

## II - WAR POEMS

### LEPANTO

White founts falling in the Courts of the sun,      And the Soldan of Byzantium  
is smiling as they run;      There is laughter like the fountains in that face of all  
men feared,      It stirs the forest darkness, the darkness of his beard,      It curls  
the blood-red crescent, the crescent of his lips,      For the inmost sea of all the  
earth is shake with his ships.      They have dared the white republics up the cape  
of Italy,      They have dashed the Adriatic round the Lion of the Sea,      And the  
Pope has cast his arms abroad for agony and loss,      And called the kings of  
Christendom for swords about the Cross.      The cold queen of England is looking  
in the glass;      The shadow of the Valois is yawning at the Mass;      From  
evening isles fantastical rings faint the Spanish gun,      And the Lord upon the  
Golden Horn is laughing in the sun.

Dim drums throbbing, in the hills half heard,      Where only on a nameless  
throne a crownless prince has stirred,      Where, risen from a doubtful seat and  
half attained stall,      The last knight of Europe takes weapons from the wall,  
The last and lingering troubadour to whom the bird has sung,      That once went  
singing southward when all the world was young.      In that enormous silence,  
tiny and unafraid,      Comes up along a winding road the noise of the Crusade.

Strong gongs groaning as the guns boom far,      Don John of Austria is going  
to the war,      Stiff flags straining in the night-blasts cold      In the gloom black-  
purple, in the glint old-gold,      Torchlight crimson on the copper kettle-drums,  
Then the tuckets, then the trumpets, then the cannon, and he comes.      Don  
John laughing in the brave beard curled.      Spuming of his stirrups like the  
thrones of all the world,      Holding his head up for a flag of all the free.      Love-  
light of Spain--hurrah!      Death-light of Africa!      Don John of Austria      Is  
riding to the sea.

Mahound is in his paradise above the evening star,      (Don John of Austria is  
going to the war.)      He moves a mighty turban on the timeless houri's knees,  
His turban that is woven of the sunsets and the seas.      He shakes the peacock  
gardens as he rises from his ease,      And he strides among the tree-tops and is  
taller than the trees,      And his voice through all the garden is a thunder sent to  
bring      Black Azrael and Ariel and Ammon on the wing.      Giants and the  
Genii,      Multiplex of wing and eye,      Whose strong obedience broke the sky

When Solomon was king.

They rush in red and purple from the red clouds of the morn, From  
temples where the yellow gods shut up their eyes in scorn; They rise in green  
robes roaring from the green hells of the sea Where fallen skies and evil hues  
and eyeless creatures be; On them the sea-valves cluster and the grey sea-  
forests curl, Splashed with a splendid sickness, the sickness of the pearl;  
They swell in sapphire smoke out of the blue cracks of the ground,-- They  
gather and they wonder and give worship to Mahound. And he saith, "Break  
up the mountains where the hermit-folk can hide, And sift the red and silver  
sands lest bone of saint abide, And chase the Giaours flying night and day,  
not giving rest, For that which was our trouble comes again out of the west.  
We have set the seal of Solomon on all things under sun, Of knowledge and of  
sorrow and endurance of things done, But a noise is in 'the mountains, in the  
mountains, and I know The voice that shook our palaces--four hundred years  
ago: It is he that saith not 'Kismet'; it is he that knows not Fate; It is  
Richard, it is Raymond, it is Godfrey in the gate! It is he whose loss is laughter  
when he counts the wager worth, Put down your feet upon him, that our  
peace be on the earth." For he heard drums groaning and he heard guns jar,  
(Don John of Austria is going to the war.) Sudden and still--hurrah! Bolt  
from Iberia! Don John of Austria Is gone by Alcalar.

St. Michael's on his Mountain in the sea-roads of the north (Don John of  
Austria is girt and going forth.) Where the grey seas glitter and the sharp tides  
shift And the sea-folk labour and the red sails lift. He shakes his lance of  
iron and he claps his wings of stone; The noise is gone through Normandy; the  
noise is gone alone; The North is full of tangled things and texts and aching  
eyes And dead is all the innocence of anger and surprise, And Christian  
killeth Christian in a narrow dusty And Christian dreadeth Christ that hath a  
newer face of doom, And Christian hateth Mary that God kissed in Galilee,  
But Don John of Austria is riding to the sea. Don John calling through the  
blast and the eclipse Crying with the trumpet, with the trumpet of his lips,  
Trumpet that sayeth ha! Domino gloria! Don John of Austria Is  
shouting to the ships.

King Philip's in his closet with the Fleece about his neck (Don John of  
Austria is armed upon the deck.) The walls are hung with velvet that is black  
and soft as sin, And little dwarfs creep out of it and little dwarfs creep in.  
He holds a crystal phial that has colours like the moon, He touches, and it  
tingles, and he trembles very And his face is as a fungus of a leprous white  
and grey Like plants in the high houses that are shuttered from the day.  
And death is in the phial and the end of noble work, But Don John of Austria  
has fired upon the Turk. Don John's hunting, and his hounds have bayed--

Booms away past Italy the rumour of his raid. Gun upon gun, ha! ha!  
Gun upon gun, hurrah! Don John of Austria Has loosed the cannonade.

The Pope was in his chapel before day or battle broke, (Don John of Austria is hidden in the smoke.) The hidden room in man's house where God sits all the year, The secret window whence the world looks small and very dear. He sees as in a mirror on the monstrous twilight sea The crescent of his cruel ships whose name is mystery; They fling great shadows foe-wards, making Cross and Castle dark, They veil the plumed lions on the galleys of St. Mark; And above the ships are palaces of brown, black-bearded chiefs, And below the ships are prisons, where with multitudinous griefs, Christian captives sick and sunless, all a labouring race repines Like a race in sunken cities, like a nation in the mines. They are lost like slaves that swat, and in the skies of morning hung The stair-ways of the tallest gods when tyranny was young. They are countless, voiceless, hopeless as those fallen or fleeing on Before the high Kings' horses in the granite of Babylon. And many a one grows witless in his quiet room in hell Where a yellow face looks inward through the lattice of his cell, And he finds his God forgotten, and he seeks no more a sign(But Don John of Austria has burst the battle-line!) Don John pounding from the slaughter-painted poop, Purpling all the ocean like a bloody pirate's sloop, Scarlet running over on the silvers and the golds, Breaking of the hatches up and bursting of the holds, Thronging of the thousands up that labour under sex White for bliss and blind for sun and stunned for liberty. Vivat Hispania! Domino Gloria! Don John of Austria Has set his people free!

Cervantes on his galley sets the sword back in the sheath (Don John of Austria rides homeward with a wreath.) And he sees across a weary land a straggling road in Spain, Up which a lean and foolish knight for ever rides in vain, And he smiles, but not as Sultans smile, and settles back the blade.... (But Don John of Austria rides home from the Crusade.)

### **THE MARCH OF THE BLACK MOUNTAIN 1913**

What will there be to remember      Of us in the days to be?      Whose faith  
was a trodden ember      And even our doubt not free;      Parliaments built of  
paper,      And the soft swords of gold      That twist like a waxen taper      In  
the weak aggressor's hold;      A hush around Hunger, slaying      A city of serfs  
unfed;      What shall we leave for a saying      To praise us when we are dead?  
But men shall remember the Mountain      That broke its forest chains,      And  
men shall remember the Mountain      When it arches against the plains:  
And christen their children from it      And season and ship and street,      When  
the Mountain came to Mahomet      And looked small before his feet.

His head was as high as the crescent      Of the moon that seemed his crown,  
And on glory of past and present      The light of his eyes looked down;      One  
hand went out to the morning      Over Brahmin and Buddhist slain,      And one  
to the West in scorning      To point at the scars of Spain;      One foot on the  
hills for warden      By the little Mountain trod;      And one was in a garden  
And stood on the grave of God.      But men shall remember the Mountain,  
Though it fall down like a tree,      They shall see the sign of the Mountain  
Faith cast into the sea;      Though the crooked swords overcome it      And the  
Crooked Moon ride free,      When the Mountain comes to Mahomet      It has  
more life than he.

But what will there be to remember      Or what will there be to see--  
Though our towns through a long November      Abide to the end and be?  
Strength of slave and mechanic      Whose iron is ruled by gold,      Peace of  
immortal panic,      Love that is hate grown cold--      Are these a bribe or a  
warning      That we turn not to the sun,      Nor look on the lands of morning  
Where deeds at last are done?      Where men shall remember the Mountain  
When truth forgets the plain--      And walk in the way of the Mountain      That  
did not fail in vain;      Death and eclipse and comet,      Thunder and seals that  
rend:      When the Mountain came to Mahomet;      Because it was the end.

**BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS**

Of old with a divided heart      I saw my people's pride expand,      Since a  
man's soul is torn apart      By mother earth and fatherland.

I knew, through many a tangled tale,      Glory and truth not one but two:  
King, Constable, and Amirail      Took me like trumpets: but I knew

A blacker thing than blood's own dye      Weighed down great Hawkins on the  
sea;      And Nelson turned his blindest eye      On Naples and on liberty.

Therefore to you my thanks, O throne,      O thousandfold and frozen folk,  
For whose cold frenzies all your own      The Battle of the Rivers broke;

Who have no faith a man could mourn.      Nor freedom any man desires;  
But in a new clean light of scorn      Close up my quarrel with my sires;

Who bring my English heart to me,      Who mend me like a broken toy;  
Till I can see you fight and flee,      And laugh as if I were a boy.

## THE WIFE OF FLANDERS

Low and brown barns thatched and repatched and tattered      Where I had  
seven sons until to-day,      A little hill of hay your spur has scattered....      This  
is not Paris. You have lost the way.

You, staring at your sword to find it brittle,      Surprised at the surprise that  
was your plan,      Who shaking and breaking barriers not a little      Find never  
more the death-door of Sedan.

Must I for more than carnage call you claimant,      Paying you a penny for  
each son you slay?      Man, the whole globe in gold were no repayment      For  
what you have lost. And how shall I repay?

What is the price of that red spark that caught me      From a kind farm that  
never had a name?      What is the price of that dead man they brought me?  
For other dead men do not look the same.

How should I pay for one poor graven steeple      Whereon you shattered  
what you shall not know,      How should I pay you, miserable people?      How  
should I pay you everything you owe?<sup>34</sup>

Unhappy, can I give you back your honour?      Though I forgave would any  
man forget?      While all the great green land has trampled on her      The  
treason and terror of the night we met.

Not any more in vengeance or in pardon      An old wife bargains for a bean  
that's hers.      You have no word to break: no heart to harden.      Ride on and  
prosper. You have lost your spurs.

## **THE CRUSADER RETURNS FROM CAPTIVITY**

I have come forth alive from the land of purple and poison and glamour,  
Where the charm is strong as the torture, being chosen to change the mind;  
Torture of wordless dance and wineless feast without clamour,      Palace hidden  
in palace, garden with garden behind;

Women veiled in the sun, or bare as brass in the shadows,      And the  
endless eyeless patterns where each thing seems an eye....      And my stride is on  
Caesar's sand where it slides to the English meadows,      To the last low woods  
of Sussex and the road that goes to Rye.

In the cool and careless woods the eyes of the eunuchs burned not,      But  
the wild hawk went before me, being free to return or roam,      The hills had  
broad unconscious backs; and the tree-tops turned not,      And the huts were  
heedless of me: and I knew I was at home.

And I saw my lady afar and her holy freedom upon her,      A head, without  
veil, averted, and not to be turned with charms,      And I heard above bannerets  
blown the intolerant trumpets of honour,      That usher with iron laughter the  
coming of Christian arms.

My shield hangs stainless still; but I shall not go where they praise it,      A  
sword is still at my side, but I shall not ride with the King.      Only to walk and to  
walk and to stun my soul and amaze it,      A day with the stone and the  
sparrow and every marvellous thing.

I have trod the curves of the Crescent, in the maze of them that adore it,  
Curved around doorless chambers and un beholden abodes,      But I walk in the  
maze no more; on the sign of the cross I swore it,      The wild white cross of  
freedom, the sign of the white cross-roads.

And the land shall leave me or take, and the Woman take me or leave me,  
There shall be no more Night, or nightmares seen in a glass;      But Life shall  
hold me alive, and Death shall never deceive me      As long as I walk in England  
in the lanes that let me pass.