

Classic Poetry Series

Alfred Noyes

- poems -

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A Loom of Years

In the light of the silent stars that shine on the struggling sea,
In the weary cry of the wind and the whisper of flower and tree,
Under the breath of laughter, deep in the tide of tears,
I hear the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web of Years.

The leaves of the winter wither and sink in the forest mould
To colour the flowers of April with purple and white and gold:
Light and scent and music die and are born again
In the heart of a grey-haired woman who wakes in a world of pain.

The hound, the fawn, and the hawk, and the doves that croon and coo,
We are all one woof of the weaving and the one warp threads us through,
One flying cloud on the shuttle that carries our hopes and fears
As it goes thro' the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web of Years.

The green uncrumpling fern and the rustling dewdrenched rose
Pass with our hearts to the Silence where the wings of music close,
Pass and pass to the Timeless that never a moment mars,
Pass and pass to the Darkness that made the suns and stars.

Has the soul gone out in the Darkness? Is the dust sealed from sight?
Ah, hush, for the woof of the ages returns thro' the warp of the night!
Never that shuttle loses one thread of our hopes and fears,
As it comes thro' the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web of Years.

O, woven in one wide Loom thro' the throbbing weft of the whole,
One in spirit and flesh, one in body and soul,
Tho' the leaf were alone in its falling, the bird in its hour to die,
The heart in its muffled anguish, the sea in its mournful cry,

One with the flower of a day, one with the withered moon
One with the granite mountains that melt into the noon
One with the dream that triumphs beyond the light of the spheres,
We come from the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web of Years.

Alfred Noyes

A Prayer in Time of War

The war will change many things in art and life, and among them, it is to be hoped, many of our own ideas as to what is, and what is not, "intellectual."

Thou, whose deep ways are in the sea,
Whose footsteps are not known,
To-night a world that turned from Thee
Is waiting -- at Thy Throne.

The towering Babels that we raised
Where scoffing sophists brawl,
The little Antichrists we praised --
The night is on them all.

The fool hath said . . . The fool hath said . . .
And we, who deemed him wise,
We who believed that Thou wast dead,
How should we seek Thine eyes?

How should we seek to Thee for power
Who scorned Thee yesterday?
How should we kneel, in this dread hour?
Lord, teach us how to pray!

Grant us the single heart, once more,
That mocks no sacred thing,
The Sword of Truth our fathers wore
When Thou wast Lord and King.

Let darkness unto darkness tell
Our deep unspoken prayer,
For, while our souls in darkness dwell,
We know that Thou art there.

Alfred Noyes

A Song of Sherwood

Sherwood in the twilight, is Robin Hood awake?
Grey and ghostly shadows are gliding through the brake,
Shadows of the dappled deer, dreaming of the morn,
Dreaming of a shadowy man that winds a shadowy horn.

Robin Hood is here again: all his merry thieves
Hear a ghostly bugle-note shivering through the leaves,
Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Merry, merry England has kissed the lips of June:
All the wings of fairyland were here beneath the moon,
Like a flight of rose-leaves fluttering in a mist
Of opal and ruby and pearl and amethyst.

Merry, merry England is waking as of old,
With eyes of blither hazel and hair of brighter gold:
For Robin Hood is here again beneath the bursting spray
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Love is in the greenwood building him a house
Of wild rose and hawthorn and honeysuckle boughs:
Love is in the greenwood, dawn is in the skies,
And Marian is waiting with a glory in her eyes.

Hark! The dazzled laverock climbs the golden steep!
Marian is waiting: is Robin Hood asleep?
Round the fairy grass-rings frolic elf and fay,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Oberon, Oberon, rake away the gold,
Rake away the red leaves, roll away the mould,
Rake away the gold leaves, roll away the red,
And wake Will Scarlett from his leafy forest bed.

Friar Tuck and Little John are riding down together
With quarter-staff and drinking-can and grey goose-feather.
The dead are coming back again, the years are rolled away
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Softly over Sherwood the south wind blows.
All the heart of England his in every rose
Hears across the greenwood the sunny whisper leap,
Sherwood in the red dawn, is Robin Hood asleep?

Hark, the voice of England wakes him as of old
And, shattering the silence with a cry of brighter gold
Bugles in the greenwood echo from the steep,
Sherwood in the red dawn, is Robin Hood asleep?

Where the deer are gliding down the shadowy glen
All across the glades of fern he calls his merry men--

Doublets of the Lincoln green glancing through the May
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day--

Calls them and they answer: from aisles of oak and ash
Rings the Follow! Follow! and the boughs begin to crash,
The ferns begin to flutter and the flowers begin to fly,
And through the crimson dawning the robber band goes by.

Robin! Robin! Robin! All his merry thieves
Answer as the bugle-note shivers through the leaves,
Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Alfred Noyes

Art

I

Yes! Beauty still rebels!
Our dreams like clouds disperse:
She dwells
In agate, marble, verse.

No false constraint be thine!
But, for right walking, choose
The fine,
The strict cothurnus, Muse.

Vainly ye seek to escape
The toil! The yielding phrase
Ye shape
Is clay, not chrysoprase.

And all in vain ye scorn
That seeming ease which ne'er
Was born
Of aught but love and care.

Take up the sculptor's tool!
Recall the gods that die
To rule
In Parian o'er the sky.

II

Poet, let passion sleep
Till with the cosmic rhyme
You keep
Eternal tone and time,

By rule of hour and flower,
By strength of stern restraint
And power
To fail and not to faint.

The task is hard to learn
While all the songs of Spring
Return
Along the blood and sing.

Yet hear—from her deep skies,
How Art, for all your pain,
Still cries
Ye must be born again!

Reject the wreath of rose,
Take up the crown of thorn
That shows

To-night a child is born.

The far immortal face
In chosen onyx fine
Enchase,
Delicate line by line.

Strive with Carrara, fight
With Parian, till there steal
To light
Apollo's pure profile.

Set the great lucid form
Free from its marble tomb
To storm
The heights of death and doom.

Take up the sculptor's tool!
Recall the gods that die
To rule
In Parian o'er the sky.

Alfred Noyes

Daddy Fell Into the Pond

Everyone grumbled. The sky was grey.
We had nothing to do and nothing to say.
We were nearing the end of a dismal day,
And then there seemed to be nothing beyond,
<i>Then
Daddy fell into the pond!</i>

And everyone's face grew merry and bright,
And Timothy danced for sheer delight.
"Give me the camera, quick, oh quick!
He's crawling out of the duckweed!" Click!

Then the gardener suddenly slapped his knee,
And doubled up, shaking silently,
And the ducks all quacked as if they were daft,
And it sounded as if the old drake laughed.
Oh, there wasn't a thing that didn't respond
<i>When
Daddy Fell into the pond!</i>

Alfred Noyes

Daddy Fell into the Pond.

Everyone grumbled. The sky was grey.
We had nothing to do and nothing to say.
We were nearing the end of a dismal day,
And there seemed to be nothing beyond,

THEN

Daddy fell into the pond!

And everyone's face grew merry and bright,
And Timothy danced for sheer delight.

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He's crawling out of the duckweed."

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Then the gardener suddenly slapped his knee,
And doubled up, shaking silently,
And the ducks all quacked as if they were daft
And is sounded as if the old drake laughed.

O, there wasn't a thing that didn't respond

WHEN

Daddy fell into the pond!

Alfred Noyes

Kilmeny (A Song of the Trawlers)

Dark, dark, lay the drifters, against the red west,
As they shot their long meshes of steel overside;
And the oily green waters were rocking to rest
When Kilmeny went out, at the turn of the tide.
And nobody knew where that lassie would roam,
For the magic that called her was tapping unseen.
It was well nigh a week ere Kilmeny came home,
And nobody knew where Kilmeny had been.

She'd a gun at her bow that was Newcastle's best,
And a gun at her stern that was fresh from the Clyde,
And a secret her skipper had never confessed,
Not even at dawn, to his newly wed bride;
And a wireless that whispered above like a gnome,
The laughter of London, the boasts of Berlin.
O, it may have been mermaids that lured her from home,
But nobody knew where Kilmeny had been.

It was dark when Kilmeny came home from her quest,
With her bridge dabbled red where her skipper had died;
But she moved like a bride with a rose at her breast;
And "Well done, Kilmeny!" the admiral cried.
Now at sixty-four fathom a conger may come,
And nose at the bones of a drowned submarine;
But late in the evening Kilmeny came home,
And nobody knew where Kilmeny had been.

There's a wandering shadow that stares at the foam,
Though they sing all night to old England, their queen,
Late, late in the evening Kilmeny came home,
And nobody knew where Kilmeny had been.

Alfred Noyes

Princeton, May, 1917

*Here Freedom stood by slaughtered friend and foe,
And, ere the wrath paled or that sunset died,
Looked through the ages; then, with eyes aglow,
Laid them to wait that future, side by side.*

(Lines for a monument to the American and British soldiers of the Revolutionary War who fell on the Princeton battlefield and were buried in one grave.)

Now lamp-lit gardens in the blue dusk shine
Through dogwood, red and white;
And round the gray quadrangles, line by line,
The windows fill with light,
Where Princeton calls to Magdalen, tower to tower,
Twin lanthorns of the law;
And those cream-white magnolia boughs embower
The halls of "Old Nassau."

The dark bronze tigers crouch on either side
Where redcoats used to pass;
And round the bird-loved house where Mercer died,
And violets dusk the grass,
By Stony Brook that ran so red of old,
But sings of friendship now,
To feed the old enemy's harvest fifty-fold
The green earth takes the plow.

Through this May night, if one great ghost should stray
With deep remembering eyes,
Where that old meadow of battle smiles away
Its blood-stained memories,
If Washington should walk, where friend and foe
Sleep and forget the past,
Be sure his unquenched heart would leap to know
Their souls are linked at last.

Be sure he walks, in shadowy buff and blue,
Where those dim lilacs wave.
He bends his head to bless, as dreams come true,
The promise of that grave;
Then, with a vaster hope than thought can scan,
Touching his ancient sword,
Prays for that mightier realm of God in man:
"Hasten thy kingdom, Lord.

"Land of our hope, land of the singing stars,
Type of the world to be,
The vision of a world set free from wars
Takes life, takes form from thee;
Where all the jarring nations of this earth,
Beneath the all-blessing sun,
Bring the new music of mankind to birth,
And make the whole world one."

And those old comrades rise around him there,
Old foemen, side by side,
With eyes like stars upon the brave night air,
And young as when they died,
To hear your bells, O beautiful Princeton towers,
Ring for the world's release.
They see you piercing like gray swords through flowers,
And smile, from souls at peace.

Alfred Noyes

Resurrection

Once more I hear the everlasting sea
Breathing beneath the mountain's fragrant
breast,
Come unto Me, come unto Me,
And I will give you rest.

We have destroyed the Temple and in three days
He hath rebuilt it -- all things are made new:
And hark what wild throats pour His praise
Beneath the boundless blue.

We plucked down all His altars, cried aloud
And gashed ourselves for little gods of clay!
Yon floating cloud was but a cloud,
The May no more than May.

We plucked down all His altars, left not one
Save where, perchance (and ah, the joy was fleet),
We laid our garlands in the sun
At the white Sea-born's feet.

We plucked down all His altars, not to make
The small praise greater, but the great praise less,
We sealed all fountains where the soul could slake
Its thirst and weariness.

"Love" was too small, too human to be found
In that transcendent source whence love was
born:
We talked of "forces": heaven was crowned
With philosophic thorn.

"Your God is in your image," we cried, but O,
'Twas only man's own deepest heart ye gave,
Knowing that He transcended all ye know,
While -- we dug His grave.

Denied Him even the crown on our own brow,
E'en these poor symbols of His loftier reign,
Levelled His Temple with the dust, and now
He is risen, He is risen again,

Risen, like this resurrection of the year,
This grand ascension of the choral spring,

Which those harp-crowded heavens bend to hear
And meet upon the wing.

"He is dead," we cried, and even amid that gloom
The wintry veil was rent! The new-born day
Showed us the Angel seated in the tomb
And the stone rolled away.

It is the hour! We challenge heaven above
Now, to deny our slight ephemeral breath
Joy, anguish, and that everlasting love
Which triumphs over death.

Alfred Noyes

Shakespeare's Kingdom

When Shakespeare came to London
He met no shouting throngs;
He carried in his knapsack
A scroll of quiet songs.

No proud heraldic trumpet
Acclaimed him on his way;
Their court and camp have perished;
The songs live on for ay.

Nobody saw or heard them,
But, all around him there,
Spirits of light and music
Went treading the April air.

He passed like any pedlar,
Yet he had wealth untold.
The galleons of th' armada
Could not contain his gold.

The kings rode on to darkness.
In England's conquering hour,
Unseen arrived her splendour;
Unknown, her conquering power.

Alfred Noyes

Sherwood

Sherwood in the twilight, is Robin Hood awake?
Grey and ghostly shadows are gliding through the brake;
Shadows of the dappled deer, dreaming of the morn,
Dreaming of a shadowy man that winds a shadowy horn.

Robin Hood is here again: all his merry thieves
Hear a ghostly bugle-note shivering through the leaves,
Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

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All the wings of fairyland were here beneath the moon;
Like a flight of rose-leaves fluttering in a mist
Of opal and ruby and pearl and amethyst.

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With eyes of blither hazel and hair of brighter gold:
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Of wild rose and hawthorn and honeysuckle boughs;
Love it in the greenwood: dawn is in the skies;
And Marian is waiting with a glory in her eyes.

Hark! The dazzled laverock climbs the golden steep:
Marian is waiting: is Robin Hood asleep?
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Rake away the red leaves, roll away the mould,
Rake away the gold leaves, roll away the red,
And wake Will Scarlett from his leafy forest bed.

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All across the glades of fern he calls his merry men;

Doublets of the Lincoln green glancing through the May,
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Rings the Follow! Follow! and the boughs begin to crash;
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And through the crimson dawning the robber band goes by.

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Answer as the bugle-note shivers through the leaves:
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Alfred Noyes

Song

I came to the door of the House of Love
And knocked as the starry night went by;
And my true love cried "Who knocks?" and I said
"It is I."

And Love looked down from a lattice above
Where the roses were dry as the lips of the dead:
"There is not room in the House of Love
For you both," he said.

I plucked a leaf from the porch and crept
Away through a desert of scoffs and scorns
To a lonely place where I prayed and wept
And wove me a crown of thorns.

I came once more to the House of Love
And knocked, ah, softly and wistfully,
And my true love cried "Who knocks?" and I said
"None now but thee."

And the great doors opened wide apart
And a voice rang out from a glory of light,
"Make room, make room for a faithful heart
In the House of Love, to-night."

Alfred Noyes

The Barrel-Organ

There's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks low;
And the music's not immortal; but the world has made it sweet
And fulfilled it with the sunset glow;
And it pulses through the pleasures of the City and the pain
That surround the singing organ like a large eternal light;
And they've given it a glory and a part to play again
In the Symphony that rules the day and night.

And now it's marching onward through the realms of old romance,
And trolling out a fond familiar tune,
And now it's roaring cannon down to fight the King of France,
And now it's prattling softly to the moon.
And all around the organ there's a sea without a shore
Of human joys and wonders and regrets;
To remember and to recompense the music evermore
For what the cold machinery forgets...

Yes; as the music changes,
Like a prismatic glass,
It takes the light and ranges
Through all the moods that pass;
Dissects the common carnival
Of passions and regrets,
And gives the world a glimpse of all
The colours it forgets.

And there *La Traviata* sighs
Another sadder song;
And there *Il Trovatore* cries
A tale of deeper wrong;
And bolder knights to battle go
With sword and shield and lance,
Than ever here on earth below
Have whirled into--a dance!--

Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's wonderland;
Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)

The cherry-trees are seas of bloom and soft perfume and sweet perfume,
The cherry-trees are seas of bloom (and oh, so near to London!)
And there they say, when dawn is high and all the world's a blaze of sky
The cuckoo, though he's very shy, will sing a song for London.

The nightingale is rather rare and yet they say you'll hear him there
At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to London!)
The linnets and the throstles, too, and after dark the long halloo
And golden-eyed *tu-whit, tu-whoo* of owls that ogle London.

For Noah hardly knew a bird of any kind that isn't heard

At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to London!)
And when the rose begins to pout and all the chestnut spires are out
You'll hear the rest without a doubt, all chorusing for London:--

*Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's wonderland;
Come down to Kew in lilac-time (isn't far from London!) </i>*

And then the troubadour begins to thrill the golden street,
In the city as the sun sinks low;
And in all the gaudy busses there are scores of weary feet
Marking time, sweet time, with a dull mechanic beat,
And a thousand hearts are plunging to a love they'll never meet,
Through the meadows of the sunset, through the poppies and the wheat,
In the land where the dead dreams go.

Verdi, Verdi, when you wrote *Il Trovatore* did you dream
Of the City when the sun sinks low,
Of the organ and the monkey and the many-coloured stream
On the Piccadilly pavement, of the myriad eyes that seem
To be litten for a moment with a wild Italian gleam
As *A che la morte* parodies the world's eternal theme
And pulses with the sunset-glow?

There's a thief, perhaps, that listens with a face of frozen stone
In the City as the sun sinks low;
There's a portly man of business with a balance of his own,
There's a clerk and there's a butcher of a soft reposeful tone,
And they're all of them returning to the heavens they have known:
They are crammed and jammed in busses and--they're each of them alone
In the land where the dead dreams go.

There's a labourer that listens to the voices of the dead
In the City as the sun sinks low;
And his hand begins to tremble and his face is rather red
As he sees a loafer watching him and--there he turns his head
And stares into the sunset where his April love is fled,
For he hears her softly singing and his lonely soul is led
Through the land where the dead dreams go...

There's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks low;
Though the music's only Verdi there's a world to make it sweet
Just as yonder yellow sunset where the earth and heaven meet
Mellows all the sooty City! Hark, a hundred thousand feet
Are marching on to glory through the poppies and the wheat
In the land where the dead dreams go.

So it's Jeremiah, Jeremiah,
What have you to say
When you meet the garland girls

Tripping on their way?
All around my gala hat
I wear a wreath of roses
(A long and lonely year it is
I've waited for the May!)
If any one should ask you,
The reason why I wear it is--
My own love, my true love is coming home to-day.

And it's buy a bunch of violets for the lady
<i>(It's lilac-time in London; it's lilac-time in London!) </i>
Buy a bunch of violets for the lady;
While the sky burns blue above:

On the other side the street you'll find it shady
<i>(It's lilac-time in London; it's lilac-time in London!) </i>
But buy a bunch of violets for the lady,
And tell her she's your own true love.

There's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks glittering and slow;
And the music's not immortal; but the world has made it sweet
And enriched it with the harmonies that make a song complete
In the deeper heavens of music where the night and morning meet,
As it dies into the sunset glow;

And it pulses through the pleasures of the City and the pain
That surround the singing organ like a large eternal light,
And they've given it a glory and a part to play again
In the Symphony that rules the day and night.

And there, as the music changes,
The song runs round again;
Once more it turns and ranges
Through all its joy and pain:
Dissects the common carnival
Of passions and regrets;
And the wheeling world remembers all
The wheeling song forgets.

Once more <i>La Traviata</i> sighs
Another sadder song:
Once more <i>Il Trovatore</i> cries
A tale of deeper wrong;
Once more the knights to battle go
With sword and shield and lance
Till once, once more, the shattered foe
Has whirled into--a dance!

<i>Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
And you shall wander hand in hand with Love in summer's wonderland,

Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)</i>

Alfred Noyes

The Elfin Artist

In a glade of an elfin forest
When Sussex was Eden-new,
I came on an elvish painter
And watched as his picture grew,
A harebell nodded beside him.
He dipt his brush in the dew.

And it might be the wild thyme round him
That shone in the dark strange ring;
But his brushes were bees' antennae,
His knife was a wasp's blue sting;
And his gorgeous exquisite palette
Was a butterfly's fan-shaped wing.

And he mingled its powdery colours,
And painted the lights that pass,
On a delicate cobweb canvas
That gleamed like a magic glass,
And bloomed like a banner of elf-land,
Between two stalks of grass;

Till it shone like an angel's feather
With sky-born opal and rose,
And gold from the foot of the rainbow,
And colours that no man knows;
And I laughed in the sweet May weather,
Because of the themes he chose.

For he painted the things that matter,
The tints that we all pass by,
Like the little blue wreaths of incense
That the wild thyme breathes to the sky;
Or the first white bud of the hawthorn,
And the light in a blackbird's eye;

And the shadows on soft white cloud-peaks
That carolling skylarks throw,--
Dark dots on the slumbering splendours
That under the wild wings flow,
Wee shadows like violets trembling
On the unseen breasts of snow;

With petals too lovely for colour
That shake to the rapturous wings,
And grow as the bird draws near them,
And die as he mounts and sings,--
Ah, only those exquisite brushes
Could paint these marvellous things.

Alfred Noyes

The Highwayman

The wind was a torrent of darkness upon the gusty trees,
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
The road was a ribbon of moonlight looping the purple moor,
And the highwayman came riding--
Riding--riding--
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn door.

He'd a French cocked hat on his forehead, and a bunch of lace at his chin;
He'd a coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of fine doe-skin.
They fitted with never a wrinkle; his boots were up to his thigh!
And he rode with a jeweled twinkle--
His rapier hilt a-twinkle--
His pistol butts a-twinkle, under the jeweled sky.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard,
He tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred,
He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter--
Bess, the landlord's daughter--
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

Dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked
Where Tim, the ostler listened--his face was white and peaked--
His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,
But he loved the landlord's daughter--
The landlord's black-eyed daughter;
Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say:

"One kiss, my bonny sweetheart; I'm after a prize tonight,
But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light.
Yet if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,
Then look for me by moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight,
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way."

He stood upright in the stirrups; he scarce could reach her hand,
But she loosened her hair in the casement! His face burnt like a brand
As the sweet black waves of perfume came tumbling o'er his breast,
Then he kissed its waves in the moonlight
(O sweet black waves in the moonlight!),
And he tugged at his reins in the moonlight, and galloped away to the west.

He did not come in the dawning; he did not come at noon.
And out of the tawny sunset, before the rise of the moon,
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon over the purple moor,
The redcoat troops came marching--
Marching--marching--
King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

They said no word to the landlord; they drank his ale instead,
But they gagged his daughter and bound her to the foot of her narrow bed.
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets by their side;

There was Death at every window,
And Hell at one dark window,
For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that he would ride.

They had bound her up at attention, with many a sniggering jest!
They had tied a rifle beside her, with the barrel beneath her breast!
"Now keep good watch!" and they kissed her. She heard the dead man say,
"Look for me by moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight,
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though Hell should bar the way."

She twisted her hands behind her, but all the knots held good!
She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!
They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years,
Till, on the stroke of midnight,
Cold on the stroke of midnight,
The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it, she strove no more for the rest;
Up, she stood up at attention, with the barrel beneath her breast.
She would not risk their hearing, she would not strive again,
For the road lay bare in the moonlight,
Blank and bare in the moonlight,
And the blood in her veins, in the moonlight, throbbed to her love's refrain.

Plot plot, plot plot! Had they heard it? The horse-hooves, ringing clear;
Plot plot, plot plot, in the distance! Were they deaf that they did not hear?
Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,
The highwayman came riding--
Riding--riding--
The redcoats looked to their priming! She stood up straight and still.

Plot plot, in the frosty silence! Plot plot, in the echoing night!
Nearer he came and nearer! Her face was like a light!
Her eyes grew wide for a moment, she drew one last deep breath,
Then her finger moved in the moonlight--
Her musket shattered the moonlight--
Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him--with her death.

He turned, he spurred to the West; he did not know who stood
Bowed, with her head o'er the casement, drenched in her own red blood!
Not till the dawn did he hear it, and his face grew grey to hear
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,
The landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high!
Blood-red were his spurs in the golden noon, wine-red was his velvet coat
When they shot him down in the highway,
Down like a dog in the highway,
And he lay in his blood in the highway, with the bunch of lace at his throat.

*<I>And still on a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
When the road is a gypsy's ribbon looping the purple moor,
The highwayman comes riding--
Riding--riding--
The highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.</I>*

*<I>Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard,
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred,
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter--
Bess, the landlord's daughter--
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.</I>*

Alfred Noyes

The Matin-song of Friar Tuck

I.
If souls could sing to heaven's high King
As blackbirds pipe on earth,
How those delicious courts would ring
With gusts of lovely mirth!
What white-robed throng could lift a song
So mellow with righteous glee
As this brown bird that all day long
Delights my hawthorn tree.
Hark! That's the thrush
With speckled breast
From yon white bush
Chaunting his best,
<i> Te Deum! Te Deum laudamus! </i>

II.
If earthly dreams be touched with gleams
Of Paradisal air,
Some wings, perchance, of earth may glance
Around our slumbers there;
Some breaths of may might drift our way
With scents of leaf and loam,
Some whistling bird at dawn be heard
From those old woods of home.
Hark! That's the thrush
With speckled breast
From yon white bush
Chaunting his best,
<i> Te Deum! Te Deum laudamus! </i>

III.
No King or priest shall mar my feast
Where'er my soul may range.
I have no fear of heaven's good cheer
Unless our Master change.
But when death's night is dying away,
If I might choose my bliss,
My love should say, at break of day,
With her first waking kiss:--
Hark! That's the thrush
With speckled breast,
From yon white bush
Chaunting his best,
<i> Te Deum! Te Deum laudamus! </i>

Alfred Noyes

The Searchlights

Political morality differs from individual morality, because there is no power above the State. -- General von Bernardi.

Shadow by shadow, stripped for fight,
The lean black cruisers search the sea.
Night-long their level shafts of light
Revolve, and find no enemy.
Only they know each leaping wave
May hide the lightning, and their grave.

And in the land they guard so well
Is there no silent watch to keep?
An age is dying and the bell
Rings midnight on a vaster deep.
But over all its waves, once more
The searchlights move, from shore to shore.

And captains that we thought were dead,
And dreamers that we thought were dumb,
And voices that we thought were fled,
Arise, and call us, and we come;
And "Search in thine own soul," they cry;
"For there, too, lurks thine enemy."

Search for the foe in thine own soul,
The sloth, the intellectual pride;
The trivial jest that veils the goal
For which our father lived and died;
The lawless dreams, the cynic Art,
That rend thy nobler self apart.

Not far, not far into the night,
These level swords of light can pierce;
Yet for her faith does England fight,
Her faith in this our universe,
Believing Truth and Justice draw
From founts of everlasting law;

The law that rules the stars, our stay,
Our compass through the world's wide sea,
The one sure light, the one sure way,
The one firm base of Liberty;
The one firm road that men have trod
Through Chaos to the throne of God.

Therefore a Power above the State,
The unconquerable Power, returns,
The fire, the fire that made her great
Once more upon her altar burns,
Once more, redeemed and healed and whole,
She moves to the Eternal Goal.

Alfred Noyes

The Sussex sailor

O, once, by Cuckmere Haven,
I heard a sailor sing
Of shores beyond the sunset,
And lands of lasting spring,
Of blue lagoons and palm trees
And isles where all was young;
But this was ever the burden
of ev'ry note he sung:

"O, have you seen my true love
A-walking in that land?
Or have you seen her footprints
Upon that shining sand?
Beneath the happy palmtrees,
By Eden whispers fanned...
O, have you seen my true love
A-walking in that land?"

And, once in San Diego,
I heard him sing again,
Of Amberley, Rye, and Bramber,
And Brede and Fairlight Glen:
The nestling hills of Sussex,
The russet-roofed elfin towns,
And the skylark up in a high wind
Carolling over the downs.

"From Warbleton to Wild Brook,
When May is white as foam,
O, have you seen my dearling
on any hills of home?
Or have you seen her shining,
Or only touch'd her hand.
O, have you seen my true love
A-walking in that land?"

And, once again, by Cowfold,
I heard him singing low,
'Tis not the leagues of ocean
That hide the hills I know.
The May that shines before me
Has made a ghost of May.
The valleys that I would walk in
Are twenty years away.

"Ah, have you seen my true love
A-walking in that land...
On hills that I remember,
In valleys I understand,
So far beyond the sunset,
So very close at hand,
O have you seen my true love

In that immortal land?"

Alfred Noyes

To The R.A.F

Never since English ships went out
To singe the beard of Spain,
Or English sea-dogs hunted death
Along the Spanish Main,
Never since Drake and Raleigh won
Our freedom of the seas,
Have sons of Britain dared and done
More valiantly than these.

Whether at midnight or at noon,
Through mist or open sky,
Eagles of freedom, all our hearts
Are up with you on high;
While Britain's mighty ghosts look down
From realms beyond the sun
And whisper, as their record pales,
Their breathless, deep, Well Done!

Alfred Noyes