

*In Later Days*

*A. L. Salmon*

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*Title:* In Later Days

*Date of first publication:* 1933

*Author:* Arthur L. Salmon (1865-1952)

*Date first posted:* Apr. 27, 2016

*Date last updated:* Apr. 27, 2016

Faded Page eBook #20160428

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# **IN LATER DAYS**

# *In Later Days*

*A Collection of Verse*

By

**ARTHUR L. SALMON**

LONDON  
ERNEST BENN LIMITED  
1933

*First Published in 1933*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

## 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*

**I**t 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*

**H**ow 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*

**M**en 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, nurst  
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*

**T**hou 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*

**T**hat 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*

**B**ecause 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*

**B**ackward 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*

**H**ere 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*

**H**igh 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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*Printed in Great Britain by Stephen Austin & Sons, Ltd., Hertford.*

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### **Transcriber's Notes:**

No printer's errors were detected in the original printing used for preparation of this ebook.  
Spelling and punctuation have been left as in the original.

[The end of *In Later Days* by Arthur L. Salmon]