

Classic Poetry Series

John Le Gay Brereton

- poems -

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At The Age Of 35

Gone are the aching want, the unceasing fret,
Mad flight and moaning over battered wings,
And self-contempt whose secret penance wrings
Out of the writhing soul her bloody sweat.
But use has never taught me to forget
The glory that the common daylight flings;
Still in my heart the rebel tocsin rings,
And still is love my glowing amulet.
Calm and contented, yet with heart afire
To fight for ever for the sake of strife,
I hold the future and the past in fee.
The time to come brings riper fruit for me
Who stretch my hands with passionate desire
And welcome for the green and grey of life.

John Le Gay Brereton

Buffalo Creek

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

John Le Gay Brereton

Home

"Where shall we dwell?" say you.
Wandering winds reply:
"In a temple with roof of blue
-- Under the splendid sky."

Never a nobler home
We'll find though an age we try
Than is arched by the azure dome
Of the all-enfolding sky.

Here we are wed, and here
We live under God's own eye.
"Where shall we dwell," my dear?
Under the splendid sky.

John Le Gay Brereton

Incarnation

OUR little queen of dreams,
Our image of delight,
Which whitens east and gleams
And beckons from the height,
Takes on her human form—is here in mortal sight.

We two have loved her long,
Have known her eyes for years;
We worshipped her with song
The spirit only hears,
And now she comes to us new-washed with blood and tears.

Her radiant self she veils
With vesture meet for earth,
And, knowing all, inhales
The lethal air of birth,
And wakes to restless dreams of misery and mirth.

The fogs of learning rise
And hide the light above,
But in her steadfast eyes
Will shine the light of love,
Which many a gloomy dale may know the gladness of.

What gift is ours to give,
What truth is ours to teach
That she may learn to live
With joy within her reach?
We can but let her learn the sound of human speech.

By custom-fettered fools
Her freedom will be blamed,
Because by sleepy rules
Her soul shall be untamed,
And she will front the sun brown-skinned and unashamed.

Her kinship she will know
With beast and rock and tree,
Wherever she may go
The sky her home will be,
The winds will be her mates,
her crooning nurse the sea.

John Le Gay Brereton

The Grave

In the grey dawn I lie within my bed
Still as a frozen lake that pats no more
With murmurous delight the o'erhanging shore,
Yet grim thoughts heave obscurely in my head;
For curtains I have earthen walls, and lead
Is colder than the woollen garb I wore--
But oh! that heart of mine is still as sore
As when I did not know that I was dead.
I knew her (O my Life!) and she was fair,
And gave her beauty to the hills and sea,
The wonder of her voice to leaf and wave.
The brown earth lies between us; does she care
That since she cast the first dull clod on me
My lonely heart is aching in the grave?

John Le Gay Brereton

The Robe of Grass

HERE lies the woven garb he wore
Of grass he gathered by the shore
Whereon the phantom waves still fret and foam
And sigh along the visionary sand.
'Where is he now?' you cry; 'What desolate land
Gleams round him in dull mockery of home?'

You knew him by the robe he cast
About him, grey and worn at last.
'It fades,' you murmur, 'changes, lives and dies.
Why has he vanished? Whither is he fled?
And is there any light among the dead?
Can any dream come singing where he lies?'

Ah peace! lift up your clouded eyes,
Nor where this curious relic lies
Grope in the blown dust for the print of feet.
Dim, tottering, ghastly sounds are these; but he
Laughs now as ever, still aloof and free,
Eager and wild and passionate and fleet.

Because he has dropped the part he played,
Shall love be baffled and dismayed?
Let the frail earth and all its visions melt,
And let the heart that loves, the eye that sees,
Seek him amid immortal mysteries,
For lo, he dwells where he has ever dwelt.

John Le Gay Brereton

The Sea Maid

In what pearl-paven mossy cave
By what green sea
Art thou reclining, virgin of the wave,
In realms more full of splendid mystery
Than that strong northern flood whence came
The rise and fall of music in thy name --
Thy waiting name, Oithona!

The magic of the sea's own change
In depth and height,
From where the eternal order'd billows range
To unknown regions of sleep-weary night,
Fills, like a wonder-waking spell
Whispered by lips of some lone-murmuring shell,
Thy dreaming soul, Oithona.

In gladness of thy reverie
What gracious form
Will fly the errand of our love to thee,
By ways with winged messengers aswarm
Through dawn of opalescent skies,
To say the time is come and bid thee rise
And be our child, Oithona?

John Le Gay Brereton

Waking

ABOVE us hangs the jewelled night;
And how her restful cool caresses
Make us forget the weary sight
Of summer's daily wildernesses!

O aching toil and hope deferred,
The night has made a promise to me;
She whispered, and a wonder stirred,
And still the joy is thrilling through me.

Smooth water, shadow deeply still,
I dare not move, you wait unsleeping
—You share the breathless hopes that fill
The watch my longing soul is keeping.

A fish is leaping in the bay;
The shafts of yellow light are shaking.
O glorious night and happy day,
Beneath my silent heart she's waking.

John Le Gay Brereton

Wilfred

What of these tender feet
That have never toddled yet?
What dances shall they beat,
With what red vintage wet?
In what wild way will they march or stray, by what sly paynims met?

The toil of it none may share;
By yourself must the way be won
Through fervid or frozen air
Till the overland journey's done;
And I would not take, for your own dear sake, one thorn from your track,
my son.

Go forth to your hill and dale,
Yet take in your hand from me
A staff when your footsteps fail,
A weapon if need there be;
'Twill hum in your ear when the foeman's near, athirst for the victory.

In the desert of dusty death
It will point to the hidden spring;
Should you weary and fail for breath,
It will burgeon and branch and swing
Till you sink to sleep in its shadow deep to the sound of its murmuring.

You must face the general foe --
A phantom pale and grim.
If you flinch at his glare, he'll grow
And gather your strength to him;
But your power will rise if you laugh in his eyes and away in a mist
he'll swim.

To your freeborn soul be true --
Fling parchment in the fire;
Men's laws are null for you,
For a word of Love is higher,
And can you do aught, when He rules your thought, but follow your own desire?

You will dread no pinching dearth
In the home where you love to lie,
For your floor will be good brown earth
And your roof the open sky.
There'll be room for all at your festival when the heart-red wine runs high.

Joy to you, joy and strife
And a golden East before,
And the sound of the sea of life
In your ears when you reach the shore,
And a hope that still with as good a will you may fight as you fought of yore.

John Le Gay Brereton