man its star.

62 THE DAGONET BALLADS

A man! Oh, I could tear this face
Until the hot blood gushed and welled,
My life's damnation was its grace
Which first his eyes to mine impelled.

Must I be mad because I shriek
And moan beneath the lash of fate?
Or cry the heavens on him to wreak
The vengeance of my deathless hate?

For, look! these hands that wear his ring
Are red with blood that left his veins,
My dead babes' souls to stain and sting,
And work its evil in their brains.

When year by year he viler grew,
And his foul nature came to light,
I prayed God take them ere I knew
Their bud and blossom hid the blight.

He robbed me. Oh, the vilest thief
Who robs a child that trips to school
Might hail my craven lord as chief,
For I was but a baby fool—

A woman weak—a trusting wife;
He stole my youth and health and faith.
Shut out the light from all my life,
And left me but love's moaning wraith.

DURING H.M.'S PLEASURE 63

My husband ! Faugh ! my lips are flame,
And burn and blacken as they link
A word so holy with the shame
Of him who brought me to the brink,—
Who took me, heart and soul and flesh,
To lead me to the gulf and cry,
“To get thee from my awful mesh
There only doth the roadway lie.”

A parting blow—a parting oath—
A devil's face—a fierce farewell ;
He left the children—left them both—
To share on earth their mother's hell ;
To toil and starve—the shameless hound !—
To die for any help but mine ;
For we were penniless, I found,
And then I prayed for help divine.

And in the night God came to me,
And showed me, in a ghastly dream,
How, if they lived, my boys would be
Attainted from the parent stream ;
That through their veins his poison ran,
And in their souls his nature slept.
I said, “The seed shall not be man,”
Yet all that day I only wept.

64 THE DAGONET BALLADS

But when the night was come they lay
In gentle slumber side by side,
And then God nerved my hand to stay
The rushing of life's crimson tide.
So swift I their salvation wrought,
The smile of sleep still kept its place—
Only a holier look death brought
To light each placid baby face.

So they were saved from Satan's grasp,
And God has got them safe and whole,
No woman now they e'er can clasp
With demon hands and sear her soul.
And that I did this noble deed,
And slew the father in the sons,
My earthly judges take no heed,
But each who hears me shrinks and shuns.

They hold me here to drive me mad,
To wreak *his* vengeance. Ay, I know—
Hark to the wailing low and sad;
My children call me—let me go!
O man, in mercy burst these chains,
Give me my death as act of love:
Life mocks a mother's deathless pains
Whose babies wait with God above.

TWO WOMEN

To-night is a midnight meeting, and the Earl
is in the chair ;
There's food and a little sermon for all who
enter there,
For all of our erring sisters who, finding their
trade is slack,
Have time to sit down and listen to the holy
men in black.

To-night is a midnight meeting, and in from
the filthy street
They are bringing the wretched wantons who
sin for a crust to eat ;
There's cake to be had, and coffee, as well as
the brimstone tracts
That paint in such flaming colours the end of
their evil acts.

66 THE DAGONET BALLADS

There's cake to be had, and coffee, and a seat,
and warmth and light,

And shelter, for just a little, from the pitiless
lash of night;

And as for the scolding sermon—though it
comes through the preacher's nose—

There's a bit of it, now and then, too, that
tells on the ghastly rows.

There are streaks on the ruddled faces when a
long-lost chord is struck;

For women are quick to whimper when they're
ill and are out of luck.

Some picture of early childhood—of the innocent
long ago,

Is raised by an artful preacher, and the tears
begin to flow.

It is only a trick of the platform, a trick that
they always try,

For they reckon it half the battle if the women
are made to cry;

They soften them down and smooth them, and
then when they're ripe for seed,

They paint them an awful picture of the end
of the life they lead.

TWO WOMEN 67

To-night is a midnight meeting, and out of the
rain and dirt

There creeps in a sinful woman—drenched is
her dragged skirt,

Drenched are the gaudy feathers that droop in
her shapeless hat,

And her hair hangs over her shoulders in a wet,
untidy mat.

She hears of the fiery furnace that waits for the
wicked dead ;

Of the torture in store for the outcast who sins
for her daily bread ;

She hears that a God of mercy has built, on a
sunlit shore,

A haven of rest eternal for those who shall sin
no more.

And by the silent waters she kneels, with her
eyes upcast,

And whispers her Heavenly Father, "O God,
I have sinned my last.

Here, in this cruel city, to live I must sin the
sin ;

Save me from that, O Father !—pity, and take
me in."

68 THE DAGONET BALLADS

A plunge in the muddy river, a cry on the chill
night air,

And the waters upon their bosom a pilgrim
sister bear ;

She has laved the stain of the city from her
soul in the river slime,

She has sought for the promised haven through
the door of a deadly crime.

To-night is a midnight meeting—a ball in a
Western square—

And rank and fashion and beauty, and a Prince
of the blood are there ;

In the light of a thousand tapers the jewelled
bosoms gleam,

And the cheeks of the men are flushing, and
the eyes of the women beam.

Round in the sensuous gallop the high-born
maids are swung,

Clasped in the arms of *roués* whose vice is on
ev'ry tongue ;

And the stately Norman mothers look on the
scene with pride

If the *roué* is only wealthy and in search of a
youthful bride.

But fair above all the women is the beautiful
Countess May,
And wealthy and great and titled yield to her
queenly sway;
Her they delight to honour, her they are proud
to know,
For wherever the Countess visits, a Prince of
the blood will go.

The story is common gossip; there isn't a
noble dame
That bows to the reigning beauty but knows of
her evil fame.
She is married—had sons and daughters when
she humoured a Prince's whim;
But her husband is proud of her conquest—the
Prince is a friend to *him*.

The bishop who christens her babies, the
coachman who drives her pair,
The maid who carries her letters, the footman
behind her chair,
The Marquis, her white-haired father, her
brothers, so gossips say—
All know of the guilty passion of the Prince
and the Countess May.

70 THE DAGONET BALLADS

The doors of the Court are open, and the great
Lord Chamberlain bows,
Though he knows that the titled wanton has
broken her marriage vows ;—
And all of the courtiers flatter, and strive for a
friendly glance—
On her whom the Prince delights in who dares
to look askance ?

She is crowned with the world's fresh roses ;
no tongue has a word of blame ;
But the woman who falls from hunger is a thing
too foul to name.
She is blessed who barter her honour just for
a prince's smile ;
The vice of the Court is *charming*, and the vice
of the alley *vile*.

So, world, shall it be for ever—this hunting the
street girl down,
While you honour the titled Phryne, and hold
her in high renown ;
But when, at the great uprising, they meet for
the Judgment Day,
I'd rather be that drowned harlot than the
beautiful Countess May.

THE LAST LETTER

JACK, old pal, is it you over there ?

I've been dozin', old fellow, I think ;
How long have ye been in that chair ?

Stay ye here, lad, and hand us a drink.
That's the stuff in the jug on the tray.

Am I better ? No, Jack, that I ain't,
Nor I never shall be, so they say.

Where's the drink ? give it here, lad—I'm
faint !

Dang it all, Jack, it's hard when it comes,

This 'ere Death, as we laughs at and jeers ;
And I don't mind confessin', 'twixt chums,

As this last touch has give me the skeers.
I'm a-dying, I tell ye—don't speak !

Don't pertend as ye thinks as I'm not.
I know what's a-keepin' me weak,
And I know it's the fever I've got.

72 THE DAGONET BALLADS

I heerd 'em, old chap, what they sed
When they come in the shanty jes' now ;
I turned to the wall, hid my 'ed,
And pretended to snore like a sow.
So they thought I was sleepin', ye know,
And they sed as I'd copped it o' Jim ;—
Well, it come like a bit of a blow,
For I watched by the deathbed o' him.

Now I reckons my race is nigh run,
And I ain't but a few days to live.
Well, as parson says, "Thy will be done!"
And I adds that there bit 'bout "Forgive."
I'm a bad 'un, old chap, certain sure,
Like the rest of the coves here I've bin,
For the atmosphere ain't over pure—
At the diggin's it's easy to sin.

I ain't not a coward to whine,
Not 'cos I'm like for to die,
But I wants that there "mercy Divine"
As they talks of, old chap—you know why.
For it's hard, Jack, to be as I be,
Lyin' here at the end o' my life,
While them thousands o' miles o' the sea
Is a-roarin' 'twixt husband and wife.

THE LAST LETTER

73

If the wicked man's portion is flame,
I suppose that's the thing I deserve;
But I don't like to think o' that same,
For I'm weak, and I ain't got the nerve.
Oh! it's hard that 'twixt me and my love
After death the black waters will flow;
For she'll go to them angels above,
While I'm sent to the devil below.

Save me, Lord! Let me see her once more
For a minute—the time for a kiss;
Jest a second with her on that shore,
When she comes to her throne and her bliss.
She will ask you that blessin' as well;
She's deservin' o' heaven, but still,
You might jest as soon put her in hell
As to not let her speak to her Bill.

Jack, I rave, and my head seems to swim,
Then I comes to my senses again.
Now, that's jest how the fever took Jim;
Sit 'e here, lad, a bit while I'm sane.
Be it wicked to think, as may be,
A woman like her—like my own—
Would be rather in torture with me
Than a-sittin' in heaven alone?

74 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Jack, old pal, do ye know as I feels
I can see her out yonder to-day ;
I can see the old room, and she kneels
And she prays for her Bill far away.
When the bairns see the tears on her cheek,
Then they know as she's 'thinkin' o' dad ;
Here's her letter as reached me last week,
Jest afore I was taken so bad.

I ain't answered that letter not yet,
I'm too weak and too weary to write ;
It's the last one as ever I'll get—
Put it there, lad, to gladden my sight.
Put it there, where my eyes, gettin' dim,
Will behold it right up to the end ;
When I'm dead say, "It's buried wi' him,
And it lies on his heart like a friend."

I remember that day as we sailed,
You and me, for these wonderful fields,
Where the di'monds and gold never failed :
Lord ! it's fevers and agues they yields.
Work was scarce over there, times was slack ;—
Over here there was fortunes to make ;
In a couple of years we'd go back,
And now—well, 'twas done for her sake.

THE LAST LETTER

75

'Twon't be long now, I guess, 'fore I go—
Jim was dead in a couple of days—
You go mad at the finish, I know,
And you struggles and shouts in a craze.
While I can, Jack, I've something to say ;
Savin' you here I ain't got a pal ;
I must answer that letter to-day,
And I wants you to write to my gal.

On yon table's the pen and the ink ;
Now write just the words as I speak,—
" My dear Bess, I'm not well, but I think
It's the weather as makes me so weak ;
Me and Jack is quite happy out here,
And we hope soon to hit on a spot
As 'll turn us some coin in, my dear—
And the weather's been awfully hot.

" I can't send no money just yet,
But I'll bring plenty back by-and-by—
And that 'ere won't be long—don't 'e fret."
Jack, I hope God'll pardon the lie ;
I don't want the last words I write
To be hintin' o' death, and be sad ;
I want, when I'm thinkin' to-night,
To know as she'll read, and be glad.

76 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"God bless you, my darlin'! keep heart;
Give the bairns a good cuddle for me;
Jack's a-writin' this here 'cos he's smart,
And the mail's gettin' ready for sea.
I can't write myself, 'cos my hand
Isn't well what I hurt with the spade;
Jack and I has a scheme what we've planned,
When we're home and our fortins is made.

"I can pictur' the day when we meet;
I can fancy your head on my breast.
And your eyes look in mine—oh, so sweet!—
And our bairns is all snug in the nest."
Jack, old man, write it quick, for I'm queer,
And there's mists comin' over my sight;
"God bless you and keep you, my dear!
I'm your own lovin' Bill—and good-night."

She'll read it, the bairns on her knee,
When I'm cold evermore in the grave;
And she'll strain them fond eyes to the sea
For a bark as will ne'er skim the wave.
Oh, it's hard to be dyin' like this,
When she reads—will she dream o' the scene?
Jack, just give me that letter to kiss;
She will touch where the kisses has been.

THE LAST LETTER

77

Jack, old man, will ye give us a prayer?

P'r'aps it may be as God 'ull forgive :

Let me meet my poor Bessie up there

When I'm dead, as I can't while I live.

For it's hard on the wench as my sins

Should divorce us in heaven as well.

I've heard as it's pray'r pardon wins :

Prop me up while I pray for a spell.

When I'm dead, just you write her again,

Say I'd faith when I wrote to her last :

That I couldn't send sorrow and pain,

Or a message her hopes for to blast.

Say I wasn't alone when I went,

That you had my hand tight in yer grip

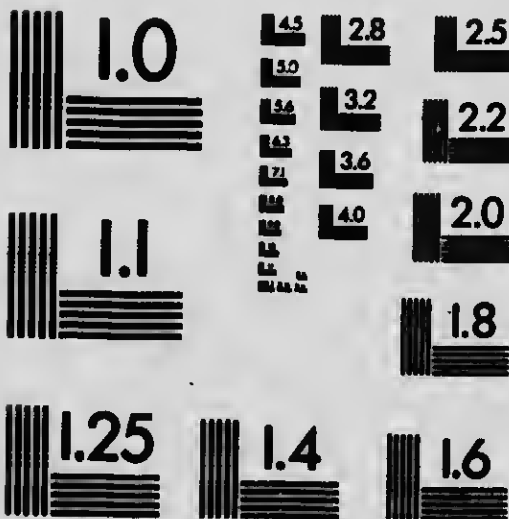
Say you caught my last breath as ye leant,

And that "Bess" was the word on my lip.



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POLLY

It's poems he's readin', that boy there, he reads
by the hour and cries ;
A silly young oaf to be fillin' his head with a
parcel o' lies.
What ha' poor folks to do with that humbug?—
it's all very well for the rich
To go frettin' theirselves about wictims and
fairies, and corpses and sich ;
Or to go off their nuts about ladies as dies for
young fellers as fights,
And them Byrons, and Manfreds, and Hamlets
what has ghostes to talk to o' nights.
He reads out aloud, and I hears him a-talkin'
the awfulest trash
About earls as goes mad in their castles, and
females what settles their hash.
Potry! I'd burn it, I would, sir—it's that
what makes young fellows drink,
And a-leave off a-partin' their hair straight and
a-washin' theirselves at the sink.

He must work for his livin', that boy must.

Will wisions put clo's on his limbs?

Will Byron or Tennerson feed him, or old Mr

What's-his-name's hymns?

There ain't not no potry in green-stuff—in
'tatures and inguns and peas,

And a-workin' from dorn till it's midnight to
earn just yer beer, bread, and cheese.

Yes, I'm pretty well off, Mister, I am; but

I've worked like a black all my days,

And I means as my boy shall do likewise, to
keep him from wagabone ways.

There, he's off! the young warmint, he's
needled; whenever I talks about work

He puts on his cap and he hooks it; he's a
notion he'll go for a clerk.

The green-stuff ain't up to his 'ighness; he
don't like to serve at the stall;

He fancies hisself in a orfice, a-fillin' o' books
with his scrawl.

It's the School Board what gives 'em these
notions, a-stuffin' boys' heads full of pride,

And makes 'em look down on their fathers—
these School Boards I ne'er could abide.

80 THE DAGONET BALLADS

When I was his age I was workin', a-wheelin'
the barrer for dad,
And a-fetchin' the stuff from the markets, when
hosses was not to be had.

Lame! What, ye noticed it, did yer? Well,
yes, he goes lame on his pins,
And that's just why I stomach his tantrums and
forgives the young beggar his sins;
For he ain't not a bad boy at bottom—and
he'll carry that limp to his grave—
He'd a squeak for his life when that happened
—escaped by the narrowest shave.
That was eight years ago—how time passes!
I was only a costerin' then,
Not a greengrocer like I be now, sir, with a
shop and a couple o' men.
It was all through yon mare in the stables, the
mare as ye saw in the yard.
As fat as Sir Roger, sir, warn't she? We
don't make her work very hard.
That was Polly, that mare was—our Polly—
Lor' bless ye, it's just like a tale;
Eight years ago she was done for, her strength
was beginning to fail.

She'd been run off her legs in the barrer,
a-gallopin' mornin' and night,
And the winter was heavy and frosty, and
settled poor Polly outright;
So my mates what had flyers they passed me,
and left me behind on the road;
And often she'd tremble and stagger, and make
quite a fuss at a load.
She'd worked like a good 'un, had Polly, and
paid me agen and agen;
But I thought as the critter was done for, and
sold her to one of the men.

I got a few poun' from a coper, who bought her
and faked her a bit,
And sold her agen at a profit, to a feller named
Whitechapel Kit.
Such a brute!—but that's just by the way, sir
As soon as I'd scraped up the cash,
I bought a new hoss with the money,—I wanted
to be a bit flash.
I bid for a beautiful stepper, as carried his 'ed
in the air,
One as looked like the horthy young hosses what
noblemen drives in a pair,

82 THE DAGONET BALLADS

I got him dirt cheap for a pony, and I reckon
I felt a bit proud

When I put down the ready and took him and
led him away through the crowd.

'Twas a Saturday night as I bought him, this
fine, strappin', flea-bitten grey;

So on Sunday I drove him to Hendon, the
missis and kid in the shay.

He went like the wind; such a pictur'; the
coves as had chaffed me before,

Their hi's was a-startin' with envy; by the
whole blessed bilin' we tore.

And I set there as proud as a peacock, a-holdin'
the reins like a toff,

And a-puffin' a great big Maniller, as set my
old gal on the cough.

And up by the Harp we met Polly, a-drorin'
six coves in a cart,

And that Kit was a-beatin' 'is 'ardest; it give
me a pain in my heart.

I passed the poor critter a-panting, and hearing
Kit's curses and blows,

It made me feel mad with myself, like, and I
hit my hoss over the nose.

I was flickin' the whip in my anger—not mean-
in' to hit 'im at all—

But the brute gave a leap and then bolted,
dashed forward, and ran at a wall.

It was done in a moment, and over; I fainted,
and when we was found

We was all of a heap there a-bleedin', and the
grey was quite still on the ground.

His hind leg was broke; I was injured; the
wheel had gone over my wife,

And the boy as you saw here a-readin'—well,
the fall, sir, had lamed him for life.

But the worst of it all was the grey, sir—when
a coster he loses a hoss,

It's precious nigh ruin, I reckon—there's few as
gets over the loss.

For his savins is gone in a minit, his food and
his clothes and his rent.

'Twas the hoss as my pals went to first, sir,—
they knew what the accident meant;

And while we was sittin' there moaning, poor
Polly comes toiling along,

With that Kit still a-thrashing her brutal, with
a stick and a great leather thong;

84 THE DAGONET BALLADS

And she turned her poor head so, I fancied,
and I seed such a look in her eye,
I'll swear as she knew what had happened, for
she give quite a queer little cry.

It was ruin that night in our kitching as sat in
the chair by my side ;

The boy was upstairs there a-groanin', the
missis had like to 'a' died ;

'Thirty poun' had gone smash in a minit—we'd
borrowed a portion o' that—

Now I hadn't a hoss for my bus'ness, and I
didn't know what to be at.

Then I thought about Polly, and sorrowed to
think as I'd let the mite go ;

She'd 'a' worked with a rest for a long time ;
she was sure, if she was a bit slow,

And just as I sat there a-thinkin'—a-cussin',
and breakin' my heart,

There was something came bump on the door-
step, and there was a hoss and a cart.

It was Polly !—I see her a-standing, and thought
as she'd come from the skies,

And she rubbed her old nose on my coat-sleeve,
and I stuck like a log with surprise ;

Then she walked herself off to the stable, and
give me to know, sir, outright
As she'd thank me to take off the harness and
make up her bed for the night.
And she's been my right hand to this day, sir,
and things 'as gone well with me, too,
And I've turned up the street and the barrer,
and now I'm a man well to do.
Didn't Kit come to claim her? Why, no, sir
—and that's just the best of the tale:
He was collared for something at Hendon, and
walked off that minit to gaol.

It seems he was nought but a bad 'un; he'd
been cracking a crib, so they say,
And the peelers was put on his traces, and they
copped him at Hendon that day.
They copped him inside a-refreshing, and took
him away there and then,
And Polly she stood there a-waiting, but they'd
bolted away had the men.
She waited, and, nobody coming, she just took
it into her head
To trot off in search of her supper and make
for her old master's shed.

86 THE DAGONET BALLADS

So from that day to this one I've kept her, and
Kit ain't been seen any more,
And I date all the blessin's I've had, sir, from
the night as she come to my door.

Past work is old Polly, God bless her! but
while I've a roof and a brown
There's a meal for the mare as has served me,
and a bed for my lass to lay down.
I felt when that grey chucked us over as Provi-
dence meant it, maybe,
As a smack for a-sellin' a critter as had given
her best days to me.
Ah! here comes my Tommy a-limpin'—now,
Tommy, don't pick up that book,
You'll never have nowt in your headpiece till
poems has taken their hook.
What!—get along with you, Mister—I ain't
told no poems to you,
That tale about Polly ain't poetry—it can't be,
ye see, *for it's true!*

AN OLD FOOL

(A FASHIONABLE CONVERSATION)

"DEAR me!" cried the Duchess; "Ha, ha!"
laughed the Earl,

While the Marchioness turned up her delicate
nose

("Twas an aquiline feature not easy to curl),
And the rest of the guests gave a chorus of
"Oh's!"

"So he's taken her back! What a fool!"
cried the Duke,

"A man of his wealth, and position, and
years.

Did he kiss her and thank her, or mildly
rebuke?

What weapons were hers—were they tantrums
or tears?"

88 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"It's a deuced queer story," drawled Egerton Grey,

"I heard it of Carholme last night, at the club.
It's a fortnight at least since the pair ran away,
And he's taken her back, like a dutiful hub."

The Marchioness giggled, the Earl laughed aloud,

And the Duchess declared it was terrible taste.

Then hushing the taunts of the frivolous crowd,
To tell the whole story a comrade made haste.

For the hero is dear to his brother-in-arms,
By whose side he has fought, by whose side
he has bled ;

In the mouth of this soldier the story has charms,
And Malice sits silent and holds down its
head.

"Come, listen, you people who scoff and who
jeer

At a deed that an angel might claim as its own ;
Let your laughter give way to a blush when
you hear

Why Sir George gave this woman one chance
to atone.

"When at Alma his colonel fell, shot through
the breast,

This man took an oath as he knelt by his side.

'Guard my girl!' cried the colonel,—his hand
Sir George prest,

And it's five years ago since that girl was his
bride.

"He worshipped, he loved her, kept silence and
prayed,

He prayed that one day she might give him
her heart.

He was old, she was young, and a gay little
maid,

And she called him her father. He acted
the part.

"Yet, as love has no rules for the young or the
old,

He played badly, broke down, and she guessed
at the truth;

He'd a title to heighten the gleam of his gold—

He gave her his riches; she gave him her
youth.

90 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"Did she love him? Who knows? Maybe,
yes, for a time,

Then this scamp came about her; she listened
and fled;

All the world was agog with the news of her
crime,

But her husband remembered his oath to the
dead.

"I'm a soldier, accustomed to barrack and camp,
And I can't put this case in the way that I
ought,

And my words are too coarse for a deed of its
stamp—

For an action diviner no man ever wrought!

"He went, did her husband, the man that you
flout,

He followed the lovers and caught them in
Spain;

Met the cur, this young lord, and would not
call him out;

Brought his wife back and gave her his honour
again.

“ ‘I swore to your father to guard you through life.’

Thus he spoke to the fool, looking straight
in her eyes.

‘I forgive you, and guard you—you still are my
wife,

Not a thing for the thoughtless to jeer and
despise.

“ ‘For your error ’tis I who am chiefly to blame,
I forgot the old saying — December and
May.

I atone for the wrong, and I shield you from
shame ;

Be patient, and wait till God calls me away.’

“ ‘So he took her and kissed her, and now the
world sneers

At a man whose brave deed should be written
in gold,

And whose feet should be washed with a
Magdalen’s tears,

As the Saviour’s were washed in the story of
old.

92 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"When you kneel at the throne of God's mercy
above,

And you pray that your sin-begrimed soul
He will lave,

Will you mock at this story of infinite love,
And call him a fool who the sinful would
save?"

"Dear me!" said the Duchess; "Ha, ha!"
laughed the Earl,

"Comparing Sir George to—'pon honour,
that's cool!"

The Duke gave his whiskers a fanciful twirl,
And murmured, "Forgive her!—the silly
old fool!"

KATE MALONEY

In the winter, when the snowdrift stood against
the cabin door,

Kate Maloney, wife of Patrick, lay nigh dying
on the floor—

Lay on rags and tattered garments, moaning out
with feeble breath,

“Knale beside me, Pat, my darlint; pray the
Lord to give me death.”

Patrick knelt him down beside her, took her
thin and wasted hand,

Saying something to her softly that she scarce
could understand.

“Let me save ye, O my honey! Only spake
a single word,

And I'll sell the goolden secret where it's wanted
to be heard.

94 THE DAGONET BALLADS

"Sure it cuts my heart to see ye lyin' dyin'
day by day.

When it's food and warmth ye're wanting just
to dhrive yer pains away.

There's a hundred goolden guineas at my mercy
if ye will—

*Do ye know that Mickey Regan's in the but
upon the hill?"*

Kate Maloney gripped her husband, then she
looked him through and through;

"Pat Maloney, am I dhraming? Did I hear
them words o' you?

Have I lived an honest woman, lovin' Ireland,
God, and thee,

That now upon my deathbed ye should spake
them words to me?

"Come ye here, ye tremblin' traitor; stand
beside me now, and swear

By yer soul and yer hereafther, while he lives
ye will not dare

Whisper e'en a single letter o' brave Mickey
Regan's name.

Can't I die o' cold and hunger? Would ye
have me die o' shame?

"Let the Saxon bloodhounds hunt him, let
them show their filthy gold ;

What's the poor boy done to hurt 'em? Killed
a rascal rich and old—

Shot an English thief who robbed us, grinding
Irish peasants down,

Raisin' rints to pay his wantons and his lackeys
up in town.

"We are beasts, we Irish peasants, whom these
Saxon tyrants spurn ;

If ye hunt a beast too closely, and ye wound
him, won't he turn ?

Wasn't Regan's sister ruined by the blackguard
lying dead,

Who was paid his rint last Monday, not in
silver, but in lead ? "

Pat Maloney stood and listened, then he knelt
and kissed his wife ;

"Kiss me, darlint, and forgive me, sure I
thought to save yer life ;

And it's hard to see ye dyin' when the gold's
within my reach.

I'll be lonely when you're gone, dear,"—here
a whimper stopped his speech.

96 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Late that night, when Kate was dozing, Pat
crept cautiously away

From his cabin to the hovel where the hunted
Regan lay;

He was there—he heard him breathing; some-
thing whispered to him, “Go!

Go and claim the hundred guineas—Kate will
never need to know.”

He would plan some little story when he
brought her food to eat;

He would say the priest had met him, and had
sent her wine and meat.

No one passed their lonely cabin; Kate would
lie and fancy still

Mick had slipped away in secret from the hut
upon the hill.

Kate Maloney woke and missed him; guessed
his errand there and then;

Raised her feeble voice and cursed him with
the curse of God and men.

From her rags she slowly staggered, took her
husband's loaded gun,

Crying, “God, I pray Thee, help me, ere the
traitor's deed be done!”

All her limbs were weak with fever, as she
crawled across the floor ;

But she writhed and struggled bravely till she
reached the cabin door,

Thence she scanned the open country, for the
moon was in its prime,

And she saw her husband running, and she
thought, "There yet is time."

He had come from Regan's hiding, past the
door, and now he went

By the pathway down the mountain, on his
evil errand bent.

Once she called him, but he stopped not, neither
gave he glance behind,

For her voice was weak and feeble, and it
melted on the wind.

Then a sudden strength came to her, and she
rose and followed fast,

Though her naked limbs were frozen by the
bitter winter blast ;

She had reached him very nearly when her new-
born spirit fled.

"God has willed it !" cried the woman, *then
she shot the traitor dead.*

98 THE DAGONET BALLADS

From her bloodless lips, half frozen, rose a
whisper to the sky,
"I have saved his soul from treason; here, O
Heaven, let me die:
Now no babe unborn shall curse him, nor his
country loathe his name;
I have saved ye, O my husband, from a deed
of deathless shame."

No one yet has guessed their story; Mickey
Regan got away,
And across the kind Atlantic lives an honest
man to-day;
While in Galway still the peasants show the
lonely mountain side
Where an Irishman was murdered and an Irish-
woman died.

A FELLOW-FEELING

"Won't we drown the new-born puppies?"

Would you have me drown the lot—

All the pretty little babies

That our faithful Nellie's got?

Steady, steady, Master Johnny,

Sit you down and leave your play;

I've a story I must tell you

Ere we take those pups away.

Don't you know, my merry Johnny,

That you're father's darling boy—

In a world of work and trouble

Just his one and only joy?

Yet you'd sisters once, and brothers;

Laddie, look into my eyes

With that look that was your mother's—

Don't you see that daddy cries?

Come you closer to me, Johnny,

Come and sit upon my knee.

It is time you knew how Heaven

Took my little ones from me.

100 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Hear it now, and in your bosom
Keep it treasured, boy, for aye—
Keep it there a sacred sorrow
To remember night and day.

I had seven little darlings,
Seven pretty boys and girls;
They had all your laughing dimples,
They had all your flaxen curls.
I had seven—five has Nellie,
And you'd drown them every one;
Kiss me, boy, and hear the reason
Why I wouldn't have it done.

You have seen the little playthings
Stowed away in yonder room;
Ah, the little hands that held them
All lie folded in the tomb.

You have seen the pretty lady
In the picture by your bed—
That's your mother, little Johnny,
"Darling mamma," who is dead.

Kiss me, boy, and clasp me tighter,
Fling your arms about my neck,
While I tell you all the horror
Of that cruel, cruel wreck.

A FELLOW-FEELING

101

In the pit-hole they are sleeping,
Mother, sisters, brothers too;
We were nine until it happened,
Now there's only me and you.

We were sailing up the river
On an autumn afternoon,
And you romped about beside us
To the music's merry tune.
"Little darlings!" said your mother,
As your joyous shouts rang clear,
Then there came a sudden terror
And a thousand cries of fear.

I will tell you when you're older
All about that fearful night,
All the horrors of the moment
Burnt for ever on my sight.
In a second we were scattered,
Father, children—husband, wife,
In my arms I clasped you tightly,
And ran forward for my life.

I could see the angry waters
Whirling upward for their prey,
I could see my bonny darlings
Trampled down and swept away.

102 THE DAGONET BALLADS

So I clasped you close and shouted,
Called your mother by her name,
Then I held my breath and listened,
But her answer never came.

Swift the waters closed above us,
Then we rose and kept afloat,
And I knew no more till someone
Seized and dragged us to a boat.
All my children God has taken ;
Of the laughing bonny crew,
From that scene of cruel slaughter,
He had left me only you.

It was weeks, my boy, ere reason
Came again and let me think ;
Once I raved in my mad anguish,
Wishing God had let me sink.
But in time the veil was lifted,
And the unwept tears could flow :
Then they brought me you, my darling,
And you broke the bitter blow.

Now I want you, little Johnny,
Just to think of what I've said,
And to pray God's blessing nightly
On our darlings who are dead.

A FELLOW-FEELING

103

Kneel beneath your mother's picture,
Lifting up your gentle eyes,
And remember she is watching
From her mansion in the skies.

She can see us, and her babies
Are around her up above,
And she has them always with her,
While I've only you to love.
But I think at times they're with us—
That they creep in unawares :
I can see their smiling faces
In the row of empty chairs.

Kiss me, Johnny, kiss poor daddy,
Wipe away his foolish tears ;
You and I will live together
Through the long and happy years.
No ; we won't drown Nellie's puppies,
We, at least, that deed may shun ;
Now you know, my pretty Johnny,
Why I wouldn't have it done.

MOLL JARVIS O' MORLEY

A CONSTABLE'S TALE

QUEER cattle is women to deal with? Lord
bless ye, yer honour, they are!
I'd sooner be faced by ten navvies than tackle
a woman, by far;
"Tain't only they bites and they scratches, and
you mustn't not give it 'em back,
But their minds is so awful perwerted—they're
such an obstropolous pack!

I can hunt down a burglar and nab him, and
tackle the roughest o' rough,
But when it's a female I'm after I feels like a
regular muff;
For I understands men and their natures, and
I knows all their fly little lays,
But there isn't a orficer breathin' as is up to all
feminine ways.

MOLL JARVIS. O' MORLEY 105

They be such a darned mixture o' feelin's—
they love and they hate in a breath,
They'll be false to one cove in five minits, and
they'll stick to another till death.

They're the blesseddest big contrydiction as ever
creation has seen,

For they've got such grand notions of honour,
and yet they're so deucedly mean.

For a moment they'll tremble and shiver, and
shriek if a spider comes near,

And the next they'll look death in the face,
sir, with never a quiver o' fear;

As to minds, they ain't got none, I reckon—
it's heart as prompts all as they do.

Have I seen some rum things with these women?
Yes, I fancy I have—one or two.

Case in point? Half-a-score, if you're willin'—
say one—Well, I'm blowed! look'ee there,

See that woman a-turning the corner—that
queer-looking wench with the hair?

Case in point! Why, she'll do for a good 'un.
She's as mad as a hatter, sir, now;

For a man she went out of her senses, and it's
worth yer a-hearin' tell how.

106 THE DAGONET BALLADS.

That wench there's Moll Jarvis o' Morley, the
place t'other side o' the wood—

Ev'ry man in the force here knows Molly—
there's pretty good reasons he should—

For the privates and sergeants and 'spectors, she
flummoxed 'em all to a coon,

And she left us like open-mouthed dummies
a-waggin' our heads at the moon.

'Twas in this way it happened: Her husband,
a horrible brute of a chap,

Was arrested for smashin' her skull in, and half
killing the babe in her lap.

He was tried, and her evidence taken; she
softened it down where she could;

But the women as seed him set on her, they
told how the real matter stood.

"Fifteen years," says the judge; then she fainted,
and Tom he growls out, with an oath,

"Have a care for yourself and the brat, Moll;
when I'm free I'll just finish you both."

Then she knelt and she prayed to the judges to
hear what she'd gotten to say—

"Her Tom was mad drunk when he done it,
and he'd never been harsh till that day."

MOLL JARVIS O' MORLEY 107

'Twas a lie; bless your soul, why, he'd whacked
her, and kicked her night, morning, and noon;
You'd 'a' thought as she'd dance at the sentence,
and think it a merciful boon.

'Twas a squeak for her life as he'd gave her,
her head was all strapped in the box,
And she trembled and shook as Tom eyed her
—he eyed her that day like a fox.

Lor', but women's rum cattle to deal with, the
first man found that to his cost,
And I reckon it's just through a woman the
last man on earth'll be lost.

But that ain't my moral at present, I just wants
to prove to yer face

That we pleecemen ain't nothing to go by when
a woman gets into the case.

Just a month after Tom got his sentence, the
news come he'd 'scaped from the gaol,
And the whole of us all round the county was
ordered to hunt on his trail.

She heard it, and went on her knees, sir, and
prayed as he'd get clean away,

And in less than a week we'd a notion we held
Master Thomas at bay.

108 THE DAGONET BALLADS

He was there, in them woods over yonder.

Them woods is uncommonly thick,
And a man might be hidden a twelvemonth if
he'd live on rank grass and a stick.

"Starve him out," says our chief; "draw a
cordon of officers right round the place,
Let him choose 'twixt starvation and capture;
one or other the beggar must face."

"They're a-starvin' him out," says a gossip;
and Molly she heard what was said,
And she shrieked, and went into hysterics, and
cried as her husband was dead.

Till at last she could bear it no longer, so she
moaned and moved west'ard one day;
For it killed her, she said, to be watching while
he was a-dying that way.

Oh! a deep 'un was Molly, Lord bless you!
She made us look awfully small—

"Went off to her friends." We believed her;
and she never went off, sir, at all.

How she done it we never discovered; but she
got in them woods, past my nose—

Got clean in them woods to that blackguard,
and he got away in her clo's.

MOLL JARVIS O' MORLEY 109

I see her come by as I fancied, and I gave her
"Good evenin'" as well,

And she nodded her head and went onward—
did ever ye hear such a sell?

It was him in her dress and her bonnet, he went
and he got slick away,

And we've never heard nowt o' the wiper, not
a whisper right up to to-day.

Yes, she'd gone to the woods to that villain, to
the bully who'd maimed her for life,

She had gone and she'd hugged him and kissed
him, I s'pose, like a dutiful wife.

Well, we waited a week; then come orders to
beat our way right through the wood,

And to capture the chap at all hazards, and
shoot him down dead if he stood.

And all as we found there was Molly, all white
and as weak as a rat,

Half-dressed and a-moanin' wi' terror and gnaw-
ing her hands where she sat;

She'd 'a' stopped there and died of starvation to
give him more time to get free;

I could see the jade's game in a moment, and it
come like a bombshell on me.

110 THE DAGONET BALLADS

For I saw on the face of the woman the red
scar stand out on the white,
Just the mark of the fist of the villain she'd crept
there to aid in his flight;
And to think as she'd perish o' hunger and
suffer the torments of hell
For the sake of the wretch who'd half-killed
her and had injured her baby as well.

No, she wasn't not charged with a-aidin' and
abettin' the fellow's escape:
She was mad when we found her a-hidin', her
reason was clean out o' shape.
But she's harmless enough, and she wanders, and
jabbers and jaws about him;
The folks about here knows her story, and
humours her every whim.

But don't talk to me about women; they ain't
got no reason nor brains,
And the man who goes in for to grip 'em is just
a big fool for his pains.
They're a blow to the force, that they are, sir;
they sends all our best plans to pot,
They're a mixture o' saint and o' devil, and a
darned contrydictory lot.

THE DEVONSHIRE LANES

I AM far from the land where my home is
located,

For the Devonshire hills are some distance
from town ;

I am roaming the country, and fancy it's fated
The snow will at last condescend to come down.

In the creeks at my feet the wild sea dashes
white in,

Each moment the wind in intensity gains ;
'Tis a scene for the Londoner's heart to delight in
When viewed from a bank in the Devon-
shire Lanes.

The hedgerows are set with the crystals of winter,
And ripe berries hiding from gay-feathered
thieves ;

The hand of December, the vigorous tinter,
Has browned and encarmined the exquisite
leaves.

112 THE DAGONET BALLADS

If the poet is fresh, with the ink on his fingers,
From tyrants who force him to harass his brains,
What wonder he sighs as he lovingly lingers
To gaze on the beauty of Devonshire Lanes?

Oh, here could I pass an enchanted existence,
Away from the evil behaviour of men,
The fields at my feet and the sea in the distance,
A poet no longer the slave of his pen.
The music of birds in the trees that surround me
Would gladden my banquet of herbs with
their strains:
I'll accept the retreat that kind nature has found me,
And build me a hut in the Devonshire Lanes.

See the clouds overhead, how they scud and
commingle,
The beautiful flakes are beginning to fall;
The cheek of the poet commences to tingle
When cut by the snow in a Devonshire squall.
It is miles to a village—the sign-posts are hidden,
And night o'er the landscape now rapidly gains.
If his language is strong, can the poet be chidden
Who's lost in a snowstorm in Devonshire
Lanes?

LE QUART D'HEURE DE RABELAIS

Who counts the cost when tables groan,
And round the flagon passes?
Let care beneath the boards be thrown
Among the broken glasses.
Yet when through shutters closely barred
Peeps in the morning grey-time,
One toast the more can but retard
The fast-approaching pay-time.

Who counts the cost when Youth essays
To drain the cup of pleasure?
To squander life a thousand ways,
And dance the giddy measure?
But when the sun has ceased to shine
And gone's the making-hay-time,
Comes Ennui o'er the past to pine,
And weep that it is pay-time.

114 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Who counts the cost when passing by
In all their vernal beauty
The cool sequestered nooks that lie
Along the path of Duty?
Our joyless eyes on earth we bend
Through all the pleasant May-time,
Till Winter meets us at the end,
And croaks that it is pay-time.

Who counts the cost when straight ahead
The golden goal is gleaming?
Let every aim but that lie dead,
All others worthless deeming.
Toil on, toil on, from morn till eve,
Through night and noon and day-time,
Till Broken Health shall pluck your sleeve,
And Death proclaim it pay-time.

A GARDEN SONG

I scorn the doubts and cares that hurt,
The world and all its mockeries,
My only care is now to squirt
The ferns among my rockeries.

In early youth and later life
I've seen an up and seen a down,
And now I have a loving wife
To help me peg verbena down.

Of joys that come to womankind
The loom of fate doth weave her few,
But here are summer joys entwined
And bound with golden feverfew.

I've learnt the lessons one and all
With which the world its sermon stocks,
Now, heedless of a rise or fall,
I've Brompton and I've German stocks.

116 THE DAGONET BALLADS

In peace and quiet pass our days,
With nought to vex our craniums,
Our middle beds are all ablaze
With red and white geraniums.

And like a boy I laugh when she,
In Varden hat and Varden hose,
Comes slyly up the lawn at me
To squirt me with the garden hose.

Let him who'd have the peace he needs
Give all his worldly mumming up,
Then dig a garden, plant the seeds,
And watch the product coming up.

IN LOVE AND WAR

"I fain would weep!" doth Chloe cry,
When Strephon gives the kiss at parting,
And bids his love a last good-bye,
To distant climes on duty starting.

"I fain would weep, but on my cheeks
My grief would leave defacing streaks.

"Go forth and conquer, Strephon mine,
This kiss upon your lips retaining;
A precept that is also thine
Forbids the tear-drop hot and staining.
We're Mars and Venus, you and I,
And both must keep our powder dry."

A STREET SONG

We are told of the rose, that, though altered
its name,

It would still be as fragrant and sweet ;
And of course the logician would argue the
same

If the subject discussed were a street.
There's a thoroughfare fringing a Grecian
abode—

'Tis of that, dearest reader, I'd talk—
It is close to the famous-in-song City Road,
And is known as the Shepherdess Walk.

Now I won't for a moment endeavour to dwell
On the argument quoted above ;
Since I own, though the place has an evident
smell,

It is not of the kind that I love.
For the region is one where the costers prevail
(You can fancy the dainties they hawk),
And the odour of roses is not on the gale
One encounters in Shepherdess Walk.

A STREET SCNG

119

What a change from the days when they
christened the spot!

Then of course it was charming and green;
And Strephon might oft, when the mornings
were hot,

Here with coy little Chloe be seen.
Now I gaze with disgust on the ill-favoured
boys

And the bold little hussies who gawk,
While I sigh for that era of pastoral joys
When here might a shepherdess walk.

A SILLY OLD MAN

A SEASIDE DITTY

'Mid all the nasty things that come to make our
tempers smart,
It's very nice in middle-age to have a childish
heart,
To feel—although you've got a house, and taxes
coming due—
The little joys of early life possess a charm for you.
My boys and girls are growing up; I'm fifty
in a day;
And all the hair that time has left has turned a
doubtful grey;
And yet I jump and skip about and sing a song
of glee,
Because we're off to spend a month beside the
sounding sea.
Where I shall wear my holland clothes, and
tuck them up and wade,
And buy myself an air-balloon, a bucket, and a
spade.

A SILLY OLD MAN 121

I've packed my box and corded it, and seen my
boys to bed,
And now I'm in the drawing-room and stand-
ing on my head :
I really can't contain myself, I shout and rub
my hands,—
Oh, won't I build a castle with a moat upon
the sands ?
I know this week I've lost a lot of money upon
'Change,
I know the kitchen boiler's burst and spoilt the
kitchen range,
I know my wife declares she wants another
hundred pounds,
And I should weep and tear my hair because
I've ample grounds ;
But visions of to-morrow's bliss bid all my
sorrows fade,—
There's comfort in an air-balloon, a bucket, and
a spade.

I ought to be a solemn chap, and dress in black,
and frown,
And do as other fathers do when going out of
town ;

122 THE DAGONET BALLADS

I ought to count the cost of it, and look extremely riled,

And swear that all the packing-up will send me nearly wild.

And when I reach the lovely sea I ought to take a seat,

Or walk about a mile a day and grumble at the heat.

But oh, I can't contain myself, I'm off my head with joy,

And won't I get my trousers wet and be a naughty boy!

For I shall wear my holland clothes, and tuck them up and wade.

And buy myself an air-balloon, a bucket, and a spade.

FICKLE AS THE WIND

BENEATH the shade of waving boughs
The gallant clasped the maiden's hand,
And urged her, with impassioned vows,
To fly to some far-distant land,
Where ev'ry joy their love would bless :
The maiden blushed, and faltered " Yes."

The soft breeze sighed around the tree,
And whispered to the flutt'ring leaf :
Come, soar, my dainty love, with me,
Beyond the realms of care and grief.
And straight—so well his suit he prest—
The leaf lay smiling on his breast.

But soon the breeze his arms unwound ;
For leaves more lovely caught his eye,
And on the cold polluted ground
He left his love to weep and sigh.
Then men with harsh unthinking tread
Passed o'er the leaf and crushed it dead.

124 THE DAGONET BALLADS

Two moons within his false embrace
The gallant held the trusting maid ;
Then cast her on the world, to face
The fate of innocence betrayed.
Ah, maid and leaf ! too late ye find
What fickle things are man and wind !

A SET-OFF

With aching heart beneath my vest

I wandered through the busy Strand,
And like a patriot felt opprest

By ills that hurt my native land.

"The knife," I mused, "the Tories wield
Is keener than the winds of May."

Just then a bill these words revealed :

"Asparagus is cheap to-day."

Like one transfixed I stood, and read

That notice in a fruit-shop hung ;

Grim sorrow flapped her wings and fled,—

Again the world was green and young.

"Let tyrants smirch our fame," I cried,

"And vote our hard-won wealth away

We yet may stem the rising tide :

Asparagus is cheap to-day ! "

What matters though the foolish swine

Obeys the madcap pig-herd's shout,

And grunting in unsav'ry line

Upturn sweet pastures snout to snout

126 THE DAGONET BALLADS

What matters though our noble knights
By such a herd are held at bay !
Here's solace for our bitter slights :
" Asparagus is cheap to-day."

For one short moment let us cease
To mourn the loss of mighty ships—
Forget how tax and rate increase,
And all that now the nation " hips."
From dreary paths of shame and guile,
To verdant fields my footsteps stray ;
Dame Fortune is not wholly vile :
" Asparagus is cheap to-day."

A PASTORAL

I SAT beside my Phillis fair,
Just hidden from the noonday glare,
Where drooping branches caught the rays
That came upon my love to gaze ;
Then sent them all to dance about
Upon the velvet sward without.
Sweet sentinels are leafy boughs
To guard a lover's sighs and vows.

The scent of woodland blossoms filled
The shady arbour, hushed and stilled.
Old numbers through my mem'ry rang,
And, dreaming, I to Phillis sang :
" My love is like the gentle breeze
That sighs among the waving trees,
Or like the sun that warms the earth,
And gives each gentle flow'ret birth.

" My love is like the sweetest rose
That in a southern garden grows ;
Nay, give her place—rose, breeze, and sun,
My lady fair is all in one."

128 THE DAGONET BALLADS

So sang I to my love, and she
Upturned her deep blue eyes to me,
And raised her finger's rosy tips
To lay them on her laughing lips.

"Oh, fie! my Damon, fie!" she cried,
"In borrowed plumes why dress your bride!
The breeze is but a changing wind
That cuts, and kills in mood unkind;
The sun will scorch the bud new-born,
The sweetest rose has many a thorn,
Oh, let me be, dear love, to you
A simple woman, fond and true."

BALLADS OF BABYLON

OVERTURE

FROM Babylon the mighty, for ever and for aye,
Float the voices of her toilers and the fighters
in the fray—

Float the voices of her victims high above the
battle's din,

As they chant in fitful measure all the ballads of
her sin.

From Babylon the mighty the monster chorus
swells,

A cry to one vague heaven from all the million
hells ;

The wail of souls despairing, the curse of mad-
dened woe,

The shriek of hunted wretches who flee the
ruthless foe.

I hear the half-hushed whisper, the growing
murmurs, then

The deep hoarse cry for vengeance of fierce and
frenzied men—

130 BALLADS OF BABYLON

The wild barbaric music that crashes through
the spheres, .
To die away in echoes of the women's sobs and
tears.

I hear the lonely singer who wanders from the
crowd,
Whose song is sung in secret, with blanched face
earthward bowed,
Who shuns the swollen chorus and seeks His
ear alone,
To tell a God of sorrows what sorrows men
have known.

From Babylon the mighty, for ever and for aye,
Float the voices of her toilers and the fighters
in the fray—
Float the voices of her victims high above the
battle's din,
As they chant in fitful measure all the ballads of
her sin.

FALLEN BY THE WAY

Don'r be a fool and blub, Jim, it's a darned
good thing for you—
You'll find a mate as can carry and 'll play the
music too ;
I'm done this time, for a dollar—I can hardly
get my breath ;
There's something as tells me somehow, " Bill
Joy, you be took for death."
It's a wessel gone bust, and a big 'un ; I can
hardly speak for blood ;
It's the last day's tramp as 'as done it—the hills
and the miles o' mud.
There ain't not the sign of a light, Jim, in this
God-forsaken spot—
Hunt for some warter, pardner, for my lips is
burnin' hot.
How much ha' we took to-day, Jim ? Why,
not a single brown,
And our show was one o' the best once, and we
rode from town to town ;

132 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Now it's dirty and old and battered, and the
puppets is wus for wear,
And their arms and their legs is shaky, and
their backs is reg'lar bare.

I ain't done my share o' the work, mate, since I
went that queer in the chest,

But I done what I could, old fellow, and you
know as I did my best ;

And now—well, I'm done, I reckon ; it's life
as is flowing fast—

Stick to me, Jim—don't leave me ; it's the end
as is come at last.

There's Toby a-waggin' his tail there ; poor
chap, how he'll miss me, Jim !—

Whoever you takes for mate, mind, they ain't
to be 'ard on 'im ;

For I 'ad him a six weeks' puppy, and I taught
him to box with Punch—

What was that sound in the distance ? I fancied
I heard a scrunch.

Nothin'—ah well, no matter ! I thought 'twas
a footstep p'r'aps.

A traveller as might ha' helped us, or one o'
them farmer chaps.

FALLEN BY THE WAY 133

A doctor might stop the bleedin'; but there's
never a chance o' one.

I'll be cold and dead in the mornin'—yer poor
old pardner's done.

I feel just as if I was chokin' and I'm, O, so
faint and low;

Prop me agen the boxes, so I can see the show—
The dear old show and the puppets, Judy and
Punch and all;

I'd like just to see 'em again, Jim—so prop me
afore I fall.

O the miles that we've been together, I and the
puppets and you

And Toby, our faithful Toby—ah, when the
show was new!

Do ye think of the time, old fellow, when first
we took the road,

And *she* was with us, God bless her! and never
a grief we knowed?

It may be as God'll let her look down from the
sky to-night,

From out o' the stars up yonder, where she sits
in the Halls o' Light—

134 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Look down on the poor old showman and see
as his time is nigh,

And he's comin' to join his darlin' where
there's never no more Good-bye!

O, Jim, how I well remember the night as my
sweetheart died,

When she lay by the wee dead baby, only a
nine months' bride.

'Twas the fall from the stilts as did it, and the
wild, rough life we led:

D'ye mind what she whispered dyin' — the
beautiful words she said?

'Twas when she knew she was goin'; I'm see-
ing her wan white cheek

And the sweet sad smile that lit it when she
tried so hard to speak;

When she took our hands and joined 'em, and
bade us, through bad and good,

Be pals, and stick tight to each other; and both
on us said we would.

I knew as you loved her fust, Jim, and had
loved her all along,

And I see how you 'id yer feelin's when you
see as you'd counted wrong;

FALLEN BY THE WAY 135

But you stuck like a pal to the show, Jim, and
you worked and whistled away,
And *she* never guessed your secret, or she
wouldn't ha' been so gay.

I fancy the dear old days, Jim, when she was
alive, poor lass—

The feasts that we had by the hedges, and the
chats in the long green grass,
And the cosy nights at the taverns, when the
coin came rolling in :

How we laughed when she puffed our baccy,
and pretended to drink our gin !

Then Toby, a gay young fellow, would lie by
the fire and doze,

While the missis worked at the puppets, and
altered and turned our clo's ;

And Judy and Punch and Joey were never so
smart before,

And the Ghost had a nice white gown on, as
a clergyman might ha' wore.

She went in the cruel winter, when the bread
was hard to get.

When we tramped and slept in the cowsheds,
hungry and cold and wet.

136 BALLADS OF BABYLON

How far am I from her grave, Jim? Ah, a
hundred miles maybe;

To lie by the side o' one's darlin' ain't meant
for the likes o' me.

The parish 'll bury me here, Jim—here where
I chance to die;

Come to the grave and see me, and bid me a
last good-bye.

You can bring the show and the puppets, and
Toby, and beat the drum;

Who knows but that I may hear it in the
wonderful Kingdom Come?

I'm goin', old pal—don't blubber and look with
that skeered white face;

Stand by me here to the last, lad; it's a horrible
lonely place;

Stoop, for I'll have to whisper—O, my eyes
grow strange and dim,

And I feel like poor old Punch feels when the
hangman comes to him.

I warn't much use as a pardner, and I ain't not
been for a year,

This bustin' o' wessels and coffin' has made me
that awful queer,

FALLEN BY THE WAY 137

I'd like to ha' got to a willage or ha' crawled
as fur as a shed :

Jim, if I lose my senses, stay till yer know I'm
dead.

O, it's hard to die in the open—here on a
country road ;

That's a matter o' sentymunt, ain't it? well
sentymunt jes' be blowed !

For where can a cove die better than under a
starlit sky,

With his pardner's arms about him, and a tear
in his pardner's eye ?

Now I want yer to do me a favour—it's the
last as I'll ask ye, Jim—

There's a mist comin' over my eyeballs, and
my senses seems to swim :

Set up the show in the road there—there where
the moonlight be—

Let down the baize and work it, now, while
I've strength to see.

Give me the drum a minit—I can hardly raise
the stick ;

Now, are ye ready, pardner?—up with the
curtain, quick !

138 BALLADS OF BABYLON

The 'blood comes faster and faster—that's it!

Ah, Punch, old boy,

And Judy, and there's the Baby, and Toby, the
children's joy.

Poor Toby, he knows there's trouble; for see
how he hangs his tail;

Bark at the Bobby, Toby, he's a-takin' old
Punch to gaol.

Where have 'you gone to, pardner? Where
have you put the show?

I see but the big, black shadows that darker and
darker grow.

I know what it is—the signal! Put down the
pipes and drum.

I'm off to the distant country—the touch on the
shoulder's come.

Shall I take any message for you, Jim? I shall
see her up there, maybe,

And I'll tell her how hard you worked, mate,
and the pal as you've been to me.

Jim, when I'm gone I wants yer just to look in
the box and take

The ragged old dress we kept there and treasured
for her sweet sake—

FALLEN BY THE WAY 139

The dress that she made for Judy—and lay it
upon my breast ;

And I want you, the day I'm buried, to give
the show a rest.

Bring 'em away to the churchyard, and show
'em their master's grave.

Now take up your pipes and blow 'em, and tip
us a farewell stave.

Mind, when you're choosin' a mate, Jim, don't
have a rogue or muff ;

Make him handle the puppets gentle, for they've
never been treated rough.

Give me the dog a minit—see how he licks my
cheek,

Now for a tune on the pipes, mate, and speak as
the puppets speak ;

It's the music I've lived my life to—let me hear
it again and die.

I'm a-goin' to her—I'm goin'—God bless yer,
Jim !—Good-bye.

ONE WINTER NIGHT

RAGGED, wretched, worn and weary,
Come the casuals, creeping in,
Where the Parish nightly shelters
Shame and sorrow, sloth and sin ;
Where the wounded in life's battle,
Pushed aside and trodden down,
Share the Poor Law's tender mercy
With the refuse of the town.

When the night has flung her mantle
Rags and tatters kindly o'er,
Come the outcasts, meekly knocking
At the black, forbidding door.
All the storm-tossed human wreckage
Sport for fortune's changing tide.
Hither drifts as to a harbour—
Foul and fair float side by side.

Here, through all the long night-watches,
Want and woe can rest their heads :
Who shall say what bygone blisses
Hover round these narrow beds ?

ONE WINTER NIGHT

141

Stained with travel, bent and broken,
Here the starving outcast lies,
Yet he smiles—some happy vision
Sleep has drawn across his eyes.
Sleep has come to weary eyelids,
Dreams have come to tortured brains,
And in dreams perchance they wander
Freely o'er life's pleasant plains.
Look where lies a woman sleeping,
Moaning even in her rest,
With a wee, wan baby pillowed
On her chilled and shrivelled breast.
In her sleep she sees the husband
Whom the cruel fever slew,
While he sought the honest labour
He was all too weak to do.
Faint and footsore, broken-hearted,
Cold and hunger did their work;
Charity that might have saved him
Went abroad to help the Turk.
When the throes of death were on him,
With a groan he raised his head,
And he cried, "O God, have mercy
On my darlings when I'm dead!"

142 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Then his dying kiss he gave them—
All that he had left to give—
Still the craved-for mercy tarries,
For his wife and baby *live*.

'Tis the Sabbath, and a woman,
With a baby on her knee,
Sits among the poor who worship
In the sittings labelled "Free."
From the cutting blast of winter
She has sought a refuge there,
Though the peasants eye her fiercely,
Wondering "how such creatures dare."

Rent and ragged are her garments,
Pinched and pallid is her face ;
She is tramping from the workhouse
To her distant native place.
Here she rests awhile and listens
In the warm and cosy church,
While the vicar reads a sermon
From his velvet-cushioned perch.

For a special sermon chosen
Is the Saviour's gentle speech,
When He blessed the little children,
Laying loving hands on each ;

ONE WINTER NIGHT 143

And the parson tells his people
How God loves the children well,
And will take them to His bosom
In the golden land to dwell.

"Dry your eyes," he says, "O mourners,
When your cherished darlings die;
Think how warm within God's bosom
In that happy land they lie.
There no more can pain and anguish
Wring the heart and cloud the brow—
They are past all sin and sorrow,
They are happy angels now."

Peals the music of the organ
As the people pass away;
O'er the fields they hurry homeward,
For the skies are ashen grey;
And a homeless creature totters
From God's temple with the rest;
In her heart His loving promise,
And a baby at her breast.

Hark, the tempest howls in fury,
And the snow is falling fast,
As an outcast sinks exhausted,
For her strength gives way at last.

144 BALLADS OF BABYLON

She is lost upon the moorland,
Daylight's last faint glimmer fled,
And the shelter that she seeks for
Lieth weary miles ahead.

She is blinded by the snowstorm,
And her limbs are numb with cold ;
In her rags she wraps the baby
That her weak arms scarce can hold.
She can feel its frozen body,
She can hear its piteous cry,
And she thinks as on she staggers,
What—O God—if she should die !

If her senses should desert her,
And through all the cruel night
Here her babe should slowly perish—
Ah, thank God !—she sees a light.
No, her eyes are dim with anguish,
'Twas a star peeped through a cloud.
Hark, the blast grows fierce and fiercer,
And the baby moans aloud.

Then the mother clasps it closer,
While her chill lips press its cheeks ;
As her strength comes back a moment,
In a strange, wild way she speaks :

ONE WINTER NIGHT

145

"Go, O baby dear!" she murmurs,
"From my breast, all cold and dry,
Go to where, in God's warm bosom,
All the happy babies lie."

Pass the preacher's words of comfort
Swiftly through her tortured brain;
High above her stretch the heavens
Where they know not grief and pain.
What had earth to give her baby?
What could be its life below?
Just one long, long spell of torture,
Years of hunger, want, and woe.

Down she kneels, poor maddened mother—
God forgive her wicked hand
As it frees a soul, and sends it
Up to seek the promised land!
Then she leaves her tiny burden,
All so still and quiet now;
Stoops to print two loving kisses
Softly on its marble brow.

Late that night they found her, living,
And the law condemned her crime.
"Death!" cried Justice, passing sentence.
But before the fatal time,

146 BALLADS OF BABYLON

He who took her burden from her
Flung her prison gates ajar—
He perchance lets tortured mothers
Pass to where their babies are.

THE MATRON'S STORY

SHE was drunk—mad drunk—was Molly, the
night that I saw her first ;
I'd seen some terrible cases, but hers was the
very worst.

This refuge had just been started for the
daughters of night and sin,
And I was the matron here, sir, on the night
that they brought her in.

Her face was flushed and swollen, and a blow
had cut her eye,

And the blood that had oozed unnoticed on her
cheek was caked and dry.

She laughed with a hoarse, wild laughter, and
capered and kicked about,

And she swore and she cursed so foully we
thought we must turn her out.

She'd come for a spree, as often these poor lost
creatures come.

They hear of our "midnight meetings" away
in their filthy slum ;

148 BALLADS OF BABYLON

I've seen 'em jump up on the platform and
fling down the chairs and shriek,
And join in a ribald chorus when the clergyman
tried to speak.

But Molly was worse than any—she staggered
across the place

And picked up a brass-bound hymn-book and
aimed at our chaplain's face ;

It cut him across the cheek-bone, and he uttered
a cry of pain,

Then we rushed at Molly to seize her, but
she struggled with might and main.

She bit and she tore and scratched us, and
kicked like a beast at bay,

Then all of a sudden reeled forward, and still
as a mouse she lay ;

In the struggle her wound was injured, and
the blood flowed down apace,

And the same sort of mark we noticed was
on hers and the chaplain's face.

What a fist had done for Molly the hymn-book
had done for him ;

He was only a young beginner, and he trembled
in every limb ;

THE MATRON'S STORY 149

For the wound was deep and painful, but he
pushed his way through the crowd,
And cleared his voice with an effort, and spoke
these words aloud :

"Poor lass, may the Lord forgive her as I
forgive her too !"

And silent, as if by magic, stood the whole of
the yelling crew ;

While he, with his face all bleeding, did the
word of the Saviour quote,

That the left cheek should be offered to one
who the right cheek smote.

He came where we held the wanton, and he
moved his lips in prayer,

And smoothed from her bloody features the
masses of tangled hair.

"Take her away," he whispered, "and see
that her wound is drest,"

Then he spake aloud the blessing, and then
he dismissed the rest.

We kept the girl at the Refuge right from the
hour she swooned

Till time and a kindly surgeon had thoroughly
healed the wound ;

150 BALLADS OF BABYLON

In a week it was closed completely, but leaving
a mark to mar,
And the face of the poor lost creature and *his*
had the self-same scar.

The day she was well she left us—left us with
never a word;
Went back to the awful outcasts with whom
such women herd;
And now and again we gathered news of the
life she led:
“In the hospital,” once they told us, and then
that the girl was dead.

It was five years after that, sir, one night went
our faithful priest
On a mission of love and mercy to an awful
place down East—
To a den where the lowest women herd with
the vilest thieves—
They’re some of the very worst, sir, that our
Refuge here receives.
He’d heard from a girl who came here tales
of this Devil’s place,
And he made up his mind to storm it, armed
with the word of Grace.

THE MATRON'S STORY 151

His face flushed red as he told us, and spoke
of the souls to win,

And the task that the Lord had set him in
that haven of shame and sin.

He laughed when we spoke of danger, and
that night went forth alone,—

But we had a strange misgiving which we
hardly liked to own;

He was back on the stroke of midnight—back
from the jaws of hell,

But his face was pale and ghastly, he'd a strange
wild tale to tell.

He had entered that filthy alley and spoken
God's Word aloud,

Till the people swarmed about him in a thick
and threatening crowd;

And they jeered and they spat and hooted, and
the women were worst of all,

For they picked up filth to pelt him, and drove
him against the wall.

Beaten and bruised and smothered, he then
would have turned and fled,

When a well-aimed brickbat struck him full
on his hatless head.

152 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Then he turned quite sick and giddy, and felt
himself dragged along,
And a door was slammed in the faces of the
threatening, murderous throng.

And beside him there stood a woman—he
could hardly see her face,
For a foul and a noisome darkness hung o'er
the dreadful place.
“Hush for your life!” she whispered, “I’ve
bolted and barred the door;
They’d ’ave your blood if I’d let ’em—hark,
how the tigers roar!

“They found out as you’re the parson as ’tices
the gals away,
They say it’s through you they peaches and
goes on the ‘Christian’ lay.
I dragged you in here and saved you, and sent
out a gal for the slops*;
Ha, they’re a-comin’, sir! Listen! the noise
and the shoutin’ stops.”

* The police. The word—originally back slang,
“scilop”—has passed into the ordinary argot of the
street

THE MATRON'S STORY 153

The noise was changed in a moment to a hiss
and a sullen groan,

The woman crept close and listened, then open
the door was thrown,

And there was a sergeant standing with six of
his tallest men,

And our chaplain walked between them out of
that awful den.

And just as they reached the entry, lo, a
woman's piercing shriek

Told of the brutal vengeance the ruffians tried
to wreak.

He guessed what it was, did the sergeant, and
hurrying back they found

The woman who'd saved our chaplain all of a
heap on the ground.

The crowd in their brutal fury had beaten the
woman down,

They kicked at her prostrate body till the red
blood stained her gown;

But nobody knew who'd done it—the cowards
had slunk away,

Her face was all white and ghastly in the light
of the bull's-eye's ray.

154 BALLADS OF BABYLON

'Twas the face of an old acquaintance our
chaplain saw that night;

By the scar on the cheek he knew her, in the
lantern's quivering light—

'Twas Molly, the long lost Molly, the girl that
we thought was dead—

She beckoned him down and whispered, and
these were the words she said:

“I know'd yer to-night by yer scar, sir, the
scar o' the cut I made;

I heerd how yer treated me then, sir; how yer
give me yer blessin' and prayed,

And I sez when I see yer in danger: Moll,
you've a debt to pay,

So I dragged yer away in yonder, and I 'eld
them curs at bay.”

Died? No, she didn't; we saved her—she's
matron here under me;

That's ~~she~~—and ah, here comes the chaplain—
now *both* the scars you can see.

And often we tell the story, how the Lord in
His tender grace

Saved a life and a soul together all through a
scar on the face.

SIR RUPERT'S WIFE

You see where the cliffs frown vonder in a line
of dingy red?—

The wild, fierce crag, the highest, is known
as Sir Rupert's Head :

It's five hundred feet and over from the brow
to the sea below,

And it won its name in the winter a hundred
years ago.

There wasn't a squire in Devon so famous as
Rupert Leigh ;

He was lord of these broad, rich acres, good-
looking and fancy free.

He came of a race of giants, stood six-feet-two
in his socks,

And once, for a drunken wager, with his fist
he had felled an ox.

"Dare-devil Leigh" was his nickname, he was
last of a lawless line

Who had gone to the deuce full gallop, through
women and cards and wine.

156 BALLADS OF BABYLON

He wasn't so bad as they were—he was more
of a hunting squire,
And he freed the name a little from some of
the ancient mire.
His wasn't an easy country, but he'd take it
every inch,
And ride as straight as an arrow where the
boldest well might flinch.
When a lad he had climbed yon headland,
climbed it from base to crest,
For a short-frooked hussy who wanted the eggs
in a seagull's nest.

One winter he went to London—he was then
about forty-three ;
His steward had told the parson he'd lawyers
in town to see.
'Twas dull in the place without him, for his
mansion was Liberty Hall ;
There was always a warm wet welcome for
neighbours who chose to call.
He was gone for a twelvemonth nearly, writing
to no old friends,
But a Devonshire man in London news to the
parson sends.

SIR RUPERT'S WIFE 157

Sir Rupert had married a madam, a play-acting,
mincing wench,

Who painted and patched and powdered, and
was finikin, fine, and French.

She was no more French than I am, but this
was about the time

That French was the title given to nigh every
kind of crime.

She sang at a minor play-house—in opera, so
they say—

And he saw her as Polly Peachum in that
famous work by Gay.

He was always an easy target for a wench's
rolling eye.

So it got to bouquets and presents, and to letters
by-and-by.

He was wax in the hussy's fingers, and she
moulded with practised skill,

Till he took the form of a husband, the slave
of her slightest will.

They travelled about a little, saw Paris, the
Hague, and Rome—

Then the news went abroad Sir Rupert was
bringing his lady home.

158 BALLADS OF BABYLON

The people about here liked him, and no warmth
did their welcome lack,
But they looked askance at my lady, and she
gave them their glances back.
They hated her then directly, they chafed at
her cold disdain,
And they gossiped her story over in language
a bit too plain.
They called her a "stuck-up stroller," and
somehow the scandal grew,
Till my lady as "Polly Peachum" the whole
of the country knew.

Sir Rupert was broken-hearted when he heard
of the mocking tone,
And he quarrelled with all his comrades until
he was left alone—
Alone at the Hall with "Polly," for the gentry
had cut her dead,
But his heart was as true as ever to the woman
he'd stooped to wed.
To him she was just an angel who'd come from
the holy skies
That his heart might bask for ever in the light
of her lustrous eyes.

SIR RUPERT'S WIFE 159

No wine, no cards, and no hunting : he kept at
my lady's side—

'Twas a great big boy with a sweetheart, not a
man with a year-won bride.

She pined in the lonely mansion ; she wanted
society—life—

She wanted to play my lady as well as Sir
Rupert's wife.

Sir Rupert must ask a party—not of bumpkins,
but folks from town :

He had plenty of friends in London ; would he
not ask them down ?

They came, and the sound of laughter rang
through the Hall once more,

And my lady was proud and happy, but her
husband's heart was sore ;

He had learned from an idle whisper—a
whisper not meant for him—

A secret that sapped his life-blood and the
strength of each stalwart limb.

He reeled when he heard the whisper and
guessed at the ghastly truth :

'Twas the tale of a player-woman and a curled
and scented youth,

160 BALLADS OF BABYLON

A dandy of six-and-twenty, the son of an old,
old chum—

He was one of the guests invited, and one of
the first to come.

Sir Rupert had been in London a guest at his
father's, too,

And this young fop, he remembered, had led
him his wife to woo;

He had raved of this Polly Peachum, and
dragged him to hear her sing;

He said at the time he knew her—'twas a
planned and a plotted thing!

And now she was always with him, they
chatted and laughed away;

She was cold and dull with Sir Rupert,—with
him she was kind and gay.

She was weary of playing my lady, of being Sir
Rupert's wife—

She pined for the tinsel glories of the old
Bohemian life;

She hated the dull decorum, she hated the legal
tie—

Her cage was a cage, though gilded. Then
the tempter whispered "Fly!"

SIR RUPERT'S WIFE 161

One night both their chairs were empty, and
slowly the news leaked out :

Two horses were gone from the stable—'twas
a settled thing, no doubt.

Sir Rupert was white with horror, but he
turned to the gaping crew

And cried, "It's a lie, I tell you!—who dares
to say it's true?"

Then seizing his holster pistols, he mounted his
fleetest mare

And made straight for the Red Cliff roadway—
he guessed they had gone by there.

For that was the way to London, from Ex-
mouth the pair would post,

And the road they were bound to travel was
the road by the rugged coast.

If you look you will see it passes right over the
headland's brow—

Only a century distant it wasn't so good as
now.

He dug his spurs in the hunter, and it flew up
the fearful steep.

'Twas a wild, fierce night in the winter, and
the snow lay thick and deep ;

162 BALLADS OF BABYLON

But the moon through the clouds had broken,
and right on the Head he spied
A horse that had slipped and fallen, and the
rider by its side;
And over them bent a figure, but whose he
could scarcely see,
Then he uttered a cry to Heaven that his wife
unharm'd might be;
And lashing his steed to fury, it flew through
the slippery snow,
While the wild waves roared a warning five
hundred feet below.

A slip, and both horse and rider would roll to
a hideous fate,
But Sir Rupert, with set white features, rode
to the headland straight.
They heard him now, and the woman rose
from her knees and moaned,
And the man gave a sudden shudder and opened
his eyes and groaned.
Sir Rupert reined up so fiercely that the mare
on the precipice reared,
And the woman sprang back with horror, in
the jaws of the death she feared.

SIR RUPERT'S WIFE 163

For a moment she seemed to totter, and then
with a piercing cry
Went over that awful headland that seems to
touch the sky.

For a second no sound was uttered, only the
billows roared,
While up from its nest a seagull, startled and
shrieking, soared ;
Then, shouting for help, Sir Rupert clutched
at the snow-clad turf,
And glanced with a look of horror down at the
boiling surf.
And as he lay there peering, right at the
farthest edge,
Something his eyes detected—a heap on a
narrow ledge ;
It was thirty feet between them, but he knew
'twas his wretched wife,
And he vowed, though his own paid forfeit, he
would save her guilty life.
He could see there were tiny juttings where his
foot might find a hold,
And the man he had quite forgotten was worth
his weight in gold.

164 BALLADS OF BABYLON

The booby was bruised and shaken, and fancied
that he should die,

But Sir Rupert bade him help him or he'd
shoot him by-and-by.

Then the white-faced coward whimpered and
lifted his jewelled hands,

And Sir Rupert set him tearing his mantle in
narrow bands.

Then the strips were twined together and tied
to a rough stone seat,

And over went brave Sir Rupert, clinging with
hands and feet.

The waves in their winter fury shrieked for a
human life,

But down and down crept Rupert till he swung
by his senseless wife.

Stooping, he clasped her firmly, one hand on
the doubtful rope,

Pressed his lips on her marble forehead, and
whispered her, "Darling—hope!"

Then breathing a prayer to Heaven to save
them both that night,

He toiled with his heavy burden up the face of
the frowning height.

SIR RUPERT'S WIFE 165

A fall of the soft red sandstone, a slip of his
bleeding hand,
And their bodies had lain together, crushed on
the cruel strand.

Safe! safe at last on the summit! safe on the
firm hard road!

There where the moonbeams glittered, he glanced
at his senseless load.

Her face was bruised and battered, and the warm
blood welled and gushed;

And he saw that his wife was injured, and her
tender bones were crushed;

No trace of the lady's gallant; he'd limped to
a horse and flown:

Sir Rupert and "Polly Peachum" were there
on the heights alone.

He leaped on the gallant hunter, took his wife
in his brawny arms,

And galloped across the country to one of his
tenant's farms.

For six long months my lady hovered 'twixt
death and life—

'Twas a surgeon who came from London that
saved Sir Rupert's wife—

166 BALLADS OF BABYLON

And when she was out of danger it was known
she was marked and maimed—

A battered, misshapen cripple, distorted and
scarred and lamed.

But Sir Rupert clung closer to her, they
travelled from place to place,

And he never winced or shuddered at the sight
of her injured face.

It was he who carried the cripple, who nursed
her with tenderest care:

And never in knightly story such gallant had
lady fair.

For many a year she lingered—'twas up at the
Hall she died,

And here in the village churchyard they're
sleeping side by side.

She died in his arms confessing the worth of
his noble love,

And in less than a year he sought her in the
mansions of God above.

There stands the great bluff headland—there
swells the sea below—

And the story I've told you happened nigh a
hundred years ago.

SIR RUPERT'S WIFE

167

Yet there isn't a soul that visits those towering
craggs of red

But thinks of the love and daring that hallowed
"Sir Rupert's Head."

A CHRISTMAS STORY

They quarrelled on Christmas night,
Fell out, and it came to blows.
No! it wasn't a stand-up fight;
For the woman was one of those
Who love like a faithful dog,
With a love as deep as mute.
Will was primed with the Christmas grog,
And drunk he was just a brute.

A wee frail thing was she,
A trembling, pale-faced wench,
And a burly chap was he,
With a giant's fist to clench.
He clenched it that night with rage
At something his help-meet said,
Some counsel discreet and sage—
It was that to the quarrel led.

It was but a loving word,
Just a thrifty wife's advice;
She wasn't a scold to gird,
But his wrath was up in a trice.

A CHRISTMAS STORY 169

He was always a hasty chap,
And quick with a word and blow ;
If he hadn't been drunk, mayhap,
Things wouldn't have happened so.

He up with his fist, did Will,
And he hit her across the head—
She groaned, and then all was still,
And she lay like a lump of lead.
She had fallen across the chair,
And her face was white as death ;
He opened the door for air,
And listened to hear her breath.

He looked in her ashen face
And saw where his fist had hit—
Near the temple—a nasty place—
And the skin with the blow had split.
Down on his knees he fell,
Sobered and shaking now ;
In his heart he had loved her well,
And it was but a drunken row.

Dead !—not a sign of life,
Not a flutter—he strained his ears ;
He gazed on his murdered wife
With a thousand ghastly fears.

170 BALLADS OF BABYLON

His brain was aflame. He thought
Of the murderer's awful doom;
Safety in flight he sought,
And rushed from the haunted room.

He wandered and wandered far
Away from the ghastly sight,
Seeing in every star
God's eye on that Christmas night.
With her wraith at his heels he flew,
Travelled and sought the sea,
And, joining a rabble crew,
Sailed for the wild West free.

Over the whole earth's face,
Bearing the brand of Cain—
Now in some savage place,
Now on the distant main—
Wandered the guilty wretch,
Haunted by night and day,
With his hands too foul to stretch
Up to the skies and pray.

Haggard and worn and weak,
Men read in his deep-lined brow
A story he dared not speak,
And all of them shunned him now.

A CHRISTMAS STORY 171

Outcast, with never a friend
Under the world-wide sky,
Longed he his life to end,
Yet did he fear to die.

Accursed of God he bore
The weight of a voiceless woe
Till the years he counted as four
Since he struck the fatal blow.
And the Christmas time came round
As they sighted a famous strand,
Where Old England's sons have found
A home in a foreign land.

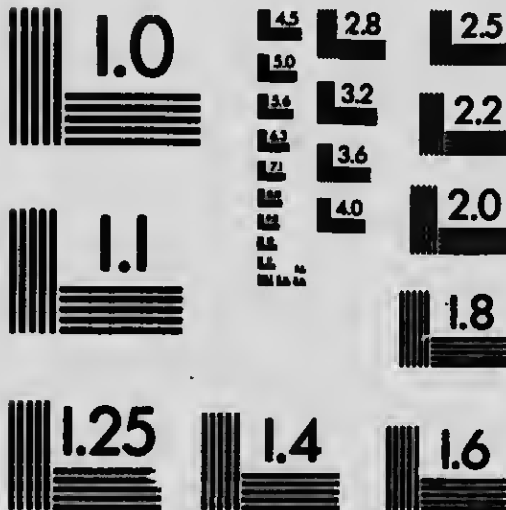
There the bells rang out a chime
On the sultry Christmas morn,
To tell of the sweet glad time
When Christ the Lord was born.
They rang in the outcast's ears
A message of tender love ;
Then, his face all wet with tears,
He prayed to the God above.

And when from his knees he rose
There was hope in the sinner's breast ;
He had seen how his life should close—
God had pointed the path to rest.



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172 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Homeward he bent his way.
Home to the far-off goal,
To tell in the light of day
The secret that seared his soul.

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Ah! weary the road has been,
But the pilgrim stands at last
There on the old, old scene,
There with the ghastly past.
He will see where he struck the blow
Ere he goes to his righteous fate,
And then shall grim justice know
Who knocks at her iron gate.
He will whisper his secret then
That is known but to God on high;
It soon shall be known of men—
What will it cost to die?
'Twas God when he prayed, who lent
Peace to his tortured breast,
By Him was the pilgrim sent
That confession his soul might rest.
He stands in the early morn
There, where the deed was done,
Just as the light is born
Of the faint December sun.

A CHRISTMAS STORY 173

He peers in the tiny room,
Then reels with a scared white face—
Is it part of his awful doom
That *her* ghost shall haunt the place?
There!—there on the cursed spot!—
“Mercy, O God!” he cries;
And his breath comes fast and hot—
How she stares with those sweet blue eyes!
She comes down the garden walk
With her arms outstretched to him;
Can a phantom in daylight stalk
As it does in the twilight dim?
She comes, and he tries to scream,
“Back! phantom of flesh and blood!”
’Tis a murderer’s ghastly dream;
Yet hark, how her heart goes thud!
It is she! ’Tis his winsome wife!
No ghost from a noisome tomb;
Her kiss has the warmth of life,—
He is saved from a murderer’s doom.
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Hark, how the bells ring out
Sweet on the frosty air;
God’s message—ah! never doubt—
“Behold how I answer prayer.”

174 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Told is the story soon
How she whom he fancied dead
Had come from her death-like swoon
Only to find him fled.

"He has left me," she thought, and wept,
"He has left me for evermore!"
Yet true had her fond heart kept
As slowly the years passed o'er.
It is Noël, the glad bells say,
As they clang from the steeple's height,
Let the joy of this Christmas Day
Atone for that Christmas night.

A SILVER WEDDING

"To Dick on our silver wedding, from Harold
and Elspeth Grey"—

Give me my glasses, nephew. Is that what the
letters say?

How stiffly these locket open. Ah, there's a
spring, I see,

A picture of both, God bless them! to show
that they think of me.

Did ever you see two faces so sweet and calm
and kind?

Their ocean of life can hardly have known a
boisterous wind.

Look at their happy features—the peace in the
eyes of each—

Ah, strange is the tale they'd tell you had
pictures the gift of speech.

To-day is their silver wedding—a fourth of a
century's past

Since, after a fierce, wild tempest, they came to
their rest at last;

176 BALLADS OF BABYLON

And I who had known their story, who from
 boyhood had been *his* friend,
 Knelt with them both at the altar where their
 lives were to meet and blend.
 But a year was gone and over since their names
 were asked in church,
 And whispers went round the neighbours so
 ready one's fame to smirch.
 The wedding was fixed and settled, the wedding
 that should have been—
 But it happened a twelvemonth later—the first
 one was stopped, I mean.

Yes, stopped, as it were, at the altar, stopped on
 the very morn,
 And the bride had to hide her secret, and
 swallow the whispered scorn.
 She was dressed in her bridal raiment, and bonny
 and flushed and glad,
 When he came to the house like a spectre, with
 a look so scared and mad
 That the bridesmaids shook like aspens as he
 passed them in the hall.
 Then he asked for the mother and Elspeth,—
 and then came a cry and fall—

A SILVER WEDDING 177

She had fainted away, poor darling. He had
left it till the last,
This message of evil fortune, that came like
a blighting blast.

And presently Elspeth's father came, with a
stern-set face,
To gather the guests together, all who were
in the place.

He said that a great misfortune had come upon
Harold Grey,
And his daughter was lying speechless, and
would be no bride that day.

Then the guests in their wedding favours drove
fast from the scene of grief ;

And I went away to St Peter's with a message
as strange as brief.

I whispered the waiting clergy, and passed to
the crowded pews,

Telling her friends and kinsfolk the sad and
mysterious news.

"To Dick on our silver wedding"—I was
always his old friend Dick ;

We were chums when the oats were sowing
and the pulse of our youth beat quick.

178 BALLADS OF BABYLON

We were students in Paris together, we were
both of us mad for art,
We lodged in the Latin Quarter, and for months
were never apart,
Till Harold got hit by a model, a beautiful,
bold, bad girl,
With a face that was meant for mischief and
eyes to set brains in a whirl.
She angled for Harold, the hussy, and landed
him safe ashore ;
He married the jade, poor fellow, and then
we were chums no more.

His father had left him money, and Harold
was well to do,
He gave up the Latin Quarter and the old
Bohemian crew,
And taking his Mimi with him went back to
his English home,
And then, so I heard from his cousin, he went
painting again to Rome.
From time to time still I gathered some news
of his wandering life—
He was worried and ill, they told me, and
had words with his foreign wife.

A SILVER WEDDING 179

She left him at last in a passion—left him and
crossed the seas,

And his lawyers sent her, monthly, the price
of their client's ease.

Then Harold and I were cronies once more
as in days gone by,

For he sought me out in my chambers, and
told me with many a sigh

Of the bonds that had worn his heart out, and
how, now that his life was free,

He had thought of our old, sweet friendship,
and how happy he'd been with me ;

Here we had rooms together and painted and
smoked and wrote,

Contented on life's vast ocean like rudderless
ships to float.

We were happy as lords and as lazy, when a
message to Harold came

That the Court of Death had divorced him
from the woman who bore his name.

Two years went by ere he whispered a secret
he'd kept with care—

A story all love and rapture, and the charms
of a maiden fair.

180 BALLADS OF BABYLON

He spoke of his boyhood's error and his
manhood's bitter pain,
And the angel who'd come to bless him, the
beautiful Elspeth Rayne.
It was settled before he told me, and they'd
fixed the happy day—
I must see her at once; he took me and carried
me straight away
To papa and mamma and Elspeth, and I felt
such an awkward stick
When Harold, his blue eyes laughing, cried,
"This is my dear old Dick!"

He spoke of our life-long friendship, and how
good I had been to him,
Till I felt like a blushing schoolgirl and my
eyes were queer and dim;
And his Elspeth came and whispered, she
feared I should hate her so—
I was one of the family circle, like a friend
of the long ago.
Well, the time came round for the wedding,
and the night before we met,
And we spoke of the glad to-morrow—ah,
that night I shall ne'er forget!

A SILVER WEDDING 181

I and Harold went home together, our path
lay by Thames's tide,
And he spoke of the dead that evening, and
then of to-morrow's bride.

And just by the bridge a woman passed us
with lightning speed,

In a moment we guessed her errand, in a second
she did the deed ;

A cry on the cold black waters, then a leap
from the muddy strand,

Brave Harold had plunged and seized her and
had dragged her safe to land.

The people had come about us, and a hearty
cheer was raised ;

But *he* with a look of horror on the face of
the outcast gazed,

For there, with her breast fast heaving with
the signs of returning life,

Lay the woman he once had honoured with
the sacred name of wife.

Her death was a well-planned fiction — she
nourished a cruel hate,

And bided her time to strike him, on the eve
of a happier fate.

182 BALLADS OF BABYLON

She would wait till he wedded another, then
prey on his hopes and fears,
And the gold that would buy her silence would
pay for the two lost years.
But she drank, and her brain was maddened ;
she had leapt in the stream to-night,
When her soul was a prey to terrors and the
fever was at its height.
He bore her away and housed her, and hid
her from prying eyes,
And the limbs of the law came slowly to find
they had lost their prize.

When the shock Time's hand had softened,
came beautiful Elspeth Rayne
To kneel by the side of the woman, who
moaned with a ceaseless pain ;
She prayed to the God of mercy to spare the
poor lost soul,
The time to repent her trespass and strive
for the heavenly goal.
And never a sign made Harold of the broken
heart within,
For he smothered his love for Elspeth as a
black and an awful sin ;

A SILVER WEDDING 183

But she, like a noble woman, came here as the
outcast's friend,
And nursed her with me and Harold right to
the very end.

One eve, as the shadows deepened, and we sat
by the patient's bed,
She spoke, in her broken English, and asked
us to raise her head ;
She called to her spouse and Elspeth to stand
in the fading light,
That her eyes might rest on their faces and be
blessed with the holy sight ;
Then, taking their hands, she joined them, and
bade them forgive her sin,
And pray to the Lord of Heaven to pity and
take her in ;
“ And when I am dead,” she murmured, “ let
Elspeth be your bride ” ;
Then she spoke no more till the morrow, when
she blessed them both and died.

“ To Dick on our silver wedding.” They
know that I've got the gout—
They know I'd have been amongst them if the
doctors would let me out—

184 BALLADS OF BABYLON

And down in the sweet green country, where
their happy lives have flown,
They can picture these grimy chambers, where
I grumble and growl alone.
And to-day is their silver wedding—I look at
each handsome face,
There's never a look less tender, and never a
vanished grace—
Give me that bottle, nephew—a fig for what
doctors say!—
Gout or no gout, here's a bumper to Harold
and Elspeth Grey!

A LAST LOOK

I HEARD him, Joe, I heard him—

I heard the doctor say

My sight was growing weaker,

And failing day by day.

"She's going blind," he whispered,

Yes, darling, it is true;

These eyes will soon have taken

Their last long look at you.

The room is dull and misty,

And as I try to gaze

There seems to fall between us

A thick and cruel haze.

I'm going blind, my darling;

Ah! soon the day must be

When these poor eyes will open

And vainly try to see.

Oh, take my hand, my husband,

To lead me to the light,

And let your dear face linger

The last thing in my sight—

186 BALLADS OF BABYLON

That so I may remember,
When darkness covers all,
'Twas there I last saw, softly,
God's blessed sunshine fall.

Cheer up, my dear old sweetheart,
And brush away your tears,
The look I see to-day, love,
Will linger through the years.
For when the veil has fallen,
To hide you evermore,
I want your smile to light me
Along the gloomy shore.

I yet can see you, dar'ling—
Some light there lingers still ;
The sun is setting slowly
Behind the distant hill ;
Odd fancies crowd about me
Now God has let me know
My eyes must close for ever
On all things here below.

Though twenty years have vanished,
It seems but yestere'en
Since first you wooed and won me
Among the meadows green ;

Here from our cottag window
I once could see the spot
Where grew the yellow cowslip
And blue forget-me-not.

But now a strange mist hovers,
And though I strain my eyes,
Beyond my yearning glances
The dear old meadow lies.

I want to see it, darling,
The meadow by the stream,
Where first your loving whisper
Fulfilled my girlhood's dream.

So take my hand and guide me,
And lead me to the air,—

I want to see the world, love,
That God has made so fair.

I want to see the sunset,
And look upon the sky,
And bid the sweet, green country,
A loving, last good-bye !

How swift the sun is setting !
It's almost twilight now ;
I hear, but cannot see, dear,
The birds upon the bough.

188 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Is this our little garden ?

I cannot pierce the gloom,
But I can smell the roses—
They're coming into bloom.

Stoop down and pluck a rosebud—

You know my fav'rite tree :
My husband's hand will give me
The last one I shall see.

Ah, Joe, do you remember
The dear old happy days—

Our love among the roses
In summer's golden blaze ?

I take the rose you give me,
Its petals damp with dew ;
I scent its fragrant odour,
But scarce can see its hue.

In memory of to-night, Joe,
When dead I'll keep it still ;
The rose may fade and wither—
Our love, dear, never will.

Quick ! Quick ! my footsteps falter ;
Oh, take me in again ;
I cannot bear the air, Joe,
My poor eyes feel the strain.

A LAST LOOK

189

Home, home, and bring my children,
And place them at my knee,
And let me look upon them
While yet I've time to see.

Then take them gently from me,
And let us be alone :
My last fond look, dear husband,
Must be for you alone.

You've been my dear old sweetheart
Since we were lass and lad :
I've laughed when you were merry,
And wept when you were sad.

I want to see you wearing
Your old sweet smile to-night,
I want to take it with me
To make my darkness light.
God bless you, Joe, for trying—
Yes, that's the dear old look !
I'll think of that sweet story
When God has closed the book.

Joe, fetch me down the picture
That hangs beside our bed.
Ah, love, do you remember
The day that he lay dead ?

190 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Our first-born bonny baby—
And how we sat and cried,
And thought our hearts were broken
When our sweet darling died?

I'd like to see the picture
Once more, dear, while I may,
Though in my heart it lingers
As though 'twere yesterday.
Ah! many bairns came after,
But none were like to him.
Come closer to me, darling,
The light is growing dim.

Come closer—so; and hold me,
And press your face to mine.
I'm in a land of shadows,
Where ne'er a light can shine.
But with your arm around me,
What danger need I fear?
I'll never need my eyes, Joe,
While your strong arm is near.

Now, be a brave old darling,
And promise not to fret:
I saw your face the last, dear,
And now I've no regret.

A LAST LOOK

191

I saw your face the last, dear—
God's hand has dealt the blow ;
My sight went out at sunset
A short half-hour ago.

Now you must be my eyesight,
Through all the sunless land,
And down life's hill we'll wander,
Like lovers, hand in hand.
Till God shall lift the curtain
Beyond these realms of pain ;
And there, where blind eyes open,
I'll see your face again.

THE EARL'S DAUGHTER

SHE stood beside the smiling stream that mirrored
back her face,
And seemed to say, "Oh weary one, behold
thy resting-place!"
The rippling water kissed her feet, and murmured,
"Daughter, rest;
Come lie as in a mother's arms, and sleep upon
my breast."

The river sang its lullaby; her eyelids, drooping
down,
Let fall their fringed curtains o'er her eyes of
hazel brown—
The sweet brown eyes that looking back
beheld the cloud of shame,
And all her life's wild history writ out in words
of flame.

In sin those brown eyes saw the light, but
sin of high degree;
The daughter of an English earl of noble
blood was she.

THE EARL'S DAUGHTER 199

In strange weird ways by Fate's big loom our
web of fortune's spun,
And *she* was doomed when Phryne's face my
lord's allegiance won.

A player wench she had for dam, who made
the stage a mart,

And reared an altar high to vice within the
fane of art;

She sinned and played, and played to sin—a
bold and brazen girl

Who won—and kept, so rumour says, for three
whole years the earl.

And Nell, the baby, had his eyes, and he
would kiss the child;

And when folks praised her pretty face, he
looked at her and smiled.

But earls have worlds so wide to roam in
search of noble joys,

He found fresh playthings by and by and left
his early toys.

He sowed his oats and settled down, and took
a noble dame,

And had a daughter born to him to bear her
father's name;

194 BALLADS OF BABYLON

The player wench was pensioned off, and Nell
was pensioned too :

He washed his hands of wicked things, and
started life anew.

A cheque was drawn—a good round sum—
and Nell's next nurse was one
Who'd sit with her the livelong day—a vis-
count's eldest son ;

But by and by, as Nellie grew too old to romp
and play,

The mother found a growing girl was some-
times in the way.

She cowed the child and called her "brat" ;
her presence was a tie ;

And when poor Nell was ill and weak half-
hoped that she would die ;

The good round sum the earl had paid, "in
full of every claim,"

Was long since spent, but Nell remained poor
child of sin and shame.

The years passed on, and Nell was put to shift
as best she could ;

The mother thought the stage might lead her
child to something good ;

THE EARL'S DAUGHTER 195

She stood half-draped in loose burlesques, and
blushed and lost her head,

And trembled when the men came round, and
burst in tears and fled.

Then Phryne cursed the weeping Nell, and bade
her pack and go,

And in her passion hit the girl a foul and cruel
blow,

That woke the evil passions there; the slumber-
ing devil rose.

That night three lovers came to woo; she
listened and she chose.

To end her sinful life to-day she seeks the
waters deep,

A gnawing hunger in her heart to close her eyes
and sleep.

Too proud to cheat and rob and lie, her wings
are broken soon;

The evening shadows cross her path ere yet it
should be noon.

She stands beside the stream that laves an earl's
far-reaching ground;

She hears a voice, and peers between the hedge
that runs around;

196 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Then turns away, and cries, "O God! had such
a lot been mine,
I had not e'er been forced to sin, and break
Thy laws divine."

Within the grounds a father sat beside his
daughter fair,
And fondly pressed his lips to hers and smoothed
her glossy hair;
A world of love was in her eyes, as in her
girlish glee
She flung her arms about his neck and rested on
his knee.

That eve the river, flinging back the sunset's
ruby glow,
Bore gently on its glassy breast a sleeper to and
fro;
It left its burden near his grounds, and there,
while still it lay,
His daughter saw the dreadful sight, and
screamed and turned away.
He clasped her close and soothed her fears, then
bade his menials go—
How dared they let a wretched corpse upset his
darling so!

THE EARL'S DAUGHTER 197

"Go float it down," the earl exclaimed, "and
leave it in the shed ;

Then bid the parish people come and fetch
away their dead."

He left her living, spurned her dead ; his blood
was in her veins ;

He sinned, and all her weary life *she* wore the
felon's chains ;

But in the great Recorder's Book, where Nell's
black life is shown,

Against her sins a righteous Judge will put *his*
name alone.

OSTLER JOE

I stood at eve, as the sun went down, by a
grave where a woman lies,
Who lured men's souls to the shores of sin with
the light of her wanton eyes,
Who sang the song that the Siren sang on the
treacherous Lurley height,
Whose face was as fair as a summer day, and
whose heart was as black as night.

Yet a blossom I fain would pluck to-day from
the garden above her dust;
Not the langourous lily of soulless sin nor the
blood-red rose of lust;
But a sweet white blossom of holy love that grew
in the one green spot
In the arid desert of Phryne's life, where all
was parched and hot.

OSTLER JOE

199

In the summer, when the meadows were aglow
with blue and red,

Joe, the ostler of the Magpie, and fair Annie
Smith were wed.

Plump was Annie, plump and pretty, with a
cheek as white as snow ;

He was anything but handsome was the Magpie's
ostler, Joe.

But he won the winsome lassie. They'd a
cottage and a cow,

And her matronhood sat lightly on the village
beauty's brow.

Sped the months and came a baby—such a blue-
eyed baby boy !

Joe was working in the stables when they told
him of his joy.

He was rubbing down the horses, and he gave
them then and there

All a special feed of clover, just in honour of
the heir :

It had been his great ambition, and he told the
horses so,

That the Fates would send a baby who might
bear the name of Joe.

300 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Little Joe the child was christened, and, like
babies, grew apace ;
He'd his mother's eyes of azure and his father's
honest face.

Swift the happy years went over, years of blue
and cloudless sky ;
Love was lord of that small cottage, and the
tempests passed them by.

Passed them by for years, then swiftly burst in
fury o'er their home.

Down the lane by Annie's cottage chanced a
gentleman to roam ;

Thrice he came and saw her sitting by the
window with her child,

And he nodded to the baby, and the baby
laughed and smiled.

So at last it grew to know him—little Joe was
nearly four ;

He would call the "pretty gemplun" as he
passed the open door ;

And one day he ran and caught him, and in
child's play pulled him in,

And the baby Joe had prayed for brought about
the mother's sin.

'Twas the same old wretched story that for ages
bards have sung :

'Twas a woman weak and wanton and a villain's
tempting tongue ;

'Twas a picture deftly painted for a silly
creature's eyes

Of the Babylonian wonders and the joy that in
them lies.

Annie listened and was tempted ; she was
tempted and she fell,

As the angels fell from heaven to the blackest
depths of hell ;

She was promised wealth and splendour and a
life of guilty sloth,

Yellow gold for child and husband,—and the
woman left them both.

Home one eve came Joe the Ostler with a
cheery cry of " Wife ! "

Finding that which blurred for ever all the story
of his life.

She had left a silly letter,—through the cruel
scrawl he spelt ;

Then he sought the lonely bed-room, joined his
horny hands and knelt.

202 BALLADS OF BABYLON

"Now, O Lord, O God, forgive her, for she
ain't to blame!" he cried;

"For I owt t'a' seen her trouble, and 'a' gone
away and died.

Why, a wench like her—God bless her!—
'twasn't likely as her'd rest

With that bonny head for ever on a ostler's
ragged vest.

"It was kind o' her to bear me all this long
and happy time,

So for my sake please to bless her, though You
count her deed a crime;

If so be I don't pray proper, Lord, forgive me;
for You see

I can talk all right to 'osses, but I'm nervous
like with Thee."

Ne'er a line came to the cottage from the woman
who had flown;

Joe the baby died that winter, and the man was
left alone.

Ne'er a bitter word he uttered, but in silence
kissed the rod,

Saving what he told his horses, saving what he
told his God

Far away in mighty London rose the woman
into fame,

For her beauty won men's homage, and she
prospered in her shame ;

Quick from lord to lord she flitted, higher still
each prize she won,

And her rivals paled beside her as the stars
beside the sun.

Next she made the stage her market, and she
dragged Art's temple down

To the level of a show place for the outcasts of
the town.

And the kisses she had given to poor Ostler Joe
for nought

With their gold and costly jewels rich and
titled lovers bought.

Went the years with flying footsteps while her
star was at its height ;

Then the darkness came on swiftly, and the
gloaming turned to night.

Shattered strength and faded beauty tore the
laurels from her brow ;

Of the thousands who had worshipped never one
came near her now-

204 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Broken down in health and fortune, men forgot
her very name,
Till the news that she was dying woke the
echoes of her fame ;
And the papers in their gossip mentioned how
an "actress" lay
Sick to death in humble lodgings, growing
weaker every day.

One there was who read the story in a far-off
country place,
And that night the dying woman woke and
looked upon his face.
Once again the strong arms clasped her that had
clasped her long ago ;
And the weary head lay pillowed on the breast
of Ostler Joe.

All the past had he forgotten, all the sorrow
and the shame ;
He had found her sick and lonely, and his wife
he now could claim.
Since the grand folks who had known her one
and all had slunk away,
He could clasp his long-lost darling, and no
man would say him nay.

In his arms death found her lying, in his arms
her spirit fled ;

And his tears came down in torrents as he knelt
beside her dead.

Never once his love had faltered through her
base unhallowed life ;

And the stone above her ashes bears the
honoured name of wife.

That's the blossom I fain would pluck to-day
from the garden above her dust ;

Not the languorous lily of soulless sin nor the
blood-red rose of lust ;

But a sweet white blossom of holy love that
grew in the one green spot

In the arid desert of Phryne's life, where all was
parched and hot.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

HARK! It is over! The organ peals,
The Bishop has mumbled the final word,
Over the chancel the sunlight steals,
Mocking the sob the bridesmaids heard.
Here, in the sight of a God above,
A Lord has taken a fair young bride;
Here they have sworn to honour and love,
And each of them knew that the other lied.

This is a market where slaves are sold;
Rare is the slave that they sell to-day.
They barter her sweet white flesh for gold
To a noble sheep who has gone astray.
For rank and jewels and vast estates
They forced his badge on her dainty hand,
Sealing her doom to the worst of fates—
He! in a church in a Christian land.

My lord the Bishop, he bowed his head,
And rolled his eyes with a mellowed grace,
As the beautiful words in the book he read,
And a sunbeam fell on his saintly face—

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST 207

His lordship knew of the bridegroom's fame—

He knew of the women, the cards, and wine ;
But up from the altar he sent his name

To be specially blessed by the King divine.

He gazed on the face of the high-born maid,
And saw the mark where the tears had been ;

He knew that a daughter had wept and prayed,

He knew that a mother had feared a scene—
Had torn herself from the weeping girl,

Whose love was away o'er the distant sea,

And had sold her child to a titled churl

Who had just got round from a bad *d. t.*

Back from the doors with the ragged crew !

Line the passage on either side !

Hide her shame from the people's view !

Hurry her off, the trembling bride !

There isn't a man in the motley crowd

But knows of her owner's evil life ;

And they tell the tale of his sins aloud,

Till the wantons pity the new-made wife.

The air is gay with the wedding chimes,

Over the town the news they tell,

That a Bishop has blessed the worst of crimes,

And now they are tolling a maiden's knell.

208 BALLADS OF BABYLON

His lordship follows his dainty prize ;
Now whip the horses, and speed away !
Look at the tears in her swollen eyes—
Pity, my lord, for your helpless prey !

Over the seas on a barbarous coast,
A soldier leads in a desperate fight
A handful of men 'gainst a swarming host,
And the battle is waged from dawn till night.
One to a hundred still they stand,
Fighting like heroes, and win at last ;
And the news goes home to the distant land,
And his fame is spread with a trumpet-blast.

She hears the story a week new wed,
For his gallant deed is on every tongue ;
Oft for him have her prayers been said,
Oft for him have her hands been wrung ;
He was the hero she loved so long,
His was the image that filled her heart ;
Ah, she had done him a grievous wrong !
Well, it was best they were leagues apart.

She thought of the soldier who fought so well,
And then of the *roué* whose rings she wore ;
She hears the tales that the gossips tell
Of the evil life that he led before

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST 209

She hears the tales and she doubts them not,

For once again he has broken out ;

He comes to his couch like a drunken sot,

And leaves strange letters and *cartes* about.

What does it matter one jot to her ?

Let him go to the bad at his own mad pace ;

No word she spoke would her lord deter ;

He'd laugh with scorn in her pleading face.

She winced but once—at the season's height

A creature sat by her husband's side,

And drove the ponies in all men's sight

His friends had given the new-made bride.

Never a flush on her marble brow,

Only a curl of her faultless lip ;

The world's tongue wags with the story now,

And her lord goes off on a lengthy trip.

All men pity, and some of them speak,

And sigh o'er the wrongs of the reigning belle ;

The papers have paragraphs week by week,

And wider and wider the scandals swell.

Her *carte* is hung in the West-end shops,

With her name in full on the white below ;

And all day long there's a big crowd stops

To look at the lady who's "all the go."

210 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Queen is she of her set to-day,
In the realms of fashion she reigns alone ;—
She should hear what the coarse-tongued rabble
say
Now the price she paid for her name is
known.

And not alone do the rabble speak ;
There's something Society whispers too—
It was all the talk of the Ascot week :
The scandal's delightfully fresh and new.
The lover who went to the wars is back—
Back with the fame which his sword had
won ;
And of more than malice the stories smack
That round on the lips of the gossips run.

Wherever is Venus, there is Mars.
Her face lights up when he comes about—
Ascot gave matter for spiteful "pars"
And Henley has put it beyond a doubt.
Her love shines out through her splendid eyes ;
Love is a passion, or right or wrong :
Pity the woman who wildly tries
To stem a torrent, yet floats along.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST 211

Gaze on the photo of "Beauty" hung—

Hung in the shops for cads to buy.

Little you dream how her heart is wrung,

Little you dream how that breast can sigh.

Let us think of the Turk with a feeling heart,

Who sells his slaves in the wanton East ;

Here we have mothers who hold a mart,

And "Beauty" is sold to the wealthy

"Beast."

A LEGEND OF LOVE

Is it true, this dainty story ?

Is it true—ah, who shall say ?
In the brighter noonday glory
Morning shadows melt away.
Poets' fancies woven gaily,
Cruel fingers tear apart ;
And in judgment Brain sits daily
On the children of the heart.

Is it true ? O bid defiance

To the doubters' cruel eyes—
Men who take as toys of science
All the glories of the skies.
Better far the foolish savage
Who on twenty Gods will call,
Than the scholar doubts can ravage,
Till he knows no God at all.

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A LEGEND OF LOVE

213

O'er the leagues of stormy water
Came a story on the breeze;
From a cruel field of slaughter
It was borne across the seas.
'Mid the roar of mighty Babel
It was whispered far and wide;
'Twas a tearful tender fable
Of a hero who had died.

Years ago, in times called olden—
'Tis a legend, mind, I tell—
From his throne, high reared and golden,
Cast to earth, a ruler fell.
Fought by foreign foes and worsted,
Mad with grief, and mad with shame,
For his blood the people thirsted,
And heaped curses on his name.

Far away, an exile broken,
Shorn of all his pomp and pride,
Cæsar passed his race's token
To his only son; and died.
Died afar, by all unheeded
Who of yore had bent the knee;
And he sleeps the sleep he needed
In his tomb across the sea.

214 BALLADS OF BABYLON

To that son the right descended
Still to count himself a king ;
Courtiers still his steps attended,
Doubting not what time would bring ;
And he kept the grand tradition
Of his proud Imperial race :
"Bide your time," was Cæsar's mission ;
"You shall fill your father's place."

Yet the waves of time they bore him
Little nearer to the throne :
Blood, he said, should not restore him,
But his people's love alone.
Not for him the pathway gory,
That his hero-fathers trod ;
He would keep his whole life-story
Fit for eyes of man and God.

So he grew among the strangers
Till he came to man's estate,
Then he sought afar the dangers
That beset a soldier's fate.
Why? Ah, whisper, gentle breezes,
Ye that come across the sea.
With the tender tale it pleases
Cruel Fate to send by thee?

A LEGEND OF LOVE 215

He had loved a high-born maiden,
Youngest daughter of a Queen ;
Yet his heart with grief was laden—
Shadows crept their loves between.
Fancy cast a dream-spell o'er him ;
Then the ghosts of history came—
Spread his race's past before him,
While in blood they wrote his name.

Lines of upraised daggers gleaming,
Pointed ever at his heart ;
Crowned at last, though in his dreaming,
He was playing Cæsar's part.
Then he clasped his queen, to save her
From the mob who sought her life ;
Just one wild embrace he gave her ;
And then fell the fatal knife.

Back he thrust the dream appalling,
While with ashen face he swore
He would list to duty's calling,
But would think of love no more.
Down he crushed his hope for ever,
Shunned the maiden's tender eyes ;
Hearts were wrung in that endeavour—
Tears would all unbidden rise.

216 BALLADS OF BABYLON

One short word had he but spoken,
His had been the maiden's hand :
In her eyes he read the token,
He could see the promised land.
Love that's checked is love the stronger,
Should he bid her be his mate?
God forbid that he should wrong her !
She should know a happier fate.

He was heir to pomp and splendour ;
Hope might dawn for him at last ;
Fiercest toes might yet surrender :
But the fatal die was cast.
Comes his dirge across the billows ;
Sets his gentle star for aye.
Death his crownless head now pillows—
He has flung his life away.

Came a whisper o'er the ocean,
He had sought a soldier's death ;
And to seal a life's devotion,
Gave *her* land his latest breath.
Reckless there he courted danger—
And the tale is far and wide,
How the youth, to fear a stranger,
Death had wooed and won for bride.

A LEGEND OF LOVE 217

Is it true, this legend olden,
Or some poet's idle dream,
Who has sought, in garments golden,
Thus to dress a dainty theme?
If aright they tell his story,
All his race he soars above:
They are men who die for glory,
'Twas a god who died for love.

FORGOTTEN—A LAST INTERVIEW

CHARLEY, I'm glad to see you! I thought
you'd forgotten me quite;

It's rarely I see an actor, and it's always a
welcome sight.

And how goes the show this Christmas? You're
making a name, I see;

Does anyone ever wonder and ask what's
become of me?

There, don't nod your head to please me; why,
it's years since I left the stage;

Five years, at the least, old fellow—I'm one
of a bygone age.

And, lying here sick and weary, and worn
with the ceaseless pain,

I wonder if folks remember my seasons at
Drury Lane.

Whenever the Lane tried Shakespeare, I was
one of the leading men;

You saw me as Hamlet, Charley, the night
that I had my Ben.

I was reckoned a fairish actor, and the public
liked me well,

Though, maybe, they'd call me stagey, now
Shakespeare must suit the swell.

But then I had big receptions, and I wasn't
afraid to shout ;

'Twas before the fine French notion of "acting
charades" came out.

I'd my name on the six-feet posters, and big
in the Drury bills ;

I think of it often now, lad, and my poor
old bosom thrills.

I can see the stage and the footlights, and the
house and the crowded pit ;

I can hear the shouts and the stamping that
tell me I've made a hit ;

I can see the sea of faces flash white as I
cross the scene.

Ah me ! but those triumphs, Charley, they
were few and too far between.

I was always weak and ailing, and I hadn't
the best of luck ;

I got the fame that I worked for, but somehow
it never stuck.

220 BALLADS OF BABYLON

There wasn't a run on Shakespeare, or the
management broke down,
And I had to take to the country, and work
from town to town.

So I couldn't have saved much money—not
with a wife to keep
And three young children, Charley—that's
one of them there asleep.

The wife she died one winter—she died of a
broken heart;

She'd to play in a play called "Troubles,"
and hers was a killing part.

And I was left with the children to do the
best I could,

But I got in the bills in London, and that
winter God was good.

I made a success, and was lucky, the play ran
half-a-year,

So I paid up my back debts bravely—and
then I was taken queer.

One day I was on the hoardings, in letters
quite two feet high,

And the next I was lying here, lad, and they
thought that I should die;

FORGOTTEN

221

But I lingered and mended slowly, and here
I am lying still—

With the last of my savings vanished, and a
terrible doctor's bill.

Oh! it's hard when the black ox bellows,
and comes with his cruel tread

To scatter our earthly treasures, and crush our
ambition dead ;

To know that the world we worked for has never
a thought to spare,

But worships a brand-new hero who reigns in
the footlights' glare.

Charley, I'm glad to see you, for there's
something I want to say,

Now I know that the Lord has called me, and
my life ebbs fast away.

It haunts me asleep and waking, and it fills
me with nameless fear ;

What will become of my darlings when I am
no longer here?

An actor is soon forgotten—he reigns as a king
awhile :

He's fêted, and cheered, and honoured, and he
basks in the public's smile.

222 BALLADS OF BABYLON

But the moment his work is over, and gone is
the power to please,
He has drained the cup of pleasure and come
to the bitter lees.

Then he whom the thousands greeted with a
tempest of hearty cheers,
Who passed as a conquering hero 'mid the
homage of crowded tiers,
May lie in his bitter anguish, and moan with
the ceaseless pain,
With never a word to soothe him, and he cries
for help in vain.
Oh, it's hard to be thus forgotten! to know,
as the years roll by,
You are fading from all remembrance, you who
had climbed so high;
It's hard, in the sad night-watches, to think
how you once could play,
And to know that the curtain's fallen which
hides you, alas! for aye.
O for the fire that nerved me when I trod the
busy scene,
In the glory of plume and helmet and my
armour's silver sheen!

O for the mad wild rapture as I fought the
mimic fight,
And the house rose nightly at me and yelled
with a fierce delight !
I am watched by the eager thousands, and their
hot flushed faces turn—
As I cry in a voice of thunder that the traitor's
threat I spurn ;
Then forth flies my white steel flashing, and I
smite at the tyrant—so,
And he reels to the wings and staggers 'neath
the weight of the ringing blow.

Hark at the people, Charley!—hark at the
mighty roar !
It floats in my ears like music that shall come
again no more.
Prop me a bit with the pillows—I'm faint, and
my sight grows dim ;
The thought of the past unnerves me, and I
tremble in every limb.
I've lain here a helpless cripple, so long in this
dull back room,
That I've grown half a corpse already ; this
is but a living tomb.

224 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Oh, it's cruel to lie and ponder, as the twilight
slowly falls,
On the scene that lies out yonder and the crowd
in Drury's walls.

I can hear the soft sweet music, I can see the
dear old baize,
And I look in the morning paper through the
list of the promised plays.
Then my eyes are closed in fancy, and right
through the walls I see,
And the lamps in the Strand are lighted, and
the folks come two and three.
Till a big crowd slowly gathers and stretches
across the street :
Then the pit-door opens sharply, and I hear
the tramping feet ;
And the quiet pro's pass onward to the stage-
door up the court—
Ah! I feel like a dying schoolboy, who
watches his comrades' sport.
I've done with the stage for ever, but I'll love
it till I die.
Charley, one word, old fellow, before we say
good-bye.

It's time for you to be going; let me look at
your face once more;

You'll be on the boards directly, and you'll
hear the welcome roar.

I've a secret, lad, to tell you—I've kept it up
till now—

But I know Whose hand is laying the chills
on my aching brow;

I smother my pride to ask it; but, Charley,
when I am dead,

Don't let me think my children may know
the want of bread.

My poor little hoard of savings has melted long
ago—

'Twas a secret I meant, God willing, the
world should never know.

I've schemed and I've planned and worried,
and parted with all we had,

And kept the poor home together with the help
of my eldest lad.

When I'm gone you may tell my story: how,
keeping the wolf at bay,

In torture of soul and body, the poor old actor
lay,

226 BALLADS OF BABYLON

Forgotten by all his fellows. But, let it go
far and wide,

'Twas the thought of his starving children that
conquered the father's pride.

THE LIFEBOAT

BEEN out in the lifeboat often? Ay, ay, sir,
oft enough.

When it's rougher than this? Lor' bless you!
this ain't what *we* calls rough!

It's when there's a gale a-blowin', and the waves
run in and break

On the shore with a roar like thunder and the
white cliffs seem to shake;

When the sea is a hell of waters, and the
bravest holds his breath

As he hears the cry for the lifeboat—his
summons maybe to death—

That's when we call it rough, sir; but, if we
can get her afloat,

There's always enough brave fellows ready to
man the boat.

You've heard of the Royal Helen, the ship as
was wrecked last year?

Yon be the rock she struck on—the boat as
went out be here;

The night as she struck was reckoned the worst
as ever we had,

And this is a coast in winter where the weather
be awful bad.

The beach here was strewed with wreckage,
and to tell you the truth, sir, then

Was the only time as ever we'd a bother to get
the men.

The single chaps was willin', and six on 'em
volunteered,

But most on us here is married, and the wives
that night was skeered.

Our women ain't chicken-hearted when it
comes to savin' lives,

But death that night looked certain—and our
wives be only wives;

Their lot ain't bright at the best, sir; but here,
when the man lies dead,

'Tain't only a husband missin', it's the children's
daily bread;

So our women began to whimper, and beg o' the
chaps to stay—

I only heerd on it after, for that night I was
kept away.

THE LIFEBOAT

229

I was up at my cottage, yonder, where the wife
lay nigh her end,
She'd been ailin' all the winter, and nothin' 'ud
make her mend.

The doctor had given her up, sir, and I knelt
by her side and prayed,
With my eyes as red as a babby's, that Death's
hand might yet be stayed.

I heerd the wild wind howlin', and I looked on
the wasted form,

And thought of the awful shipwreck as had
come in the ragin' storm ;

The wreck of my little homestead—the wreck
of my dear old wife,

Who'd sailed with me forty years, sir, o'er the
troublous waves of life,

And I looked at the eyes so sunken, as had
been my harbour lights,

To tell of the sweet home haven in the wildest,
darkest nights.

She knew she was sinkin' quickly—she knew as
her end was nigh,

But she never spoke o' the troubles as I knew
on her heart must lie,

For we'd had one great big sorrow with Jack,
our only son—

He'd got into trouble in London, as lots o' the
lads ha' done;

Then he'd bolted, his masters told us—he was
allus what folk call wild.

From the day ~~as~~ I told his mother, her dear
face never smiled.

We heerd no more about him, we never knew
where he went,

And his mother pined and sickened for the
message he never sent.

I had my work to think of; but she had her
grief to nurse,

So it eat away at her heartstrings, and her
health grew worse and worse.

And the night as the Royal Helen went down
on yonder sands,

I sat and watched her dyin', holdin' her wasted
hands.

She moved in her doze a little, then her eyes
were opened wide,

And she seemed to be seekin' somethin', as she
looked from side to side;

Then half to herself she whispered, "Where's Jack, to say good-bye?"

It's hard not to see my darlin', and kiss him afore I die!"

I was stoopin' to kiss and soothe her, while the tears ran down my cheek,

And my lips were shaped to whisper the words I couldn't speak,

When the door of the room burst open, and my mates were there outside

With the news that the boat was launchin'.

"You're wanted!" their leader cried.

"You've never refused to go, John; you'll put these cowards right.

There's a dozen of lives maybe, John, as lie in our hands to-night!"

'Twas old Ben Brown, the captain; he'd laughed at the women's doubt.

We'd always been first on the beach, sir, when the boat was goin' out.

I didn't move, but I pointed to the white face on the bed—

"I can't go, mate," I murmured; "in an hour she may be dead."

I cannot go and leave her to die in the night alone."

As I spoke Ben raised his lantern, and the light on my wife was thrown ;

And I saw her eyes fixed strangely with a pleading look on me,

While a tremblin' finger pointed through the door to the ragin' sea.

Then she beckoned me near, and whispered,
"Go, and God's will be done !

For every lad on that ship, John, is some poor mother's son."

Her head was full of the boy, sir—she was thinking, maybe, some day

For lack of a hand to help him his life might be cast away.

"Go, John, and the Lord watch o'er you ! and spare me to see the light,

And bring you safe," she whispered, "out of the storm to-night."

Then I turned and kissed her softly, and tried to hide my tears,

And my mates outside, when they saw me, set up three hearty cheers ;

THE LIFEBOAT

233

But I rubbed my eyes wi' my knuckles, and
turned to old Ben and said,

"I'll see her again, maybe, lad, when the sea
gives up its dead."

We launched the boat in the tempest, though
death was the goal in view,

And never a one but doubted if the craft could
live it through ;

But our boat she stood it bravely, and weary
and wet and weak,

We drew in hail of the vessel we had dared so
much to seek.

But just as we come upon her she gave a fearful
roll,

And went down in the seethin' whirlpool with
every livin' soul !

We rowed for the spot, and shouted, for all
around was dark—

But only the wild wind answered the cries from
our plungin' bark.

I was strainin' my eyes and watchin', when I
thought I heard a cry,

And I saw past our bows a somethin' on the
crest of a wave dashed by ;

I stretched out my hand to seize it. I dragged it aboard, and then

I stumbled, and struck my forrud, and fell like a log on Ben.

I remember a hum of voices, and then I knowed no more

Till I came to my senses here, sir—here, in my home ashore.

My forrud was tightly bandaged, and I lay on my little bed—

I'd slipped, so they told me arter, and a rulluck had struck my head.

Then my mates came in and whispered; they'd heard I was comin' round.

At first I could scarcely hear 'em, it seemed like a buzzin' sound;

But as soon as my head got clearer, and accustomed to hear 'em speak,

I knew as I'd lain like that, sir, for many a long, long week.

I guessed what the lads was hidin', for their poor old shipmate's sake.

I could see by their puzzled faces they'd got some news to break;

THE LIFEBOAT

235

So I lifts my head from the pillow, and I says
to old Ben, "Look here !
I'm able to bear it now, lad—tell me, and never
fear."

Not one on 'em ever answered, but presently
Ben goes out,

And the others slinks away like, and I says,
"What's this about ?

Why can't they tell me plainly as the poor old
wife is dead ?"

Then I fell again on the pillows, and I hid my
achin' head ;

I lay like that for a minute, till I heard a voice
cry "John !"

And I thought it must be a vision as my weak
eyes gazed upon ;

For there by the bedside, standin' up and well
was my wife.

And who do ye think was with her ? Why,
Jack, as large as life.

It was him as I'd saved from drownin' the night
as the lifeboat went

To the wreck of the Royal Helen ; 'twas that
as the vision meant.

They'd brought us ashore together, he'd knelt
by his mother's bed,
And the sudden joy had raised her like a miracle
from the dead ;
And mother and son together had nursed me
back to life,
And my old eyes woke from darkness to look
on my son and wife.
Jack? He's our right hand now, sir; 'twas
Providence pulled him through—
He's allus the first aboard her when the lifeboat
wants a crew.

THE MAGIC WAND

A SCHOOL BOARD OFFICER'S STORY

HORRIBLE dens, sir, aren't they?
This is one of my daily rounds
It's here, in these awful places,
That child-life most abounds.
We ferret from roof to basement
In search of our tiny prey;
We're down on their homes directly
If they happen to stop away.

Knock at the door! Pooh, nonsense!
They wouldn't know what it meant.
Come in and look about you;
They'll think you're a School Board gent.
Did you ever see such hovels?
Dirty, and damp, and small.
Look at the rotten flooring,
Look at the filthy wall.

238 THE MAGIC WAND

That's lucky—the place is empty,
The whole of the family's out.
This is one of my fav'rite cases :
Just give a glance about.

There's a father and four young children,
And Sally the eldest's eight ;
They're horribly poor—half-starving—
And they live in a shocking state.

The father gets drunk and beats them,
The mother she died last year :
There's a story about her dying
I fancy you'd like to hear.

She was one of our backward pupils,
Was Sally the eldest child—

A poor little London blossom
The alley had not defiled.

She was on at the Lane last winter—
She played in the pantomime ;

A lot of our School Board children
Get on at the Christmas time.

She was one of a group of fairies,
And her wand was the wand up there—
There, in the filthy corner
Behind the broken chair.

THE MAGIC WAND

239

The gilt of the star has faded,
And the tinsel's peeled away ;
But once, in the glaring lime-light,
It gleamed like a jewelled spray.
A fairy's wand in a lodging
In a slum like this looks queer ;
But you'll guess why they let her keep it
When you know how the wand came here.

Her mother was ill that winter,
Her father, the drunken sot,
Was spending his weekly earnings
And all that the fairy got.
The woman lay sick and moaning,
Dying by slow degrees
Of a cruel and wasting fever
That rages in dens like these.

But night after night went Sally,
Half-starved, to the splendid scene
Where she waved a wand of magic
As a Liliput fairy queen.
She stood in the "Land of Shadows"
Where a demon worked his spell,
At a wave of her wand he vanished,
And the scene was changed as well.

She'd a couple of lines to utter,
Which bade the gloom give way
To the "Golden Home of Bliss
In the Land of the Shining Day."
She gazed on the limelilt splendours
That grew as she waved her wand,
And she thought of the cheerless cellar
Old Drury's walls beyond.

And when, in her ragged garments,
No longer a potent fay,
She knelt by the wretched pallet
Where her dying mother lay,
She thought, as she stooped and kissed her,
And looked in the ghastly face,
Of the wand that could change a dungeon
To a sweet and lovely place.

She was only a wretched outcast,
A waif of the London slums ;
It's little of truth and knowledge
To the ears of such children comes.
She fancied her wand was truly
Possessed of a magic charm,
That it punished the wicked people,
And shielded the good from harm.

THE MAGIC WAND

241

Her mother grew slowly weaker,
The depth of the winter came,
And the teeth of the biting weather
Seized on the wasted frame.
And Sally, who saw her sinking,
Came home from the Lane one night
With her shawl wrapped over something,
And her face a ghostly white.

She had hidden the wand and brought it,
The wand that could do so much ;
She crept to the sleeping woman,
Who moved not at her touch.
She stooped to hear her breathing,
It was, O, so faint and low ;
Then, raising her wand, she waved it,
Like a fairy, to and fro.

Her well-known lines she uttered,
That bade the gloom give way
To "The Golden Home of Bliss
In the Land of Shining Day."
She murmured, "O mother, dearest,
You shall look on the splendid scene!"
While a man from the playhouse watched her
Who'd followed the fairy queen.

He thought she had stolen something,
And brought it away to sell,
He had followed her home and caught her,
And then he'd a tale to tell.
He told how he watched her waving
The wand by her mother's bed,
O'er a face where the faint grey shadows
Of the last long sleep had spread.

She's still at the school, is Sally,
And she's heard of the Realms of Light;
So she clings to the childish fancy
That entered her head that night.
She says that her poor sick mother
By her wand was charmed away
From earth to the Home of Bliss
In the Land of Eternal Day.

A BUNCH OF PRIMROSES

I AM only a faded primrose, dying for want of
air ;

I and my drooping sisters lie in a garret bare.

We were plucked from the pleasant woodland
only a week ago,

But our leaves have lost their beauty, and our
heads are bending low.

We grew in a yellow cluster under a shady tree,
In a spot where the winds came wooing straight
from the Sussex sea ;

And the brisk breeze kissed us boldly as we
nodded to and fro

In the smiling April weather—only a week ago.

Only a week this morning ! Ah, me ! but it
seems a year.

Since the only dew on our petals was a woman's
briny tear ;

244 A BUNCH OF PRIMROSES

Since the breeze and the merry sunshine were
changed for this stifling gloom
And the soot of the smoky chimneys that robs
us of our bloom.

We grew in a nook so quiet, behind a hedge so
high;

We were hid from the peeping children who,
laughing, passed us by.

But a primrose gatherer spied us—his cruel
hand came down;

We were plucked in the early morning and
packed and sent to town.

We were tossed in a busy market from grimy
hand to hand,

'Till a great rough woman took us, and hawked
us about the Strand;

Clutched in her dirty fingers our tender stalks
were tied,

And "A penny a bunch, who'll buy 'em?—
fine primroses!" she cried.

We lay on the woman's basket till a white-
faced girl came past;

There was, O, such a world of yearning in the
lingering look she cast—

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A BUNCH OF PRIMROSES 245

Cast on the tumbled bunches—a look that
seemed to say,

“O, if I only had you!”—but she sighed, and
she turned away.

She was only gone for a moment, and then she
was back again;

She'd the look on her pale, pinched features
that told of the hunger pain;

She held in her hand the penny that ought to
have bought her bread,

But she dropped it into the basket and took us
home instead.

Home—how we seemed to wither, as the light
of day grew dim,

And up to a London garret she bore us with
weary limb!

But her clasp it was kind and gentle, and there
shone a light in her eyes

That made us think for a moment we were
under our native skies.

She stole in the room on tiptoe, and “Alice,”
she softly said,

“See what I've brought you, Alice!” Then
a sick girl raised her head,

246 A BUNCH OF PRIMROSES

And a faint voice answered, "Darling, how
kind of you to bring
The flowers I love so dearly—I've longed for
them all the spring.

"I've thought of it so often, the green bank
far away,
And the posies we used to gather—it seems but
the other day;
Lay them beside my pillow, they'll last as long
as I—
How quickly in cruel London the country
blossoms die!"

We pined in our gloomy prison, and we thought
how sweet we were
Blooming among the hedgerows out in the
balmy air,
Where we gladdened the eyes that saw us all
in our yellow pride,
And we thought now our lives were wasted as
we lay by a sick bedside.
We thought how our lives were wasted until
we grew to know
We were dear to the dying workgirl for the
sake of the long ago;

A BUNCH OF PRIMROSES 247

That her anguish was half-forgotten as she
looked upon us and went
Back in her dreams to the woodland filled with
the primrose scent.

We primroses are dying, and so is Alice, fast ;
But her sister sits beside her, watching her to
the last ;

Working with swollen eyelids for the white
slave's scanty wage,
And starving to save her darling and to still the
fever's rage.

We stand on the little table beside the sick girl's
bed,

And we know by the words she murmurs that
she wanders in her head ;

She stretches her hand to take us, and laughs
like a child at play—

She thinks that she sees us growing on the
old bank far away.

Forgotten the gloomy garret, the fierce and the
fevered strife—

Forgotten the weary journey that is ending with
her life ;

248 A BUNCH OF PRIMROSES.

The black, black night has vanished, and the
weary workgirl hies
Back to her country childhood, plucking a
primrose prize.

We have banished awhile her sorrow, we have
brought back the sunny smile.

That belongs to the children's faces in the days
that are free from guile.

The Babylon roar comes floating up from the
street below :

Yet she lists to the gentle plashing of a brook
in its spring-tide flow.

The gurgling brook in the meadow, with its
primrose-laden brim—

How thick were the yellow clusters on the bank
where she sat with him !

With him who had loved and lost her, who
had trampled a blossom down.

Ah, me ! for the country blossoms brought to
the cruel town !

Thank God for the good brave sister who found
the lost one there ;

Who toiled with her for the pittance that paid
for that garret bare ;

A BUNCH OF PRIMROSES 249

Who slaved when the wasted fingers grew all
too weak to sew,
And hid all her troubles bravely that Alice
might never know.

We have brought one country sunbeam to shine
in that garret bare ;

But to-morrow will see us lifeless—killed by
the poisoned air.

Then the primrose dream will vanish, and Alice
will ask in vain

For the poor little yellow posy that made her
a child again.

On to our faded petals there falls a scalding tear ;

As we lie to-night on the bosom of her who
held us dear.

We shall go to the grave together—for the
workgirl lies at rest,

With a faded primrose posy clasped to her icy
breast.

NELLIE'S PRAYER

It's a month to-day since they brought me
The news of my darling's death ;
I knew what it meant when the neighbours
Whispered under their breath ;
And one good motherly creature,
Seeing my Nell at play,
Stooped down, with her eyelids streaming,
And kissed her and turned away.

I knew that my Nell was an orphan
And I was a widowed wife,
That a soldier for Queen and country
Had bravely given his life ;
That out on the field of battle,
Under the far-off skies,
He had thought of his absent dear ones
With the film of death on his eyes.

It was there in the evening paper,
His name was among the dead—
We had won a glorious battle,
And the enemy, beaten, fled.

NELLIE'S PRAYER

251

Then they counted the dead and wounded,
And found him among the slain ;
O God ! had I known when we parted
We were never to meet again !

I couldn't believe the story—
I couldn't believe that he,
My darling—my soldier husband—
Would never come back to me.

I had thought of him night and morning :
I had passed long nights on my knees
Praying that God would bring him
Back to me over the seas.

It all came back like a vision ;
I could hear the band as it played
When the regiment marched to the station,
And the noise that the people made
As they shouted " Good luck " to the soldiers,
And gave them three ringing cheers,
While the women, with ashen faces,
Walked by the side in tears.

We walked by *his* side that morning,
And Nellie was quite elate
With the band and the crowd and the cheering—
My Nellie was only eight.

She never thought of the danger ;
He had tried to make her gay,
And told her to take care of mother—
He wouldn't be long away.

He held her up at the station,
Lifted her up to kiss,
And then, with her arms flung round him,
Said to her, softly, this :
"Nellie, my pet, at bed-time,
When you kneel at your mother's knee
To pray to the God who loves us,
Say a wee prayer for me.

"I shall think of you in the twilight,
When the stars come out above,
And fancy I see you kneeling
With your blue eyes full of love,
Breathing my name to Heaven ;
And if, as the good folks say,
God hears the prayers of the children,
He'll guard me while I'm away.

"He'll guard me, and bring me safely
Back, little Nell, to you :
There's many a danger, darling,
He'll have to help me through."

And the child looked up at her father,
The tears in her pretty eyes ;
There was something of shame in her manner—
Something of sad surprise.

“ You needn't have asked me, daddy,
I always do that ! ” she said ;

“ Don't I pray for you and for mammy
At night when I go to bed ?

God loves the little children,
And answers their prayers they say ;
I'm sure that you'll come back safely,
I'll ask in my prayers that you may.”

It's only a month since they started,
We thought when the regiment went
That long ere the troops were landed
The force of the war would be spent.

And so I had taken courage,
And looked on the bright side first,
Though now and again I fretted,
And sometimes feared the worst.

They took little Nellie from me,
Took her away for a while ;
How could I hear her prattle,
And watch her eager smile,

As she counted the days till daddy
Would be back from the foreign shore
How could I tell my darling
She would see his face no more?

I was left alone with my sorrow—
Alone in my little room,
Where the evening shadows deepened
Into the twilight gloom.

I had heard the words they uttered,
I had seen his name on the list;
But I sat and peered through the darkness
As a sailor peers through the mist.

I sat like a sleeper doubting
If she dreams or is wide awake,
Till the truth came on me fiercely,
And I thought that my heart would break
As I sat in the deepening gloaming
The child came back again,
And I picked her up and kissed her
While my tears ran down like rain.

"Why are you crying, mammy?"
I only shook my head,
"It's nothing, Nellie," I whispered;
"Kiss me, and go to bed."

NELLIE'S PRAYER

255

"Let me say my prayers, mammy—
Will you hear me say them now?"

She prayed for her absent father;
I listened, but God knows how.

She prayed to the Lord to bring him,
Safe and sound and well,

Back from the far-off country
To mother and little Nell—

Prayed *that*, with her father lying
In that far-off country dead!

"Now, father's safe till to-morrow,"
She whispered, and went to bed.

I hadn't the heart to tell her,
So night after night she prayed,
Just as she promised her father
When the last good-bye he bade.

But the prayer was a cruel dagger
To me as I sat and heard,
And my heart was stabbed to bleeding
With every childish word.

So a weary month went over,
Till at last my nerves gave way,
And I told her to stop one evening,
As she came to my knee to pray.

My brain was turned with sorrow,
I was wicked and weak and wild
To speak as I spoke that evening,
And shock the faith of a child.

She heard what I said ; then, sobbing,
Broke from my knee and fled
Up to her room, and I heard her
Kneeling beside her bed.
She prayed in her childish fashion,
But her words were choked with tears—
I had told her it wasn't always
God the prayer of children hears.

She prayed that her absent father
Might come back safe and well,
From the perils of war and battle,
To mother and little Nell.

And, ere ever her prayer was finished,
The door was opened wide,
And my darling rushed towards me—
My darling who had died !

I gave one cry and I fainted,
And Nell ran down at the cry :
" They said God wouldn't hear me,"
She told him by-and-by.

NELLIE'S PRAYER

257

When the shock of surprise was over
We knew what the miracle meant,
There'd been a mistake in the bodies,
And the news to the wrong wife sent.

There were two of his name in the regiment—
The other was killed, and when
It came to making the list out
An error was made in the men.
Yet I think as I clasp my darling,
Would he still be here to-day
Had I shaken Nell's simple tenet,
"God listens when children pray"?

IN THE SIGNAL BOX

A STATIONMASTER'S STORY

Yas, it's a quiet station, but it suits me well enough ;

I want a bit of the smooth now, for I've had my share o' rough.

This berth that the company gave me, they gave as the work was light ;

I was never fit for the signals after one awful night.

I'd been in the box from a youngster, and I'd never felt the strain

Of the lives at my right hand's mercy in every passing train.

One day there was something happened, and it made my nerves go queer,

And it's all through that as you find me the stationmaster here.

IN THE SIGNAL BOX 259

I was on at the box down yonder—that's where
we turn the mails,

And specials, and fast expresses, on to the
centre rails ;

The side's for the other traffic—the luggage and
local slows.

It was rare hard work at Christmas, when
double the traffic grows.

I've been in the box down yonder nigh sixteen
hours a day,

Till my eyes grew dim and heavy, and my
thoughts went all astray ;

But I've worked the points half-sleeping—and
once I slept outright,

Till the roar of the Limited woke me, and I
nearly died with fright

Then I thought of the lives in peril, and what
might have been their fate

Had I sprung to the points that evening a tenth
of a tick too late ;

And a cold and ghastly shiver ran icily through
my frame

As I fancied the public clamour, the trial, and
bitter shame.

260 IN THE SIGNAL BOX

I could see the bloody wreckage—I could see
the mangled slain—

And the picture was seared for ever, blood-red,
on my heated brain.

That moment my nerve was shattered, for I
couldn't shut out the thought
Of the lives I held in my keeping, and the ruin
that might be wrought.

That night in our little cottage, as I kissed our
sleeping child,

My wife looked up from her sewing, and told
me, as she smiled,

That Johnny had made his mind up—he'd be
a pointman too.

"He says when he's big, like daddy, he'll
work in the box with you."

I frowned, for my heart was heavy, and my
wife she saw the look;

Lord bless you! my little Alice could read me
like a book.

I'd to tell her of what had happened, and I said
that I must leave,

For a pointman's arm ain't trusty when terror
lurks in his sleeve.

IN THE SIGNAL BOX 261

But she cheered me up in a minute, and that
night, ere we went to sleep,

She made me give her a promise, which I swore
that I'd always keep—

It was always to do my duty. "Do that, and
then, come what will,

You'll have no worry," said Alice, "if things
go well or ill.

There's something that always tells us the thing
that we ought to do"—

My wife was a bit religious, and in with the
chapel crew

But I knew she was talking reason, and I said
to myself, says I,

"I won't give in like a coward—it's a scare
that'll soon go by."

Now, the very next day the missus had to go
to the market town;

She'd the Christmas things to see to, and she
wanted to buy a gown.

She'd be gone for a spell, for the parly didn't
come back till eight,

And I knew, on a Christmas Eve, too, the
trains would be extra late.

262 IN THE SIGNAL BOX

So she settled to leave me Johnny, and then she
could turn the key—

For she'd have some parcels to carry, and the
boy would be safe with me.

He was five was our little Johnny, and quiet,
and nice, and good—

He was mad to go with daddy, and I'd often
promised he should.

It was noon when the missus started—her train
went by my box ;

She could see, as she passed my window, her
darling's curly locks.

I lifted him up to mammy, and he kissed his
little hand,

Then sat, like a mouse, in the corner, and
thought it was fairyland.

But somehow I fell a-thinking of a scene that
would not fade,

Of how I had slept on duty, until I grew
afraid ;

For the thought would weigh upon me, one day
I might come to lie

In a felon's cell for the slaughter of those I had
doomed to die.

IN THE SIGNAL BOX 263

The fit that had come upon me, like a hideous
nightmare seemed,

Till I rubbed my eyes and started like a sleeper
who has dreamed.

For a time the box had vanished—I'd worked
like a mere machine—

My mind had been on the wander, and I'd
neither heard nor seen.

With a start I thought of Johnny, and I turned
the boy to seek,

Then I uttered a groan of anguish, for my lips
refused to speak ;

There had flashed such a scene of horror swift
on my startled sight

That it curdled my blood in terror and sent my
red lips white.

It was all in one awful moment—I saw that the
boy was lost :

He had gone for a toy, I fancied, some child
from a train had tossed ;

The local was easing slowly to stop at the
station here.

And the Limited Mail was coming, and I had
the line to clear.

264 IN THE SIGNAL BOX

I could hear the roar of the engine, I could
almost feel its breath,
And right on the centre metals stood my boy in
the jaws of death;
On came the fierce fiend, tearing straight for the
centre line,
And the hand that must wreck or save it, O
merciful God, was mine!

'Twas a hundred lives or Johnny's. O
Heaven! what could I do?—
Up to God's ear that moment a wild, fierce
question flew—
"What shall I do, O Heaven?" and sudden
and loud and clear
On the wind came the words, "Your duty,"
borne to my listening ear.
Then I set my teeth, and my breathing was
fierce and short and quick.
"My boy!" I cried, but he heard not; and
then I went blind and sick;
The hot black smoke of the engine came with a
rush before,
I turned the mail to the centre, and by it flew
with a roar.

IN THE SIGNAL BOX 265

Then I sank on my knees in horror, and hid
my ashen face—

I had given my child to Heaven; his life was
a hundred's grace.

Had I held my hand a moment, I had hurled
the flying mail

To shatter the creeping local that stood on the
other rail!

Where is my boy, my darling? O God! let
me hide my eyes.

How can I look—his father—on that which
there mangled lies?

That voice!—O merciful Heaven!—'tis the
child's, and he calls my name!

I hear, but I cannot see him, for my eyes are
filled with flame.

I knew no more that night, sir, for I fell, as I
heard the boy;

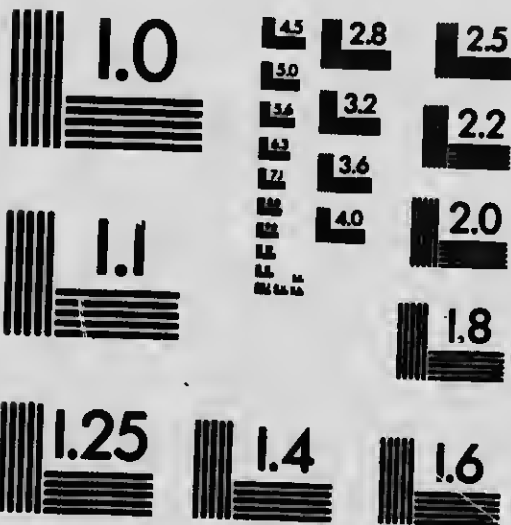
The place reeled round, and I fainted—swooned
with the sudden joy.

But I heard on the Christmas morning, when
I woke in my own warm bed,

With Alice's arms around me, and a strange
wild dream in my head,



(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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266 IN THE SIGNAL BOX

That she'd come by the early local, being
anxious about the lad,
And had seen him there on the metals, and the
sight nigh drove her mad—
She had seen him just as the engine of the
Limited closed my view,
And she'd leapt on the line and saved him just
as the mail dashed through.

She was back in the train in a second, and both
were safe and sound—
The moment they stopped at the station she
ran here, and I was found
With my eyes like a madman's glaring, and my
face a ghastly white:
I heard the boy, and I fainted, and I hadn't my
wits that night.
Who told me to do my duty? What voice
was that on the wind?
Was it fancy that brought it to me? or were
there God's lips behind?
If I hadn't a-done my duty—had I ventured
to disobey—
My bonny boy and his mother might have died
by my hand that day.

TICKET-O'-LEAVE

A VILLAGE DRAMA

Who's getting married this morning? Some
o' the big folks? No!

Leastways, not as you'd call such as nowadays
big folks go

It's only a common wedding—old Bradley's
daughter Eve

Is a-saying "I will" in yonder, and the
bridegroom's "Ticket-o'-Leave."

You thought 'twas a big folk's wedding because
o' the crowd, maybe;

Well, it's one as the whole o' the village has
come to the church to see.

You needn't say you're a stranger—if you
wasn't you'd know their tale,

For to find another as didn't you might search
ten mile and fail.

"Ticket-o'-Leave," did I call him? I did,
sir, and all round here

"Ticket-o'-Leave" we've called him for as
nigh as maybe a year;

For he came back here from a prison—this is
his native place,

And that wa. the gibe as his neighbours flung in
his haggard face.

Eve was the village beauty, with half the lads
at her feet;

But she only gave 'em the chaff, sir—it was
Ned as got all the wheat.

They were sweethearts trothed and plighted,
for old Bradley was nothing loth—

He had kissed the girl when she told him, and
promised to help them both.

But Jack, his son, was his idol—a rackety,
scapegreece lad;

Though to speak e'er a word agin him was to
drive the old chap mad.

He worshipped the boy—God help him!—
the dearest to him on earth:

The wife of his early manhood had died in
giving him birth.

To him Jack was just an angel; but over the
village ale

The gossips who knew his capers could tell
a different tale.

There were whispers of more than folly—of
drinking bouts and of debt,

And of company Jack was keeping into which
it was bad to get.

Ned heard it all at the alehouse, smoking his
pipe one night,

And he struck his fist on the table, and gave
it them left and right;

He said it was lies, and dared them to breathe
a word 'gin the lad—

He feared it might reach the farmer; but Ned
knew as the boy was ba

Old Bradley was weak and ailing, the doctor
had whispered Ned

That a sudden shock would kill him—that he
held his life by a thread.

So that made Ned more than anxious to keep
the slanders back

That were running rife in the village about
the scapegrace Jack.

One night—I shall ne'er forget it, for it came
like a thunderclap—

The news came into the village as they'd found
a pedlar chap

Smothered in blood and senseless, shot and
robbed on the green,

And they brought Ned back here handcuffed
two constables between.

At first we couldn't believe it, not as he could
ha' been the man,

But one of our chaps had caught him just as
he turned and ran—

Had caught Ned there red-handed, with a gun
and the pedlar's gold,

And we went in a crowd to the station, where
the rest of the tale was told.

The facts agin Ned were damning. When
they got the pedlar round

His wound was probed, and a bullet that fitted
Ned's gun was found.

He'd been shot from behind a hedgerow, and
had fallen and swooned away,

And Ned must have searched his victim and
have robbed him as he lay.

They kept it back from the farmer, who had
taken at last to his bed :

Eve came, red-eyed, and told him that she'd
had a quarrel with Ned,

And he'd gone away and had left them, and
p'r'aps he wouldn't come back—

Old Bradley said he was sorry, then asked for
his boy, his Jack.

And Jack, white-faced and trembling, he crept
to his father's side,

And was scarcely away from the homestead
till after the old man died.

On the night that death crossed the threshold
one last, long, lingering look

At the face that was his dead darling's the
poor old farmer took.

As the shadows of twilight deepened the long
ago came back,

And his weak voice faintly whispered, "Lean
over and kiss me, Jack ;

Let me take your kiss to Heaven, to the mother
who died for you."

And Eve sobbed out as she heard him, "Thank
God, he never knew !"

In his lonely cell a felon heard of the old man's
end

In a letter his faithful sweetheart had conquered
her grief to send ;

And the load of his pain was lightened as he
thought of what might have been

Had Jack and not he been taken that night
upon Parson's Green.

Five years went over the village, and then, one
midsummer eve,

Came Ned back here as an outcast—out on his
ticket-o'-leave ;

And all of the people shunned him ; the
Braunys had moved away,

For Jack had squandered the money in drink
and in vice and play.

Poor Eve was up at the doctor's—his house-
keeper grave and staid ;

There was something about her manner that
made her old flames afraid.

Not one of them went a-wooing—they said
that her heart was dead,

That it died on the day the judges sentenced
her sweetheart Ned.

TICKET-O'-LEAVE 273

"Ticket-o'-Leave" they called him after he
came back here :

God knows what he did for a living!—he must
ha' been starved pretty near.

But he clung to the village somehow—got an
odd job now and then ;

But, whenever a farmer took him, there was
grumbling among the men.

He was flouted like that for a twelvemonth.

Then suddenly came a tale

That a man from out of our village had been
sick in the county gaol—

Sick unto death, and, dying, he had eased his
soul of a sin,

Hoping by that atonement some mercy above
to win.

We knew it all on Sunday, for the parson,
right out in church,

He wiped away in a moment from Ned the
felon smirch.

He told us his noble story ; how, following
Jack that night,

He had seen him shoot at the pedlar, and rob
him and take to flight.

He had seized the gun and the money from
the rascal's trembling hand ;

Jack fled at the sound of footsteps, and the
rest you can understand.

The word that he might have spoken Ned
kept to himself to save,

For the sake of the dying father, the pitiful
thief and knave.

He knew that the blow would hasten the death
of one who had done

More for him than a father—who had treated
him as a son ;

And so he suffered in silence, all through the
weary years,

The felon's shame and the prison, and the
merciless taunts and jeers

Hark ! there's the organ pealing. See how
the crowd divides !

Room for the best of fellows !—room for the
queen of brides !

Look at their happy faces ! Three cheers
for the faithful Eve !

And three times three and another for Ned
the " Ticket-o'-Leave ! "

THE STREET TUMBLERS

THANK the lady, Johnny, and give the money
to dad ;

Yes, I'm his mother, lady—don't say, "Poor
little lad ! "

For he likes the tumblin' rarely—took to it
from the first.

Accidents ?—nothing to speak of—a bruise or
two at the worst.

It's him as draws the money ; he's pretty and
looks so smart,

He gets many a bit o' silver, with a "Bless
your little heart ! "

Danger—because his father flings him up like a
ball ?—

He's been at the game too long, ma'am, to let
our Johnny fall.

You'd sooner your child was dead, ma'am, than
leading a life like this ?

Come here a minute, Johnny, and give your
mammy a kiss ;

276 THE STREET TUMBLERS

Look at his rosy cheeks, ma'am! look at his
sturdy limbs!

Look how his dark eyes glisten! there's nothin'
their brightness dims.

We live in the air and sunshine, we tramp thro'
the long green lanes,

We know where to' get good shelter, and we
never have aches or pains.

We're happy we three together as we roam
from place to place,

We should die pent up in cities, for we come of
a gipsy race.

The rough and the smooth together, it isn't so
hard a life.

Yes, I've had my troubles—the biggest, the
year I was mother and wife.

'Twas a hard black frosty winter the year that
our baby came,

The master had sprained his ankle, and hobbled
along dead lame.

He'd had to give up performin', for the agony
made him shriek,

And I had a month-old baby, and illness had
left me weak.

THE STREET TUMBLERS 277

We couldn't do much for a livin', and we
weren't the folks to beg;

The master was fond o' baby, but, Lord, how
he cursed his leg!

We wouldn't go in the workhouse, so we just
kept trampin' on,

Till the last of our little savin's hoarded for
months had gone.

The master he got no better, and I got worse
and worse,

And I watched the baby wastin' as I hadn't the
strength to nurse.

I was cross and low, and I fretted, and I'd look
at the child and think

As p'r'aps it 'ud be a mercy if the Lord 'ud let
it sink—

Sink and die and be buried before it grew to
know

What a road life is to travel when the luck's
agin' your show.

At last, with the miles of trampin', Jo's leg
grew quite inflamed,

And the doctor who saw it told him if he didn't
rest he'd be lamed;

278 THE STREET TUMBLERS

You can fancy what that meant, lady, to him as
could lie in the street

And toss a weight up and catch it, and spin it
round with his feet.

Now we couldn't earn a copper, and at last we
wanted bread,

So we had to go to the workhouse for the
sake of a meal and bed.

We had to go to the workhouse, where they
parted man and wife,

And that was the wretchedest time, ma'am, of
all my wand'rin' life.

It's only folks, like ourselves, ma'am, as can tell
what artists feels,

When they're treated like common loafers that
tramps and cadges and steals.

It seemed to us like a prison, with all them
heartless rules,

So we started again, but often I'd stop by one
o' them pools

That lie in a quiet corner, dark and slimy and
still,

And wonder what drownin' felt like—you see I
was weak and ill.

THE STREET TUMBLERS 279

I know it was bad and sinful, but my thoughts
were strange and wild ;

You can pity a homeless mother, who loved her
ailin' child.

I hated the healthy babies I saw in their mothers'
arms,

I'd look at my pale thin darlin' with a thousand
wild alarms,

And think of what lay before us if the master
didn't mend,

And our means of earnin' a livin' had come
to a sudden end.

I envied the sturdy children when I looked at
my poor wee mite.

I sometimes fancy now, ma'am, maybe as my
head weren't right ;

But I never envied another after a certain day,
As Providence gave me a lesson in a wonderful
sort o' way.

It was through your a-sayin' you'd rather your
child was stiff and dead

Than leadin' a life like Johnny, and as put it
into my head

280 THE STREET TUMBLERS

To tell you my bit o' story, and how as I came
to see

It's better to be contented, no matter how bad
things be.

Now look at him yonder, lady—handsome and
firm o' limb ;

There isn't a mother in England as mightn't be
proud o' him.

Yet the day as I had my lesson I looked at his
poor pinched face,

And I envied a little creature as came of a high-
born race.

We'd tramped to a country village, and passin'
the village church

Sat down in the porch a minit, for Joe had
begun to lurch

And stagger a bit and murmur, for his ankle was
awful bad ;

But we hadn't sat down a second when a beadle
came up like mad.

And ordered us off, and bellowed, and went
nigh black in the face ;

We saw what was up directly, when a big
crowd filled the place,

THE STREET TUMBLERS 281

And carriages full of ladies came drivin' up to
the gate ;

I never saw such a christenin'—'twas the heir
to a grand estate.

We were pushed along by the people, and got
mixed up in the crowd,

And I heard 'twas a countess's baby, for the
women talked aloud.

The great folks filled the chancel—all friends of
my lord the earl's,

For this was the first boy-baby—the others had
all been girls.

I heard that one-half the county would come to
that baby-boy ;

I watched as his grand nurse held him, and I
saw the mother's joy.

Then I thought of the life of pleasure, of the
love and the tender care,

Of the fortune that God had given that white-
robed baby-heir.

Then I looked at my half-starved Johnny, and
thought of his hapless lot,

A lame street-tumbler's baby, by God and by
man forgot.

282 THE STREET TUMBLERS

And my heart was filled with passion as I
looked at the tiny heir,
And thought, "Ah, if only Johnny had future
half as fair!"
I envied my lady countess—no fear had she for
her child;
My eyes were red with weepin'—her proud lips
only smiled,
And I cried in my bitter anguish, "O God, if
my little son
Could have such a fate as Heaven intends for
that pampered one!"

So we stood in the church—two mothers—she
blessed and me accursed,
And my heart was full of envy, when suddenly
with a burst
Of a music loud and joyous the organ filled the
place;
And stoopin', the lovely countess pressed her
lips on her baby's face.
And then—it was all in a moment—I heard a
sudden cry,
And a shriek from the lady-mother—then a
murmur from low and high.

THE STREET TUMBLERS 283

For the baby-heir to the title, guarded from
every harm,

Lay dead in its christenin' garments—lay dead
in its nurse's arm!

I rushed from the church that moment, my
senses seemed to reel,

And I hugged my poor wee baby, with my
hand on its heart to feel

The beatin' that seemed like music—then I
clasped it to my breast

And smothered its face with kisses till I woke
it from its rest.

Then its eyes looked up so sweetly, like an
angel's, into mine,

And I thanked the God of Mercy for a blessing
so divine.

For I had my babe—my darlin'—what matter
the workhouse bed?

I could pity the noble lady, whose little child
lay dead.

But our luck got round soon after, for I got
better so quick

I was able to dance and juggle, and spin the hat
with a stick;

284 THE STREET TUMBLERS

And Johnny grew plump and pretty, and learnt
to hold the shell,

To lisp out "Ta" for the pennies, and the
master's leg got well ;

And then when the boy grew bigger he took
to the tumblin' so

That he learnt the tricks directly, and was quite
a part of the show.

Street tumblin' ain't a fortune, but you know
how I came to see

As it's better to rest contented, to be what
you've got to be.

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN

How is the boy this morning? Why do you
shake your head?

Ah! I can see what's happened—there's a
screen drawn round the bed.

So poor little Mike is sleeping the last long
sleep of all;

I'm sorry—but who could wonder, after that
dreadful fall?

Let me look at him, doctor—poor little London
waif!

His frail barque's out of the tempest, and lies in
God's harbour safe;

It's better he died in the ward here, better a
thousand times,

Than have wandered back to the alley, with its
squalor and nameless crimes.

Too young for the slum to sully, he's gone to
the wonderland

To look on the thousand marvels that he scarce
could understand.

286 THE ROAD TO HEAVEN

Poor little baby outcast, poor little waif of sin !
He has gone, and the pitying angels have carried
the cripple in.

Didn't you know his story ?—Ah, you weren't
here, I believe,
When they brought the poor little fellow to the
hospital, Christmas Eve.
It was I who came here with him, it was I who
saw him go
Over the bridge that evening into the Thames
below.

'Twas a raw cold air that evening—a biting
Christmassy frost—
I was looking about for a collie—a favourite
dog I'd lost.
Some ragged boys, so they told me, had been
seen with one that night
In one of the bridge recesses, so I hunted left
and right.

You know the stone recesses—with the long
broad bench of stone,
To many a weary outcast as welcome as
monarch's throne ;

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN 287

On the fiercest night you may see them, as
crouched in the dark they lie,
Like the hunted vermin, striving to hide from
the hounds in cry.

The seats that night were empty, for the
morrow was Christmas Day,

And even the outcast loafers seemed to have
slunk away;

They had found a warmer shelter—some casual
ward, maybe—

They'd manage a morning's labour for the sake
of the meat and tea.

I fancied the seats were empty, but, as I passed
along,

Out of the darkness floated the words of a
Christmas song,

Sung in a childish treble—'twas a boy's voice
hoarse with cold,

Quavering out the anthem of angels and harps
of gold.

I stood where the shadows hid me, and peered
about until

I could see two rugged urchins, blue with the
icy chill,

288 THE ROAD TO HEAVEN

Cuddling close together, crouched on a big
stone seat—

Two little homeless arabs, waifs of the London
street.

One was singing the carol, while the other, with
big round eyes—

It was Mike—looked up in wonder, and said,
“Jack when we dies

Is that the place as we goes to—that place
where ye’r dressed in white?

And has golding ’arps to play on, and it’s
warm and jolly and bright?

“Is that what they mean by ’eaven, as the
misshun coves talks about,

Where the children’s always happy and nobody
kicks ’em out?”

Jack nodded his head assenting, and then I
listened and heard

The talk of the little arabs—listened to every
word.

Jack was a Sunday scholar, so I gathered from
what he said,

But he sang in the road for a living—his father
and mother were dead;

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN 289

And he had a drunken granny, who turned
him into the street—

Sh. "—ank what he earned, and often he hadn't
a crust to eat.

He told little Mike of heaven in his rough
untutored way,

He made it a land of glory where the children
sing all day;

And Mike, he shivered and listened, and told
his tale to his friend,

How he was starved and beaten—'twas a tale
one's heart to rend.

He'd a drunken father and mother, who sent
him out to beg,

Though he'd just got over a fever, and was
lame with a withered leg;

He told how he daren't crawl homeward,
because he had begged in vain,

And his parents' brutal fury haunted his baby
brain.

"I wish I could go to 'eaven," he cried, as
he shook with fright;

"If I thought as they'd only take me, why
I'd go this very night.

290 THE ROAD TO HEAVEN

Which is the way to 'caven? How d'ye get there, Jack?"—

Jack climbed on the bridge's coping, and looked at the water black.

"That there's *our* road to 'caven," he said, as he pointed down

To where the cold Thames water surged muddy and thick and brown.

"If we was to fall in there, Mike, we'd be dead; and right through there

Is the place where it's always sunshine, and the angels has crowns to wear."

Mike rose and looked at the water; he peered in the big broad stream,

Perhaps with a childish notion he might catch the golden gleam

Of the far-off land of glory. He leaned right over and cried—

"If them are the gates of 'caven, how I'd like to be inside!"

He'd stood but a moment looking—how it happened I cannot tell—

When he seemed to lose his balance, gave a short shrill cry, and fell—

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN 291

Fell o'er the narrow coping, and I heard his
poor head strike

With a thud on the stonework under; then
splash in the Thames went Mike.

We brought him here that evening. For help
I had managed to shout—

A boat put off from the landing, and they
dragged his body out;

His forehead was cut and bleeding, but a
vestige of life we found;

When they brought him here he was senseless,
but slowly the child came round.

I came here on Christmas morning—the ward
was all bright and gay

With mistletoe, green, and holly, in honour of
Christmas Day;

And the patients had clean white garments,
and a few in the room out there

Had joined in a Christmas service—they were
singing a Christmas air.

They were singing a Christmas carol when
Mike from his stupor woke,

And dim on his wandering senses the strange
surroundings broke.

292 THE ROAD TO HEAVEN

Half-dreamily he remembered the tale he had heard from Jack—

The song, and the white-robed angels, the warm bright Heaven came back.

"I'm in Heaven," he whispered faintly.

"Yes, Jack must have told me true!"

And, as he looked about him, came the kind old surgeon through.

Mike gazed at his face a moment, put his hand to his fevered head,

Then to the kind old doctor, "Please, are you God?" he said.

Poor little Mike! 'twas Heaven, this hospital ward to him—

A heaven of warmth and comfort, till the flickering lamp grew dim;

And he lay like a tired baby in a dreamless gentle rest,

And now he is safe for ever where such as he are best.

This is the day of scoffers, but who shall say that night,

When Mike asked the road to Heaven, that Jack didn't tell him right?

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN 293

'Twas the children's Jesus pointed the way to
the kingdom come

For the poor little tired arab, the waif of a
London slum.

IN THE HARBOUR

Go for a sail this mornin'?—This way, yer honour, please.

Weather about? Lor' bless you, only a pleasant breeze.

My boat's that there in the harbour, and the man aboard's my mate.

Jump in, and I'll row you out, sir; that's her, the Crazy Kate.

Queer name for a boat, you fancy; well, so it is, maybe,

But Crazy Kate and her story's the talk o' the place, you see;

And me and my pardner knowed her—knowed her all her life—

We was both on us asked to the weddin' when she was made a wife.

Her as our boat's named arter was famous far and wide;

For years in all winds and weathers she haunted the harbour side,

IN THE HARBOUR 295

With her great wild eyes a-starin' and a-strainin'
across the waves,

Waitin' for what can't happen till the dead come
out o' their graves.

She was married to young Ned Garling, a big
brown fisher-lad ;

One week a bride, and the next one a sailor's
widow—and mad.

They were married one fearful winter, as
widowed many a wife.

He'd a smile for all the lasses ; but she loved
him all her life.

A rollickin' gay young fellow, we thought her
too good for him.

He'd been a bit wild and careless—but married
all taut and trim,

We thought as he'd mend his manners when he
won the village prize,

And carried her off in triumph before many a
rival's eyes.

But one week wed and they parted—he went
with the fisher fleet—

With the men who must brave the tempest that
the women and bairns may eat.

296 IN THE HARBOUR

It's a rough long life o' partin's is the life o' the
fisher folk,

And there's never a winter passes but some good-
wife's heart is broke.

We've a sayin' among us sea-folk as few on us
dies in bed—

Walk through our little churchyard and read the
tale of our dead—

It's mostly the bairns and the women as is restin'
under the turf,

For half o' the men sleep yonder under the
rollin' surf.

The night Kate lost her husband was the night
o' the fearful gale—

She'd stood on the shore that mornin' and had
watched the tiny sail

As it faded away in the distance—bound for the
coast o' France,

And the fierce wind bore it swiftly away from
her anxious glance.

The boats that had sailed that mornin' with the
fleet were half a score,

And never a soul among 'em came back to the
English shore.

IN THE HARBOUR 297

There was wringin' o' hands and moanin', and
when they spoke o' the dead
For many a long day after the women's eyes
were red.

Kate heard it as soon as any—the fate of her
fisher-lad—

But her eyes were wild and tearless; she went
slowly and surely mad.

“He isn't drowned,” she would murmur: “he
will come again some day”—

And her lips shaped the self-same story as the
long years crept away.

Spring, and summer, and autumn—in the fiercest
winter gale,

Would Crazy Kate stand watchin' for the glint
of a far-off sail;

Stand by the hour together and murmur her
husband's name—

For twenty years she watched there, for the
boat that never came.

She counted the years as nothin'—the shock that
had sent her mad

Had left her love for ever a brave, young, hand-
some lad;

298. IN THE HARBOUR

She thought one day she should see him, just
as he said good-bye,

When he leapt in his boat and vanished where
the waters touched the sky.

She was but a lass when it happened—the last
time I saw her there

The first faint streaks o' silver had come in her
jet-black hair ;

And then a miracle happened—her mad, weird
words came right,

For the fisher lad came ashore, sir, one wild and
stormy night.

We were all of us watchin', waitin', for at dusk
we'd heard a cry,

A far-off cry, round the headland, and strained
was every eye—

Strained through the deep'nin' darkness, and a
boat was ready to man—

When, all of a sudden, a woman down to the
surf-line ran.

'Twas Crazy Kate. In a moment, before what
she meant was known,

The boat was out in the tempest—and she was
in it alone.

IN THE HARBOUR 299

She was out of sight in a second—but over the
sea came a sound,

The voice of a woman cryin' that her long-lost
love was found.

A miracle, sir, for the woman came back
through the ragin' storm,

And there in the boat beside her was lyin' a
lifeless form.

She leapt to the beach and staggered, cryin',
"Speak to me, husband, Ned!"

As the light of our lifted lanterns flashed on the
face o' the dead.

It was him as had sailed away, sir—a miracle
sure it seemed.

We looked at the lad and knowed him, and
fancied we must ha' dreamed—

It was twenty years since we'd seen him—since
Kate, poor soul, went mad,

But there in the boat that evenin' lay the same
brown handsome lad.

Gently we took her from him—for she moaned
that he was dead—

We carried him to a cottage and we laid him
on a bed;

300 IN THE HARBOUR.

But Kate came pushin' her way through and
she clasped the lifeless clay,
And we hadn't the heart to hurt her, so we
couldn't tear her away.

The news of the miracle travelled, and folks
came far and near,
And the women talked of spectres—it had
given 'em quite a skeer;
And the parson he came with the doctor down
to the cottage quick—
They thought as us sea-folks' fancy had played
our eyes a trick.

But the parson, who'd known Kate's husband,
as had married 'em in the church,
When he seed the dead lad's features he gave
quite a sudden lurch,
And his face was as white as linen—for a
moment it struck him dumb—
I half expected he'd tell us as the Judgment
Day was come.

The Judgment Day, when the ocean they say
'ull give up its dead;
What else meant those unchanged features,
though twenty years had sped?

.

IN THE HARBOUR 301

That night, with her arms around him, the
poor mad woman died,
And here in our village churchyard we buried
'em side by side.

'Twas the shock, they said, as killed her—the
shock o' seein' him dead.

The story got in the papers, and far and near
it spread ;

And some only half believed it—I know what
you'd say, sir ; wait—

Wait till you hear the finish o' this story o'
Crazy Kate.

It was all explained one mornin' as clear as the
light o' day,

And when we knowed we were happy to think
as she'd passed away,

As she died with her arms around him, her lips
on the lips o' the dead—

Believin' the face she looked on was the face o'
the man she'd wed.

But the man she'd wed was a villain, and that
she never knew—

He hadn't been drowned in the tempest ; he
only of all the crew

302 IN THE HARBOUR

Was saved by a French ship, cruising, and
carried ashore, and there

Was nursed to life by a woman—a French girl,
young and fair.

He fell in love with the woman—this dare-devil
heartless Ned,

And married her, thinkin' the other had given
him up for dead.

He was never the man—and we'd said so—for
a lovin' lass like Kate;

But he mightn't ha' done what he did, sir, if
he'd known of her cruel fate.

'Twas his son by the foreign woman, his image
in build and face,

Whose lugger the storm had driven to his
father's native place—

'Twas his son who had come like a phantom out
of the long ago.

On the spot where Kate had suffered God's
hand struck Ned the blow.

We learnt it all from the parson when Ned came
over the waves

In search o' the son he worshipped—and he
found two fresh-made graves.

IN THE HARBOUR 303

Dang!—what was that? Sit steady! Rowed
right into you, mate!

I forgot where I was for a moment—I was
telli' the gent about Kate.

THE LAND OF GOLD

"THE woman must go to the workhouse, and the young 'uns to the schools.

Outdoor relief? O, nonsense!—besides, it's against the rules."

The man didn't speak unkindly, he simply met the case,

But the woman she lay and listened with a white despairing face.

She had starved herself to a shadow, she had plied her needle and thread

To pay the rent of her lodging, and to give her children bread ;

But when she was down with fever, to the parish her landlord sent

To come and remove the tenant who had nothing to pay the rent.

The children clung to their mother, the tears coursed down their cheeks ;

They had been her little nurses through all the weary weeks.

THE LAND OF GOLD 305

They had starved, and had never murmured ;
they had knelt with her to pray
That the God of widow and orphan would send
them a brighter day.

But now they were thrust asunder—the parish,
whose laws are wise,

Can't alter its regulations for sentimental ties ;
The guardians in their wisdom keep families far
apart,

Which is good for the parish pocket if bad for
the pauper heart.

They took her away to the workhouse—this
woman, Elizabeth Roy,

And the officer came soon after to fetch the girl
and boy ;

But the girl and the boy had vanished ; they
dreaded their pauper fate—

The boy was just eleven, and the little girl was
eight.

Where had the children gone to ? They'd
hidden, the neighbours said,

And all that day they hunted for Kate and her
brother Fred.

306 THE LAND OF GOLD

But night came down on the alley where their
poor little home had been,
And by none of the people searching were the
missing children seen.

The mother lay in the workhouse, racked with
the hunger pain,

But a beautiful, peaceful vision came to her
fevered brain :

The squalor of slum and alley had faded out of
sight,

And back to a scene far brighter had Fancy
winged its flight.

Happy as wife and mother, she sat in the sunlit
room,

And looked down the country garden, where
the roses were in bloom :

And the children played and prattled, and their
innocent laughter filled

The air with a joyous music, and the sweet
birds sang and trilled.

And he, her love and her darling, stood smiling
by her side,

As gentle, as kind and tender, as the day she
was his bride ;

THE LAND OF GOLD 307

There was never a cloud in the heavens, never
a chill in the breeze.

As the sunshine danced a measure with the
leaves of the waving trees.

But suddenly rose a tempest, and the skies grew
an ashen grey,

And night with its gloom and terrors had
banished the golden day.

A wife sat alone—deserted—left with her babes
to brave

The storm that had proved her husband only a
coward knave.

He had flown from the shame and sorrow,
flown to a far-off land,

Leaving his wife and children with never a
helping hand—

Leaving them here to suffer for the reckless life
he'd led.

So, giving up all for honour, she toiled for her
daily bread :

Toiled as the hungry women of the seething
cities do,

Killing themselves by inches, for the white
slave-driving crew—

308 THE LAND OF GOLD

Toiled for a scanty pittance, till the feeble
frame gave way,
And she fell a starving pauper, the parish's
lawful prey.

Her life came back in her dreaming as she
tossed through the weary night,
And woke in the parish poorhouse in the early
morning light—

Woke to the bitter knowledge that there in the
guiltless jail

She must bear the punishment meekly of those
who try and fail,—

That pent in a dreary prison like a felon she'd
have to stay,

With never a kind face near her, and her
children far away :

In an angry sea of troubles she had failed to
stem the flood—

For this she had lost her freedom and the right
to her flesh and blood.

Where had the children gone to? She never
knew their fate.

They feared to tell her the story in her weak,
exhausted state ;

THE LAND OF GOLD 309

But the neighbours had traced the children to
the busy riverside—

Some one had seen them gazing on the black
and swollen tide.

They had heard of the fate before them, they
had thought of the "schools" with dread,
They'd be found some day in the river—that's
what the gossips said ;

But many a month went over, and never a trace
was found

Of the missing brother and sister, and the
parish believed them drowned.

Yet they were alive and happy, thousands of
miles away ;

And this is how things had happened. They
had heard the people say

That "the workhouse" would come to take
them. They knew of their mother's fate,
So they held a council together, Fred and his
sister Kate.

A wonderful scheme the boy had: he had
heard of a Land of Gold

Where you pick up the yellow nuggets as big
as your hand can hold--

310 THE LAND OF GOLD

Where the beautiful golden metal that can buy
you such lovely things

Can be got with a spade—and he murmured,
“O, Kate, for a pair of wings!

“For a pair of wings to fly with, away to that
golden land,

And then we could fill our pockets,”—but
Kate didn’t understand,

So he told her the splendid story—he fancied
that in the mines,

In great big wondrous masses, the fabulous
treasure shines—

And he said if they could but get there and dig
up a lot of gold

They’d be able to get the things back their
mother had pawned and sold,

And buy her warm clothes for winter and
comforts to make her well:

But how they could make the journey was more
than the boy could tell.

“I know!” cried Kate, in a moment; “I’ve
heard the teacher say

That ships from the docks are sailing almost
every day.

THE LAND OF GOLD 311

You know the name of the country where the
golden nuggets grow ;

Let us look for a ship that sails there, and step
on board and go.

There's only one thing," she added—"I fancy
you have to pay."

Then Fred remembered a story he'd heard of a
stowaway,

So they trudged to the Docks, and, finding a
vessel about to sail,

They managed to get on board her and hide
behind a bale.

They were found by the men next morning
when the vessel was out at sea,

And were taken before the captain, who said a
word spelt with D ;

But they told him their simple story, and begged
so hard to stay

That the captain's wrath was melted, and he
took them all the way.

And the passengers heard about it, and petted
the girl and boy,

And the hearts of the little miners were filled
with childish joy

312 THE LAND OF GOLD

As they dreamed of the famous gold-fields that
lay across the seas ;
And the good ship ploughed the waters, and
flew before the breeze.

Their pale cheeks flushed with colour, and their
tear-dimmed eyes grew bright,
And the ship was a wondrous playground from
early morn to night.

When they touched at last at Melbourne, the
captain took them ashore,
And showed them a hundred marvels they had
never seen before.

But Freddy said to the captain, " We shall
have to say good-bye,

For we want to get to the places where the
beautiful nuggets lie.

We'll go, if you please, to-morrow, and as soon
as we've filled a sack,

We'd like, if you'd be so kind, sir, for your
ship to take us back."

The eyes of the captain twinkled—he thought
it a splendid joke !

And that night in a Melbourne bar-room, having
his evening smoke,

THE LAND OF GOLD 313

He told the children's story to the men who
were in the place ;

There were some of them there, old miners,
who said " 'T was a rummy case."

But one of them asked the captain to let him
see "the pair" :

A big, fine, handsome fellow, who'd made a
fortune there,

Who'd roughed it for years as a miner, but had
just made a lucky hit,

And brought his "pile" to Melbourne, and was
going the pace a bit.

The captain took the miner, and showed him
the girl and boy.

He asked the girl what her name was, and she
answered "Katie Roy."

The miner stared for a moment, and his face
went deadly white,

Then he asked the boy a question—he mightn't
have heard aright.

He asked him about his mother, and the miner's
face flushed hot

As the children told the story of their mother's
weary lot ;

314 THE LAND OF GOLD

He rushed from the room like a madman, and
came back with a bag of gold,
And gave to the staring children as much as
their hands could hold.

"Take that," he said, "to your mother—it's
the gold that you came to seek ;
God's Providence sent you hither, the wanted
word to speak
To call the wanderer homeward—he'll sail by
to-morrow's ship."

Then he touched the children's foreheads with
a hot and trembling lip,
And told them that he was their father—the
father who ran away
When things went wrong in the City, and a
gambler couldn't pay ;
The father who left their mother, and had gone
from bad to worse,
Till a stroke of luck at the diggings had
suddenly filled his purse.

A white-faced convalescent sat in the workhouse
yard,
Dozing away her leisure, for her lot was rough
and hard ;

THE LAND OF GOLD 315

And a beautiful dream. God sent her—a dream
of the long ago,
In the days ere her heart was heavy with a
burden of bitter woe.
She dreamed that her husband called her, with
a smile on his handsome face,
And the children ran towards her—then she
woke in that dreary place ;
Woke with a cry of wonder, for her husband
called her name,
And, bounding along to greet her, the boy and
his sister came.

Or ever a word she uttered, the children were
at her knee—
In her lap fell a golden shower, and the boy
cried out in glee,
“Look what we’ve brought you, mother!
We’ve been to the Land of Gold,
And daddy’s got lots of nuggets—more than
your hands could hold.”
She gave one glance at the treasure, and then
her head sank down
On the breast of the sunburnt miner, and the
gold slipped from her gown ;

316 THE LAND OF GOLD

And the paupers stared in wonder as the
sovereigns rolled away—
Folks don't walk into the workhouse with
fortunes every day.

Are you anxious to hear the finish? I fancy
that you can guess
How Elizabeth Roy's eyes brightened at the
old familiar "Bess,"
And your fancy can paint the picture of the
dawn of a happier fate
As father and mother and children went out
of the workhouse gate.
Would you like to know the sequel? Peep
through the hedge and see
The dear old home and the garden, just as
they used to be,
And a happy wife and husband, smiling the
smile of old
As the children tell the story of their trip to
the Land of Gold.

A LANCASHIRE LAD *

So you've gotten an offer o' marriage! There's
a brave and comely lad
Wi' a home of his own a'ready, and he's
sighin' away like mad,
And frettin' his honest heart out, just for a
word o' thine;
And he canna tell if you love him, for your
cheeks give ne'er a sign.

He told me the tale hissen, lass—he left me
a while ago.
You're makin' his heart a plaything, and wunna
say yes or no.

* For many reasons I have allowed the heroine of this ballad to tell her story without a too strict adherence to the Lancashire dialect. She had been in the Colonies for many years, and would have lost much of it herself. Moreover, this ballad is written specially for recitation, and thorough and uncompromising "Lancashire" would have been a stumbling block to all but those who are masters of it.

318 A LANCASHIRE LAD

Look in your mother's eyes, lass; nay, dunna
 droop your head—

There's nowt as you've need to blush for—a
 woman was born to wed.

He's rough in his ways—a miner. He's
 grimed wi' the grime o' coal—

Better ha' grime on his hands, lass, than grime
 on his heart and soul.

Maybe your heart's another's—that finicking
 Lunnon chap

As come to the town last winter—as'll leave
 again this, mayhap.

Have I guessed your secret, Jenny; is that
 why you won't have Joe?

You've gotten a finer sweetheart, and the collier
 chap mun go.

Shall I help you to make your mind up, and
 to choose between two men?

I'll tell you a tale o' sweethearts, and the lass i'
 the tale's mysen.

I was summat about your age, lass, and a good-
 lookin' wench, folks said,

When a chap as come to our village, a
 Lunnoner, turned my head.

A LANCASHIRE LAD 319

He came wi' the player people, he came and
he stayed a while,

And somehow he won my heart, lass, wi' his
fine play-acting style.

But I was a promised wife then. My sweet-
heart was, like thy Joe,

A Lancashire lad, a miner, who worked in
the mines below.

He saw what was up, did Dan'l, and he came
to my feyther's place

Wi' a look o' shame and o' sorrow deep lined
on his honest face.

And he took my hand and he pressed it, and
he said in a choky voice,

"My lass, they say in t' village that you're
getten doubts o' your choice;

That a felly ha' coom betwixt us, that your
love for mysen be dead,

So it's reet that I stan' aside, lass—yo' can
marry this mon instead."

I was free fro' that day; we parted—for the
word that I wudna speak;

But he stopped to gi' me his blessing—he
stooped and he kissed my cheek,

320 A LANCASHIRE LAD

And he said to me softly, "Jenny, we canna
be mon and wife,
But if ivver yo' need a friend, lass, why I
am your friend for life."

I went wi' my playe' lover—we were married
in Lunnun town—
For a month I was up i' th' heavens, and then
I came crashin' down.
My man got in debt and trouble, and the devil
came peerin' out,
And I was a drunkard's victim—sworn at and
knocked about.

In a year he had gone and left me—wi' a bairn
at my aching breast—
Left me without a shillin', to struggle and do
my best;
Left me in cruel Lunnun, wi' never a friend
anigh,
Wi' a fever wearin' my brain out, and a bairn
as I prayed might die.

I went mad wi' the shame and sorrow—went
mad, and the devil crept
Into my heart and told me to choke the babe
as it slept;

A LANCASHIRE LAD 321

But I clasped it tight to my bosom, and, bravin'
the wind and rain,
I tramped fro' the city here, lass—here to my
home again.

I came like a ghost to the village, one cold,
fierce winter night ;
I knocked at my father's cottage, and a man
came out wi' a light,
And I saw the face of a stranger—and I knew
by the words he said
That my father lay i' the churchyard—the last
o' my kin was dead.

I wandered away wi' my baby—it cried wi' the
hunger pain,
And again came the fiend to whisper "Death !"
to my maddened brain ;
"Kill it !" the devil whispered, and again
came the feeble cry :
God help me ! the devil conquered, and I left
the child to die.

I laid it down by a hayrick that stood in a field
o' snow,
I tore down the hay and hid it, and the tempter
whispered, "Go !"

322 A LANCASHIRE LAD

Then I fled, but there rose behind me the cry
 of my murdered child;
 And the storm fiend seemed to mock me as the
 night grew fierce and wild.

I fled wi' the feet of terror, and ever behind me
 came

A phantom that tracked my footsteps, and
 shouted and called my name,

That cried to the heavens "Murder!" And
 I thought in my mad despair
 That a hundred eyes were watchin'—I could
 see them everywhere.

On I fled, though the storm grew fiercer, and
 the blindin' snow fell thick;

Till I sank on the frozen highway—giddy, and
 faint, and sick;

And a merciful sleep crept o'er me—and then
 came a long, strange dream;

I woke—in a close, dark waggon—I woke wi'
 a stifled scream.

A woman was stannin' by me; she lifted a
 lantern high,

And whispered me, "Don't be afeart, lass, you
 bain't a-goin' to die!"

(A LANCASHIRE LAD 323

We found you asleep in the roadway—asleep in
the driftin' snow—

And we're 'takin' you to the workhouse, if
you've nowhere else to go."

'Twas some gipsy-folk who had found me—
'twas a gipsy van I was in :

I shuddered to think o' the workhouse—I
thought o' my awful sin ;

I feared that the dawn o' the mornin' would
bring my crime to light,

So I prayed to the gipsy woman to shelter me
through the night.

I prayed till I won her pity—and she kept me
for many a day

Till we came to a mighty city, a hundred mile
away.

On the skirt o' the town they left me ; and,
ever in fear and dread,

I tried, while I hid from justice, to earn my
daily bread.

And there I met wi' a lady who helped me—
wi' hundreds more—

To try our chance in the struggle on a newer
and brighter shore ;

324 A LANCASHIRE LAD

And out in a far-off country I had worked my
way in time,
But ever my mind was haunted wi' the thought
o' my deadly crime.

I read in an English paper the news o' my
husband's fate :

He'd been killed in a drunken quarrel—I was
widowed and free to mate.

I'd many a decent offer, but I answered 'em all
wi' "No,"

I'd a duty to do in England, and I made up
my mind to go.

Year after year grew stronger that terrible
hauntin' thought

That many a guilty felon to the clutch o' the
law has brought ;

And, maddened at last—despairing—tortured
by conscience still,

I cried, "I must go to England, and the law
shall ha' its will ! "

Eight years from that day of horror—eight
years to the very night—

I came to my native village, came in the waning
light ;

A LANCASHIRE LAD 325

There was never a soul that knew me as I
passed through the quiet street,
And I thought o' the days long vanished and
the friends that I used to meet.

I thought o' the dreaded morrow, when all the
town 'ud know

That I'd owned to the cruel murder of many
a year ago.

I thought o' the friends and neighbours who'd
crowd to the court for a sight

O' the wretch who had left her baby to perish
that winter night.

Then I thought o' the man who had loved me
—I thought o' the honest heart

I had crushed for a cruel villain—and it pierced
me like a dart.

And I felt a strange, wild yearnin' to gaze on
his face once more ;

I lifted my eyes and started—I stood by his
cottage door.

I stood i' the deepenin' shadow—there, where
my lad had dwelt

I' the days when he wooed and won me—and
a strange dread fear I felt.

326 A LANCASHIRE LAD

As I crept to the little window and peered
through the winter gloom
The ruddy glow o' the embers fell full on the
tiny room.

Did he mourn for me still unwedded, did he
call some woman wife?

Should I see them there together? O! my
heart was cut wi' a knife

As I looked and I saw him sittin' there wi'
a child at his knee,

A gowden-haired sweet-faced lassie—how soon
he'd forgotten me!

The child looked up at that moment, and seeing
my wan, white face,

She uttered a cry, and her father in a second
was out o' the place;

He had seen me, too, at his window. But I
tottered, and turned to fly,

But he caught me and strained me to him wi'
a passionate, joyful cry.

"Ma lass!" he cried, "tha' art coom, then;
coom whoam to us here at last—
ha' waited for thee, my Jenny, this mony a
long year past;

A LANCASHIRE LAD 327

I knew as thy mon had left thee—I knew as thy
mon wur dead—

And I thowt' you'd ha' coom before, lass!" I
shivered and hung my head.

"Will yo' be ma wife?" he whispered. "I
ha' waited, ma lass, for thee;
I've a bairn as wants a mither—the lassie as yo'
can see.

Will yo' make me a happy mon, Jenny?"
Then I tore mysen away.

"It canna be, Dan," I answered, "for I go to
my doom to-day!

"I come here a wretched woman, to let the
whole world know
How I left my babe to perish many a year ago.
Trouble and pain and hunger had turned my
tortured brain;
I'd ha' given the world for my darlin' when my
reason came again!

"I've come to my native village—here where
the deed was done—
To cry out that dark night's secret i' the light
o' the noonday sun.

328 A LANCASHIRE LAD

A murderess comes to justice to forfeit her
wretched life ! ”

He heard me without a shudder, and he
answered, “ Be ma wife !

“ Be ma wife and forget th’ past, lass, and howd
up tha bonny head,

For t’ bairn as yo’ see in t’ cottage is t’ one as
tha thowt wur dead ;

I sa’ thee th’ toime tha coom here—I sa’ as tha
wurna reet,

An’ t’ babe as tha laid i’ the snow, lass, I browt
to my whoam that neet.”

I listened as though in dreamland while he told
o’ that fearful night—

He had watched me and followed closely,
keepin’ well out o’ sight.

When he’d rescued the babe, I had vanished—
gone only God knew where ;

But my baby grew fair and bonny ’neath his love
and his tender care.

That bairn that he found was you, dear—the
man I had cast away.

Had been to you as a feyther—you call him
your “ dad ” to-day ;

A LANCASHIRE LAD 329

And now yu're a woman grown, dear, mine's
a story you ought to know—
It may help you to make your mind up 'twixt
the Lunnon chap and Joe.

What's that? A knock at the door, lass; why,
your cheeks are like the rose!

You know the knock for a penny—you've heard
it afore—it's Joe's.

What do you whisper, Jenny? "You have
always loved him!" Then

I'll bide i' the other room, lass—you can tell
him his fate yoursen.

A SISTER'S STORY

THIS is my fortieth birthday—ah me, how the years roll by !

Ten years to-day, 'tis, Lion, since they doomed you, old dog, to die ;

But you, stretched out on the hearthrug, lie fast asleep by the fire,

As true and as brave as ever, but with limbs more quick to tire.

With many a fleck of silver the years have touched you, too,

And your crisp black curls, old fellow, don't shine as they used to do.

I wonder, as you lie dreaming, if back from the far away

There comes to your eyes the vision that has come to mine to-day.

Shall I tell them our story, Lion ? ah, there's never a list'ner by—

Cissy has gone to the play-room, hearing her youngest cry ;

A SISTER'S STORY 331

The farmer has gone to market, and the children
are all at school,

And you, with your head on the fender, and I,
with my feet on the stool,

Are left all alone together this April after-
noon.

For elderly folks as we are, a little quiet's a
boon.

I'm an old maid of forty, and you an old dog—
fourteen,

And this my birthday, Lion, your deathday
should have been.

You wonder what aunty's saying. She's telling
a story, boy—

A story of fear and sorrow, a story of hope and
joy ;

A story, if she were clever, she'd write for the
world to read,

That people with souls might honour a soulless
dumb brute's deed.

Ten years ago I'd a trouble—the biggest of all
my life—

'Twas all about Sister Cissy, now the farmer's
happy wife ;

I was her elder sister, she was just eighteen,
And I, who was twelve years older, more like
her mother had been.

We'd lost our mother when Cissy was a wee
bit lassie still,
And to father and brother and sister I'd had
her place to fill.
I was grave for my age, they told me; I'd
plenty of cares, you see—
The house was a constant worry, and father
would come to me
And tell me his graver troubles. He was losing
money, he said—
The land was bad, and the harvest—'twas a
season of doubt and dread,
And I had a heavy sorrow: our Cissy, our
pride, our pet,
Was looking so pale and poorly—she'd sit by
the hour and fret.

We called in the village doctor, but he only
shook his head—
It was nothing, she'd soon be better, there was
nothing to do, he said;

A SISTER'S STORY 333

Then he took me aside and asked me if I knew
of a love affair.

My Cissy in love, and hide it! Why, she told
me her every care!

But I was worried and frightened. I went to
her room that night,

And asked her had she a secret, but she turned
her face from the light

And said she was only tired. I sat by her side
till she slept,

Then went to my little bed-room, and knelt by
the bed and wept.

A tale of a dog I told you—well, we had a
retriever then—

He was given to me, a puppy, by one of the
out-door men—

A fine, black sturdy puppy, he grew and he
grew until

He was nearly as big as you are—but he never
lay so still.

He was always our Cissy's playmate, he was
ever our faithful friend,

Ready a tramp or a beggar to seize by the
throat and rend;

But, quiet with decent people, he seemed, as it were, to know

An honest man from a loafer, a trusty friend from a foe.

We let him loose in the farmyard as soon as the men had left;

We wanted a trusty yard dog—we'd many a little theft—

And the night that I'd been to Cissy, just as I'd closed my eyes,

I heard the retriever barking, and then two short, sharp cries.

I ran to the little window, and, peering out in the night,

I saw our good dog running, and a man in the act of flight;

Then suddenly through the silence there rang a howl of pain,

And I saw that the dog was limping back to his tub again.

"Thieves," said the dad in the morning;
"gipsies after the hens."

That was my own opinion—so was it all our men's.

A SISTER'S STORY 335

We hugged and we patted Lion—that was his name, you know—

And the paw that a blow had injured was well in a week or so.

But after that night our watch-dog would wander around the farm

From dusk till the day had broken, as though he had dread of harm.

Folks told us they'd heard him barking down by the little wood

On the lands a good mile distant, where the house of our squire stood.

One day—'twas a fortnight after our Lion had hurt his paw—

Riding up to the homestead, the squire himself I saw.

He tied his horse to the wicket, and came straight up the path,

With his red face nearly purple—he was hard and fierce in his wrath.

He asked for the farmer roughly, and, when my father came,

Told him his sheep were worried, and Lion, our dog, to blame ;

His son had watched, he told us, and caught
the dog in the act.

We listened in wonder, mutely—we dared not
dispute the fact.

We were only his humble tenants, we feared
to offend the squire,

He was cruel and unforgiving to the vassals who
roused his ire ;

But I, with 'a woman's daring, let the doubt in
my face be seen ;

I guessed it was spite against us, and wondered
what it might mean.

“Do you think that my son's a fool, miss—
d'ye think that he's told a lie?”

Cried the squire, his face more purple, and an
evil look in his eye.

“Your brute of a dog's a nuisance ; now, just
mind what I say,

If you'd stop in my good books, farmer, you'll
shoot the beast to-day.”

Shot! What, our dog Lion! young and
hearty and strong!

My cheeks flushed a burning crimson at the
thought of the cruel wrong.

A SISTER'S STORY 337

The squire strode out in a passion, my father
looked at his gun :

"It's cruel, my lass," he muttered, "but the
thing 'll have to be done.

I've asked for the rent to be lowered, I've
asked for a little grace ;

How can we snap our fingers right in the squire's
face ?

We're all on us fond o' Lion, but worryin'
sheep's a trick

As once a dog gets a name for it's one as is
sure to stick."

"It's a lie ! " I cried in a passion—"it's a lie
of the squire's son ;

It's only his spite against us—something we've
said or done ;

He's hated by all the village, a profligate
drunken lout ;

I stopped him talking to Cissy—this is to pay
me out."

It had come to my mind that moment how,
barely a month ago,

I had met the fellow with Cissy—they were
walking to and fro

338 A SISTER'S STORY

In the lane by Fairley's meadow, and Cissy had
walked away,
At a hasty word I whispered, with only a curt
good-day.

It was only a chance encounter: young squire
had raised his hat—

So Cissy had told me after—and stopped for a
moment's chat.

Then I warned her against the fellow, I spoke
of his evil fame;

To be seen with him was a scandal—'twould
ruin a girl's good name.

So I said, "It's a lie!" to father—"a lie of
the squire's son."

"Maybe it is," he muttered, "something we've
said or done.

But whether it's truth or falsehood, this story
about the sheep—

You heard what the squire threatened—and his
threat he's the man to keep."

He took his gun from the corner, and out he
went to the yard;

And Lion flew out of his kennel, dragging his
chain so hard

A SISTER'S STORY 339

That his bark was hoarse and choky; but he
leaped about in glee,
And stood upright and struggled to get to the
dad and me.

"I'll do it at once," said father; "I sha'n't
ha' the heart if I wait."

He levelled his gun at Lion, and the poor dog
guessed his fate.

Then came such a look of sorrow into the kind
brown eyes,

And he crouched on the ground and uttered
two low heart-broken cries.

"I'm hanged if I'll do't!" cried father;
"we'll tell the squire he's dead,

And get him away to London." And the dog
knew what he said,

For he put his paws on my shoulder, and tried
to kiss my cheek,

Saying he knew we'd saved him, as plainly as
words can speak.

"You're right," said my father gently, dropping
the cruel gun;

"But lest the squire send over to see if the
murder's done,

340 A SISTER'S STORY

We must hide the dog for the present, and then
we can get him away ;

We can do it to-morrow morning—we can start
before break o' day.

“I'll drive the cart to the station, and send the
dog to Ned

(That was my brother in London), but the
squire must think he's dead.”

I loosened the chain, and Lion, with a short
sharp bark of glee,

Bounded, and frisked, and capered, and ran in
the house with me.

Not a soul but myself and father knew but that
he was dead,

But that night he lay calmly sleeping at the foot
of his mistress's bed.

I brought him down from the garret, where I'd
hidden him till 'twas dark ;

I kept him with me to hush him, lest the
servants should hear him bark.

That night in my dreams my father came to my
room with his gun ;

“Give me the dog !” he shouted. “I tell
you it must be done !”

A SISTER'S STORY 341

Still, in my dreams I struggled—I struggled for
Lion's life,
I seized on the gun and held it, but it wasn't
an equal strife.
My father had pushed me from him, and was
taking a deadly aim;
I saw the poor dog lie crouching—then, quickly,
a flash of flame,
And I screamed as the dog fell bleeding—I
tried, but in vain, to speak;
I knelt by our dying Lion, and he tried to lick
my cheek.

At the touch of the dog I started, and I woke
with a little scream,
'Twas Lion himself had touched me, just as he
had in my dream;
He was trying to wake me, growling, and his
ears stood up erect.
What had he heard? I listened. What did
the dog suspect?
He looked at me for a moment, and dashed at
the bed-room door;
I opened it then, and Lion out like a mad dog
tore.

Then I heard the sounds of voices and a hurried
tread outside,
I shot back the bolts in a moment, and opened
the house-door wide.

A dog's fierce cry and a scuffle—then oaths and
a scream of pain—

A man and a dog together, fighting with might
and main.

Straight at the throat flew Lion—I could see
by the light of the moon—

Then a fall, and a cry of horror, and a woman
down in a swoon.

“Help! for the sake of Heaven! Help!”
I cried, and a light

Flashed in the upper window, and our folks
came down in a fright.

At the sight that their lanterns showed us, with
horror my heart stood still,

And the blood in my veins seemed frozen by
a sudden and deadly chill.

There on the ground, half fainting, the son of
our squire lay,

The blood from his bare throat streaming where
the flesh had been torn away;

A SISTER'S STORY 343

And near him my sister Cissy, moaning with
shame and fright,
Knelt with her hood and cloak on—there in
our grounds at night.
And Lion stood over his victim, ready to spring
again,
And we saw the lights of a carriage just round
the bend of the lane.
My father went to the villain, lest Lion should
kill him there,
And gently I led our Cissy indoors from the
people's stare.

But for the dog, our Cissy, poor little trusting
maid,
Fooled by the lies of a villain, who had vowed,
and promised, and prayed,
Would have been in his toils in London, think-
ing to be his wife,
And have found herself his victim, ruined for
all her life.
It all came out in the morning, as she sobbed
her tale aloud,
Her pretty eyes red with weeping, and her head
in her shame low bowed.

'Twas that scamp that our Lion flew at the night
that I saw the scene—

Under my sister's window that night had the
scoundrel been.

He'd made our poor little Cissy keep it from
kith and kin,

And the secret had worn her heart out—made
her grow white and thin;

She was always a simple lassie, but now she's
good man's wife,

And she owes to our old dog Lion the bliss of
her later life.

If he had been shot that morning!—ah! but I
mustn't think

Of the shame that was planned for Cissy, of
how near she went to the brink.

It was only a dumb brute's instinct that saw
through the villain's plan—

That knew the thief and the rascal in the dress
of a gentleman.

This is my fortieth birthday—ah me, how the
years roll by!

Ten years to-day, 'tis, Lion, since they doomed
you, old dog, to die.

A SISTER'S STORY 345

And Cissy's a wife and a mother, and mistress
of all this land

That came to the rich young farmer who gave
her his heart and hand.

You've heard the story, Lion, and your eyes
look into mine

With that deep mute brute devotion—not human,
but half divine.

What's that?—ah, you hear the children! a
bark of joy, and away;

Romp with our Cissy's babies, and forget what
I've said to-day.

CHARITY: A PROBLEM

A WHITE-FACED girl on a doorstep—
A doorstep down a slum—
Nursing a tiny baby,
Hungry, and cold, and numb.
Nelly, "the little mother,"
Sat wondering what to do
In a world where foes are many,
And friends, alas! so few.

Her face was the face of twenty,
For poverty ages fast;
But just fifteen were the winters
That Nelly could count as past.
And the little ragged bundle
She was rocking to and fro
Had uttered its first faint whimper
Only a year ago.

Nell and the babe were sisters,
And they were "the family" now,
For mother had got into trouble
All through a drunken row—

CHARITY : A PROBLEM 347

A drunken row with father
At the flaring gin-palace bar ;
She'd teased him—they'd had a quarrel—
And she'd gone a bit too far.

She picked up a thick quart measure,
And flung it with all her force
At the head of her lord and master—
His head had altered its course,
And sent it off at a tangent,
And it broke a mirror.—Alas !
It wasn't the head that mattered,
But the beautiful thick plate-glass.

For heads, you know, can be mended,
But glass when it's smashed is lost ;
Nell's parents were only hawkers,
So how could they pay the cost ?
They'd to pay as the poor folks have to :
In person, and not with purse—
Nell's mother was sent to prison,
And her father's head grew worse.

The hospital held the father,
And in prison the mother lay,
And Nell was left with the baby,
And the rent of the room to pay.

348 CHARITY: A PROBLEM

One small room in an alley,
But all that they had was there ;
You'd laugh at the household treasures,
The bed, and table, and chair.

You laugh at the rags and rubbish
The dregs of the alley prize,
But if you know their story
The tears come into your eyes.
If you know the years of struggle
The poor little "home" has seen,
You know what the "sticks" and "rubbish"
To the one-roomed outcasts mean.

So Nelly said to the baby,
As it lay in her lap at night,—
They slept alone in the garret,—
She said, with a touch of spite :
"We *won't* go into the workhouse,
And no one shall turn us out ;
But we'll keep the room for father
Till he's well again and about !
"And mother shall come from prison
And see how we managed to keep
The poor little home together—
We won't sit down and weep ;

CHARITY: A PROBLEM 349

But we'll work and earn the money
That'll keep us and pay the rent ! ”
So said the brave little Nelly
As over the babe she bent.

But the winter was cold and cruel,
And the work was hard to get ;
Then the baby grew weak and ailing,
And peevish and prone to fret.
And many a night poor Nelly
Went famished and cold to bed,
For the landlord took the money
She wanted for coals and bread.

She worked at home in the garret
From morning till late at night,
Till trouble and toil together
Had broken her down outright.
And her strength waxed faint and fainter,
And her brain began to reel ;
Then she asked for time from the landlord,
And he laughed at the girl's appeal.

She owed him a month already—
He'd let it stand too long ;
She'd better go to the workhouse—
He saw she was far from strong.

350 CHARITY: A PROBLEM

"She couldn't go on a-working,
So how'd she pay the rent?
He'd take the 'sticks' for the balance"—
Then he turned on his heel and went.

Was this the end of her scheming?
To lose the "home" at last;
Her father was getting better,
They said he was mending fast.
Her mother would soon be coming
Out of the cruel gaol;
Had she fought so hard with the billows,
In sight of the land to fail?

She had heard of some kindly people
Who help in the nick of time,
She would go and would tell her story—
She would beg, for it wasn't a crime.
She found out a splendid office
Where the agents of Dives sit,
And when she had told her story
The brow of the chief was knit.

"Your mother was drunk—she's in prison;
Does your father belong to a club?
Of course not—ah, drunk and thriftless.
We'd help you—but here's the rub:

We can't encourage the vicious—

Your mother gets drunk, you see ;
And your father has been imprudent,
Or else in a club he'd be.

"You had better go to the workhouse—

There, there, come dry your eyes ;
The result of giving you money
Would be to pauperise.

We should only be paying the landlord

The rent that your parents owe—
One's drunk and the other's thriftless,
So that wouldn't do, you know."

So Nelly went back to the alley

With a look of blank despair,
And cast herself down on the doorstep,
Too tired to mount a stair.

She thought of her long, hard struggle,

And what she had hoped might be,
And her tears rained down on the baby
She nursed on her trembling knee.

'Twas a slum, where the thief and wanton

Herd with the poor who toil—
A place where the worst of vices
Wax fat on the filthy soil.

352 CHARITY: A PROBLEM

A loafer, and thief, and wanton,
Hanging about the place,
Took note of the big tears rolling
Down Nelly's poor pinched face.

They made her tell her story;
And as she sobbed it out,
The blasphemous lips were silent,
And wanton, and thief, and lout
Muttered a word of pity,
With a terrible oath or two;
And a big, broad, brazen woman
Turned round to the listening crew,

And in words to make one shudder
Said, "The wench is a little brick,
And I'll see the landlord somewhere
Before he shall touch a stick!"
And she seized the cap of a fellow,
And, flinging it on the ground,
Bade them "chuck in their blessed coppers"—
And her voice in a cheer was drowned.

So thief, and wanton, and loafer,
Moved by the tale of woe,
Made up the rent for Nelly,
And the woman, bending low,

Whispered her not to trouble.
 For that week at a pub they'd hold
 A friendly Lead. And they did it,
 And brought her a piece of gold.

Drunken and thriftless people,
 With little themselves to spare,
 They heard of a case of trouble,
 And they helped it then and there.
 They kept the girl and the baby,
 And they paid the weekly rent
 Till back from the hospital, better,
 The father at last was sent.

And father and mother together
 Heard, when in time they met,
 The tale of Nell and their neighbours,
 And they swore to pay the debt.
 They thought of their girl's brave story,
 And it turned the tide of their lives—
 The man grew a frugal husband,
 And the woman the best of wives.

They were saved by the poor and vicious,
 When Dives had turned away.
 Which charity, think you, brother,
 Was the truer one that day?

354 CHARITY: A PROBLEM

The "science" of wealthy Christians,
With its pauperising qualms,
Or the "heart" of the heathen outcasts
Flinging their careless alms?

THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY

MINZ is a wild, strange story—the strangest you
ever heard ;

There are many who won't believe it, but it's
Gospel every word ;

It's the biggest drama of any in a long adven-
turous life—

The scene was a ship, and the actors—were
myself and my new-wed wife.

You mustn't mind if I ramble, and lose the
thread now and then ;

I'm old, you know, and I wander—it's a way
with old women and men,

For their lives lie all behind them, and their
thoughts go far away,

And are tempted afieid, like children lost on a
summer day.

The years must be five-and-twenty that have
passed since that awful night,

But I see it again this evening—I can never shut
out the sight ;

356 THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY

We were only a few weeks married, I and the wife, you know,

When we had an offer for Melbourne, and made up our minds to go.

We'd acted together in England, travelling up and down

With a strolling band of players going from town to town ;

We played the lovers together—we were leading lady and gent—

And at last we played in earnest, and straight to the church we went.

The parson gave us his blessing, and I gave Nelly the ring,

And swore that I'd love and cherish and endow her with everything.

How we smiled at that part of the service when I said, "I thee endow !"

But as to the "love and cherish," I meant to keep that vow.

We were only a couple of strollers—we had coin when the show was good ;

When it wasn't, we went without it, and we did the best we could.

THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY 357

We were happy, and loved each other, and
laughed at the shifts we made—

Where love makes plenty of sunshine, there
poverty casts no shade.

Well, at last we got to London, and did pretty
well for a bit,

Then the business dropped to nothing, and the
manager did a flit—

Stepped off one Saturday morning, forgetting
the treasury call.

But our luck was in, and we managed right on
our feet to fall.

We got an offer for Melbourne—got it that very
week—

Those were the days when thousands went over
to fortune seek :

The days of the great gold fever—and a manager
thought the spot

Good for a "spec," and took us as actors
among his lot.

We hadn't a friend in England—we'd only our-
selves to please,

And we jumped at the chance of trying our
fortunes across the seas ;

358 THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY

We went on a sailing vessel, and the journey
was long and rough—

We hadn't been out a fortnight before we had
had enough.

But use is a second nature, and we'd got not to
mind a storm,

When misery came upon us—came in a hideous
form.

My poor little wife fell ailing, grew worse, and
at last so bad

That the doctor said she was dying—I thought
'twould have sent me mad.

Dying where leagues of billows seemed to shriek
for their prey,

And the nearest land was hundreds — ay,
thousands of miles away.

She raved one night in a fever, and the next lay
still as death,

So still I'd to bend and listen for the faintest
sign of breath.

She seemed in a sleep, and sleeping, with a
smile on her thin wan face,

She passed away one morning, while I prayed
to the throne of grace.

THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY 359

I knelt in the little cabin, and prayer after prayer
I said,
Till the surgeon came and he told me—"It was
useless, my wife was dead!"

Dead! I wouldn't believe it. They forced
me away that night,
For I raved in my wild despairing—the shock
sent me mad outright.

I was shut in the farthest cabin, and I beat my
head on the side,
And all day long in my madness "They've
murdered her!" I cried.

They locked me away from my fellows—put
me in cruel chains—

It seems I had seized a weapon to beat out the
surgeon's brains.

I cried in my wild, mad fury that he was a
devil sent

To gloat o'er the frenzied anguish with which
my heart was rent.

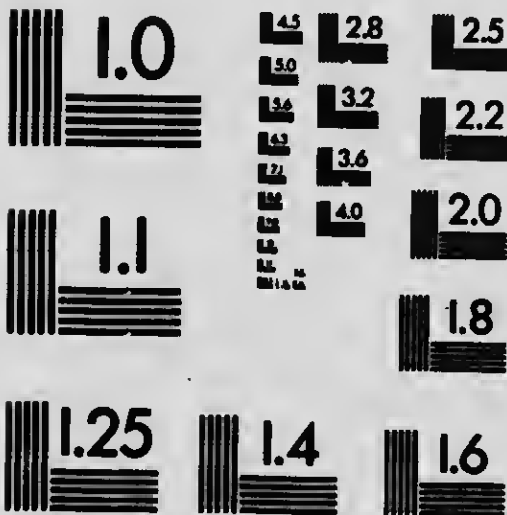
I spent that night with the irons heavy upon my
wrists,

And my wife lay dead quite near me. I beat
with my fettered fists,



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360 THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY

Beat at my prison panels, and then—O God!—
and then

I heard the shrieks of women and the tramp of
hurrying men.

I heard the cry, "Ship a-fire!" caught up by a
hundred throats,

And over the roar the captain shouting to lower
the boats;

Then cry upon cry and curses, and the crackle
of burning wood,

And the place grew hot as a furnace, I could
feel it where I stood.

I beat at the door and shouted, but never a sound
came back,

And the timbers above me started, till right
through a yawning crack

I could see the flames shoot upwards, seizing on
mast and sail,

Fanned in their burning fury by the breath of
the howling gale.

I dashed at the door in fury, shrieking, "I will
not die!

Die in this burning prison!"—but I caught no
answering cry.

THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY 361

Then, suddenly, right upon me, the flames crept
up with a roar,
And their fiery tongues shot forward, cracking
my prison door.

I was free—free with the heavy irons dragging
me down to death.

I fought my way to the cabin, choked with the
burning breath

Of the flames that danced around me like man-
mocking fiends at play,

And then—O God! I can see it, and shall till
my dying day.

There lay my Nell as they'd left her, dead in
her berth that night;

The flames flung a smile on her features—a
horrible, lurid light.

God knows how I reached and touched her, but
I found myself by her side;

I thought she was living a moment—I forgot
that my Nell had died.

In the shock of those awful seconds reason came
back to my brain;

I heard a sound as of breathing, and then a low
cry of pain.

362 THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY

O, was there mercy in heaven—was there a God
in the skies?

The dead woman's lips were moving—the dead
woman opened her eyes.

I cursed like a madman raving—I cried to her,
“Nell! my Nell!”

They had left us alone and helpless—alone in
that burning hell.

They had left us alone to perish—forgotten me
living—and she

Had been left for the fire to bear her to heaven,
instead of the sea.

I clutched at her—roused her shrieking—the
stupor was on her still;

I seized her in spite of my fetters—fear gave a
giant's will.

God knows how I did it, but blindly I fought
through the flames and the wreck

Up—up to the air, and brought her safe to the
untouched deck.

We'd a moment of life together—a moment of
life, the time

For one last word to each other—'twas a
moment supreme, sublime.

THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY 363

From the trance we'd for death mistaken, the
heat had brought her to life,

And I was fettered and helpless—so we lay
there, husband and wife !

It was but a moment, but ages seemed to have
passed away,

When a shout came over the water, and I
looked, and lo, there lay,

Right away from the vessel, a boat that was
standing by—

They had seen our forms on the vessel, as the
flames lit up the sky.

I shouted a prayer to heaven, then called to my
wife, and she

Tore with new strength at my fetters—God
helped her, and I was free ;

Then over the burning bulwarks we leaped for
one chance of life.

Did they save us? Well, here I am, sir, and
yonder's my dear old wife.

We were out on the boat till the daylight, when
a great ship passing by

Took us on board, and at Melbourne landed us
by and-by.

364 THE OLD ACTOR'S STORY

We've played many parts in dramas since we
went on that famous trip,
But ne'er such a scene together as we had on
the burning ship.

THE PARSON'S FIGHT

It was market day at Deering. I was sitting in
the smoke-room

Of the farmers' house, The Wheatsheaf—'twas
a quaint old carven oak room,

Darkly panelled, dingy ceilinged—where the
farmer folk of Deering,

After market, came to gossip and hear any-
thing worth hearing.

I, a stranger, sat and listened while the farmers
talked together

About trade, about Protection, and the harvest,
and the weather,

And the changes in the market and their
labourers and cattle,

And the scandal and the gossip and the local
tittle-tattle.

There I sat and smoked and listened, with a
patient smile enduring

Yarns of live stock and of dead stock and of
chemical manuring;

366 THE PARSON'S FIGHT

Yarns of roving gipsy robbers and of midnight
stackyard arsons ;

Long indictments of the landlords, and hard
words about the parsons.

But my comments were not stirring in their
eloquence or passion

On the news my friends narrated in their slow
bucolic fashion,

Till a parson formed the subject of a Midland
farmer's prosing—

Then I woke, as if by magic, from my state of
mental dozing.

For I listened to the story of a hero unpre-
tending,

Told as gossip by a farmer—no beginning and
no ending.

And the story that he told us was the Reverend
Harry Corder's,

A gentleman, a scholar, and a Clerk in Holy
Orders,

Who had lived in humble lodgings, and, for
sixty pounds paid yearly,

Tried to make his flock good Christians—toiled
among them late and early ;

THE PARSON'S FIGHT 367

And to others gave—God bless him!—such a
share of his poor payment
That the balance scarce sufficed him for his rent
and food and raiment.

He'd a mother living with him—she was feeble,
old, and failing—

And a crippled younger sister, who was always
ill and ailing ;

So the Reverend Harry Corder, who was some-
times called "Old Harry,"

Had to bear too many burthens e'er to fall in
love and marry.

Though they called him old, the curate, as a
fact, was eight-and-thirty ;

But the best ship soon looks battered when the
weather's always dirty,

And his life had been a struggle and its burthens
bowed and bent him,

And his face perhaps grew wrinkled o'er the
bills his tradesmen sent him.

But he kept the home together, and I'll tell you
how he did it :

He'd to feel the pangs of hunger, but he starved
himself and hid it.

368 THE PARSON'S FIGHT

When his women folk on Sunday had a joint,
he wouldn't share it,
And he wore his coat so threadbare that no
tailor could repair it.
But his Rector was a parson of the good old
gouty order,
Who nursed himself in comfort and left all the
work to Corder—
Fond of pictures and engravings, did the dolce
far niente,
Had a daughter who was flighty, very fair, and
four-and-twenty.

The curate had his troubles—he was never one
to grumble—
He would shun his wealthy neighbours while he
sought the poor and humble;
But the rich folks didn't mind it, for he always
looked so seedy,
And the rich folks have a horror of a parson
who is needy.
E'en the poor folks thought "Old Harry" just
a bit what they called "cracky,"
But he'd sit with them and gossip, and he didn't
mind their 'baccy,

THE PARSON'S FIGHT 369

And of certain sporting matters he a decent
judge was reckoned—

He could tell the points of gamecocks and of
bulldogs in a second.

He had been a bit athletic, it was said, till he
left college,

And of wrestling and of boxing had a scientific
knowledge ;

So the common folks accepted much he said
about religion,

Since they found he was their equal when dis-
cussing dog or pigeon.

And he'd liven up his sermons with a sporting
illustration

About "getting fit" and "training" for the
Prize Fight of Salvation ;

Which at last gave rise to rumours—'twas his
enemies who spread them—

That he borrowed sporting papers of a publican
and read them.

Then the folks who didn't like him said religion
he was slighting,

And encouraging the vicious in their gambling
and their fighting.

370 THE PARSON'S FIGHT

And these rumours reached the Rector, and he
sent for him one morning

And told him of the gossip; but the curate—
malice scorning—

On his innocence relying, shrugged his shoulders
at the scandal,

And continued by his conduct to give calumny a
handle,

Knowing well the poor folks loved him, and
he'd made their lives the better

By giving them the Gospel in the spirit—not
the letter.

But at last there came a crisis, when the Rector's
groom, Ned Sorrel,

Late one Saturday with "parson" had a most
unchristian quarrel,

And the quarrel came to fighting, when, in spite
of Sorrel's slogging,

Skill and science helped the parson to administer
a flogging.

The groom, a handsome bully, slunk away in
silence bleeding,

While between the crowd which gathered passed
the curate, all unheeding

THE PARSON'S FIGHT 371

Every question that was asked him ; but it set
the sinners scorning

When in church they saw the parson with a
blackened eye next morning.

How it shocked the congregation ! Some old
ladies nearly fainted ;

While the men declared 'twas shameful—that he
might have had it painted—

And the choir boys grinned and tittered, and
invented after prayers

A nickname for the parson—'twas the Reverend
Thomas Sayers ;

And the upshot of the scandal was, the wardens
called a meeting,

And proposed a resolution, which was passed
nem. con., entreating

That the Rector would instanter sack this parson
who went brawling

And had brought such grave discredit on the
Church's sacred calling.

The groom had packed and started—left the
following Sunday morning—

Gone away, and none knew whither, for he'd
given no one warning ;

372 THE PARSON'S FIGHT

The Rector saw his curate when he'd heard the
deputation,

Said this scandal was too dreadful—could he
give an explanation?

"Not a word," was Harry's answer. "But
though all the world defame me

For the thrashing of that scoundrel, my own
conscience does not blame me."

Not another word he uttered, so his reverend
chief dismissed him,

And when he left the Rector some ill-natured
people hissed him.

He'd a week of grace to leave in, but that week
most people shunned him,

Save some tradesmen that he dealt with, and
they came to him and dunned him.

"Give me time," he said; "I'll pay you every
farthing that is owing.

Not a debt would I have had here had I known
that I was going.

What I owe is for my people, and you know
I've always paid you.

Has one promise e'er been broken, since I came
here, that I made you?

THE PARSON'S FIGHT 373

I must shield my poor old mother from the blow
that fate has dealt her ;
What I have I cannot spare you till I've found
my people shelter."

There was none that could deny it, so they went
away and grumbled ;
But some there were felt pity for that man so
poor and humbled,
And so, when his grace was over, and the time
was come for leaving,
All his poor folks came about him, and he knew
that they were grieving
When they spoke rough words of comfort, while
their husky voices faltered,
As they told him that they loved him, and their
love remained unaltered ;
And some gave him little presents, and his heavy
heart was lighter,
For the future, that he feared so, seemed to
suddenly grow brighter.

'Twas a great crowd came to see him on the
platform at the station,
And some men among them begged him still to
give the explanation ;

374 THE PARSON'S FIGHT

But he answered, firmly, "No, friends; I am punished, and I'll bear it.

But my enemies have wronged me; theirs the fault, let them repair it."

Then the last good-bye was spoken, as the guard's shrill whistle sounded.

And then—there happened something which the staring crowd astounded.

It was just the fat old Rector, with his face all hot and streaming,

Who came rushing on the platform, throwing up his arms and screaming.

"Stop the train! Stop! stop!" he shouted, and then—well, need I tarry,

Save to tell you how the Rector made a speech to Parson Harry;

How he shook his hand, embraced him, and in all the people's hearing

Told a tale that made the station ring again with hearty cheering.

Told them how he'd just discovered, through a woman's brave confession,

That his groom had but been punished for a dastardly transgression.

THE PARSON'S FIGHT 375

How the Reverend Harry, learning what this rascal had been planning, topped his game for once and ever, and administered that "tanning."

For the lady's name and honour, and to keep his promise to her,

And to save from pain and sorrow all her friends and those who knew her,

"This brave fellow," said the Rector, and he laid his hand on Harry,

"Would not say the groom had urged her to elope with him and marry.

He had seen them both together, just in time to stop the flitting,

And then there came the quarrel, and the subsequent hard hitting.

'Twas a prize-fight he was fighting, and the prize was worth redeeming :

'Twas a foolish woman rescued from a cruel rascal's scheming."

Here, the Midland farmer pausing, I exclaimed, "The Reverend Harry!—

What became of the brave fellow?—did he prosper?—did he marry?"

376 THE PARSON'S FIGHT

"Did he marry!" said the farmer. "Yes, he
did, the Rector's daughter;
She had had another lover—he the second was
who sought her,
And I fancy he deserved her, for he'd saved
her from the fellow
Who had made him preach one Sunday with
his eye all black and yellow.
He's the rector where I come from, and he's
famous in the county
For his gamecocks and his bulldogs, and his
goodness and his bounty."

A MAN HUNT

Stop thief!—there he goes—

He runs like a deer ;
On his heels the crowd close
In pursuit with a cheer.

Up alley, down street,
Round the corners like mad ;
He staggers—he's beat—

Knock him down. Bravo, lad !

He's down in the mud—

How they clutch at his rags !
They've hurt him ; the blood
Trickles down on the flags.

Poor devil ! How white
Is his face—and his eyes

Are starting outright,
And he gasps and he cries,—

“ Let me go, in God's name !

Let me go if you're men.

I know I'm to blame,

I'm a thief—well, but then

A MAN HUNT

It's the first time, I swear,
And the loaf lay inside
Of the shop over there
With the door open wide.

"I've a wife at death's door
Lying hungry and cold
On a bare garret floor,
With a babe a week old.
And she raved for a crust;
We were starving, I say.
Let me go, men, you must—
O, don't take me away!

"Don't hurt me, I'm ill!
Ah, sir, 'twas your bread.
Yes; forgive me—you will,
'Taint the prison I dread!
But, O God, she—my wife,
In that garret alone
With the babe—it's her life
That I ask—not my own.

"If you'd heard her moan
In the fever, and cry,
And you hadn't been stone,
You'd have done just as I—

Run out in the street
Like a madman, and said,
'If I steal she shall eat !'
And I stole—just this bread.
"O, don't hurt my wrists,
I'll go—yes, I'll go,
Since no pity exists
In your hearts for my woe.
God have mercy this night
On a woman who lies
Mad with hunger and fright
While the law claims its prize !"
All this as he goes
He stammers and shouts,
Half-blind with the blows
Of the loafers and louts
Who have beaten him down
With a bloodthirsty glee—
For the scum of the town
Call a Man Hunt "a spree."
The station at last !
He's thrust in with an oath,
And the doors are made fast
'Gainst the crowd, who are loth

A MAN HUNT

To abandon their game
While the scent is so strong.
Such an ending is tame
To the man-hunting throng.
Shall we pause and take breath
And turn back from the crush,
Or be in at the death
When the law claims its brush?
This fox killed himself—
Hanged himself in his cell;
For that pitiful pelf
Chanced the suicide's hell.
And a woman next day,
With a babe at her breast,
In a lone garret lay
Stiff and cold; but at rest!
Her eyes staring wide,
And fixed right on the door,—
She had missed from her side
One who never came more.
She had missed him that night:
As the death-film came fast
And encurtained her sight,
She had gazed till the last!

A MAN HUNT

381

Ah ! maybe up above
(Does it wrong true belief ?)
She may meet her lost love—
The poor man-hunted thief!

