

In Later Days

A. L. Salmon

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IN LATER DAYS

In Later Days

A Collection of Verse

By

ARTHUR L. SALMON

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PREFACE

A number of these pieces have appeared in the *Observer*; others in the *Glasgow Herald*, *Everyman*, etc.; and one, "Dawn," in *Poetry* (Chicago). To the Editors of these the writer offers his sincere thanks.

Some pieces appear here for the first time, the reason being that no editor has cared to give them hospitality; among these are "A Vision of Sunset" and "In the Mendips".

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Crisis

O country—this our own,
Whose faults we know, whose failures we have known—
In darkest days to be
We have no doubts of thee;
Knowing how great
And bravely borne the burdens of thy state,
Thy love of right, thy strong unfaltering will
Wide destinies to fulfil—
Thy care in all contingencies of fate
That righteousness shall be the password still;
The manner of thy dignities, thy hate
Of public boast and vaunt—
Thy soul that no catastrophe can daunt—
Thine own peculiar way
Of facing deeds to do and debts to pay
Without elusive parleyings or dismay.
Long days of testing come, and thou wilt bear
Almost with joy the stress that might have brought despair.

Nightfall by the Thames

The voices of the day
Have stilled before the sacring touch of night.
Something there is to go, something to stay.
Late lingerings of light,
Melting from amber to cerulean grey,
Pass like the gleam that dies
With sweet forgetfulness from slumberous eyes
When dreams are on their way.
Stooping, I see
How bush and grass and tree
Unwavering lie
Transfigured in the stream's serenity—
Save when a sighing hush of night goes by
To stir, as we when half awake are stirred
By something dreamed or something heard.
Which is the real and which the dream?—who knows?—
The hours of busy haste
And want and waste,
Or those that reach
This high security from time and speech,
Winning a trance of movement in repose,
Like the clear stream that rests the while it flows.

The Wet Streets

It needs not noontide's ripe and generous ray
Nor sunset's smouldering glow,
To make this city street a luminous way.
Here through the rain's resplendencies I go
Enrapt, and watch the road's transfiguring
To a most mystic thing.
Vivid the windows flame,
And dazzling signs of merchandise or name
Break on the solid black;
Each lamp defines my track
With sportive checkwork of conflicting gleams,
Fantastical as dreams.
Wet wheels swish rapid and are gone,
Like glow-worms taking flight,
And, miracles of flashing light,
The clanging cars come on.

Far off, the rain-storms beat
On tangled sobbing grasses, sodden'd soil;
Here in the long loud street
They lash our human goings and our toil,
Casting their liberal diamonds at our feet.
Yonder on wood and down the torrent falls,
But here on blackened walls
And roofs, and mirrors of refulgent glass,
By which the people pass,
Each nursing his own dream, feeding his hope
Of wide or narrow scope.
And some behold the signs and marvels—some
See nothing, being blind,
Say nothing, being dumb.
Bringing no light, they have no light to find,
And famish'd pass as empty as they come.

Too Long

O love, if we should stay
Too long, when it is time to be away,
Shall we not find outworn
The welcome that was ours at morn,
And the great voices have no more to say?
The rapture that was ours,
The thrill of winds, the witchery of flowers,
The mystic tale that every sunset told us,
Would have the sadness of remembered things,
The poignancy of half-forgotten Springs
When winter torpors hold us.
Would not the vision fail, the spirit sleep
In languorous silence deep,
And the chill fog of sluggish sense enfold us?

O love, if we should stay!—
Life might forget
Its lingering last regret,
And its last hope be lost in dull decay.

In Later Days

When we have passed the gate
Beyond the midway fields of life, and tread
With lurking dread
To the unfamiliar destinies that await,
Shall we not find
That many things we feared to leave behind
Remain with kindly and consoling grace
To make a homeland of the loneliest place?
Our eyes will dim to meet the same dear flowers—
The same old cuckoo-song of April hours
Calling from misty bowers;
The selfsame lark-song hailing from the blue
That childhood summers knew.

And then all silences will be a song;
And then the old loved places will be dearer,
The lost loved faces nearer;
And we shall pass
Through fields of daisied grass,
Redeemed from much complexity of wrong,
From mad revolt and passioned fight,
To patient days and dreams beyond the night.

The Conductor

He stands
With tremulous groping hands
And eyes half-closed, as one whose sight
Is dazed with looking at a light—
Whose spirit is the thrall
Of some compelling yet elusive call.
So with imploring look and questionings
He lures their mystery from the throbbing strings,
He woos the singing wind to his desire,
The brass with tongues of fire;
The crash, the tempest of tumultuous sound
From Titan throats unbound—
The hundred-voiced, as of a single soul
Subdued to his control.

He stands
With eyes half-closed, with wizard tremulous hands.

Fugitive

Whither at close of day,
Fugitive trembling?—
Backward and fore thy way
Foes are assembling.

Far from the stricken field,
Whither thy faring?
Were it not best to yield
Baffled, despairing?

Not for thee now the light
Kindling in flashes;
Fire of the passioned fight
Sinks to its ashes.

Horror and dark and dread—
Swiftly the foe came;
Smiting at heart and head,
Sudden the blow came.

Turn thee then, battle-spent,
Back to thy doing;
Snatching thy soul's assent,
Face the pursuing.

He thou hast called to aid
Seems not to hear thee.
Back let thy stand be made—
Where He was near thee.

Action

How are we irked by these,
The little things of life, that vex and tease
Like gnats that dog our way
Through the still meadows of a summer day;
Small ailings, petty pesterings, tiny stings,
Follies, futilities—the little things.
But the great moment comes—
Not with despair that dazes and benumbs—
The sudden, instant call
To countering action now or not at all;
And some great floodtide of the soul is freed;
Alert, equipped, we pass from fret to deed.

The Two Conflicts

Wrestle thou with thine angel of the night
Close in, thy muscles tight
Clinging, nor let him go,
Friend habited as foe,
Till thou hast wrested from his might
The utmost blessing he hath brought for thee—
Boon to be won by stress of fight,
Not offered free.
But if the Foe in very fact appear,
Whose force thou knowest, whose deadly lunging spear,
Go not too near.
Stand with the weapon that is best thine own,
And, heeding not his taunt, his mock, his jeer,
Slay with the far-slung stone.

Emergence

Weakness quiescent gains no power
Through a millennium of dejected days;
But dormant strength will leap from its delays
To the inspiration of its destined hour.
The road is forced, the deed is done; men see
What quickening will can be.
The shames of apathy become the praise
Of swift achievement in bewildering ways:
The strong has found his strength: the man is free.

The Grail

I seek it on the height
 At flush of dawn,
When summits pulse with light,
 And veils are drawn;
But a mist ascends and chills
 With numbing fingers pale,
And a gloom is on the hills:
 I do not see the Grail.

I seek it in delight
 Of craft and word—
In glories of the sight
 And glories heard.
But wilful self-desires,
 Though yet unsated, fail;
The hollow questing tires—
 I have not seen the Grail.

But sometimes, it may be,
 I meet a child;
Or men have wept with me,
 And men have smiled.
I show a loving face,
 I hear a human tale;
And for a moment's space
 There flashes forth—the Grail!

The Near

F arther and farther I pursued, to find
Some mythic vision that allured my mind.
But while I scan the horizon far
Above are the blue heavens and evening star,
And at my feet,
Where carelessly I pass,
The lowly sweet
Consolement of the grass.

As one who far to meet a friend will fare,
And, coming homeward, finds his friend is there,
So have I travelled wearying ways
For that which has been with me all my days;
Now finding here,
Unnoted and unheard,
The vision and the clear
Miraculous word.

For Bed and Board

Men have gone forth from their own souls, to play
At masque and mumming and all manner of jest;
Or, seeking to possess, have been possess'd,
Chasing for spoil, have been themselves the prey.
Lured by the song and dance, the market's glare,
They would not stay
To greet the guest who might come unaware,
Nor meet him on his way.

But I, though tempted oft, must feel it shame
To close the door and turn the key
Against the host at whose desire I came.
Missive or messenger may come for me.
Though him I never see,
His both for bed and board my place must be.

In the Deep

Is it thy clinging hair
That holds me low
Beneath the ebb and flow,
Or is it but the weed
Whose coiling snare
Hath seized me unaware,
So that I cannot speed
Through the clear wave to meet the light of day,
But here must stay?

Was it thy witching eye
That lured me to the deep,
Dragging me down where filmy phantoms creep
And snaky dreams go by?
Is it thy slender arm that circles me
And will not set me free?

Yet cometh here at whiles
A recollection of the living light—
Far dawn that smiles
Above the hills, and fields that hush to night.
Joy hath corroded into care
And gladness into woe.
Unloose the tresses of thy clinging hair
And let me go.

At the Kirkyard Gate

He who will watch in the pale moonlight
Will see the dead go by this night;
No footstep sounds and there comes no cry,
When the dead go by,
 When the dead go by.

O my love, shall I see you go
White as a wisp of the driven snow?
O my love, shall I stand and wait—
At the kirkyard gate,
 At the kirkyard gate?

Will you linger a moment upon the way,
While I shiver and sob, while I sob and pray?
Will you say the good-bye that you never said,
When you pass with the dead,
 You pass with the dead?

O my love, will you stay a while
With a parting look and a phantom smile,
As you go to the place where the sleepers lie,
When the dead go by,
 When the dead go by?

The Wayfarer

He passes slowly down the road,
With lagging staff and scanty load
Of faggots gathered by the way,
Himself as brown and stark as they.

Forgotten sorrow, bygone strife,
The trampling of long years of life,
Have scored his face with deep impress
Into a furrowed wilderness.

He does not stay to note the glow
Of flowers, the laughing brooklet's flow—
A guest whose welcome is outworn,
Through loveliness he moves forlorn.

Yet was he born the peer of these,
Playmate of earth and sky and seas;
He was at one where greetings are
Between the brook and evening star.

But now the stress of hastening years,
The drought of toil, the soak of tears,
Have brought him far with tottering tread
Beyond desire and hope and dread.

The weed of age has overgrown
His manhood, as does moss a stone,
Or as the slow resistless green
Takes back the soil where homes have been.

His motions, like a babe's, express
An instinct, not a consciousness—
A thing of bare existence, nursed
In naked hunger and in thirst.

So dead he looks, it would not seem
There can be harbourage for a dream,
Or any recollection be
Of days when earth was witchery.

Yet, passing slowly down the road,
Withered and faded as his load
Of scanty knotted twigs, he bears
A life that never has been theirs.

Sheep-bells

The sheep-bells of the sky
 Thrill through the tingling night,
As the stars shepherdless go by.
 And then—they fade from sight
Within a fold whose wattles are of light;
 And dawn throws wide her gate,
That all the gathered messengers who wait
 May come in concourse bright
To throng the glistening meadows of the morn,
 With minstrelsy and pipe of faery horn,
And hope and love reborn.

O days and years, your buffetings are vain,
If every morn I see that light, I hear that strain.

The Waking

The singing of the birds has come,
The laughter of the wind,
And speech is given to the dumb
And vision to the blind:

Here in the hollow of the hills,
Beside the running streams—
Where children gather daffodils,
And lovers gather dreams.

The Miracle

Only by love the miracles are wrought.
Love takes the little things,
With wondrous changes and transfigurings,
Finding the image sought:
Sweet from the bitter, beauty from the wild.
Love takes a little clay, and makes a Child.

The Thing Not Done

I willed to do you good, but did not act;
And now have passed the occasion and the power;
My will achieved no consummating fact
But held its hand, and lost the appointed hour.
And yet, perhaps, so subtly are we wrought,
Although I willed unactingly, you knew;
Perhaps you are the better of my thought,
Nor wholly missed the thing I did not do.

Forgiveness

Thou mayst forgive me, friend,
And there, for thee, the wrong will end;
But I—so long as I shall live
My trespass how can I forgive?

And so, till self-forgiven,
Though penance hath been done
And thy dear pardon won,
I go unshriven.

Defeat

That thou be baffled, buffeted, defamed,
 May be inexorable fate;
 And yet thy soul's estate
May be unshamed.

Not in the falling is thy fall complete,
 Nor hope's last refuge rent;
 Only if thou consent
Is thy defeat.

Remembrance

Because your eyes are sealed
With clinging dust and earth lies on your breast—
Because your pains are healed
By one swift virtue of assuaging rest—
Because of this, I crave
Some solace of the same appeasing touch,
And of the things life gave
Consent, reluctant, to surrender much
That had been mine—
But not my love resign.

A Moorland Stream

Through these green places
 Among the hills
The river races
 And whirls and spills,
And sometimes nestles cold
 In pools of amber-gold.

Bracken and grasses
 Are thick around
Where the stream passes
 With flash and bound,
And where the boulders press
 To stay its wilfulness.

Here swiftly gliding
 Through tangled meads,
Or darkly hiding
 'Neath bank and weeds;
There leaping with a strong
 Exultancy of song.

But when night darkens
 And all is strange,
To him who harkens
 There comes a change;
The wizard luring stream
 Becomes a shuddering dream.

The Undying

I saw a Roman soldier in the wood
That crowns the dreaming valley, near the rim
Of low entrenchment, where the oaks are grim
Amid the tangles of their solitude,
The moss and bramble-twine. Passioned he stood
And clasped the weeping maid who clung to him;
With deeps of long farewell his eyes were dim
And her lips speechless of the thing she sued:

They who are now a thing of dream and dust.
Lonely the old encampment heaves and dips
Where sunlight seldom comes nor lovers speak;
Only the love is deathless and the trust.
Dear girl, her tears are wet upon your cheek,
And his hot words come broken from my lips.

In Autumn

The heather burns as a flame that smoulders along the grass;
There's a chequer of wandering lights and of glimmering clouds that pass,
With the glory of autumn sun as it flashes divinely between
On the hills where the red and the gold are triumphing over the green.

Deep where the rains have drenched the blades rise tangled and tall,
And oh, but the autumn grass is the richest and ripest of all!
Dappled with fallen leaves that glisten with yellow and red.
As they pass to the mother-breast by which they were fostered and fed.

Sometimes the vapours lie like the smoke of artilleries rolled,
White as a drift of the snow or touched with unspeakable gold;
Sometimes they wash away to spaces of fathomless blue,
Cleaner and deeper than skies that the midmost of summer-time knew.

And over the moorland the floods of the westering sunlight stream,
Bennet and tussock and bush merged in an ocean of gleam;
Laving the purple ling and the yellowing dwarfish furze,
And the tremulous harebell-stem that flushes with light as it stirs.

Autumn

Now come the grey days mingling with the gold;
The grey days come
That veil and sadden and benumb;
Days when the soul would cry and yet is dumb—
When everything is felt and nothing told.

How lovely in their mist are field and wold,
Where dreamy blue and smoke of field-fires blend.
Theirs not the pain.
They are content with that which hath been done
Alike by storm and sun,
By wind and rain.
They have received and given; to them the end
Is the beginning; death and birth are one.

Autumn Mists

Mist in the pearly dawn,
 With films of gossamer on drenching leas;
Mist like a curtain drawn
 To veil the shimmering murmurous seas;
Mist where the old road drops
 Between the larches and the cottage eaves—
Mist over glade and copse
 Weaving a witchery of the yellowing leaves.

Mist that is like a breath
 Blurring the surface of some secret pool,
Or stream that lingereth
 Through tangled willow-banks and rushes cool:
O tender, clinging haze
 Suffused at sundown with a smouldering fire—
Mother of luring greys
 And lurking blues, of dreamlight and desire.

Dawn

Backward to cairn and moss, barrow and mound,
The ghosts are trooping, while the wind
Dies to the dawn of silence, and the land
Hushes to peace.
But in the dim old church
Where daybreak shivers like a vaporous sea,
Night with its conscience weighed
By evil visions, records of despair,
Lingers and lurks unshriven.

And there the dead
On his trestled bier
Lies at the altar step,
Waiting dismissal to the kirkyard grasses.
Pale in the bloodless morn the chancel lights
Waver a yellowish flame;
And the priest,
Weary with watching, tense with high desire,
Offers for quick and dead
The consummating mystery of his faith.
For the needs of the world,
Its sin and folly and tears—
And for him who toils no more,
The bread is broken,
The wine is poured—
Here in the shadowy kirk
Between the field and the sea.

Without, the gulls are crying, the day awakes.

In the Mendips

Here in the secret places of the hills
I saw great marvels, and became aware
Of greater than I saw—dim presences
That lurked elusive; silence full of sound,
And phantom forms that just escaped the seeking;
A consciousness of elemental lives
Not human, yet not wholly of the beast;
Hauntings from days of no remembered tale,
Rumour of things that never have been told
Unless in dreams.

A stir of hidden springs

Thrilled through the low green grasses; heights were brown
With withering bracken; beds of mossy turf
Dimpled and rose resilient to the footfall;
And rarely, with surrounding byre and barn,
A slumbrous homestead hedged with mystery,
Or ruinous hut that spake of long desertion.
From the dark underworld of caverned base
Came wraiths of things long fabled; while above
On high bleak downlands tumulus and cairn,
Grey stony earthwork, brooded awesomely,
Mute with the weight of bygone happenings
That know no other record.

And in my soul

Were these—the intangible dim presences,
The dream, the myth, the semi-human shape,
The cairn; and in my soul the haunting voice
That speaks from secret depths or from the height,
Whose words defy me when I seek to bring
Our hampered speech to their significance.

On the Downs

Here suddenly the moment, from its sense
Of near restricted ways,
Lifts to a consciousness of permanence
That knows no bygone and no coming days—
A present that transcends
All dim beginnings and conjectural ends;
Slipping through swift amaze
To the unstirred content
And full surrender of absorbed assent.
The self, the hope, the wonder glide
Into a peace assured and satisfied,
More like a waking than a dream.

O turn

To grasp at bush and flower and drooping fern,
Feeling that they and thou and all things float
In this embracing tide,
Not future or remote
But here and now. Bramble and earth and trees—
Body and spirit thou art one with these;
One with the seen and heard,
The grass, the bird;
And one, escaped from thought and questioning strife,
From lonely dream and troublous word,
With the soul that is our life.

The Signpost

Starkly with outstretched hands
The signpost at its crossway stands,
Facing dejectedly the lonely lands;
And they who come
Wayworn along the trackways of the height
Are foiled, as by a questioning of the dumb.
For not alone at night,
Or in a shroud of dripping fog, their sight
Is cheated. Years of sun and rain and storm
Have wrought and buffeted, to deface, deform;
So that the writhen arms point night and day
To speed no traveller on his way.
Grim as a hanging-post, with empty hands
The withering relic stands.

Yet in the Spring
Small birds come flutteringly to twitter and sing;
Perhaps a passing schoolboy's laugh will ring,
Because his arm has thrown
And struck the sullen post with mocking stone.
Strangers will pause here in the heat
To feel the country's low heart-pulses beat;
And laden folk who from the village wend
Welcome the post as a familiar friend,
To love, not scorn.
And sometimes when a spear of light hath torn
Through mass of rifted wrack,
The traveller looking back
Sees it a storm-lit cross against the black.

A Vision of Sunset

High on the western hill
Soars the great pyre;
Masses of cloudy fuel up-piled for kindling—
Wrack of the day, its vapours and its dust,
Flotsam of sea and skies, of wold and wild,
Drift of the storm-wind, scourings of the waste,
Wreckage of all dead days and all dead years,
Joy, toils and sorrows—
Soul of man's agony,
Of faith, of love, of hope,
These three—
Thrust to the heart of the flame
Thrice-heated for its mighty consummation.
See—the wide heavens are held with terror and wonder.

And lo—a vision on the hills.
Were there not three men cast into the fire?—
Behold, there now are four men, and the fourth
Is as the Son of God.

Adventure

Some to far lands—to scale alluring heights,
Tread pathless forest, traverse arid waste—
Seeking to stay their thirst with novel taste
Of torrid solitudes or Arctic nights:
Craving the new, the strange, in sound and sights,
New feats to be accomplished, perils faced,
New soils to delve, new victims to be chased:
To these the reaping of their own delights.

But to my seeking through life's common way
There comes adventure in a simpler guise—
The sight of men and women, day by day,
Their toil, their pastime—children's wondering eyes—
The lure of dawns and setting suns, the thrill
Of homeland seas, the wind's impetuous will.

A Life

Write this above his name:
He neither sought nor was awarded fame,
Yet fit result and due rewardings came.

He loved the tender greys
Of quiet, fragrant, sleep-encircled ways,
Stilling with dream the discord of his days.

Flame had he known, and frost;
The un hoped thing found, the vain enrichment lost:
Of all things gained or given he paid the cost.

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