

Classic Poetry Series

John Milton Hayes

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John Milton Hayes (1884-1940)

John Milton Hayes, better known as J. Milton Hayes, was an English actor and poet, best known for his 1911 dramatic monologue *The Green Eye of the Yellow God*, much parodied by his contemporary Stanley Holloway and later by *The Goon Show*. He also wrote and performed many other monologues. Curiously little is known about Hayes, save that he was from the north of England (probably Lancashire) and that he knew Alec Waugh when the two were prisoners of war together in Mainz, Germany in 1918. From the fact that he was accommodated alongside Waugh at Mainz, we may assume that Hayes served as an officer in the First World War. In his book *My Brother Evelyn and Other Profiles* Waugh describes Hayes as 'A North Country man; he was nearly forty; he was brisk, assured, purposeful, with his eye on the main chance. He was the first person I heard analyse success. He gives Hayes's account of the writing of the poem:

I wrote *The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God* in five hours, but I had it all planned out. It isn't poetry and it does not pretend to be, but it does what it sets out to do. It appeals to the imagination from the start: those colours, green and yellow, create an atmosphere. Then India, everyone has his own idea of India. Don't tell the public too much. Strike chords. It is no use describing a house; the reader will fix the scene in some spot he knows himself. All you've got to say is 'India' and a man sees something. Then play on his susceptibilities.

His name was Mad Carew. You've got the whole man there. The public will fill in the picture for you. And then the mystery. Leave enough unsaid to make paterfamilias pat himself on the back. 'I've spotted it, he can't fool me. I'm up to that dodge. I know where he went.' No need to explain. Then that final ending where you began. It carries people back. You've got a compact whole. 'A broken-hearted woman tends the grave of Mad Carew' They'll weave a whole story round that woman's life. Every man's a novelist at heart. We all tell ourselves stories. That's what you've got to play on.

Merchandise

MERCHANDISE! Merchandise! Tortoiseshell, spices,
Carpets and Indigo sent o'er the highseas;
Mothero'Pearl from the Solomon Isles
Brought by a brigantine ten thousand miles.
Rubber from Zanzibar, tea from NangPo,
Copra from Haiti, and wine from Bordeaux;
Ships, with topgallants and royals unfurled,
Are bringing in freights from the ends of the world

Crazy old windjammers, manned by Malays,
With rattridden bulkheads and creaking old stays,
Reeking of bilge and of paint and of pitch
That's how these oceangirt islands grew rich:

And tramps, heavy laden, and liners untold
Will lease a new life to a nation grown old.
Merchandise! Merchandise! England was made
By her Men and her Ships and her OVERSEAS TRADE.

Widen your harbours, your docks and your quays,
Hazard your wares on the seven wide seas,
Run out your railways and hew out your coal,
For only by trade can a country keep whole.

Feed up your furnaces, fashion your steel,
Stick to your bargains and pay on the deal;
Rich is your birthright, and well you'll be paid.
If you keep in good faith with your Overseas Trade.

Learn up geography, work out your sums,
Build up your commerce, and pull down your slums;
Sail on a Plimsoll that marks a full hold:
Your Overseas Trade means a harvest of gold.

Bring in the palmoil and pepper you've bought,
But send out ten times the amount you import:
Trade your inventions, your labour and sweat:
Your Overseas Traffic will keep ye from debt.

Hark to the song of the shuttle and loom,
Keep up your commerce or crawl to your tomb
Study new methods and open new lines,
Quicken your factories, foundries and mines,

Think of what Drake did, and Raleigh and Howe
And waste not their labours by slacking it now:
Work is life's currency earn what you're worth,
And send out your ships to the ends of the earth.

Deepbosomed mothers with widefashioned hips
Will bear ye good sons for the building of ships
Good sons for your ships and good ships for your trade

That's how the Peace of the World will be made!

So send out your strong to the forests untrod,
Work for yourselves and your neighbours and
Keep this good England the home of the free,
With Merchandise, Men and good Ships on the
Merchandise! Merchandise! Good honest Merchandise!
Merchandise, Men and Good Ships on the Sea.

John Milton Hayes

My old football

YOU can keep your antique silver and your statuettes of bronze,
Your curios and tapestries so fine,
But of all your treasures rare there is nothing to compare
With this patched up, wornout football pal o' mine.
Just a patchedup wornout football, yet how it clings!
I live again my happier days in thoughts that football brings.
It's got a mouth, it's got a tongue,
And oft when we're alone I fancy that it speaks
To me of golden youth that's flown.
It calls to mind our meeting,
'Twas a present from the Dad.
I kicked it yet I worshipped it,
How strange a priest it had!
And yet it jumped with pleasure
When I punched it might and main:
And when it had the dumps
It got blown up and punched again.
It's lived its life;
It's played the game;
Its had its rise and fall,
There's history in the wrinkles of that wornout football.
Caresses rarely came its way in babyhood 'twas tanned.
It's been well oiled, and yet it's quite teetotal, understand.
It's gone the pace, and sometimes it's been absolutely bust,
And yet 'twas always full of bounce,
No matter how 'twas cussed.
He's broken many rules and oft has wandered out of bounds,
He's joined in shooting parties
Over other people's grounds.
Misunderstood by women,
He was never thought a catch,
Yet he was never happier
Than when bringing off a match.
He's often been in danger
Caught in nets that foes have spread,
He's even come to life again
When all have called him dead.
Started on the centre,
And he's acted on the square,
To all parts of the compass
He's been bullied everywhere.
His aims and his ambitious
Were opposed by one and all,
And yet he somehow reached his goal
That plucky old football.
When schooling days were ended
I forgot him altogether,
And 'midst the dusty years
He lay a crumpled lump of leather.
Then came the threat'ning voice of War,
And games had little chance,
My brother went to do his bit

Out there somewhere in France.
And when my brother wrote he said,
'Of all a Tommy's joys,
There's none compares with football.
Will you send one for the boys?'
I sent not one but many,
And my old one with the rest,
I thought that football's finished now,
But no he stood the test.
Behind the lines they kicked him
As he'd never been kicked before.
Till they busted him and sent him back
A keepsake of the war.
My brother lies out there in France,
Beneath a simple cross,
And I seem to feel my football knows my grief,
And shares my loss.
He tells me of that splendid charge,
And then my brother's fall.
In life he loved our mutual chum
That worn-out football.
Oh you can keep your antique silver
And your statuettes of bronze
Your curios and tapestries so fine
But of all your treasures rare
There is nothing to compare
With that patched-up worn-out football—
Pal o' mine.

John Milton Hayes

Orange peel

THE COLONEL stopped, and glared around,
Then, pointing sternly to the ground,
'What does this mean?' demanded he,
'A piece of orange peel I see!'
The Major called the Captain then,
And said, 'By Gad! Your fault again!
Now what the blazes do you mean
By letting all this filth be seen?'

The Captain sniffed, but took the snub,
Then, calling to the junior Sub.,
Observed, 'Look here, what's all this mess?
It's fit for pigs, sir, nothing less!'

The junior Sub. blushed crimson red,
Then, to the Sergeant-major, said,
'I'm quite fed up, and all that rot!
I mean to say a pigsty! What?'

The Sergeant-major, filled with rage,
Attacked the Sergeant at this stage,
'You careless swab! jump to it smart.
Oh strewth! You break my blinkin 'eart!'

The Sergeant, starting in to
Apostrophized the Corporal, thus,
'You lazy, lumberin', boss-eyed lout!
Who chucked this crimson fruit about?'

The Corporal frowned, and turned his eye
On Private Atkins passing by;
'Hi! you! Come 'ere, you slobberin' sweep,
Just shift this festerin' rubbish 'eap!'

And Private Atkins, filled with gloom,
Applied himself with spade and broom:
'They talk a ruddy lot,' Quothe he,
'But 'oo does all the work? Why me'

John Milton Hayes

The Dream Ring of the Desert

THE MERCHANT Abu Khan shunned the customs of his race,
And sought the cultured wisdom of the West.
His daughter fair Leola had the desert's supple grace,
With an English education of the best.
The suitors for her hand were as grains of desert sand
But the merchant bade the Arab swarm begone:
And he swore a mighty oath, she should only make troth
With an Englishman an Englishman or none!

The chieftain Ben Kamir, tho' rejected, stayed to plead,
But Abu Khan replied, 'Thy suit is vain.
I cast aside my kinsmen and I scorn the prophet's creed;
So get thee to thy tents, across the plain.'

'Enough,' the Chief replied, 'Thine eyes are blind with pride,
But Allah hears my prayers and guides my star,
With patience I shall wait till I am called by Fate,
And then I shall return to Akabar.'

The right man came at last in the month of Ramadhan,
An Englishman who learned to love her soon.
His suit was proudly sanctioned by the merchant Abu Khan,
And the wedding was to be at the full moon.

The merchant, in his pride, thought the news too good to hide,
And it circled round the desert near and far:
Circled round and caught the ear of the chieftain Ben Kamir,
And he turned his camel's head to Akabar.

The chieftain wore his robe of green, an emblem of his rank.
And many bowed in honour of the man.
But heedless of their reverence he beat his camel's flank,
And rode on to the house of Abu Khan.

The merchant, from his roof, saw the chief, but held aloof
A suitor twice dismissed was one to shun
But Kamir declared his ride was in homage to the bride,
And the merchant's fears vanished one by one.

'Leola,' said the Arab, as she came to greet the guests
'Thy praises are beyond what I can sing,
But let this little token bring the fortune of the best.'
And he placed upon her hand an opal ring.

'Tis more than what it seems, and its spell shall gild thy dreams,
For 'twas carried by Mahomet, Allah's Priest.'
Then the chieftain said goodbye, and she watched him with a sigh,
As he rode across the desert to the East.

Leola dreamt a dream most strange, and nightly 'twas the same,
And love within her breast began to peep.
A voice from out the burning sandhills called and called her name,

And waking she would long again for sleep.

The wedding eve's bright moon saw her rise as from a swoon,
With the dream voice ringing still within her ear,
Saw her glide toward the sand, where the stately palmtrees stand,
To the desert, and the arms of Ben Kamir.

The chieftain pointed Eastward to the plains he loved so well,
And told her of his plans for hasty flight.
The dream-ring on her finger held her soul within its spell.
And they rode across the desert thro' the night.

On the morrow, lined with care, at the Maghrib sunset prayer,
The merchant joined the worshippers unshod.
And he cried with spirit broken, as the Mueddin's chant was spoken,
'Mahomet is the prophet, God is God.'

John Milton Hayes

The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God

There's a one-eyed yellow idol to the north of Khatmandu,
There's a little marble cross below the town;
There's a broken-hearted woman tends the grave of Mad Carew,
And the Yellow God forever gazes down.

He was known as "Mad Carew" by the subs at Khatmandu,
He was hotter than they felt inclined to tell;
But for all his foolish pranks, he was worshipped in the ranks,
And the Colonel's daughter smiled on him as well.

He had loved her all along, with a passion of the strong,
The fact that she loved him was plain to all.
She was nearly twenty-one and arrangements had begun
To celebrate her birthday with a ball.

He wrote to ask what present she would like from Mad Carew;
They met next day as he dismissed a squad;
And jestingly she told him then that nothing else would do
But the green eye of the little Yellow God.

On the night before the dance, Mad Carew seemed in a trance,
And they chaffed him as they puffed at their cigars:
But for once he failed to smile, and he sat alone awhile,
Then went out into the night beneath the stars.

He returned before the dawn, with his shirt and tunic torn,
And a gash across his temple dripping red;
He was patched up right away, and he slept through all the day,
And the Colonel's daughter watched beside his bed.

He woke at last and asked if they could send his tunic through;
She brought it, and he thanked her with a nod;
He bade her search the pocket saying "That's from Mad Carew,"
And she found the little green eye of the god.

She upbraided poor Carew in the way that women do,
Though both her eyes were strangely hot and wet;
But she wouldn't take the stone and Mad Carew was left alone
With the jewel that he'd chanced his life to get.

When the ball was at its height, on that still and tropic night,
She thought of him and hurried to his room;
As she crossed the barrack square she could hear the dreamy air
Of a waltz tune softly stealing thro' the gloom.

His door was open wide, with silver moonlight shining through;
The place was wet and slipp'ry where she trod;
An ugly knife lay buried in the heart of Mad Carew,
'Twas the "Vengeance of the Little Yellow God."

There's a one-eyed yellow idol to the north of Khatmandu,
There's a little marble cross below the town;

There's a broken-hearted woman tends the grave of Mad Carew,
And the Yellow God forever gazes down.

John Milton Hayes

The Whitest Man I Know

HE'S acruisin' in a pearler with a dirty nigger crew,
Abuyin' pearls and copra for a stingy Spanish Jew,
And his face is tann'd like leather 'neath a blazin' tropic Sun,
And he's workin' out a penance for the things he hasn't done.
Round the Solomons he runs, tradin' beads and castoff guns,
Buyin' pearls from grinnin' niggers, loadin copra by the ton;
And he'll bargain and he'll smile, but he's thinkin' all the while
Of the penance that he's workin' out for sins he hasn't done.

We'd been round the Horn together, and I'd come to know his worth;
The greatest friend I'd ever had, the whitest man on earth.
He'd pull'd me out of many a scrape, he'd risk'd his life for me,
And side by side, for many a year, we'd rough'd it on the sea;

But a woman came between us; she was beautiful as Venus,
And she set her cap at him until she hook'd him unawares:
And I sailed off on my own
Leavin' him and her alone:
Sign'd aboard a tramp for 'Frisco, leavin' them in Bu'nos Ayres.

When I met him in a twelvemonth he was goin' to the deuce,
For she's blacken'd all the good in him, she'd play'd him fast and loose,
And she'd gone off with a Dago who was lettin' dollars fly,
And she'd left my mate to drink his precious soul away and die.

Well, I talk'd and talk'd him over, and we sign'd aboard 'The Rover.'
It was just like good old times, until we shor'd at Rio Bay;
Then the hand of Fate show'd plain brought us face to face again
With the woman, and the Dago who had taken her away.

We were sittin'in a cafe when the couple came along,
She simply smil'd and pass'd us by, then vanish'd in the throng.
My mate jump'd up to follow, but I wouldn't let him stir,
And later on a waiter brought a note that came from her:
She pretended she regretted
What she'd done, and that she fretted
For the wrong that she had done him, and she wanted to atone;
There was so much to explain,
Would he meet her once again
After midnight, in her garden she would watch for him, alone.

'Course he went, but unbeknown to him I follow'd on behind.
I watch'd, and saw the shadows of two figures on the blind
The woman and the Dago and I heard the Dago shout,
They quarrell'd, and the woman scream'd and then a shot rang out.
My mate dash'd thro' the curtain
And I follow'd, makin' certain
That my little gun was ready case I had to make a stand:
There I saw the Dago dead,
With a bullet thro' his head,
And the woman standin' near him with a shooter in her hand.

Before the Civil Guard came in my mate had snatch'd her gun,
And he ask'd them to arrest him for the thing he hadn't done.
I tried madly to explain things, but they shook their heads at me,
And the woman let them take him, so that she might get off free.
In the court I sat and heard her
Tell them all he'd done the murder,
And I pray'd she might be stricken into some shape,
He was sentenc'd for his life
But out there corruption's rife,
And I brib'd and brib'd, until at last I manag'd his escape.

Then I stow'd him on a hooker sailin' far from woman's wiles,
And he's workin' his salvation out amongst the South Sea Isles;
And the woman's there at Rio, and she's weavin' of her spell,
With a crowd of fools awaitin' her commands to burn in hell;
Whilst the whitest man I know
Runs a Christy minstrel show,
Buyin' pearls from dirty niggers 'neath a blazin tropic sun,
And he'll cuss'em, and he'll smile
But he's thinkin' all the while
Of the penance that he's workin'out for things he hasn't done.

John Milton Hayes

You know what I mean

I'VE noticed this happen, when everything is black,
When I'm down below zero and cannot get back,
When I feel like a sort of a National Debt,
That will go on for ages and never be met,
When my will is all bagged at the knees and dead beat,
It is then, don't you know, that., I'm certain to meet
With some prodigal lifeless dejected old bean,
Who is worse off than I you know what I mean.
Someone or other who's entered the race,
With a sense of intention but can't stay the pace,
He tells all his troubles and heaven knows what,
Talks about Fate and all that sort of rot,
And it makes all my own little troubles look small,
Till I find I've no cause to be worried at all,
And it doesn't seem cricket to grouse when I've seen,
That he's worse off than I you know what I mean.

No matter how hard one may fall down the hill,
There's always a somebody lower down still,
And it makes you feel well, it seems mean to repeat,
All your own little troubles to people you meet.
One learns in the end, that self pity's a curse,
And to talk of your cares only makes them seem worse.
It takes courage to stand where it's easy to lean,
But it makes you feel better you know what I mean.

The chap we all like is the chap who can smile,
Though his heart may be breaking with sorrow the while,
He just keeps them all secretly locked in his breast,
Keep's the worm to himself, gives the world of his best.
He has losses like we have, yet never gives in,
But goes silently back to his task with a grin.
And the lesson we learn from this priceless old being,
Is to smile all the while with some laughs in between.
Though you're empty and broke, meet your fate with a joke,
For the sake of the folk who can't see what you mean
And it may be in turn even they will yet learn,
And they'll smile all the while when they see what you mean.
Do you get me? Ah well that's what I mean.

John Milton Hayes