

Classic Poetry Series

Laurence Binyon

- poems -

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A Song

For Mercy, Courage, Kindness, Mirth,
There is no measure upon earth.
Nay, they wither, root and stem,
If an end be set to them.

Overbrim and overflow,
If you own heart you would know;
For the spirit born to bless
Lives but in its own excess

Laurence Binyon

For the Fallen

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill; Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres,
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.

Laurence Binyon

In the High Leaves of a Walnut

In the high leaves of a walnut,
On the very topmost boughs,
A boy that climbed the branching bole
His cradled limbs would house.

On the airy bed that rocked him
Long, idle hours he'd lie
Alone with white clouds sailing
The warm blue of the sky.

I remember not what his dreams were;
But the scent of a leaf's enough
To house me higher than those high boughs
In a youth he knew not of,

In a light that no day brings now
But none can spoil or smutch,
A magic that I felt not then
And only now I touch.

Laurence Binyon

In the shadow of a broken house

In the shadow of a broken house,
Down a deserted street,
Propt walls, cold hearths, and phantom stairs,
And the silence of dead feet —
Locked wildly in one another's arms
I saw two lovers meet.

And over that hearthless house aghast
Rose from the mind's abyss
Lost stars and ruined, peering moons,
Worlds overshadowing this, —
Time's stony palace crumbled down
Before that instant kiss.

Laurence Binyon

Invocation to Youth

COME then, as ever, like the wind at morning!
Joyous, O Youth, in the aged world renew
Freshness to feel the eternities around it,
Rain, stars and clouds, light and the sacred dew.
The strong sun shines above thee:
That strength, that radiance bring!
If Winter come to Winter,
When shall men hope for Spring?

Laurence Binyon

Men of Verdun

There are five men in the moonlight
That by their shadows stand;
Three hobble humped on crutches,
And two lack each a hand.

Frogs somewhere near the roadside
Chorus their chant absorbed:
But a hush breathes out of the dream-light
That far in heaven is orbed.

It is gentle as sleep falling
And wide as thought can span,
The ancient peace and wonder
That brims in the heart of man.

Beyond the hills it shines now
On no peace but the dead,
On reek of trenches thunder-shocked,
Tense fury of wills in wrestle locked,
A chaos of crumbled red.

Laurence Binyon

Nothing is enough!

No, though our all be spent--
Heart's extremest love,
Spirit's whole intent,
All that nerve can feel,
All that brain invent,--
Still beyond appeal
Will Divine Desire
Yet more excellent
Precious cost require
Of this mortal stuff,--
Never be content
Till ourselves be fire.
Nothing is enough!

Laurence Binyon

O World, be Nobler

O WORLD, be nobler, for her sake!
If she but knew thee what thou art,
What wrongs are borne, what deeds are done
In thee, beneath thy daily sun,
Know'st thou not that her tender heart
For pain and very shame would break?
O World, be nobler, for her sake!

Laurence Binyon

The Children Dancing

Away, sad thoughts, and teasing
Perplexities, away!
Let other blood go freezing,
We will be wise and gay.
For here is all heart-easing,
An ecstasy at play.
The children dancing, dancing,
Light upon happy feet,
Both eye and heart entrancing
Mingle, escape, and meet;
Come joyous-eyed and advancing
Or floatingly retreat.
Now slow, now swifter treading
Their paces timed and true,
An instant poised, then threading
A maze of printless clue,
Their motions smoothly wedding
To melody anew,
They sway in chime, and scatter
In looping circles; they
Are Music's airy matter,
And their feet move, the way
The raindrops shine and patter
On tossing flowers in May.
As if those flowers were singing
For joy of the clean air,
As if you saw them springing
To dance the breeze, so fair
The lissom bodies swinging,
So light the flung-back hair.
And through the mind enchanted
A happy river goes
By its own young carol haunted
And bringing where it flows
What all in the world has wanted
And who in this world knows?

Laurence Binyon

The Healers

In a vision of the night I saw them,
In the battles of the night.
'Mid the roar and the reeling shadows of blood
They were moving like light,

Light of the reason, guarded
Tense within the will,
As a lantern under a tossing of boughs
Burns steady and still.

With scrutiny calm, and with fingers
Patient as swift
They bind up the hurts and the pain-writhen
Bodies uplift,

Untired and defenceless; around them
With shrieks in its breath
Bursts stark from the terrible horizon
Impersonal death;

But they take not their courage from anger
That blinds the hot being;
They take not their pity from weakness;
Tender, yet seeing;

Feeling, yet nerved to the uttermost;
Keen, like steel;
Yet the wounds of the mind they are stricken with,
Who shall heal?

They endure to have eyes of the watcher
In hell, and not swerve
For an hour from the faith that they follow,
The light that they serve.

Man true to man, to his kindness
That overflows all,
To his spirit erect in the thunder
When all his forts fall, —

This light, in the tiger-mad welter,
They serve and they save.
What song shall be worthy to sing of them —
Braver than the brave?

Laurence Binyon

The House That Was

Of the old house, only a few, crumbled
Courses of brick, smothered in nettle and dock,
Or a shaped stone lying mossy where it tumbled!
Sprawling bramble and saucy thistle mock
What once was fire-lit floor and private charm,
Whence, seen in a windowed picture, were hills fading
At night, and all was memory-coloured and warm,
And voices talked, secure of the wind's invading.
Of the old garden, only a stray shining
Of daffodil flames among April's Cuckoo-flowers
Or clustered aconite, mixt with weeds entwining!
But, dark and lofty, a royal cedar towers
By homelier thorns; and whether the rain drifts
Or sun scortches, he holds the downs in ken,
The western vales; his branchy tiers he lifts,
Older than many a generation of men.

Laurence Binyon

The Rain Was Ending, And Light

The rain was ending, and light
Lifting the leaden skies.
It shone upon ceiling and floor
And dazzled a child's eyes.

Pale after fever, a captive
Apart from his schoolfellows,
He stood at the high room's window
With face to the pane pressed close,

And beheld an immense glory
Flooding with fire the drops
Spilled on miraculous leaves
Of the fresh green lime-tree tops.

Washed gravel glittered red
To a wall, and beyond it nine
Tall limes in the old inn yard
Rose over the tall inn sign.

And voices arose from beneath
Of boys from school set free,
Racing and chasing each other
With laughter and games and glee.

To the boy at the high room-window,
Gazing alone and apart,
There came a wish without reason,
A thought that shone through his heart.

I'll choose this moment and keep it,
He said to himself, for a vow,
To remember for ever and ever
As if it were always now.

Laurence Binyon

The Woods Entry

So old is the wood, so old,
Old as Fear.
Wrinkled roots; great stems; hushed leaves;
No sound near.
Shadows retreat into shadow,
Deepening, crossed.
Burning light singles a low leaf, a bough,
Far within, lost.

Laurence Binyon

The Zeppelin

Guns! far and near
Quick, sudden, angry,
They startle the still street,
Upturned faces appear,
Doors open on darkness,
There is a hurrying of feet,
And whirled athwart gloom
White fingers of alarm
Point at last there
Where illumined and dumb
A shape suspended
Hovers, a demon of the starry air!
Strange and cold as a dream
Of sinister fancy,
It charms like a snake,
Poised deadly in the gleam,
While bright explosions
Leap up to it and break.
Is it terror you seek
To exult in? Know then
Hearts are here
That the plunging beak
Of night-winged murder
Strikes not with fear
So much as it strings
To a deep elation
And a quivering pride
That at last the hour brings
For them too the danger
Of those who died,
Of those who yet fight
Spending for each of us
Their glorious blood
In the foreign night. —
That now we are neared to them
Thank we God.

Laurence Binyon

To the Belgians

O race that Cæsar knew,
That won stern Roman praise,
What land not envies you
The laurel of these days?
You build your cities rich
Around each towered hall, —
Without, the statued niche,
Within, the pictured wall.
Your ship-thronged wharves, your marts
With gorgeous Venice vied,
Peace and her famous arts
Were yours: though tide on tide
Of Europe's battle scourged
Black fields and reddened soil,
From blood and smoke emerged
Peace and her fruitful toil.
Yet when the challenge rang,
"The War-Lord comes; give room!"
Fearless to arms you sprang
Against the odds of doom.
Like your own Damien
Who sought that leper's isle
To die a simple man
For men with tranquil smile,
So strong in faith you dared
Defy the giant, scorn
Ignobly to be spared,
Though trampled, spoiled, and torn,
And in your faith arose
And smote, and smote again,
Till those astonished foes
Reeled from their mounds of slain,
The faith that the free soul,
Untaught by force to quail,
Through fire and dirge and dole
Prevails, and shall prevail.
Still for your frontier stands
The host that knew no dread,
Your little, stubborn land's
Nameless, immortal dead.

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