

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **John Le Gay Brereton**

**- 73 poems -**

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### **John Le Gay Brereton (2 September 1871 – 2 February 1933)**

John was the son of a doctor of the same name who came to Sydney in 1859. Dr Brereton rapidly established himself in his profession and sired a large family. Among his other achievements, he set up Australia's first Turkish Bath in Spring Street and following its success, opened larger premises in Bligh Street on 14 March, 1861. Originally a Quaker, Dr Brereton was converted to the teachings of Swedenborg and became a leader of the New Jerusalem Church, the tenets of which underlay his several published volumes of poetry and didactic prose.

John Le Gay Brereton the Younger (as he was always known) was the fifth son, born in the family's home in Richmond Terrace, which then existed between Sydney Hospital and the Domain, on September 2, 1871. In 1882, when John the Younger was 11, his father retired to Osgathorpe at Gladesville, reputedly the house occupied by Ludwig Leighardt before he left on his ill-fated expedition in 1848.

As a boy, John the Younger appears to have preferred his own company, being in his own words a "timid child with heart oppressed ... by images of sin." In 1881 he entered Sydney Grammar School where he had no enthusiasm for the team sports favoured by the other boys. However, in 1887 he joined the editorial committee of the school magazine, *The Sydneian*, and thus began what was to prove his most illustrious and influential literary career.

Le Gay Brereton was not only a writer: he was also a voracious reader. Library services at that time in Sydney were not well developed, so it was a measure of his need to read that the youth approached and even persuaded the famous "recluse of Darlinghurst Road", the bibliophile David Scott Mitchell, to lend him books from his own huge private library. In his researches, Martin Smith even found in a copy of Brereton's *Oithona*, published in 1902, a dedication in his own hand to David Scott Mitchell, indicating that Brereton himself clearly recognized the literary debt of gratitude he owed the older man.

Mitchell appears to have introduced Brereton to the two great literary influences of his life: one was Christopher Marlowe, the Elizabethan playwright, whose work greatly influenced Brereton's later scholarly prose; the other was Walt Whitman, the American openly homosexual poet whose style and sentiments provided the blueprints for Brereton's own poetry. He was only a teenager when he first read Whitman. Later in his life, in a backward look at books he remembered, Brereton wrote:

"On the ferry boat I pored over Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, without perhaps

understanding much of it, borne on tremendous billows of sound to a region of glorious mystery..." (in *The Lone Hand*, published by JF Archibald, February 1913)

Brereton entered Sydney University as an undergraduate in the Faculty of Arts in 1891. His academic record in general was not outstanding. In English however, he was one of the most brilliant students Mungo MacCallum, the Professor of Modern Literature, ever had. He not only won MacCallum's own prize for English essays but also the University Medal for English Verse in both 1892 and 1893. As an undergraduate he was active in SUDS and from 1891 until 1894 he was one of the editors of the Arts journal *Hermes*. In 1896 he published his first book of poetry. Its title, "The Song of Brotherhood" gives a clear indication of its contents:

My hand in yours, dear friend,  
I give you words of greeting -  
Of friendship without end,  
My hand in yours, dear friend,  
My heart with yours in loving music beating. "

Despite his academic brilliance, there were no suitable academic vacancies at the University when Brereton graduated in 1894 so from time to time he did some lecturing for the recently-established University Extension Board. He apparently shocked his former mentor, Mungo MacCallum, when he devoted his first such lecture to a frank discussion of the homosexuality apparent in Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass. "

Brereton's academic and professional career had two major segments, one as the first director of the Fisher Library and later, as the first of the Challis Professors of English Literature.

What is of interest here is the influence Brereton had upon Australian literature. Through the 'Nineties and later in the new century, Brereton was a respected member of the literary Bohemia which nurtured, among others, Henry Lawson and Christopher Brennan.

Lawson and Brereton first met in 1894 at the home of Mary Gilmore. The attraction between them was immediate, sharing as they did not only similar temperaments but also many ideals and beliefs and particularly, their liking for the great outdoors and life on the road. Not read nowadays but important in our literary (and gay) history, is Brereton's "Landlopers", published in 1899, in which he tells of the journey by a man and a youth who humped their swags from Gladesville to Janolan, to Moss Vale and Gerrigong and back to Sydney.

Throughout the middle years of his life, Brereton's closest friend and companion was Duncan Hall. Brereton, Duncan and his brother Machin Hall, along with several other young men, often spent holidays together in a cave on the banks of the Nepean River. There, Brereton - who was very much the wise and mature elder of the little gang - found the liberation of spirit he enjoyed on the road in his younger years.

Brereton died on 2 September 1933 while on a caravan tour of northern New South Wales. His contributions to Australian literature and scholarship are not in doubt. What is open to question, however, is the extent to which he was homosexual? Despite his outwardly "homoaffectional" poetry and whatever he said in his lectures about Walt Whitman, Brereton married a Gladesville girl in 1900 and subsequently had 4 sons and a daughter. Indeed, one of the two men who were with him when he died on the fateful caravan tour of the Northern Tablelands was his son, Ray.

Works:

The Song of Brotherhood (1896)  
Landlopers (1899)  
Sea and Sky (1908)  
The Burning Marl (1919)

Swags up! (1928)  
Knocking Round (1930)  
Henry Lawson, by his Mates, ed. (1931)

## A Prologue

While to the clarion blown by Marlowe's breath  
Tall Tragedy tramped by in hues of death,  
And Shakespeare yet was tuning string by string,  
With English hawthorn crowned, in that glad spring  
When bright clouds melted in a sky serene,  
Romance moved lightly to the pipe of Greene.  
As fresh as buds half-open, pure as dew,  
Two damsels came in forefront of her crew,  
One native to the hedgerows and the meads,  
The keeper's lass, in simple country weeds,  
Her firm white arms, as delicate as silk,  
Below her smock-sleeve shining wet with milk;  
No marvel the young noble learnt to woo  
A maid so merry and frank and homely true.  
The other with sad mien, though yet a bride,  
Clad in man's raiment softly stole aside  
And grieved that he who should have been her stay  
Would privily have done her life away,  
For still his crime with bloodshot eyeballs grim  
And dripping fangs turned back and hunted him.  
Cast off, contemned and hated, stabbed, discrowned,  
Still in her heart wide realm for him she found,  
When earth and love and joy seemed to his hand,  
Gripped madly, a waning measure of slipping sand.  
Though lust and murder made of him a slave,  
Her love set free, her purity forgave.  
Humbled and hopeless, all his sins confessed,  
By miracle his contrite soul was blessed,  
And heavy tolling of those haunted days  
Was turned to golden peals of joyous praise.  
Ah, but this woeful lady, lily-pale,  
Is no mere vision drifting through a tale;  
The sad sweet picture of the patient Queen  
Betrays the rebel heart of Robert Greene.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **A Reflection on Lawson's Poems**

Seasons bloom and seasons wither; dark or bright, they cannot last.  
Must we try with floods of bitter teas to vivify the past?  
Vainly chase the brown and broken blossoms blown along the blast?

Shall we scorn the flowers around us - red, or blue, or white as snow -  
Flowers giving loads of fragrance unto all the winds that blow  
Must we hide our eyes and falter: 'O, the days of long ago!'

Never stop to look behind you, if the blaze of glory there  
Blinds you to the splendour stretching round about and everywhere.  
True, the past was pleasant, Lawson, but the present is as fair.

I, too, love the days when heroes, seeking treasure, seaward sped;  
Days of Drake, when English sailors followed where their leaders led;  
Days when Marlowe trod the glowing clouds, that thundered to his tread.

Even then, though, there were cowards, traitors, swindler, 'business men,'  
Plot and murder, slave and master, secret sneer, and wounding pen;  
And the poets thought the present vile and barren even then.

And their comrades were no better than some modern mates we meet -  
Even though they don't go wearing tights and feathers in the street;  
And the girls are dear as ever, and their kisses just as sweet.

Sing the present; dropp the drivel of the 'days evanished,' please!  
Though you pray until your pants are burst or baggy at the knees,  
You can't bid the sun go backward - no, not even ten degrees.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **An Epitaph**

On a monument formed as a curving wave

By ceaseless waves, that break and waste,  
All human record is effaced:  
Only our love in brief defence  
Shall hold the billow in suspense.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Anzac

Within my heart I hear the cry  
Of loves that suffer, souls that die,  
And you may have no praise from me  
For warfare's vast vulgarity;  
Only the flag of love, unfurled  
For peace above a weeping world,  
I follow, though the fiery breath  
Of murder shrivel me in death.  
Yet here I stand and bow my head  
To those whom other banners led,  
Because within their hearts the clang  
Of Freedom's summoning trumpets rang,  
Because they welcomed grisly pain  
And laughed at prudence, mocked at gain,  
With noble hope and courage high,  
And taught our manhood how to die.  
Praise, praise and love be theirs who came  
From that red hell of stench and flame,  
Staggering, bloody, sick, but still  
Strong with indomitable will,  
Happy because, in gloomiest night,  
Their own hearts drummed them to the fight.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **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

## **Beauty And Hate**

I have sought and followed you, drunk with your sacred wine;  
Led out by a laughing wind on a tumbling sea,  
On crags amid clouds, in cups that allure the bee,  
And deep in the gem-lit gloom of the tortuous mine,  
And on widespread wings where the great worlds dance and shine  
I have sought by the golden light; but have bent the knee  
At last where you lie, a humble goddess and free,  
Naked and flushed in the warmth of a crimson shrine.  
The hordes of hate have trampled your blooms in mire,  
And cackle and roar as their mockery priests blaspheme,  
And sing the marching hymn of a wingless might.  
They forge their god in the heat of unholy fire  
The squat strong incubus born of an evil dream;  
And it shrinks and crumbles away in the golden light.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Belgium

The Blatant Beast saw meadows, made for peace,  
Sunlit and gently asway, and held them light,  
Till each green blade grew rigid in the night  
And ruddied with a glorious morn's increase.  
Thou hast suffered; nor till Freedom find release  
And set for ever on the shining height  
The eternal rolling banner of her might  
Shall thy great gift of strife and suffering cease.

We, bred of one small island in the west,  
A little shrine of Freedom, far away  
We, who can bow at no strong tyrant's hest,  
Bend low our heads in pride to thee to-day,  
For all unknown, a smiling babe at rest,  
Within thy lowly manger Freedom lay.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Buffalo Creek

A timid child with heart oppressed  
By images of sin,  
I slunk into the bush for rest,  
And found my fairy kin.

The fire I carried kept me warm:  
The friendly air was chill.  
The laggards of the lowing storm  
Trailed gloom along the hill.

I watched the crawling monsters melt  
And saw their shadows wane  
As on my satin skin I felt  
The fingers of the rain.

The sunlight was a golden beer,  
I drank a magic draught;  
The sky was clear and, void of fear,  
I stood erect and laughed.

And sudden laughter, idly free,  
About me trilled and rang,  
And love was shed from every tree,  
And little bushes sang.

The bay of conscience' bloody hound  
That tears the world apart  
Has never drowned the silent sound  
Within my happy heart.

John Le Gay Brereton

## David

Eternal cold of silence, where each sound  
Dies in its birth, and Death's pale henchmen meet  
With soft Lethean traps unwary feet  
Or ride with hell's white steed and slaving hound;  
Which of us, searching selfward, has not found  
This desolate realm, and long black seams, that greet  
Our souls with recollections of defeat,  
And torrid fossils in the frozen ground?  
Not he, who comes among us as a king;  
Strange were the secret waste and granite walls  
To him whose reverent feet have travelled far  
Where duty beckons and adventure calls.  
He steers his course, by one red tropic star,  
Where ripples the green robe of the lilting spring.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Death

He, born of my girlhood, is dead, while my life is yet young in my heart  
Ere the breasts where his baby lips fed have forgotten their softness, we part.  
We part. He was mine, he was here, though he travelled by land and by sea,  
My son who could trample on fear, my babe who was moulded in me.  
As I sat in the darkness, it seemed I could still feel his touch on my head;  
He came in the night as I dreamed, and he knelt at the side of my bed;  
He murmured the words I had taught when his lips were the lips of a child,  
Ere the strength of his arm had been bought and the love that upheld him defiled;  
Then my faltering spirit grew bold, and my heart had forgotten its drouth,  
And I crooned little songs as of old, till I woke at his kiss on my mouth.  
Now waking and sleeping are pain. Nevermore will he kiss, nevermore  
Shall I hear his low whistle again at the gate, or his step on the floor,  
For to-night he was here while I slept, and this is the end of it all.  
Now that welter of darkness has swept us apart, can he come if I call?  
Can he come, little chap with the eyes that brought light out of heaven to earth?  
Can he come, though the soul of me cries for the joy that I bought by his birth?  
I can see but the horror that bids the heart of the mother despair,  
The vision that burns on my lids, the face that will always be there,  
For he holds out his hands to me, red, and his eyes tell the truth as he stands.  
He is dead. He is dead. He is dead. He is dead, with the blood on his hands.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Dedication

Grant me a moment of peace,  
Let me but open mine eyes,  
Forgetting the empire of lies  
And warfare's majestic increase  
Of national folly and hate;  
Ere I return to my fate,  
Grant me a moment of peace.

To what is I would turn from what seems  
From a world where men fall and adore  
The god that Fear shuddering bore  
To Greed in the desert of dreams,  
Unholy, inhuman, impure;  
From the State to the loves that endure,  
To what is I would turn from what seems.

No man has been richer than I,  
Though he staggered with infinite gold  
And bought of whatever is sold  
Of the beauty that money can buy.  
In the wealth that is lost in the mart  
And is stored in the innermost heart  
No man has been richer than I.

Humbly, a pilgrim, I stood,  
Weary and hungry and lame,  
And out of the multitude came  
Friends who were better than good,  
Friends who would not be denied  
Where by the palpitant tide  
Humbly, a pilgrim, I stood.

Now to my army of friends  
A handful of petals I fling,  
Strays of perennial spring,  
Weeds, but the lover who sends  
Bled that each blossom might live.  
This is myself that I give  
Now to my army of friends.

Comrade in exile, to you  
Chiefly the gift should belong,  
You who will hear in my song  
Echoes of days that we knew  
Blue and deep-droning and clear  
Far in the hills that are dear,  
Comrade in exile, to you.

Pause and remember them now,  
Plunge, as you dived in the stream,  
To the sweet cool depth of your dream.  
The drooping, sheltering bough,

The brown rock lettered above,  
The still interfusion of love,  
Pause and remember them now.

There as we lay in the cave  
And saw, as an eye of the dark,  
The camp-fire's slumbering spark,  
And heard the cataract rave,  
Your soul and my soul were as one;  
Our life in one channel has run  
There as we lay in the cave.

Forth to the task of a man!  
Youth and the valour of youth,  
Force and the ardour of truth  
Give you a place in the van,  
Love keeping step at your side  
Chanting aloud as you stride  
Forth to the task of a man.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **Disillusion**

When fires have burnt your forest bare and black,  
And you are parched and dizzy, and search in vain  
For pools in dust unvisited of rain,  
And shamble, lost, along a shimmering track,  
This is the comfort of the world: "Alack!  
So youth's illusions die, that we may gain  
Wisdom and strength to face our lifelong pain,  
The truth, from which no man shall turn him back."  
Falter for no such melancholy lies,  
For by one holy touch the spirit is healed  
To know its treasure of sight and sound and scent;  
Veil after veil the earthborn fogs arise,  
Star beyond star the heavens are then revealed,  
And truth is fair in love's enlightenment.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Erskine

A singing voice is in my dream  
The voice of Erskine, on his boulders,  
Babbling and shouting till he shoulders  
Stoutly against the heavier stream.

No longer now my curtained sight,  
On serried books and pictures dwelling,  
Of long-neglected work is telling,  
But looks beyond the travelling night.

And here no longer is my home,  
For you and I are far asunder:  
I hear again the cascade thunder  
And watch the little pool of foam.

And where the water, pouring sleek,  
In sudden whiteness flings his treasure,  
I see you sitting, Queen of Pleasure,  
Clad only by the glittering creek.

I hold my arms to you once more,  
For O my longing flesh is aching,  
And you, your rocky throne forsaking,  
Come cool and radiant to the shore.

I see my girl of girls recline  
On smooth rock sloping to the water;  
Then savagely have leapt and caught her,  
And limpid eyes look up at mine.

Love, Love, O Love, the embracing sun,  
The trees, the creek, the earth our mother,  
Who made that hour, give such another,  
And make us—see us—know us one.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **For Valour**

Hail to you, comrades, who have won,  
Where the torn lines of battle run  
By tattered town and ruined mead,  
The honour that men give with pride  
To those who, daffing death aside,  
Have done the valorous deed.

And has the war, then, brought to birth,  
As flowers that spring from western earth  
At summons of the pelting rain,  
The courage that can force its way,  
And hold the shadowing wings at bay,  
And smile at lingering pain?

And is it true that only now  
Life lifts from her heroic brow  
The smothering shroud of deadly peace,  
And laughs to sniff the morning air,  
And bids a thousand bonfires flare  
The news of her release?

Hell's throat may swallow down its lie,  
For men knew how to live and die  
And take the gifts of motley fate,  
Before the fiends of fear and greed,  
Clasping, engendered from their seed  
The hissing brood of hate.

Are they not sightless fools who crave  
The sombre splendours of the grave  
To prove that man is more than dust;  
Who dabble fingers in the side  
Of him who lives because he died,  
Believing, when they must?

John Le Gay Brereton

## Hesper

Not till the sun, that brings to birth  
The myriad marvels of the earth  
And bids us look with wandering eyes  
On all that here about us lies,  
Has gone behind the hill,  
Do you, O peaceful evening star,  
Gaze on the dusk in which we are  
And draw the heart of hope and love  
To infinite deep on deep above  
And bid our care be still.

All glorious pleasures of the day,  
When every sense may have its way  
And thought may touch the tiniest fact  
And gauge the motive and the act  
And measure our delight,  
Depart, and leave us to the quest  
Of quiet solitude and rest  
And knowledge that the plotting brain  
With all its science cannot gain  
But from the soul of Night.

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

## Hymn To The God Of War

From every quarter we,  
Who bent the trembling knee  
And cowered or grovelled prostrate day and night,  
Now come once more to sing  
A dirge before thee, King,  
Once more with earnest heart to do thee right.

Have we not hailed thee God?  
Our weary feet have trod  
The vasty barren sands and treacherous ice,  
With many a bitter cry,  
To pile thine altar high  
With pallid human hearts in sacrifice.

We hated thee and came  
With eyes of shifty shame,  
With heavy steel above the craven breast,  
Yet evermore we did  
The ill thy servants bid,  
For everywhere thy might was manifest.

At thy sibilant word  
We were filled with distrust,  
And we glared on each other,  
All horribly stirred  
Against sister and brother;  
Our green hopes were wilted and riven, our red-running blood was as dust.

And a foul poison ran  
Through the veins of the world,  
And we waited and wondered.  
By magical ban  
We were cruelly sundered,  
Then a maniac hatred upcaught us and deep into hell we were hurled.

We have crept to thee, God,  
In the day of thy wrath,  
We have wept, we have fasted,  
We have crimsoned the sod  
That thy worship has blasted,  
And have seen thee stalk pale and triumphant where nations fell flat in thy path.

Yet out of the dust and the flame,  
The squalor and muddle of crime,  
A red waving blossom there came  
And a scent on the tempest of time.  
Heroic and splendid, we threw  
Our lives to be oil in the fire,  
But a marvel of fellowship grew  
As the blaze bickered broader and higher,  
And the soul of a people stood up, and spoke to us all from the pyre.

And lo, we are come to thy shrine,  
O God, but we ask for no grace,  
For our hearts are made glad with a wine  
That is death to the craven and base,  
And thy shrine shall be burnt for our mirth  
And thine altar be turned to thy bier,  
For, if Love be our Lord upon earth,  
What corner is left for thee here?  
The veil of thy temple is rent—and behold, thou hast vanished, O Fear!

John Le Gay Brereton

## **In A Tram**

One of the twain was long and dusty grey,  
And like a spark that in the ashes lies,  
Satiric laughter glinted in his eyes  
And made his nose auroral with its ray:  
The other like a huge black bird of prey,  
His hat enorm, his pipe of awful size,  
His coat hung empty-sleeved in careless wise,  
Loomed a fat angel from the pit astray.  
A voice was booming ever: laugh and jeer  
Mingled with noble praise of battling right,  
And verse and girls were mixed with radiant beer  
And all the city tram was given sight  
Of the invisible dark and bidden hear  
Unsplashing silence of the pouring light.

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

## July

'Twas Jack-o'-Winter hailed it first,  
But now more timid angels sing,  
For what dull ear can fail to hear  
Afar the fluting of the Spring?

In all free spaces of the land  
A sightless flame is flickering;  
Through every vein it leaps amain,  
The fiery miracle of Spring.

A music ranging in the air,  
A lambent light in everything;  
O sweet, my sweet, the subtle heat,  
The dancing light of Love and Spring!

John Le Gay Brereton

## **Kretschmann**

Love may trace his echoing footsteps, yet we never more shall meet  
Rugged Kretschmann, the musician, plodding down a Sydney street,  
Never see the low broad figure, massive head and shaggy mane  
And the quiet furrowed features, never hear his voice again.

But from many a home there rises many a note that lingering rings  
Ever since his cunning fingers touched and drew it from the strings;  
All our land is full of noises; happy phantom fields of scent,  
Bright with sunlit blossoms, echo birdlike music where he went.

He was old and grey and weary, death and he were long at grips,  
Evil whispers hissed behind him, German to the finger-tips,  
War's wild fury snarled about him, so he gently stepped aside,  
Loving us and loving Germans, heavy-hearted, and he died.

Crusted shells, by ocean battered, taken from the barren shore  
Bear within their hearts a murmur of the sea's eternal roar;  
Who shall say what vital music, all unheard by duller ears,  
Swept the soul of good old Kretschmann to his home amid the spheres?

Harmony was all his being, and he held the music sweet  
Welling up in baby voices, beaten out by tiny feet;  
Still with playthings in his pockets, rest and solace may he know,  
Welcomed gladly to the kingdom where the little children go.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Lali

While the summer day is hot  
You and I will loaf awhile,  
Lolling in a leafy spot,  
Lali of the cunning smile.

You and I have little care  
How the "precious moments" pass  
While we snuff the drowsy air  
Rich in fragrance of the grass.

Stupid people boom or squeal  
Lessons drawn from daily strife;  
"Time," they cry, "is on the wheel;  
Death puts out the gas of life.

Imitate the prudent ant,  
Labour like the busy bee."  
O the everlasting cant!  
Loafing's good for you and me.

Here we watch the ants that haul  
Loads by weary jungle ways!  
If they like it, let them crawl  
Laden through the heavy blaze.

We've no time for moral tags;  
We can hear a sleepy sound  
With his yellow tucker-bags  
Brother Bee is bumming round.

Little souls are vexed to see  
How their hours of toil decrease:  
Floating dreams for you and me,  
Lazy joy in starry peace.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **Light Loss**

"Our loss was light," the paper said,  
"Compared with damage to the Hun":  
She was a widow, and she read  
One name upon the list of dead  
Her son, her only son.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Love Is Blind

And can you tell me Love is blind  
Because your faults he will not find,  
Because the image that he sees  
Is one of splendid mysteries?  
And if he lack the power to look  
On what he will, as on a book,  
And read therein the heart of it,  
Why are his ways with wonder lit?  
Why think you he should bind his eyes  
And hide the many-tinted skies,  
But that he sees too well to trust  
The shadows on an orb of dust?  
For he hath vision keener far  
Than poring Thought's and Fancy's are  
An inward vision, full and clear  
When night has flung her mantle sheer  
Across the world we stumble through  
In search of Truth's evasive clue.  
He looks, and straight there fall away  
The flutt'ring rags of your array,  
The far-fet gem, th' indecent drape,  
The pads that mar the perfect shape,  
And naked to his reverent view  
Is beauty's self, essential you.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **Marlowe**

The spell of Shakespeare fills the heart  
With earthly music loud and low;  
But Marlowe drives the clouds apart,  
And through their thundering rifts we go.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **Maxims**

The heart is hard that cannot feel  
The bruising of a light appeal.

The heart is deaf that cannot hear  
The splashing of a tiny tear.

The heart is dumb that cannot say  
"God speed you, comrades," night and day.

The heart is blind that cannot see  
The beckoning soul of mystery.

The heart is lame that cannot rise  
From clamouring earth to silent skies.

And O that heart were better dead  
That truckles to the prudent head

John Le Gay Brereton

## Merlin

O Merlin, how the magic from your eyes  
Bids the world flame about your idle feet,  
And makes a marvel of the humming street,  
The watchful bush, the starry-haunted skies!  
Dear, do you know that all such magic dies  
In foolish hearts that regularly beat?  
Blinded with dust, the elders in retreat  
Shake their thin locks to prove that they are wise.  
God help them in their tameness: you are wild.  
Hold fast your faith, for love has mightier spells  
Than yet your mouth has chattered, sung or laughed;  
Be drunk still with th' enchanted wine you've quaffed.  
Awe spreads her wings above the hut where dwells,  
Rapt in his glow of gramarye, the child.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Microcosmography

He looks beyond the veils of night and day;  
He hearkens in the silence, and has heard  
The ancient woods by dryad singing stirred,  
To mortal ears how thin and far away.  
With what gross laughter yet he turns to play  
With slaves of vice and virtue and the herd  
Of flopping little Calibans, that gird  
At muddy boots and call them feet of clay.  
Here you may loaf the valley or breast the hill,  
Dive deep for pearl or sink your shaft for gold,  
Or watch Love, laughing, flit in the summer nights.  
Sit by the mud and sniff it as you will,  
If you but lift your eyes an inch, behold  
The moving tide and broken glimmer of lights.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Middle Harbour

Lonely wonder, delight past hoping!  
Sky-line broken by stirring trees,  
Grey rocks hither and shoreward sloping,  
Silent bracken about my knees.

Dusky scrub where the sunlight splashes,  
Glimmer of waters barely seen  
Here the hope that was dust and ashes  
Leaps and flashes in flames of green.

Through the boughs that are still before me,  
Misty blue of the harbour hills;  
Mighty Spirit of Earth who bore me,  
Here the peace of thy love distils.

Fools have harried me; hell has driven,  
Bidding me toil for its fading shows:  
Back I spring to your arms, forgiven,  
Back to the truth that a dreamer knows.

Gold and glory and fleeting pleasure  
Pass in dust or as melting cloud:  
You can dower with eternal treasure  
Heart uplifted and head unbowed.

Arms outstretched, and the hill-top hushes;  
Long deep breath, and the whole scene fades;  
Sweeping homeward, my soul outrushes,  
My heart the heart of the world invades.

Fleshly trammels no longer bind me,  
Joyous, forgetting that such things be;  
Time and space have been left behind me,  
Brother of stars, I am soaring, free.

Cramped no more, I exult, extended,  
All I think of I hold within;  
Secret surety of vision splendid  
Makes me one with my lordly kin.

Out of the vast I return, and slowly  
Into the prison of sense I glide,  
Yet the splendour is gone not wholly,  
Yet the love and the peace abide.

Soft wind rustles the leaves, and brightly  
Wavers the light on the ferns and trees;  
Water-ripples are laughing lightly,  
Played upon by the sun and breeze.

There the robin, a friendly fellow,  
Clings to a sapling stem and waits

Just where I noted his breast of yellow  
Ere I ventured beyond the gates.

Only a moment, as clocks can reckon,  
Dwells the soul at that height of heights;  
Ah, but I know why the wood-gods beckon,  
Why the stars are as beacon lights.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Open Speech

Good friend of mine, you feel with me—  
Your blood grows hot by sympathy  
With something that I say or do;  
Then speak—I want a word from you.

Let not the silence wrap you round  
While you are living over-ground.  
They say that earthly years are few;  
Then speak—I want a word from you.

Perhaps I pass you in the street,  
And when our eyes a moment meet,  
I wonder are you wishing too;  
Then speak—I want a word from you.

Are you, too, longing for a sign,  
Yet fear to stretch a hand for mine?  
What other am I writing to?  
Then speak—I want a word from you.

Some way our thoughts together run,  
Since both lift brow toward the sun  
Beneath the self-same vault of blue;  
Then speak—I want a word from you.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Rebel Hearts

An outcry in the bush below,  
A crash, and boughs that sway,  
And shouts of laughter let me know  
Where my two ruffians play.

Barelegged, bareheaded, brown and free,  
They lurk and prowl and spring;  
Like tiger-cubs they disagree,  
Like honeysuckers sing.

For in their hearts are echoes yet  
From ages when they knew  
The caves of green they now forget,  
Though there they climbed or flew.

No cage set limits to their pace;  
They held the hunt at bay;  
And in their careless mien I trace  
The savage mood to-day.

They'll take no tidal drift, nor lie  
And rot like souls of mud,  
For sullen lip and flashing eye  
Betray the rebel blood.

Go, flout the law your hearts disdain  
Your foes are well arrayed  
And take for guerdon love and pain,  
And triumph unafraid.

In jungles where the night imparts  
Her secret lore to you,  
Lie still and listen to your hearts.  
Be true, my sons, be true!

John Le Gay Brereton

## Rod Quinn

How many years, how many years have fled,  
Since in the cool dim parlour sat the three  
Lawson and I and, lounging easily,  
The beaming indolent poet! Then instead  
Of labouring weary at the mill, we led  
The careless life of wanderers, frank and free,  
And had the wealth of a new-found world in fee:  
How pitiless time gropes on with tireless tread!  
A glass was raised, and golden liquor glowed  
When a ray from summer streets came piercing in;  
He drank the sunlight in the gloomy place!  
And now I know the magic drink bestowed  
A vital golden splendour on Roderic Quinn,  
Which fumbling fingers of Time will scarce efface

John Le Gay Brereton

## Sonnets Of Old Egypt

I

### The Sphinx

The spires of sand spring up at every gust  
That bids them dance and scatter and lays them low:  
He sits impassive, as the ages flow  
And bear superbly the mirage of lust.  
The moonbright steel he has witnessed redden and rust,  
He has seen storm-proud deep-rooted empires grow,  
And watched victorious gods flash forth and go;  
And still before him spins the aspiring dust.  
What has he seen in that hoar-centuried land  
More strange and dreadful in its long delight  
Of vain hope-haunted ever-starting quest  
Than I can follow across this burning sand  
Wherefrom the dizzying phantoms take their flight  
Within the compass of a wanderer's breast?

II

### Nicholson Museum: Exhibit 32

The curious look and pass, beholding naught  
But yellow skin and small contorted toes:  
I see a burning wilderness of woes  
And stagger through its quivering air distraught.  
I know the paradise a baby wrought  
Of old where still the dear blue river flows,  
And there's a crouching fear within that knows  
To what a desperate havoc it was brought.  
Dear Isis, have you not heard Horus sing  
His infant ditties, kissed his radiant head,  
And laughed at legs that learned to leap and run?  
Forget it not. My heart in offering  
Lies bare before you; take it, Queen, and spread  
Thy sheltering wings about my little son.

III

### Nefert

The gaudy pageant of the ages hies  
Down the dim years, yet many a look is cast  
That calls us dumbly, from the abysmal past,  
In love that lives amid a world that dies.  
I thrill to look on Nefert's friendly eyes,  
Mad to recall the night I saw her last,  
And yet across that memory has the blast  
Whirled the deep desert sand of centuries.  
Forgive if I forget thee now, my sweet,  
If other eyes have led me to the source

Wherefrom the thirsting heart draws sustenance.  
Can pallid marble feel my pulses beat?  
We approach the limit of our dusty course  
When hearts must live on store of old romance.

IV

Shu

Spread on the desert, Seb of mighty thew  
Felt cloudy hair, trailed by the evening breeze,  
Tingling along each nerve, as by degrees  
Nub bowed above him, till his brown arms drew  
Her body upon his; so, all night through,  
The desert bloomed in starry ecstasies,  
Till, even as she sighed in overburdened ease,  
Between them thrust the radiant arm of Shu.  
Yet they are of the gods, and evermore  
Their joy renews itself when earth and sky  
Are all one substance in the odorous gloom.  
But when two lovers drain their little store  
Of mortal bliss and yet are thirsting, why  
Inflict on us thy peremptory doom?

V

Khonsu

"Have I not smiled and kept the world at bay,  
Given my friends the joy that dried my tears  
And left a savour of salt, and filled the years  
With desolate wreckage of each yesterday?  
O Khonsu," with uplifted hands I pray,  
"O Master of Love, give respite to my fears;  
Before the dust is in my eyes and ears,  
Grant me thy light upon the darkening way."  
He gazes mildly from the crescent moon;  
The sea grows silent and its shimmering space  
Is wave upon wave of sand beyond all sight;  
I stretch my arms to take whate'er the boon,  
And feel imagined kisses on my face,  
Lonely amid the desert of the night.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Spring

Spring, and the wispy clouds that fade away  
And draw the ecstatic soul in pain to aspire  
In maddening flight through heaven's thin flood of fire  
To melt in rapture at the heart of day,  
The powers of the world that promise and betray  
Have dragged me from you in their icy ire  
And set me spinning at their loom, for hire,  
The shroud in which my senses must decay.  
For hire I give myself, and cannot tell  
If the blind force that flings me in the chest  
Have power or will to pay the bargained price,  
Yet for a word of love I gladly quell  
The quivering hope of not inactive rest  
And very humbly make my sacrifice.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Swags Up!

Swags up! and yet I turn upon the way.  
The yellow hill against a dapple sky,  
With tufts and clumps of thorn, the bush whereby  
All through the wonder-pregnant night I lay  
Until the silver stars were merged in grey  
Our fragrant camp, demand a parting sigh:  
New tracks, new camps, and hearts for ever high,  
Yet brief regret with every welcome day.  
Dear dreamy earth, receding flickering lamp,  
Dear dust wherein I found this night a home,  
Still for a memory's sake I turn and cling,  
Then take the road for many a distant camp,  
Among what hills, by what pale whispering foam,  
With eager faith for ever wandering.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Bold Buccaneer**

One very rough day on the Pride of the Fray  
In the scuppers a poor little cabin-boy lay,  
When the Bosun drew nigh with wrath in his eye  
And gave him a kick to remember him by,  
As he cried with a sneer: "What good are you here?  
Go home to your mammy, my bold buccaneer."

Now the Captain beheld, and his pity upwelled:  
With a plug in the peeper the Bosun he felled.  
With humility grand he extended his hand  
And helped the poor lad, who was weeping, to stand,  
As he cried: "Have no fear; I'm the manager here.  
Take heart, and you'll yet be a bold buccaneer."

But how he did flare when the lad then and there  
Doffed his cap and shook down a gold banner of hair.  
Though his movements were shy, he'd a laugh in his eye,  
And he sank on the Captain's broad breast with a sigh,  
As he cried: "Is it queer that I've followed you here?  
I'm your sweetheart from Bristol, my bold buccaneer."

On an isle in the west, by the breezes caressed,  
The bold buccaneer has a warm little nest,  
And he sits there in state amid pieces of eight  
And tackles his rum with a manner elate,  
As he cries: "O my dear little cabin-boy, here  
Is a toast to the babe of the bold buccaneer!"

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Carillon**

Alone  
I sit in the dusk and see  
Surely the living faces, dear to me,  
Of comrades who have thrown  
All that they had, the fruit of all desire,  
Upon an altar fire.

They heard,  
Above all clamour of the crowd,  
The music of their own hearts throbbing loud  
Until the air was stirred  
Into a summoning harmony; and so  
We saw them rise, and go.

The sound,  
That love set ringing in those years  
Of agony, exultation, voiceless fears,  
And hopes now underground,  
Shall not be silenced; it is thrilling yet,  
And we shall not forget.

But clear  
The mellow tone of mingled notes,  
Triumph and sorrow made one spirit, floats  
To my prophetic ear;  
That is their music echoing, echoing still  
From our remembering hill.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Chain Gang**

Borne in the car along a crowded way,  
Sun-soaked, I saw the world like shadows glide,  
Or phantom boats, upon a running tide,  
Driven through flying fog at break of day.  
"The chain gang? Yes," I heard a woman say,  
"Here in this very street." I glanced aside  
And saw the fetters that she flashed in pride,  
And turned again to watch the world's array.  
Clearly I saw men scurrying on the hour,  
Young girls who weary all day on dainty feet,  
Dandies whose socks betoken infinite pains,  
The life that springs and withers like a flower:  
I heard the gangs go clanking down the street,  
Intolerably patient of their chains.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Child Impaled**

Beside the path, on either hand,  
To keep the garden beds,  
The rusted iron pickets stand  
Thin shafts and pointed heads.

And straight my spirit swooping goes  
Across the waves of time  
Till I'm a little boy who knows  
A fence is made to climb;

And bed and lawn and gloomy space  
By thicket overgrown  
Are wonderlands where I may trace  
The beckoning Unknown.

But O the cruelty that strikes  
My elder heart with dread  
The writhing form upon the spikes,  
The trickled pool of red!

So, every day I pass and see  
The fence the urchin scales,  
The little boy stands up in me  
To curse the iron rails.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Clay**

When I cast my slough of clay  
Put it quietly away.

Let no bloom untimely fade  
Where my empty heart is laid.

Ask no folk to crowd around  
With an air of woe profound.

Those who love me know that I  
Cannot in a coffin lie.

Let them go where'er they will,  
Dreaming of me living still.

Let no formal words be said  
Customary for the dead.

Plant no stone above the pit:  
Let the grass run over it.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Dead**

Hail and farewell to those who fought and died,  
Not laughingly adventurous, nor pale  
With idiot hatred, nor to fill the tale  
Of racial selfishness and patriot pride,  
But merely that their own souls rose and cried  
Alarum when they heard the sudden wail  
Of stricken freedom and along the gale  
Saw her eternal banner quivering wide.

Farewell, high-hearted friends, for God is dead  
If such as you can die and fare not well  
If when you fall your gallant spirit fail.  
You are with us still, and can we be adread  
Though hell gape, bloody-fanged and horrible?  
Glory and hope of us who love you, Hail!

John Le Gay Brereton

## The Dirge

Out of the pregnant darkness, where from fire  
To glimmering fire the watchword leaps,  
The dirge floats up from those who build the pyre  
High and still higher  
That yet shall blaze across the verminous deeps.

Farewell, O brother-heart,  
Yet we shall not forget;  
Though hand from hand must part,  
Your hope is with us yet.  
The clank of the swaggerer's sword  
And clink of the grasper's gold  
Are not so loud as the lover's word  
In a thousand echoes rolled.

The lords of the tottering order sit and plot,  
With cunning courtesy haggling still:  
The insistent chorus cannot be forgot  
Its words are shot  
Like summoning rockets from the eastern hill.

You, it was you who showed  
How Murder made his pact  
In busy Greed's abode,  
Preparing for the act.  
To save the fatherland  
They bade your comrades die,  
And full in their path you took your stand  
To kill the patriot lie.

Now, lest their flags and bags be lost in flame.  
The desperate pair have summoned those  
Whose love is moderate and whose life is tame  
To quench in shame  
The light that streams where wind of warning blows.

The ranks of freedom swell,  
The flag of love rolls out:  
The efficient ranks of hell  
Close up in deadly doubt.  
Moulded in battle's mire,  
The bullet found its mark;  
A living spirit, winged with fire,  
Flares homeward from the dark.

John Le Gay Brereton

## The Domain

The bulging cloud mounts lazily  
In shade where sunlight glances through,  
And sweeping lightly from the tree  
Melts indolently in the blue.

The scanty grass-blades yonder shake,  
A tremulous flurry takes the smoke,  
And ancient memories start awake  
At pungent scent of fig and oak.

For here of old an urchin strayed  
And gloomed in lonely pride the while,  
An outlaw in a forest glade  
Or pirate on a tropic isle.

Here where a staid policeman strolls  
Ned Kelly in his armour stood,  
And underneath the roadway rolls  
The river of the Haunted Wood.

And yonder, couched in phantom fern,  
Not far from Nelson's rolling ship,  
I spied the antler'd head of Herne  
And saw the startled rabbit skip.

And Will Wing shook in desperate strife  
Defiantly his bloody hand,  
And heard the waves of daily life  
Drone on the reef-ring, far from land.

Not Robin, clad in verdant baize,  
Nor Britain's silver-plated king,  
Was master of the winning ways  
That drew me to the flag of Wing.

He sauntered on the southern isle  
In garments of eccentric cut,  
And, with his grim sardonic smile,  
Would masticate his coco-nut.

Within his cave, upon a heap  
Of Spanish coin and rubies red,  
I've seen him lying half-asleep  
And dreaming of the blood he'd shed.

The gold-dust, spilled about the ground,  
Made common dirt a treasure rare,  
And if you fingered it you found  
The flashing jewels buried there.

The seabird, sweeping free and far  
On wings of wonder, will not see

That green isle and its coral bar,  
That corsair and his mystery.

As when a lump of sugar shrinks,  
When coffee waves about it glide,  
Crumbles and topples, melts and sinks,  
And mingles with the sombre tide,

So is the islet vanished; yet  
As now I gulp a bitter draught  
The sweetness lingers. Up, and set  
The canvas of the rakish craft!

John Le Gay Brereton

## The Explorer

Dearest, when I left your side,  
I stood a moment, hesitating,  
And plunged. The boiling tide  
Of darkness took me, and down I went  
Swift as a bird with folded wing,  
And upward sent  
The bubbles of my vital breath  
That shuddered from my secret deeps  
To freedom and light;  
Then, dimly, on my sight  
Opened the still abode of living death.  
Amid the mire,  
In which invisibly sightless horror creeps,  
Sat, each intent on his own woe,  
The host that burns with inward fire,  
Crowded like monuments of memorial stone  
Beneath a pitchy sky  
Where even the flash of tempest dare not show,  
Yet each of them alone;  
And each was I.

### II

Breathless I struggled up,  
As if the gloom had arms to clutch at me  
And drag and hold,  
Until the daylight's gold  
Shook faintly above my dizzy head  
And parted suddenly, that I might see  
The sky, a sheltering cup  
Of hopeful azure, and your eyes of blue,  
One promise and yet two  
Of harbouring bliss;  
And your lips parted and said,  
"Shall not we twain  
Find joy upon joy on earth  
Together and see,  
In the kinship of all that has birth  
From the mutual reach of desire,  
A joy beyond this,  
A fire at the heart of the fire?"  
And we clung till our spirit was free  
As the flame of a kiss.

### III

So we soared and the earth fell away, and the region of night  
Was melted in limitless day of ineffable light  
Till the myriad souls of the dead were united as we,  
Themselves, and yet merged in the spread of an infinite sea  
The joy that is life, and around us, below and above,  
The One that all lovers have found, our eternity, Love.

John Le Gay Brereton

## The Faun

When I was but a little boy  
Who hunted in the wood  
To scare or mangle or destroy  
A freakish elemental joy  
That tasted life and found it good

I hardly heard the awful ban  
That mutters round the free,  
But followed where the waters ran,  
And wondered when the pipe of Pan  
Shook silence with its minstrelsy.

Where sun-spray glittered on my limbs  
I danced, and laughed, and trilled  
My happy incoherent hymns,  
Sped only by the whirling whims  
With which my eager heart was filled.

The wind was glad and so was I;  
My soul lay open wide,  
Reflecting all the starry sky;  
The swallows called to me to fly;  
I dreamed of how the fishes glide.

But while my errant feet were set  
On mosses cool and sweet,  
The great grey phantoms brooding met  
Within the shades, and cast a net  
With dreary charms about my feet.

They pent me in a barren place,  
A city, so they said,  
Of gallant wonder-working grace  
But haunted, haunted by a race  
Of rigid unperceptive dead.

With sightless eyes they pored on books,  
And scrawled on many a sheet  
Their regimental strokes and hooks,  
And stalked about with pompous looks,  
Top-hatted, in the civil street.

I strove to flee, but everywhere  
Met solid-seeming walls;  
And yet I knew the world was fair,  
And, hearkening well, heard, even there,  
A bird and distant waterfalls.

And love which I had scarcely known  
Leaped upward as I heard;  
I blessed the creek, the mossy stone,  
The fern along the gully strown,

The little beasts, the piping bird.

Could walls o'ermaster one who knew  
The world of outer light?  
The very shadow that they threw  
Was tindured with a deeper blue  
Because the quickening sun was bright.

I laughed aloud, as one who leaps  
Against a curling wave,  
And, as a widening ripple creeps,  
A shudder caught the stony steeps,  
And life shook, laughing, in the grave.

"O phantoms, who are you to fix  
Eternal towers of pride?"  
I mocked at their fantastic tricks,  
I thrust my fingers through the bricks  
And felt the flowers the other side.

I pricked my pointed ears to hear  
The love-song of the bird,  
And dear was every note, and dear  
The myriad sounds that echoed near  
The magically chorus'd word.

I saw the fading phantoms glare;  
Their tones to silence hissed.  
The walls bulged, brightening everywhere,  
And thinned and melted in the air  
To ragged streams of rosy mist.

Trill, happy bird, for ever trill,  
For I have learned to bless  
The great grey shades whose thwarted will  
Turned earth to heaven; and I am still  
A dweller in the wilderness

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Fugitive**

His shatter'd Empire thunders to the ground:  
A myriad hearts peal laughter as it falls,  
While red flags flutter on its ruined walls  
And living joy darts all the world around.  
The imperial criminal, naked and uncrowned,  
Breathing a shuddering air of curses, crawls,  
Baffled and beaten, from his gorgeous halls,  
While Vengeance halloos lapdog, cur and hound.

Behold the arrogant humbled, and rejoice  
The grasping hand holds naught but flying dust,  
And Envy meets the pitiless grin of Fate.  
Take warning of your own heart's inward voice,  
Bid your own soul be humble and distrust  
The yelping promises of greed and hate.

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 Grey Tide**

The cold green rocks and lapping waves  
Are all my world as here I sit  
With downcast eye and heart that craves  
The bush and blue sky over it.

The tide of years is washing by,  
The misty water drifts between  
A soul with wings that may not fly  
And shadowy realms that might have been.

Too late, too late, alas, I know  
The track that winds by shining leaves  
From where the flood reflects, below,  
The greyness of the heart that grieves.

Another yet may tread the way,  
And offer at that hidden shrine  
His gift of rolled and twisted clay,  
And set his lips to holy wine.

Another yet may tinge the flame  
Upon that altar blue or red,  
And freely call upon Her name,  
And taste at will the blessed bread.

The waves are grey about the rocks,  
A cold wind sets across the sea,  
A travelling ray of sunlight mocks  
The shadow on the heart of me.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Guest House**

What imps are these that come with scowl and leer?  
Black motes upon the morning's amber beam,  
They crowd and float about each happy dream  
And blow upon pure joy the taint of fear.  
Perforce those muttered hideous words we hear,  
Yet bid our nobler nature rise supreme  
And, sunlike, dry to naught th' infernal steam  
Till all our day is luminous and clear.  
"What cruel beasts find refuge in the soul  
Amid the murky deep of sightless flame  
Whose waves are flatten'd by a rain of blood!"  
Nay, but however pure the waters roll,  
The offal thrown therein will rise and shame  
Their glittering pride with bubbles from the mud.

John Le Gay Brereton

## The Liner

The foamy waves are swishing  
As patiently we thud,  
But O the wave of wishing  
That surges in my blood!

Along the ocean's rim, now,  
With never-ceasing song,  
I wish that I could swim now  
And shove the boat along.

My heart is crying, tireless,  
The word it has to say.  
What need have we of wireless  
Who know a better way?

The slow craft plunges nor'ward  
And welters on the blue:  
My thoughts are floating forward  
And swooping home to you.

Your magic love is tingling  
In every vein of me,  
And you and I are mingling  
In spite of rolling sea.

Yet O that I could borrow  
That albatross's flight!  
To-morrow, Love, to-morrow  
Is our supreme delight.

John Le Gay Brereton

## The Nepean

Far down the reach a creeping mist  
Hung dim along the mountain side;  
On shadowed water, sleek and whist,  
I let the lazy shallop glide.

The ripple scarcely cut the green  
That edged the central path of grey.  
I drew the oars, and, all unseen,  
Gave reverent greeting to the day.

Naked I stood with arms outspread  
That opened wide the gates of dream;  
Then breathless bent my wondering head  
And sprang to meet the silent stream.

I slid and floated like a seal,  
And bade my senses revel free,  
From cheek to footsole I could feel  
Her soft cool hands caressing me.

A noise of tiny wavelets woke,  
I quenched my drouth with delicate sips,  
And, as I drank, the surface broke  
In eager kisses on my lips.

The scented breath of morning turned  
To incense as toward the west  
At last, rock-altar'd, I discerned  
The sunshine on the mountain crest.

That light of blessing from the sky  
Made us the fuel of its blaze,  
And fragrant bush and stream and I  
Were one aspiring cry of praise.

John Le Gay Brereton

## The Patriot

The patriot from his walls of brass  
Is singing loudly as I pass;  
With fearless heart and open eyes,  
He shouts the ancient battle cries;  
And, where I pause to hear him sing,  
A silent crowd is listening.

My country, God bestows by thee  
The glory of the world to be  
The glory thou alone canst give  
To last amid things fugitive.

My country, an ideal form  
I see thee splendid in the storm,  
Directress of the power divine  
That makes the expectant future thine.

My country, all the world shall bow  
Before thy peace-conceiving brow,  
And all the peoples humbly stand  
Submissive to thy blessing hand.

My country, yea, the foes who raise  
A tyrant flag shall learn to praise  
Thy steadfast love that dares to fight  
The horde of Satan for the right.

My country, loveliest, strongest, best,  
Thou hast a mission to the rest,  
And greater wealth and love shall be  
The guerdon of thy ministry.

In every land I hear him sing;  
In every land I see him fling  
His country's flag against the skies  
And gaze aloft with dazzled eyes;  
And then his loud applause rings round  
His walls of brass with brazen sound;  
And deep below his cheering loud  
I mark the murmur of the crowd.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Peace Of God**

The seeking souls, by baleful fires made blind,  
Torn by entrapping brambles, thirsty and mad,  
Hear on the lonely waste the stealthy pad  
And half-held breath of glaring beasts behind;  
Then soft hands lead them where the weary find  
A refuge from thought's hunting and are glad.  
Why to their certain misery should they add?  
They rest secure, to freedom's loss resigned.

So, in the bitter years when love and age  
Sneered at the youth whose sturdy heart withheld  
His hand from slaughter, till, in desperate plight,  
He flung into the trampling equipage,  
I have heard him mutter, as the music swelled,  
"The peace of God is on me. They were right."

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Power Of Hell**

"There is no place," he said,  
"For love or pity here;  
We dread and only dread  
The moods that once were dear.

"We break the ancient spell,  
And arm to take our part  
Against the power of Hell."  
And Hell was in his heart.

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

## **The Touch Of Time**

Time, who with soft pale ashes veils the brand  
Of many a hope that flared against the sky  
To plant its heaven-storming banners high,  
Has touched you with no desecrating hand;  
Your beauty wins a ripeness sweet and bland  
As opulent summer, and your glancing eye  
Glowes with a deeper lustre, and your sigh  
Of love is still my clamouring heart's command.

Yet what if all your fairness were defaced,  
Wilted by passionate whirlwinds, battle-scarred,  
Your skin of delicate satin hard and dry?  
Still you would be the laughing girl who graced  
A gloomy manhood, by forebodings marred,  
In the deep wood where still we love to lie.

John Le Gay Brereton

## The War After The War

I.

Yonder, with eyes that tears, not distance, dim,  
With ears the wide world's thickness cannot daunt,  
We see tumultuous miseries that haunt  
The night's dead watches, hear the battle hymn  
Of ruin shrieking through the music grim,  
Where the red spectre straddles, long and gaunt,  
Spitting across the seas his hideous taunt  
At those who nurse at home the unwounded limb.

What shall we say, who, drawing indolent breath,  
Mark the quick pant of those who, full of hate,  
Drive home the steel or loose the shrieking shell,  
Heroes or Huns, who smite the grin of death  
And laugh or curse beneath the blows of fate,  
Swept madly to the thudding heart of hell?

II.

O peace, be still! Let no drear whirlwind sweep  
Our souls about the vault, that groans or yells  
In travail of the brood of Fear, and swells  
Stupendous with new monsters of the deep.  
This is no day to wring the hands and weep,  
No hour for hopeless tolling and clash of bells.  
Faith is no faith if god or demon quells  
One hope or drugs it to uneasy sleep.

What you have shed man's blood for, fight for still  
In world-wide conflict, joining hand with hand;  
Hate fear and hatred and the seed thereof,  
And, since you have struck for Freedom, do her will  
And smash the barriers parting land from land,  
Unflinching armies of immortal love.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **The Wounded**

Stupidity and Selfishness and Fear,  
Who hold enslaved the intellect of Man,  
Have found their victims here.

We saw them go, alert to seek the van  
Where phantom Glory showered her withering leaves;  
Now they return who can.

Slowly, full-fraught with pain, the vessel heaves  
From labouring seas, and creeps along the bay  
To where the city grieves.

Happy are those who limp the dusty way;  
And those whose eyes can meet the loving glance,  
Happy indeed are they.

But mock them not with babble of romance:  
They have glared at death across the orient rocks  
Or in the mire of France.

O welcome to your land of herds and flocks  
And fields that pray toward a fairy sky  
That promises and mocks.

Welcome! our eyes are strained and sorrow-dry,  
Watching for peace and you, and every heart  
Would fain, but cannot, cry.

For you who, led by love, have borne your part  
Where war's black ploughshare turns the bloody sand  
And crops of hatred start

For you and by your help, heroic band,  
We swear by love and labour to make this  
A lovelier, worthier land.

Nor shall we let the home-bred serpent hiss  
Unscotched upon our hearth, if ever here  
Our hope and fortune kiss.

The workers of the battered world draw near,  
Scorning a foeman's name. The heart of Man  
In every land is dear.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **To My Mother**

Once more the Christian festival is near,  
And I, for whom each day repeats all days  
Continuously in ecstasy of praise,  
Love's birthday lasting through the unending year,  
Am dreaming how the spirit draws me sheer  
From farthest wandering in the illusive maze  
To that white centre whose creative blaze  
Spun me aloft and sets me tremulous here.  
And since all heaven is figured in my heart,  
As in a dewdrop ere it change and live  
There shines the glory of the eternal dome,  
Mother, to you the showering meteors dart  
Of free affection, fancies fugitive,  
And flare, with increasing heat and splendour, home.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **Toby**

Hey, Toby, Toby, Toby!—Dead?  
The silence is a flood  
That closes, choking, overhead,  
And chills the living blood.

The leaping friend, whose jolly bark  
Was greeting every night,  
No more to thrill the summer dark  
With welcome of delight?

Beside his grave I bend the knee,  
And O, my eyes are dim.  
He hunted for the dog in me:  
I found the man in him.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Trade

Where yonder ruddy-misted star  
Is tumbling down the placid sky  
The people's aims were not so high  
As our heroic motives are;  
To love and trust they set a bar,  
And "Profit" was their only cry;  
They paid but little heed how nigh  
Came thundering the iron car.

It rushed upon them and it passed  
Leaving a ghost of pain and fear  
To haunt the ruin it had made.  
But surely they have learnt at last?  
What far faint murmur can we hear  
Of frantic howling? Listen! . . . "TRADE."

John Le Gay Brereton

## Transports

Behind us lay the homely shore  
With youthful memories aureoled;  
A sky of dazzling blue before,  
We sailed a sea of molten gold.

To our old haven we return;  
By smoky hills as grey as mud  
We see the sullen sunset burn  
Malignant on a lake of blood.

Yes, we return: but memory roams  
A foul, bleak age of pain that yields  
The smoke and flame of ruined homes,  
The muck of cannon-pitted fields.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Twenty-One

The world, all busy round us here of late,  
Is still unchanged: but you are twenty-one.  
The mind, victorious with the rising sun,  
Steps boldly and blithely through the imagined gate  
On greener grass where brighter flowers await  
The quickened senses and the waters run  
With livelier music, and a web is spun  
Of loveliest pattern on the loom of fate.  
Doubt nothing, fare right on with manly trust,  
And know, whatever failures be in store,  
Though all your light seem shimmering blinding haze,  
And flowers and grass fly up in choking dust,  
Better than you can fancy waits before  
For those who find the secret of the maze.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Unborn

O wistful eyes that haunt the gloom of sleep,  
Are you my own, remembered from the night  
I sat before my glass in dumb affright  
And saw my cowering soul afraid to weep?  
Perhaps you are his, foreshadowed, when I creep  
Behind him and confess the hopeless blight  
That wilts the bloom of our supreme delight  
The breath of horror from the unknown deep.  
Eyes that have never seen a mother's face,  
Have you no mercy that you stare and stare,  
Although I never felt the hope I slew?  
Wide eyes, but when I kneel to God for grace,  
Your steadfast pity deepens my despair;  
The darkness I desire is full of you.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Vixit

Nurse not your grief, nor make obsequious moan  
When I have shed this flesh I love so well,  
Nor slowly toll the dull heart-bruising knell,  
Nor carve my name in customary stone;  
But let the generous earth reclaim her own  
And my usurious profit who can tell?  
Dash tears aside, let joy resume her spell;  
Stars glitter where the storm is overblown.  
Because I have lived I would not have one say:  
"Here long ago a man of such a name  
Was left to moulder in his pit of clay."  
Let only love remember how I came  
And built an earthen altar in my day  
And lit thereon a comfortable flame.

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

## War

### I.

The beast exultant spreads the nostril wide,  
Snuffing a sickly hate-enkindling scent;  
Proud of his rage, on sudden carnage bent,  
He leaps, and flings the helpless guard aside.  
Again, again the hills are gapped and dyed,  
Again the hearts of waiting women spent.  
Is there no cooler pathway to content?  
Can we not heal the insanity of pride?

Silence the crackle and thunder of battling guns,  
And drive your men to strategy of peace;  
Crush ere its birth the hell-begotten crime;  
Still there's a war that no true warrior shuns,  
That knows no mercy, looks for no surcease,  
But ghistlier battles, victories more sublime.

### II.

Envy has slid in silence to its hole,  
And Peace is basking where the workers meet,  
And fire has purged the fever of the street  
Where raucous tradesmen grinned and gave and stole.  
Yet louder now the tides of battle roll,  
With cheer or sob of charge or stern retreat,  
And sullen thud and rumble of cannon beat  
About the heights and passes of the soul.

Not only that amid the hush we hear  
The sounds that once were blurred by market cries,  
Or classes wrangling in affairs of state:  
But forces now set free from sordid fear  
No longer work as Mammon's murdering spies,  
But storm the very citadels of hate.

John Le Gay Brereton

## **What Of The Night?**

The doom is imminent of unholy hate.  
Hail to the light that glimmers where the leaves  
Are shaken by winds of dawning, and the sheaves  
Of hemlock swirl and scatter in the spate!  
Love, that has learned in faith to sorrow and wait,  
Sings loud his glorious charm and subtly weaves  
The spell subduing madness that receives  
The madman at his own mad estimate.

Ah, but the ponderous horror! Nay, not yet  
The cloud of sorrow leeward growls and rolls;  
The eyes that meet the morn are heavy and wet.  
The loss the military mind enscrolls,  
Spilt blood and battered bones, we may forget,  
But not the wastage of beloved souls

John Le Gay Brereton

## **When My Time Is Come**

When my time is come to die,  
I would shun the decent gloom,  
Whispered word and weeping eye,  
Fitful hum of knowing fly  
Questing through the darkened room.

I would lay my skin and bone  
Where no busy care could trace  
Failing steps by bush and stone,  
With my farewell dream alone  
In a bird-frequented place.

So the sounds that bless my ear  
When my weary eyelids close  
Will be songs of hope and cheer;  
So departing, I shall hear  
How the tide of living flows.

So my memories shall not be  
Blurred by griefs however true;  
So my drowsy sense may see  
Eyes that light in love on me;  
So I'll not be leaving you.

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

## Winter

When winter chills your aged bones  
As by the fire you sit and nod,  
You'll hear a passing wind that moans,  
And think of one beneath the sod.

You'll feebly sleek your hair of grey,  
And mutter words that none may know,  
And dream you touch the sodden clay  
That laps the dream of long ago.

The shrinking ash may fall apart  
And show a gleam that lingers yet.  
A moment in your cooling heart  
May shine a sparkle of regret.

And where the pit is chill and deep,  
And bones are mouldering in the clay,  
A thrill of buried love will creep  
And shudder aimlessly away.

John Le Gay Brereton

## Yorick

A golden largesse from a store untold  
Announced the ruddy day's imperial birth,  
And woke a loyal world to jubilant mirth  
And hopes that boasted, madly over-bold.  
Shadow and thunder from a dull cloud rolled,  
A shiver chilled the lately glittering firth,  
As gloom set heavy hand upon the earth;  
Yet look, on westward hills a gleam of gold.  
You have laughed and bidden us laugh, O lord of jest;  
You have wept and given us grief, O lonely friend;  
And now we sit with silent lips and white,  
And dream what craggy ways thou wanderest,  
Not finding yet of hope or strife an end,  
O soul set free from bondage of the night.

John Le Gay Brereton