

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Richard Francis Burton**

**- poems -**

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## **An Unpraised Picture**

I SAW a picture once by Angelo.  
"Unfinished," said the critic; "done in youth;"  
And that was all, no thought of praise, forsooth!  
He was informed, and doubtless it was so.  
And yet, I let an hour of dreaming go  
The way of all time, touched to tears and ruth,  
Passion and joy, the prick of conscience' tooth,  
Before that careworn Christ's divine, soft glow.  
The painter's yearning with an unsure hand  
Had moved me more than might his master days;  
He seemed to speak like one whose Meccaland  
Is first beheld, though faint and far the ways;  
Who may not then his shaken voice command,  
Yet trembles forth a word of prayer and praise.

Richard Francis Burton

## **Black Sheep**

FROM their folded mates they wander far,  
Their ways seem harsh and wild:  
They follow the beck of a baleful star,  
Their paths are dream-beguiled.

Yet haply they sought but a wider range,  
Some loftier mountain slope,  
And little recked of the country strange  
Beyond the gates of hope.

And haply a bell with a luring call  
Summoned their feet to tread  
Midst the cruel rocks, where the deep pitfall  
And the lurking snare are spread.

Maybe, in spite of their tameless days  
Of outcast liberty,  
They 're sick at heart for the homely ways  
Where their gathered brothers be.

And oft at night, when the plains fall dark  
And the hills loom large and dim,  
For the shepherd's voice they mutely hark,  
And their souls go out to him.

Meanwhile, "Black sheep! black sheep!" we cry,  
Safe in the inner fold;  
And maybe they hear, and wonder why,  
And marvel, out in the cold.

Richard Francis Burton

## Extras

THE CROCUSES in the Square  
Lend a winsome touch to the May;  
The clouds are vanished away,  
The weather is bland and fair;  
Now peace seems everywhere.  
Hark to the raucous, sullen cries:  
"Extra! extra!"—tersely flies  
The news, and a great hope mounts, or dies.

About the bulletin-boards  
Dark knots of people surge;  
Strained faces show, then merge  
In the inconspicuous hordes  
That yet are the Nation's lords.  
"Extra! extra! Big fight at sea!"  
Was the luck with us? Is it victory?  
Dear God, they died for you and me!

Meanwhile the crocuses down the street  
With heaven's own patience are calm and sweet.

Richard Francis Burton

## **In Sleep**

NOT drowsihood and dreams and mere idless,  
Nor yet the blessedness of strength regained,  
Alone are in what men call sleep. The past,  
My unsuspected soul, my parents' voice,  
The generations of my forbears, yea,  
The very will of God himself are there  
And potent-working: so that many a doubt  
Is wiped away at daylight, many a soil  
Washed cleanlier, many a puzzle riddled plain.  
Strong, silent forces push my puny self  
Towards unguessed issues, and the waking man  
Rises a Greatheart where a Slave lay down.

Richard Francis Burton

## **Love Is Strong**

A VIEWLESS thing is the wind,  
But its strength is mightier far  
Than a phalanx'd host in battle line,  
Than the limbs of a Samson are.

And a viewless thing is Love,  
And a name that vanisheth;  
But her strength is the wind's wild strength above,  
For she conquers shame and Death.

Richard Francis Burton

## On A Ferry Boat

THE RIVER widens to a pathless sea  
Beneath the rain and mist and sullen skies.  
Look out the window; 't is a gray emprise,  
This piloting of massed humanity  
On such a day, from shore to busy shore,  
And breeds the thought that beauty is no more.

But see yon woman in the cabin seat,  
The Southland in her face and foreign dress;  
She bends above a babe, with tenderness  
That mothers use; her mouth grows soft and sweet.  
Then, lifting eyes, ye saints in heaven, what pain  
In that strange look of hers into the rain!

There lies a vivid band of scarlet red  
With careless grace across her raven hair;  
Her cheek burns brown; and 't is her way to wear  
A gown where colors stand in satin's stead.  
Her eye gleams dark as any you may see  
Along the winding roads of Italy.

What dreamings must be hers of sunny climes,  
This beggar woman midst the draggled throng!  
How must she pine for solaces of song,  
For warmth and love to furnish laughing-times!  
Her every glance upon the waters gray  
Is piteous with some lost yesterday.

I 've seen a dove, storm-beaten, far at sea;  
And once a flower growing stark alone  
From out a rock; I 've heard a hound make moan,  
Left masterless: but never came to me  
Ere this such sense of creatures torn apart  
From all that fondles life and feeds the heart.

Richard Francis Burton

## **The First Song**

A POET writ a song of May  
That checked his breath awhile;  
He kept it for a summer day,  
Then spake with half a smile:

"Oh, little song of purity,  
Of mystic to-and-fro,  
You are so much a part of me  
I dare not let you go."

And so he made a sister-song  
With more of cunning art;  
But held the first his whole life long  
Deep hidden in his heart.

Richard Francis Burton



## The Forefather

HERE at the country inn,  
I lie in my quiet bed,  
And the ardent onrush of armies  
Throbs and throbs in my head.

Why, in this calm, sweet place,  
Where only silence is heard,  
Am I ware of the crash of conflict,—  
Is my blood to battle stirred?

Without, the night is blessed  
With the smell of pines, with stars;  
Within, is the mood of slumber,  
The healing of daytime scars.

'T is strange,—yet I am thrall  
To epic agonies;  
The tumult of myriads dying  
Is borne to me on the breeze.

Mayhap in the long ago  
My forefather grim and stark  
Stood in some hell of carnage,  
Faced forward, fell in the dark;

And I, who have always known  
Peace with her dove-like ways,  
Am gripped by his martial spirit  
Here in the after days.

I cannot rightly tell:  
I lie, from all stress apart,  
And the ardent onrush of armies  
Surges hot through my heart.

Richard Francis Burton

## **The Polar Quest**

UNCONQUERABLY, men venture on the quest  
And seek an ocean amplitude unsailed,  
Cold, virgin, awful. Scorning ease and rest,  
And heedless of the heroes who have failed,  
They face the ice floes with a dauntless zest.

The polar quest! Life's offer to the strong!  
To pass beyond the pale, to do and dare,  
Leaving a name that stirs us like a song.  
And making captive some strange Otherwhere,  
Though grim the conquest, and the labor long.

Forever courage kindles, faith moves forth  
To find the mystic floodway of the North.

Richard Francis Burton