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THE SOUL'S DESTROYER AND OTHER POEMS

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The Souls Destroyer
and other Poems by
William H. Davies



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THE SOUL'S DESTROYER

London! What utterance the mind finds here!
In its academy of art, more rich
Than that proud temple which made Ophir poor,
And the resources famed of Sheba's Queen.
And its museums, hoarding up the past,
With their rare bones of animals extinct;
And woven stuffs embroidered by the East
Ere other hemispheres could know that Peace
Had trophies pleasanter to win than War ;
The great man, wrought to very life in stone—
Of genius, that raises spirits that
It cannot lay until their will is wrought—
Till in their eyes we seek to wander awed,
Lost in the mind's immensity, to find
The passage barred, the spirit gone away.
And not without sweet sounds to hear : as I
Have heard the music, like a hiding child,
Low chuckling its delight behind a wall,
Which, with a sudden burst and joyous cry,
Out leapt and on my heart threw its sweet weight—
When strolling in the palace-bounded parks
Of our great city on a summer's morn.
Now, one who lives for long in London town
Doth feel his love divided 'tween the two—
A city's noise and Nature's quiet call:

His heart is as a mother's, that can hear
Voices of absent children o'er the sea
Calling to her, and children's words at home.
E'en when old Thames rolls in his fog, and men
Are lost, and only blind men know their way ;
When Morning borrows of the Evening's lamps,
Or when bewildered millions battle home
With stifled throats, and eyes that burn with pain—
Still are there lovers faithful to such moods.
But in thy slums, where I have seen men gaunt,
In their vile prisons where they wander starved
Without a jailer for their common needs—
Heard children whimper to their mother's moan ;
Where rich ones, had they love, with willing hands,
Have privilege to win their godhead soon
By charity that's needless in new realms—
Oh, who can love thy slums with starving ones !
Where children live, like flowers in Ocean's dells,
Unvisited by light or balmy wind:
As daffodils, that plead with their sweet smiles
Our charity for their rude father March.
Thy place is in the slums, O Charity,
These are thy churches for thy visitings ;
The charity that seeks is nobler far
Than charity that must at home be sought.
This London served my life for full five years.
viii.

In sheer disgust to know intemperance
And poverty, and leaning to the sot
Who lays this precious intellect to sleep,
As though no beauty was in all the world,
With heaven and earth scarce worthy of a thought,
And helpless grown of every future joy—
Methought return to Nature might restore
Youth's early peace and faith's simplicity.
Though Hope be an illusion, yet our life
Were never so bewildered as without it;
An April day of sunny promises
When we are suffering actual cold and want,
And child of Discontent—without such hints
Of coming joy Life's name were Vanity.
Hopeless had I become, a wreck of men ;
A derelict that neither sinks nor floats,
Is drifting out of sight of heaven and earth,
Not of the ways of men, but *in* their ways.
And there lived one, now to another wed,
Whom I had secret wish to look upon,
With sweet remembrance of our earlier years.
Her presence then a pool of deep repose
To break Life's dual run from Innocence
To Manhood, and from Manhood unto Age,
And a sweet pause for all my murmuring;
Until a way, for which is no account,

Set me to run again, and she received
Into her favour one who was my friend.
Oft had I mourned those days for ever gone
We went together side by side to school,
Together had our holidays in fields
Made golden by June's buttercups ; in woods,
Where under ferns fresh pulled I buried her,
And called her forth like Lazarus from the grave;
She'd laughing come, to shake her curls until
Methought to hear full half a hundred bells.
A grown-up world took playful notice soon,
Made me feel shame that grew a greater love ;
She was more chary of her laughter then,
And more subdued her voice, as soft and sweet
As Autumn's, blowing through his golden reeds.
In her sweet sympathies she was a woman
When scarcely she was more than child in years;
And yet one angry moment parted us,
And days of longing never joined us more.

One morning I awoke with lips gone dry,
The tongue an obstacle to choke the throat,
And aching body weighted with more heads
Than Pluto's dog ; the features hard and set,
As though encased in a plaster cast;
With limbs all sore through falling here and there

To drink the various ales the Borough kept
From London Bridge to Newington, and streets
Adjoining, alleys, lanes obscure from them,
Then thought of home and of the purer life,
Of Nature's air, and having room to breathe,
A sunny sky, green field, and water's sound;
Of peaceful rivers not yet fretful grown
As when their mouths have tasted Ocean's salt ;
And where the rabbits sit amid their ferns,
Or leap, to flash the white of their brown tails.
Less time a grey crow picks the partridge clean,
I was appalled, and, with impulse that
Was wonderful in one of many sprees,
Went onward rapidly from street to street,
I still had vision clear of Nature's face,
Though muddled in my senses to the ways
And doings of the days and nights before.
I heard the city roaring like a beast
That's wronged by one that feared an open strife
And triumphed by his cunning—as I walked.
It followed on for hours with rushing sound,
As some great cataract had burst all bounds
And was oncoming with its mingled pines—
The fallen sentinels—to choke the sea.
Once in awhile the sound, though not less near,
Seemed distant, barred by dwellings closely joined,

But at a corner's turn heard full again ;
Yet lessened soon and sure to softer ways
Of a low murmuring—as though it found
Anger was vain, and coaxed for my return.
All day walked I, and that same night, I scorned
The shelter of a house, lay peaceful down
Beneath the glorious stars ; beneath that nest
Of singing stars men call the Milky Way ;
Thought it, maybe, the way that spirits take,
And heavenly choir to sing triumphal march
For dead men for the New Jerusalem.
I was alone : had left the Borough in
Safe care of my old cronies, who would keep
Its reputation from becoming changed
Into a quiet neighbourhood.

As with a shipwrecked seaman cast ashore,
And carried to a land's interior
By the rude natives, there to work and slave
Quarries and mines of their barbaric king ;
Who after years escapes his servitude
To wander lost, at last to see before
Him mountains which he climbs to see beyond,
When on their top he stands—beholds the sea!
And, wonders more, a fleet of friendly flags
Lying at anchor for his signalling—

Such joy a hundred times a day was mine
To see at every bend of the road the face
Of Nature different. And oft I sat
To hear the lark from his first twitter pass
To greater things as he soared nearer heaven;
Or to the throstle, singing nearer home,
With less of that abandon and wild fire,
But steady, like a sheltered light from wind.
What joy was mine, sweet Nature, to return !
The flower so wild, reared on thine own pure milk
Of dew and rain, and by thy sunbeams warmed,
Speckled the green with light of various hues;
The hawthorn it caught slippery Mercury,
And smothered him to smell of where he'd been ;
And everything that had a voice made sound,
The speechless things were gladsome in dumb smiles.
It was a day of rest in heaven, which seemed
A blue grass field thick dotted with white tents
Which Life slept late in, as 'twere holiday.
Yon lord or squire in his great house,
Who himself busies guessing all his days
The age of horses and the weight of hogs,
The breed of hounds—not such as he has held
The ear to Nature's quiet heart-beat. No ;
He overlooks the flower to spy the fox,
Ignores the lark's song for the halloing horn,

Nor hears the echo of that horn he loves—
Not such as he is rich in Nature's stores.
I've seen proud Autumn in more gold arrayed,
Ere cold October strips and blows him bare,
Than ever delved from earth or ta'en from water's wash ;
More pearls seen scattered to a summer's morn
Than Ocean e'er possessed in depths or out,
Though in his water's workshop—like a slave.
Who sees a cobweb strung with dew pearls, sees
A finer work than jewelled crowns of gold.
Few are thy friends, sweet Nature, in these days,
But thou art still the Solitary's love.
The glory of the river's long since gone,
The land is sped and beauty unrevealed.
The motor-car goes humming down the road,
Like some huge bee that warns us from its way.
On, on, we speed by fire on slippery rails,
And earth goes spinning back from whence we came,
And through the trees, or on the hills' smooth tops
That cut the heaven clean—the day's one orb
Goes with us till he sinks before the dark,
Clouds towering with him, to his back and front;
We speed our way through tunnels under ground,
Where one sees naught but faces of his kind.
Let others praise thy parts, sweet Nature; I
Who cannot know the barley from the oats,

Nor call the bird by note, nor name a star,
Claim thy heart's fulness through the face of things.
The lonely shepherd in his hut at night
Will dream of Beauty in the feverous towns,
Of Love and Gaiety, of Song and Dance;
With fore-paws on his master's crook, the dog
Sleeps dreaming his life's duty—though his flocks
Are countless, and the hills on which they roam :
So faithful I to thee, like shepherd's dog,
To follow thee with joy in all thy moods,
As docile as the lamb that Una led.
When man shall stand apart from this dear world,
And have his vision's manifold increase,
To see it rolled at morning when the sun
Makes lamps of domes and lighthouses of fanes,
With its green fields, blue waters, and its hills,
And smiling valleys filled with brooks and flowers ;
To hear the music of the world once his,
Singing in unison with other spheres—
He shall exclaim, " I have God's second heaven
Ere I have known the wonder of His first."

Six days had gone, and I at length near home,
Where toil the Cymry deep in sunless pits,
And emptying all their hills to warm the world.
Soon saw familiar scenes, and saw no change :

The rookery, where never silence seemed—
For every hour seemed it to be disturbed
By strange new-comers, aliens to invade;
Or, maybe, known ones bringing envied stores
Which stay-at-homes would clamour to divide.
And near that rookery a river ran,
And over it a bridge too small for piers ;
Another crossing, of irregular stones,
Was seen, which in the springtime flooded o'er;
And I had heard the river tell their number,
And spell—like letters of an alphabet,
That it would never tire repeating day
And night. When young I oft had bared my feet
To go from bank to bank, leapt stone to stone,
My ankles wetted on a sunken one.
Beyond the bridge was seen the village spire—
My courage failed. I feared to see in life
Her who was now the heroine of dreams,
And sweet familiar of my solitude
And silence, and whose shadowy hand kept full
The cup of memory ; and in such mood
Entered an inn, to seek that courage which
Makes man abuse his friends, and wish them foes ;
Or puts unnatural pity in his mind
To help strange ones, forgetful of his own.
Not one known face had met my own, or voice

To recognise, until that moment came ;
And then such sight to see that had the man
Been other than he was had not surprised :
He who had wed my love stood shaking there
While to his lips another held the glass
Which his own hand lacked power to raise unspilled ;
And there stood he, in manner of a beast
That's drinking from a trough, but more the greed.
We greeted as old friends ; few moments passed
When I inquired of her, in casual way,
On which a fearful change came over him :
" Why, she hath filled the house with merry men
To mock her husband," he replied, and turned
His head in fear. And well I knew his thoughts,
And of such demons in a drunkard's dream,
The sleepless dream that wearies flesh and brain.
This curse of drink, in village and in town,
The curse of nations, their decline and fall,
Ere they can question purpose of this life ;
And so 'twill be until the mind is reared
To see the beauty that is in the world,
Of science, art, and Nature at all times ;
To know that temperance and sobriety
Is truer joy—e'en though the grave ends all—
Than an unnatural merriment that brings
A thousand tortures for its hundred joys.

He now seemed worse and moved about the room,
And many a sound of triumph, anguish made,
Though from his unseen foes receiving knocks
And giving in return. We stood in awe !
One looked at me and said : " He should be home,
And we are much to blame for him ; wouldst thou
See him safe there ? for none can censure thee."
"Nay, I would rather tread his threshold floor,
And dare all devils of his fancy there,
Than front his wife and children innocent."
As some lone hunter might at sunrise see,
Upon the margent of a woodland pool,
Huge prints of something alien to his lore,
And know not if 'twere fowl or beast, or freak
Of man—so awed, amazed I stood; until
He grew more calm, and then we coaxed him home.

We reached his home, a cottage lone and small
And such a place was my ideal to live,
Where I might walk it round, touch its four sides,
Free to the sun in every latitude,
Unto the first and final look on earth.
And at its door three little Aprils played,
Three little children, little Aprils all,
So full were they of April's strife and love ;
Who, when they saw us coming, ran to meet us,

To make a bridal entry with their laughter ;
But saw a stranger, and their father cold,
Fell back, and followed hushed, a funeral train.
Sure, thought I, our whole duty is to leave
Our children's state exalted 'bove our own :
Equipping them with kinder thoughts than ours,
And they do likewise in their day; so through
The generations to at last attain
The climax of our mortal purity.
Had I so failed to these poor little ones
If she and I were sharing of their lives !
We entered, and we stood before her face,
And it was stern, as woe affects the man,
Not that sweet resignation of her sex.
She looked on me as one unjustly served,
A look regretful, part resigned, as if
Some retribution was my right to claim.
Her once blue sapphire eyes had not a gleam,
As they would never smile or weep again,
And had no light to draw the waters up
Which staled upon her heart. To me all seemed
So plain : that she had loved without avail,
And reasoned, then had widowed her own self,
A widowhood in which Death claimed no part.
All night he raved, and in his madness died.
And I have seen his death-look on a beast

Baring the teeth 'twas powerless to use
Against a foe of greater strength, and there
Lay dead, intentions hatefully revealed.
Such his dread look: the vicious show of teeth
Made bare in hatred to his unseen foes.
Such is this drink that fathers half our sins ;
It makes a simple one responsible
For deeds which memory makes no count to save,
And proves man guilty in his innocence.
When he shall stand before his judging God
He needs must answer charges strange to him
And his own mind—to One who sees all things ;
And what He sees, He never can forget.
May God have mercy on our frailties !
Sure we, though set a thousand years of pain,
Nor once should murmur at vicissitude,
Yet ill deserve those promises fulfilled
Of an eternity of bliss with Him ;
And who can know the thoughts of him in hell,
Who sacrificed eternity of joy
To gratify this little life on earth !
Were't not for God Almighty's mercy, trees
Would 'scape the thunderbolt, th' unfeeling rocks
The lightning's blast; all ills would fall on man,
Who hides his conscience in a covered cage,
As dumb and silent as a moulting bird.

LOVE'S COMING

An hour or more she's gone,
And we are left alone,
I and her bird.

At last he twittered sweet,
To hear my loved one's feet,
And I, too, heard.

When she had entered,
He tilted then his head,
If right or wrong;
But when her voice was heard
A frenzy seized the bird
To rave in song.

" Peace, pet, my love is near,
Her voice I cannot hear
In such a din ;
Thou couldst not call more loud
Unto a smiling cloud
That May hides in."

Now, what his thoughts could be—
If she still spake and he
In harmony;
Or had forgetful grown,
Enamoured of his own
Sweet melody—

Is not my say ; I know
I out with her must go
To hear her story.
We left that raving thing—
Made worse by laughter—sing
Out his mad glory.

IN A LODGING HOUSE

" Get to thy room," a voice told me,
" From sottish lips in blasphemy " ;
And I said this : " If I go there,
Silence will send me to Despair;
Then my weak What I Am will be
Mocked by that one I wish to be ;
And leeches of regret will lie
On me to palely stupefy,
Close sucking at my heart's content"—
Yet I arose, to my room went.
I knew't: scarce off my garments were
When came the funeral gathering there
To bury my dead hopes, as night
By night to mock my Fancy's sight.
There was a meeting-house adjoined,
Where rich ones, rare and few of kind,
Fed little children, came to cheer
Parents with music sweet to hear.
While now I grieved a real voice stole
Into my room, and sang this soul
To heaven from hell, though I knew well
Silence would drift it back to hell
When that sweet sound was heard no more.
She sang to me a chanted shore
Where seamajds' dripping tresses spread

And made the rocks gold carpeted ;
She sang me back to childhood's way,
To fields with lambs to see at play,
And sheep that coughed like men. Again
I saw quaint treasures of the main,
Dried fishes, model ships, and shells,
And coral stalks, and seaweed bells,
In my grandfather's house. Ah ! sweet
To bear his boast through school and street—
" Master of my own ship was I."
Again I heard his footsteps nigh,
As to and fro the passage dark
He walked, as though on his own bark ;
When granny, I, a sister, brother,
Huddled under cosy cover.
Now have I lived my score and ten,
Yet less my hope than older men.
No collier bowelled in the earth
But Hope shall flush with rosy breath ;
No seaman drowning in the main,
Nor traveller perished on a plain,
Where all is silent, and the wind
Prowls day and night in vain to find
A living thing to make a moan,
Or mountaineer was lost—nay, none
Of these but Hope makes less afraid,
xxiv.

And flatters to some call for aid.
Yet here lives one a score and ten,
And less his hope than older men.
I cared not for that singer's grace₁
If plain she were or fair of face,
Or what her station, age might be—
She was a Voice, no more to me,
But such an one, so sweet and fresh,
I made no judgment on her flesh.
It seemed a spirit there to float,
Alighting with such raptured note
That it must ease its heart of. Oh,
Woman; thy sweet voice none others know
As those to whom thou'rt seldom heard ;
Who have no flower to tend, no bird
For pet, no child to play—to give
A cultured joy to ones that live
In common lodging house. To hear
A sweet voice is to me more dear
Than sound of organs, bands, or bells.
Discordant bursts lead out soft swells
Of instrumental harmony—
Love's voice is from all discord free,
Here darkly die, die darkly here,
And lack e'en Friendship's common tear;
A wreck of men, one score and ten,
And less thy hope than older men.

AUTUMN

Autumn grows old: he, like some simple one,
In Summer's castaway is strangely clad;
Such withered things the winds in frolic mad
Shake from his feeble hand and forehead wan.

Autumn is sighing for his early gold,
And in his tremble dropping his remains;
The brook talks more, as one bereft of brains,
Who singeth loud, delirious with the cold.

O now with drowsy June one hour to be !
Scarce waking strength to hear the hum of bees,
Or cattle lowing under shady trees,
Knee deep in waters loitering to the sea.

I would that drowsy June awhile were here,
The amorous South wind carrying all the vale—
Save that white lily true to star as pale,
Whose secret day-dream Phoebus burns to hear.

SLEEP

Life's angel half, sweet Sleep,
When, like the mermaid, thou
In all thy loveliness
Dost rise from out the deep
Where Life is foul to see—
Men wake to scheme and sin,
But thou dost keep them pure
In that sweet hour with thee.

The flower upon the hill,
Where caves and crags and peaks
Carry the thunder on
After the heavens are still,
Knows thee: as that cared flower
Within some sheltering wood,
And houses built by men,
And in my lady's bower.

If Age hath followed Truth,
A conscience clean and pure
Is unto him as is
Sweet Innocence to Youth ;
But Age and Innocence
Dost thou, sweet Sleep, reward :
Thou givest rest to both,
To both art recompense.

Yet thou hast awful power
When thou art lying still
And breathing quietly!
Was it not such an hour
Dark Murder slunk away,
Fearing thy innocence
More than the watchfulness
Of men in armed array ?

Thou makest War to cease
Awhile, and armies pause;
And in the midst of strife
Thou bringest them to peace ;
The tyrant must delay
The cruel deed at thy command ;
Oppressed ones know thy balm
Can take their fears away.

DEATH

Beauty'll be no fairer than
Aged dame so shrunk and wan,
Whom she looks on proudly. Now,
Did Death strike them sudden low,
Strike them down, a little while
Vanished Beauty's velvet smile,
Ugly grinner she, and few
Mark the difference 'tween these two.
Nothing here shall arbitrate,
Chivalry intimidate,
Hour of doom, or change Death's laws;
Kings hire no ambassadors.
Death makes monarchs grinning clowns,
Fits their skulls for bells, not crowns.

BEAUTY'S LIGHT

Think not her face is patched with pink,
Or is a jumbled mess to seem,
As berries red, that neither sink
Nor swim in shallows of pale cream—
Oh, no! her face it is not white,
Nor red, nor brown, nor dark, nor fair,
Nor yellow sure, though all the light
Of gold and yellow flower meets there;
So radiant is my loved one's face
There's not one colour there to trace.

I know not where the light turns on :
Whether that wondrous ball of hair
And golden fire reflects upon
Her cheeks, creating sunbeams there,
I cannot tell; but it is sweet
Back of that column white as snow
To let my fingers link and meet
Under her hair falls, and to know
Her mine ; where it feels warm ; a nest
Just emptied by the birds at rest.

A thousand sunbeams on each cheek
Are crowding eager to o'erleap
Her blue eye's fence rails, where they seek
To drown themselves in pools so deep ;
xxx.

And leapt them seems that many have,
Yet, strange to say, not one could drown,
But may be seen afloat the wave,
Bobbing their bodies up and down ;
And not a beam that leapt the fence
Lost its soul's light in consequence.

LINES TO A SPARROW

What shall we call thee—mouse o' the air,
To raid our buds, make our trees bare,
To rob the sunlight of its grain,
More mischievous than April's rain ;
To rob our orchards, and to knock
Young blossoms down, to spoil and pock
Nature's fair face, in spite and wrath—
As he, thy brother of the earth,
Who creeps at night time slyly forth
To tear our satins, silks, and what
He cannot munch makes wanton rot ?
Nay, not like him art thou, for he
Doth from his own poor shadow flee,
And is a fearsome wretch, to show
A guilt his conscience should not know ;
And so ridiculous his fear
That Innocence, without a tear
Delights to prison him ; but thou
Art guiltier than we will allow.
It is in wintry weather when
The robin turns a beggar, then
Jays, pigeons, steal the squirrel's store ;
But, when the winter's stress is o'er,
They are dishonourable no more—
Yet thou art thief, despoiler ever,
xxxii.

Through sunny and through stormy weather.
Time was thou didst perform great work,
And slay slugs, bugs, and things that lurk
In pioneer's path ; of late
Thou hast incurred our mortal hate,
And we would hunt thee out of life—
Were't not for such unequal strife ;
Our gins and traps, we must confess,
Are vain, and powder powerless ;
And all our cunning arts are vain,
The triumph thine, and ours the pain.
Man cannot shake thee off: as though
A billow reared and plunged to throw
The wind that on its arched crest
Jockeyed from shore to shore, and rest
Not for a moment gave—e'en so
Thy triumph none can overthrow.
With all this fuss of thee, I doubt
Thou art all bad, as men make out;
Not Cocky Sparrow, nor Jim Mouse,
O foolish man, that robs thy house :
If thou wouldst know what takes thy feed,
Set trap for hand of human greed;
'Tis not that sparrows, mice are sly—
On men who govern men keep eye.
Brown Sparrow, with us everywhere,
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Go, multiply without a care :
When larks sing over fields unroamed,
And sealed woods by night are stormed,
Surrendering unto nightingales—
When cuckoos call to hills from vales,
Thou, Sparrow mine, art here and near,
To find all times, come year, go year.

A DRINKING SONG

A Bee goes mumbling homeward pleased,
He has not slaved away his hours ;
He's drunken with a thousand healths
Of love and kind regard for flowers.
Pour out the wine,
His joy be mine.

Forgetful of affairs at home,
He has sipped oft and merrily;
Forgetful of his duty—Oh!
What can he say to his queen bee ?
He says in wine,
" Boo to her shrine !"

The coward dog that wags his tail,
And rubs the nose with mangy curs,
And fearful says, " Come play, not fight,"
Knows not the draught to drown his fears ;
Knows not the wine,
The ruby shine.

Poor beggar, breathless in yon barn,
Who fears a mouse to move thy straw,
Must Conscience pester thee all night,
And fear oppress with thoughts of law ?
O dearth of wine,
No sleep is thine,
c 2

Is Bacchus not the god of gods,
Who gives to Beauty's cheeks their shine ?
O Love, thou art a wingless worm;
Wouldst thou be winged, fill thee with wine ;
Fill thee with wine,
And wings be thine.

Then, Bacchus, rule thy merry race,
And laws like thine who would not keep ?
And when fools weep to hear us laugh,
We'll laugh, ha ! ha ! to see them weep,
O god of wine,
My soul be thine.

LOVEABSENT

Where wert thou, love, when from Twm Barium turned
The moon's face full the way of Alteryu,
And from his wood's dark cage the nightingale
Drave out clear notes across the open sheen ?

I stood alone to see the ripples run
From light to shade, and shade to light in play;
Like fearsome children stealing guilty moves
When Age is dozing—when thou wert away.

The banks of Alteryu are no less sweet,
Nor Malpas brook more chary of his flowers,
And I unchanged as they; but thou, dear love,
Allowest Time to part us with his hours.

THE PROVER

If Life gives friends,
Tis Death that keeps them true:
When living long
Time proves them false and few;
So Life's a boon
When Death is coming soon.

Life has no joy
Except we cherish some
Illusive dream:
If Wisdom come,
Life were no boon—
Did Death not come more soon.

I loved a maid
Time has proved false to be ;
Would Death had come
When true that maid to me !
Life were a boon
Had Death been coming soon.

SAINTS AND LODGERS

Ye saints, that sing in rooms above,
Do ye want souls to consecrate ?
Here's " Boosy " Bob, " Pease Pudding " Joe,
And " Fishy Fat," of Billingsgate.

Such language only they can speak,
It juggles heaven and hell together ;
One threatens, with a fearful oath,
To slit a nose like a pig's trotter.

Here's sporting Fred, swears he is robbed,
And out of fifteen shillings done
By his own pal, who would not lend
Sixpence to back a horse that won.

Here's Davie, he's so used to drink,
When sober he is most bemuddled ;
He steers his craft with better skill,
And grows quite sly when he is fuddled.

Here's " Brummy " Tom, a little man,
Who proudly throws his weight in drink;
He knows men think him poor when sober,
And then, ashamed, to bed doth slink.

The " Masher " who, by his kind deeds,
The friendship of our house hath lost;
He lent out cash that's not repaid—
They hate him worst who owe him most.

Here's " Irish " Tim, outspoken wretch,
Insult him, he is thy staunch friend;
But say " Good morning," civil like,
Hell damn thee then to thy life's end.

What use are friends if not to bear
Our venom and malicious spleen !
Which, on our life ! we dare not give
To foes who'll question what we mean.

Come down, ye saints, to old " Barge " Bill,
And make his wicked heart to quake,
His stomach nothing can upset,
He boils his tea an hour to make.

Ye saints above, come to these sinners:
To " Sunny " James, and " Skilly " Bob,
" The Major," " Dodger," " Tinker " George,
And " Deafy," he's the lodgers' snob.

Here's " Yank," we call " All Legs and Wings,"
He's so erratic in his motion ;
And poor wee " Punch," a sickly man—
He's worse when he hath ta'en his lotion.

" Haymaker " George, a pig for pickles,
And " Brass " for old clay pipes swops new;
Here's " Balmy " Joe, he's cursed clean,
Sweeps beetles in one's mutton stew,
xl.

" Australian " Bill, ta'en sick away,
Came home to find his wife hath slid
To other arms ; he's done with Liz,
But in his heart he wants the kid.

Here's Jack, so mean he begs from beggars,
Who make scant living door to door;
Here's " Slim," a quiet man awake,
Whose sleep's a twenty-horse-power snore.

Here's " Sailor," pacing to and fro,
Twice on his four hours' watch to see;
Ten paces forward, ten go aft—
A silent man and mystery.

" The Watchman " takes twelve naps a day
And at each wake his mouth is foul;
When he shall wake from his last sleep
He'll have good cause to curse his soul.

Here's gentle Will, who knows most things,
Throws light on Egypt and the Nile—
And many more to consecrate,
If, Christian folk, ye think worth while.

Toy-sellers, fish-men, paper-men,
A few work barges, few are cadgers;
Some make up flowers from wire and wool,
Some pensions take—such are our lodgers.

THE LODGING HOUSE FIRE

My birthday—yesterday,
Its hours were twenty-four;
Four hours I lived lukewarm,
And killed a score.

I woke eight times and rose,
Came to our fire below,
Then sat four hours and watched
Its sullen glow.

Then out four hours I walked,
The lukewarm four I live,
And felt no other joy
Than air can give.

My mind durst know no thought,
It knew my life too well:
Twas hell before, behind,
And round me hell.

Back to that fire again,
Ten hours I watch it now,
And take to bed dim eyes
And fever's brow.

Ten hours I give to sleep,
More than my need, I know ;
But I escape my mind
And that fire's glow.

For listen: it is death
To watch that fire's glow ;
For, as it burns more red
Men paler grow.

O better in foul room
That's warm, make life away,
Than homeless out of doors,
Cold night and day.

Pile on the coke, make fire,
Rouse its death-dealing glow;
Men are borne dead away
Ere they can know.

I lie; I cannot watch
Its glare from hour to hour;
It makes one sleep, to wake
Out of my power.

I close my eyes and swear
It shall not wield its power;
No use, I wake to find
A murdered hour.

Lying between us there!
That fire drowsed me deep,
And I wrought murder's deed--
Did it in sleep.

I count us, thirty men,
Huddled from Winter's blow,
Helpless to move away
From that fire's glow.

So goes my life each day—
Its hours are twenty-four—
Four hours I live lukewarm,
And kill a score.

No man lives life so wise
But unto Time he throws
Morsels to hunger for
At his life's close.

Were all such morsels heaped—
Time greedily devours,
When man sits still—he'd mourn
So few wise hours.

But all my day is waste,
I live a lukewarm four
And make a red coke fire
Poison the score.

THE HILL-SIDE PARK

Some banks cropped close, and lawns smooth mown and
green,

Where, when a daisy's guiltless face was seen,
Its pretty head came sacrifice to pride
Of human taste—I saw upon the side
Of a steep hill. Without a branch of wood
Plants, giant-leaved, like boneless bodies stood.
The flowers had colonies, not one was seen
To go astray from its allotted green,
But to the light like mermaids' faces came
From waves of green, and scarce two greens the same.
And everywhere man's ingenuity
On fence and bordering: for I could see
The tiny scaffolding to hold the heads
And faces overgrown of flowers in beds
On which their weak-developed frames must fall,
Had they not such support upright and tall.
There was a fountain, and its waters' leap
Was under a full-quivered Cupid's keep.
And from his mother's lip the spray was blown
Upon adjusted rock, selected stone;
And so was placed that all the waters fell
Into a small ravine in a small dell,
And made a stream, where that wee river raved,
As gold his rocks and margent amber paved.

This park, it was a miracle of care,
But sweeter far to me the prospects there :
The far beyond, where lived Romance near seas
And pools in haze, and in far realms of trees.
I saw where Severn had run wide and free,
Out where the Holms lie flat upon a sea
Whose wrinkles wizard Distance smoothed away,
And still sails flecked its face of silver-grey.

