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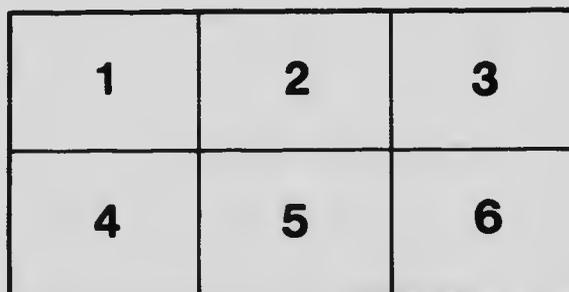
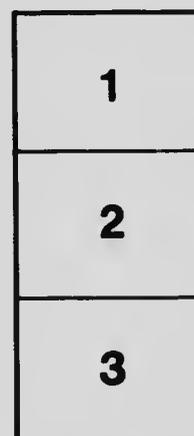
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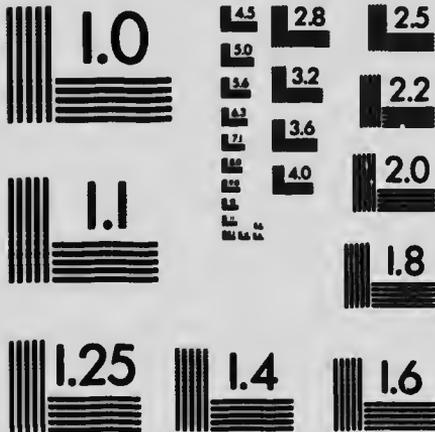
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# ON STRIKE TILL 3

G:

By

GRANT BALFOUR

Author of

"Canada My Home and Other Poems"

"The Fairy School of Castle Frank"

&c., &c.

■

TORONTO  
WILLIAM BRIGGS  
1913

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## WHERE UNION DWELT

Beside the deep ravine the cottage stood,  
O'erlooking elm and willow, beech and birch,  
In growth profuse and wild o'er shady stream:  
And viewing cedar, oak and towering pine  
On yonder crest aglow with light. How grand  
The vision in the greenness of the spring.  
When birds of blue and scarlet vestments come;  
The greater glory of the summer time,  
When twinkling wings outvie the rarest flowers:  
Or ripeness of the fall, when richest green  
And gold and red in mass of tapestry  
Delight the eye.

But now the scene is white.  
Resplendent white. No miser hand hath swept  
The vale and heights but Nature bountiful  
Of beauty dazzling pure, the season's own.  
The spotless path below, meandering midst  
O'erhanging boughs and drooping plants enwrapped  
In feathered snow, a reverend scene, appears  
As if for angels formed, who came to walk  
This sacred aisle to worship winter's God.  
The lofty pines that grace the other crest,  
Enrobed in sparkling splendor, raise their heads  
In solemn awe to yonder jewelled dome,  
And offer praise to Him whose temple bright  
Holds earth and sky.

Beneath a frosted birch,  
Lit up to brilliance by the burnished moon,  
The shingle cottage stood, a humble home.  
The labour of the day was done. The lamp  
Within sent out its yellow rays athwart  
The silver snow and on the well-washed sheets  
And other things that hung on lines and told  
The woman's calling. Work. from dawn of day  
Till dark, with poor reward.

### CHRISTMAS EVE

'Twas Christmas Eve.

The mother and her little boy (his name  
Was David Annandale) sat down to read  
And converse hold before they sought repose.  
A widow young, with richest auburn hair,  
Bright hazel eyes 'neath finely arching brows,  
Teeth of pearl, and sympathetic smile  
Most sweet. No wonder that her child, a lad  
Of six, with raven hair and ruddy cheeks,  
Should find in her alone his heart's desire.  
His reigning thought, the perfect one. His eyes  
Lovelit no blemish saw in careworn looks.

Her stories, read and told with girlish zeal.  
Of beaver, bear and wolf, and jet black squirrel,  
But, best of all, of smiling Santa Claus.  
Aroused an interest intense. The deep  
Ravine itself and other themes all passed  
Beneath her spell. And he, tho' entertained,  
Was also purified and lifted up.  
"My mother, dear," he said, "When I'm a man,  
I'll work and work for you, and buy a castle  
And a carriage; you will be a lady,  
And nevermore be tired."

Tired himself at last,  
His eyelids fell. He dreamed a moment deep,  
Then wide awoke and starting up he wept,  
And as he sobbed he said, "I've seen my kitten  
In the cold ravine. Oh, let it in!"  
This was a kitten lost a while before,  
A creature in his heart as much as treasure  
Real or ideal fills the heart  
Of any ardent man. He ever longed  
And hoped for its return. And every night  
The door was opened and the yearning call  
Went out into the empty air. And every  
Night he saw the lost one's dish supplied,  
Which morning found untouched. The mother did  
Her best to stay his tears, and as she bent  
And tucked him warm in bed she said that maybe  
Santa Claus would bring another kitten.  
"Tie a great big stocking, mother; make it  
Open wide and warm." She did so, kissed him,  
And he closed his eyes.

One hand alone,  
Would fill that empty stocking, nor forget.  
A friend or neighbor would come later on,  
But David's eyes when morning came would look  
On emptiness, save for mother's hand. Nay, stay,—  
At midnight, yea, at midnight, when the moon  
Was still a silver lamp, a creature poor,  
Benighted, wandered to the cottage door.  
Ill-treated, cold, too sick to cry, it looked  
With wistful eyes beneath the fastened door.  
Then turned and went aside and trembling climbed  
The sloping birchen tree and reached the roof.  
Adown the chimney peered, then slowly crept,  
Then fell. It lay upon the hearth a time.

But lured, it lapped the milk, and, strengthened, strove  
To climb into the little sleeper's cot.  
It strove but failed, and, guided by a gentle  
Hand, it fell at last into the open  
Stocking, head above, and finding comfort,  
Softly purred and slept.

Ah, sleeping boy,  
Thou dreamest not the joy awaiting thee—  
The empty place within thy heart shall soon  
Be filled, thy grief assuaged, thy hot tears dried.  
'Tis little value—but 'tis much to thee—  
Because thy love is wrapped up there, and love  
Is value's measure in the heart of rich  
And poor.

The boy awoke and rubbed his eyes.  
The sun had risen o'er the grand ravine,  
A silver scene, and sent its slanting rays  
Of gold beneath the blind, across the cot.  
He waited not, but crept along and looked  
Below. Two eyes looked up. A moment mutual  
Magnetized, transfixed ! He drew the creature  
From its woollen bed, he kissed it,—pressed it  
To his cheek—and wept for joy. The mother  
Woke. The midnight "gift" was seen and gladly  
Welcomed home while David slept, and now  
She also wept for joy. No home was happier  
On that Christmas morn. No gift was costlier  
Than the gift that meant the wasted worthless  
Waif's return.



"Magnetized"

## THE LURKING FOE

Till early spring (too soon),  
While David went to school, and learned well,  
The widow bravely labored on 'mid frost  
And snow and storm, thro' strain of overwork  
And worse. Inhaled, mayhap, from matter bad,  
Close-handed in her calling (who can trace  
The lurking venom foe?) the wasting plague  
Had found a cruel lodgment in her breast.  
"One hope remains," the kind physician said—  
Who made no charge for visits not a few—  
" 'Tis institutional treatment where the air  
Is light and pure, where food is plentiful,  
And rest abounds."

The parting wrench was sore.  
The mother hid her grief and tears, and smiled,  
But David wept without restraint. A farming  
Couple sympathetic offered refuge  
For awhile, and when he went away  
(His kitten in a basket 'neath his arm),  
His heart was heavy—for the sun was down,  
The world was dark.

But five months' treatment free  
Was great and good, and David's mother seemed  
To be restored to health, for strength was there  
And color beautiful. 'Twas not enough,  
Tho' all that could be given, that other waiting  
Sufferers might have a chance to live.  
With rest at home the healing work begun  
Would one day be complete.

Ye men of wealth,  
And all that generous give, with all that halt,  
Herein your golden opportunity  
Doth lie. A home you have prepared for them  
That leave the prison cell, and this is well.  
But what awaits the convalescent widow  
And the orphan, fighting off the wasting plague?  
Suspicion—dread—a refuge craved for vainly  
Here and there—a battle hopeless, lost.  
Awake, awake! Oh, give the shelter sure  
A child would give to any famished waif!  
Oh, wake, compassion, wake!

When David, big  
With joy, returned, the wind sang in the trees,  
The flowers, red and white, a welcome smiled,  
The cottage seemed to be a prince's home,  
And mother in her loveliness a queen,  
While in the mother's eyes her child appeared  
As if a shepherd lad, he looked so strong,  
So lithe, and ruddy. But the only flock  
That David had consisted of a kitten,  
Now a cat renowned of tiger-stripe  
And fat. And once again the cottage-home  
Gave foretaste of the other, deathless, pure,  
And glad, for love was there.

With quenchless hope  
The happy widow bravely bent her shoulders  
To the yoke again. She had her boy  
To live for, work for, love, and he would be  
A man some day, and strong, when she would lean  
On him as he had leaned on her. And yet  
The yoke was heavy, and grew heavier  
As vigour waned. In spite of hope and will

She craved for rest. Or even if the wage  
Were better, labour could be lessened  
And give more of rest.

## ON STRIKE

One day some workmen  
Struck for better pay. And David wondered  
What it meant to strike. "What is it, mother?—  
Do they hit the men that give them work?"  
The mother smiled. "No, no, my child, they merely  
Rest or cease from work to force their masters  
Into giving better pay to get them  
Back to work." A happy thought now seized him—  
"Oh, mother, strike, and then the people sure  
Will give you better pay." The mother smiled,  
But sighed and said, "My darling boy, if I  
Should strike, a score of women poor are ready,  
Even glad, to take my place, perchance for less."  
The boy was disappointed, and his heart  
Was sad.

But "strike," that odd word strike, as meaning  
Rest from work, or stopping work, clung fast  
To David's mind. Apart from better pay  
He thought that something good remained, and so  
At night, the last thing done before he slept,  
The boy would often take his board, a blackboard  
Big, and chalk in letters large and white—  
"On strike till 7," "On strike till 6," "On strike  
Till 5," according as his mother's work  
Required, or strength could stand. The metal clock,  
A loud alarm, was also wound and set.  
At this the mother always smiled, but when  
Her treasure's eyes were closed in sleep she wept.

She dared not bend and kiss those cherub lips.  
His lovely face grew paler day by day,  
And dread, an awful dread, laid hold of her.  
And she herself was wasting swift and sure—  
The candle flame was burning low.

### ANOTHER CHRISTMAS

Two nights, not more, before the Christmas eve,  
A heap of things for washing lay against  
The wall. Alas, at any time too great,  
The present task might break the weary back,  
But Christmas need was pressing and the labour  
Must be done. (Oh, spare that wasted frame !  
Hear, O Lord, the widow's cry ! )

The weary, yet the watchful boy,  
His blackboard took and wrote in letters big  
And urgent, seeming charged with meaning strange.  
And the clock's alarum was set. And now  
On bended knee beside his mother's knee  
He spoke his simple prayer, pleading lastly  
That his mother might have better wages  
And have rest. And, oh, the mother's heart  
Went with him, with himself before the throne,  
Forgetful, ay entirely, of herself.  
A wild temptation seized her. She would clasp,  
Yea, fiercely hug, that wasted angel-body  
To her breast, and kiss those guileless, beauteous,  
Sweetest lips. Alas! she knew the worst  
Had come—those eyes, uplifted, hollow, shining,  
Spoke of death. And why refrain? She would not,  
Yea, she drank the cup of pleasure to the full.  
The child was glad, and went to rest,  
A smile of heaven on his lips.

And now the mother satisfied, as one  
With strongest wine, rose up, and ope'd the door.  
She looked abroad a moment, then went out  
Into the silent air. The deep ravine  
Was glorious white. The mighty pines were robed  
As if prepared to sing in heaven's choir  
On earth, when strong the northern tempest blew.  
The widow, vigour getting for a little  
From the frosty air, admired the scene,  
And lifting up her eyes to sparkling worlds  
Above, she felt assured, though human help  
And pity wholly failed, that somewhere, sometime,  
There was plenteous rest.

And yet she thanked  
And praised the Power that good and evil gave,  
For one brief cup of pleasure, if no more—  
Her pleasure in her darling boy. "Take him,  
O Lord, whatever portion mine."

The tension loosed,  
The stricken widow turned, yet ere she turned  
She scanned the northern shore of brilliant night,  
And, lo, a mountain mass of tempest clouds  
Lined up for battle with the sleeping south.  
The woman, fearless, smiled as if in kinship  
With the coming storm.

But having struggled, spoken,  
Pleaded strong, her transient vigour gone,  
She stumbled to the door and entered in.  
Beside the bed, she saw the letters written  
On the board, as if the sacred writing  
On the wall. She saw the slender lovely hand  
Exposed that wrote them, and she bowed and kissed it,  
But she could not weep.

Ere midnight came,  
The child awoke, disturbed, and anxious said,  
"Oh, mother dear, what is that awful sound?"  
"My darling, 'tis the sighing of the wind  
Among the pines." But swifter sped the tempest,  
Swifter, and the pines—they bowed their heads  
Before the blast and sang. The cedars high  
And oaks together answered back in song.  
And louder, louder, as if thunder grand,  
The tempest bell of music rang. The boy  
Awoke again, and feebly cried—"Oh, mother,  
I'm afraid—what is that dreadful sound?"  
"My darling, fear not, 'tis the voice of God—  
He leads the choir. And he remembers you  
And me." "Oh, mother, take me in beside you.  
I'm afraid of God, but Jesus"—Here he stopped.  
He struggled till he got in part athwart  
The cot. And as his wearied head sank down  
He whispered faintly, and there came a broken  
Answer, whispering—"Near me, nearer, darling"—  
That was all.

The storm, the mother's music,  
But the child's affright, attained its height.  
Then sudden rang the loud alarum. But  
They heard it not.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was once a manger.  
Once a cross, and both by man despised.  
But God hath both exalted high. And once  
A lonely cottage lowly, overlooked  
By men. But God on it had mercy.  
Tho' He seemed to be in wrath.



"The morning saw her come"

Three wise men  
Did not come, nor one. A child, a girl  
With golden hair and gray-blue laughing eyes,  
A furtive playmate of the boy, with stress  
Walked through the spotless wreaths of snow. The morning  
Saw her come, when all was still. No lock  
Debarred her, and she entered, having knocked.  
She saw the writing on the blackboard big,  
Against the wall, in trembling chalk—

“ ON STRIKE TILL 3 ”

And duly signed by David Annandale.  
She saw the mother's snow-white face upturned  
To heaven. She saw the raven locks of David  
Strewn upon her breast. And saw his face—  
'Twas also white as snow. The tragic scene  
Was quickly seen. She stood amazed a moment,  
Then approached, uncertain, all atremble,  
And she softly pressed her playmate's brow.  
The chill of death went thro' her, and she gave  
A piercing cry and fled.

Of Christmas Day,  
Next day but one, the pretty child had come  
To speak and childlike tell of something fine  
She was to bring. But that great day of countless  
Happy homes would see the cottage empty.  
Nature, nature's God, in mercy stayed  
The stricken widow's ill-paid, weary labour.  
She had gone on strike, as David said.  
And she had taken her darling with her.

