

Classic Poetry Series

Bernard O'Dowd
- poems -

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Bernard O'Dowd(11 April 1866 – 1 September 1953)

Bernard Patrick O'Dowd was an Australian activist, educator, poet, journalist, and author of several law books and poetry books. O'Dowd worked as an assistant-librarian and later Chief Parliamentary Draughtsman in the Supreme Court at Melbourne for 48 years; he was also a co-publisher and writer for the radical paper Tocsin. Bernard O'Dowd lived to age 87.

Bernard O'Dowd was born in Beaufort, Victoria, Australia in 1866. He was a child prodigy that read Milton's, "Paradise Lost", at age 8. He was employed as a head teacher at a Catholic School in Ballarat, but was dismissed for heresy. He opened up his own school in Beaufort. In 1886, at age 20, he moved to Melbourne where he found employment in 1887 as an Assistant - Librarian in the Supreme Court Library, working for the Victorian colonial and State government until 1935, retiring as Chief Parliamentary Draughtsman.

He joined the Melbourne Lyceum, the educational and social arm of the Australian Secular Society in 1886. In 1888, a number of anarchists associated with the A.S.A, who were members of the Melbourne Anarchist club (Australia's first anarchist group formed in 1886) were expelled from the A.S.A. O'Dowd joined the progressive Lyceum, which was made up of the anarchists Monty Miller, Upham, Brookhouse and Nicholls, as well as other radical members who had been expelled from the Melbourne Lyceum. He had become the editor of the Tutor in 1888 just before the split.

His poem "Hoist the Flag" Lyceum published in the Lyceum Tutor in 1888, outlined ideas that were very similar to anarchism. O'Dowd had become a friend of the Melbourne anarcho-communist Jack Andrews, and in 1897, O'Dowd and two others set up the radical paper Tocsin. In 1898, he was co-editor of Tocsin with Jack Andrews. He continued to be an editor, contributor and financial supporter of Tocsin until Andrews died of tuberculosis in 1903. During these six years, he published numerous radical poems, and used the pages of the Tocsin to express his opposition to Federation and The Boer War. In 1902, he issued a pamphlet "Conscience and Democracy" which opposed the Boer War.

Like Chummy Fleming who protested the opening of the first parliament in 1901, O'Dowd saw grave problems in Federation and wrote a clause by clause critique of the draft Federal Bill. He saw StateFederal rivalry as a future danger to working people. He warned of the unspecified powers given to the Governor General, which were ultimately used by Sir John Kerr, the CIA's 'Our Man in Australia', in dismissing the Whitlam Labor Government in 1975.

Between 1903 to 1921, O'Dowd turned his attention to poetry and published six poetry books. Dawnward (1903), The Silent Land (1906), Dominion of the Boundary (1907), The Seven Deadly Sins (1909), The Bush (1912) and Alma Venus (1921). His most well known pamphlet "a plea for purpose in poetry", Poetry Militant, was published in 1909. In it he asks, "Why should poetry be militant nowadays? I hear some ask Because This is an Age of Revolt and Reconstruction, because the Poet is the father and mother of wise rebellion and because he, being in touch with the Infinite, the Permanent is most potent and far-reaching stimulator of Reconstruction".

O'Dowd was married and had five sons. In 1920, he left his wife and moved in with Marie Pitt, the editor of the Victorian Socialist and also a poet. He lived with her until her death in 1948. He and Pitt became members of the Unitarian church, denied the trinity and saw the historical Jesus Christ as an anarchist.

Although O'Dowd grappled constantly with the conflict between his work for the government and his radical politics, according to the Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB) "His optimism about human destiny never failed", and a few months before his death at 87, "he affirmed his almost religious belief in anarchist communism.

A Keynote [extract]

Heard, from the speaking stones that strew
The hillside of Success;
From spheres whose harmonies anew
Can those who listen bless;

From breaths of every sacred isle
By which my Muses move,
Released from battle's claim a while,
In Brendan voyage of Love;

From shambles of the Dispossessed;
From Croesus in his sty;
From old Democracy obsessed
By fiends about to die:

Read, in the scars of veterans
In Want's resultless fray;
In noon-day Science' futile plans
To yoke the soul to clay;

In watchings of the social sky
And soundings of its deep;
And where Oppression's vultures fly,
And sad Redeemers weep;

'Neath living palimpsests of Pain;
On shards of deathless song;
hi God's magnificent disdain
Of Might enthroned on Wrong;

Read where, unheeded, outcasts groan,
And waits Rebellion's form:
These verses voice an undertone-
The prelude to a storm?

Bernard O'Dowd

Alma Venus! [excerpt]

Trembling Creation's omnipresent sun,
Immanent Harmonist, Whose rhythms run.
Alike where midge pursues his swift romance,
Or grave stars cluster for their midnight dance 1
Bringer of fire, from what far fane despoiled?
Potter of grace, by what fell finger soiled?
In temple throned of old, or here in shame
Lurking, to Deathless YOU, of many a name-
Paphia, Freya, Aphrodite, Fand,
Cabiri vague, or in the fairy band

Titania, Niamh, or that Morgan fay
Our simpler eyes in. Sicily to-day
Catch at her sorcery-to YOU, whose breath
To a rippling rapture stirs the pool of Death,
I bring this coronal of rose and rue,
With golden wattle twined-and she-oak too.

* * *

The living wheels we call Creation roll
Whither and while You lead. Who are their soul!
Wheels within wheels, and whose the whirl of eyes
But Love's, Who was. Who is. Who never dies?
Wheels within wheels, but ever at the nave
Venus Pandemos, She for Whom we crave!
Wheels within wheels, but glowing from the tires
Venus Immaculate's Uranian fires!

* * *

If lovelight played not round the misty bourn
Could Life her marshy perils thread unworn?
Were Heaven's many mansions built to hold
Women and men seraphically cold?
Or does annihilation mean but this-
'Tristram no more desires Isolda's kiss'?

* * *

Fountains of Art that keep this old Earth fresh
Ascend to God from cisterns of the flesh:
Angel and phoenix flowered from the fires
Of virgin Ishtar's ravenous desires:
In good Nile mud incestuous Isis set
Many a tree of knowledge bearing yet:
Austere Mohammed meets at Heaven's door
Fond phantoms of his desert dreams of yore:
The shrine, the song, the picture and the bust
Are diamonds doubles of the charcoal, lust. . .

* * *

Your ruby billows floated to our ken
Many a rite that soothes the souls of men;
Swastik of Ind as once Egyptian Tau
In shining symbol utters yet Your law:
And coldest fanes for eunuch gods designed
Reveal Your girdle with their chaplets twined.
Around the Maypole, aeon-old, they dance,
Maiden and youth of Britain and of France,
Obedient to the law, forgot to-day,
That fertile gods, unshackled by their play,
From winter death will duly be reborn
And with their foison fill the ears of corn:
Or where, horizonward, Australian sand
Billows monotonous, behold Your band
Of leaf-clad lubras, swaying to the hum
Of droning wizard and barbaric drum,
In strange Unthippa dance to conjure there,
With warm wild posturing and coy despair,
Some dream-time god of golden ages dim,
That with the drama of their love for him
The waste in sympathy will fertile grow,
Emu be plentiful, the dry creeks flow,
And all the wild be rich with nut and plant,
Witchetty grub and root and honey-ant:
Virgins and boys, who with the bridal pair
And hymeneal chant through Athens bear
That casket strange, unknowing that inside
The mysteries of Aphrodite hide,

Ye will acknowledge too, in turn, ere long,
Omnipotent the goddess of my song:
And, childless ones of Ind, with prayer ye pour
Oil on that shrine to-day, as wives of yore
On wayside Jahv or god of boundary,
For benison of grudged fertility. . . .

* * *

Let pale usurpers of Your old domain
In crumbling book and vapid hymn maintain
That You, great Queen, are dead, that nevermore
Shall devotee Your majesty adore,
Or sad Meander wail as long ago
For torn Adonis and Your helpless woe:
We hear in beating hearts another rune,
In hymn of man and maid another tune:
On every road Your living creatures draw,
Whither You list, the Tables of Your Law:
Wherever tree hath sap or being breath,
Ubiquitous, You bruise the head of Death:
Here, pallid cuckoo's great crescendos call
His coy companion to Your festival:
There, magpie warbles to the morning star
The advent of the rapture that You are:
And desolate the spirit unaware
Of quivering enchantment in the air
When August struggles from his gaoler's power,
And gleaming envoys from each wooing flower
Cajole the bees to waft his tender dues
To some dear tabernacle's secret cruse;
When listening almonds weary of the night
Hearing You coming blossom into white;
When wattle waking from her torpor cold
Knowing You near her trembles into gold;
When, ancient symbols realizing here,
Gabriel Spring announces every year
To expectant Nature's myriad maidenhood,
In rolling plain or solitary wood,
The miracle that maketh Life complete,
The brooding Presence of the Paraclete.

* * *

Magi profounder than the Eastern Three
Followed the Star of Your Epiphany:
Isis had hidden with a sullen pall
The secret of the Universe from all,
Until Lucretius wondering found a fold,
It swayed to Goethe's eyes, and, growing bold,
Darwin stooped down and groping patiently
Out of the dust lifted the hem, till we
Staggering saw against the eternal blue
The secret Builder of Creation-You I ...

* * *

'When Love was driven from the world by stark
And sexless mattoids of the Ages Dark,
Disgusted lore to Moorish havens fled,
The Muses nine with eunuch monks were wed:
Primordial terror to the day returned,
The witch in hordes and great Servetus burned:
Celibate piety with thumb uncouth
Plastered a fig-leaf over Plato's truth:
Aquinas thinned, to make a draught divine,
With holy water, Aristotle's wine;
Round every comer eft or devil stares,
And very Dante mumbles craven prayers;
The childish painter daubs his maudlin fears,
And song forgets to sing a thousand years.
Yet You had lingered cunningly concealed
Now in an altar-piece, now in a field
With shards of pillared grandeur buried deep,
Until the nightmare passed. Yea, did You peep
A moment now and then, ere rose the sun,
Under the hood of a rose-hearted nun
At Abelard, or told the tale so well
Of Launcelot that even glowering hell
Drove not Francesca from her lover's wraith;
Yea, visored chivalry unhorsed his faith,
And far Jerusalem and Paynim tryst
Forgot, for victory in a gender list
Where with the provocation of a smile

Your ambushed omnipresence would beguile
Crusader sullen to a softer creed,
Knight errant to an errant knight indeed....

* * *

As what strange god did You entice the King
Through brave Uriah's comely wife to fling
Harp and the psaltery aside to plan
As mean a deed as had polluted man
Till Sextus lusted, or her father's knife
Rescued Virginia from the hell of life?
Yea, there is that in You man dare not face:
A dark star dogs Your limpid planet's grace:
Jetsam from old pollution stales Your shore:
Lewd gargoyles grin above Your temple door. ...
Wormwood is waiter at Your choicest feast,
Your Beauty shadowed ever by the Beast.
Yon feudal lord of mediaeval France,
Your devotee of many a Rose Romance,
Hath on his peasants' daughters' bridal nights
Exacted to the full his shameful rights:
Your cuckoo calling Spring into the wood
Was stark nest-brother to a robin's brood:
And, tragi-comedy of humble life,
That doting husband of the buxom wife
Is fondling (while You laugh) the child she gave
At Your still altar to some passing knave. . . .

* * *

Was it a glimpse of phases fell that mar
The radiant round of Your auspicious star,
That drove the hermit to the wilderness
From demons lurking in Your least caress,
And bade the nun, as once the vestal too,
Renounce Your works and all Your pomps-and You?
Yea, those whose eyes can pierce the dazzling veil
Of Light that is Your mask have told a tale
Of how we in the world were once expelled
From Paradise, and now, in prison held,
On moaning treadmills of repeated lives

Work out our crimes, until the hour arrives
For life to cease on earth and You to fade
With all the woe Your temptress wiles have made.
You are the gaoler of that prison, Who
(For so they say) inveigle all to woo,
Be won, that so by our own ardours we
Keep lit Your hell, yea, for eternity,
Unless, until, ignoring all You say,
As monk, as nun, we dare to disobey.
If so it be, then were the barren one
Blest of all women underneath the sun,
An angel of the Lord sent here to ray
The midnight of the soul with coming day;
The tower impregnable that masters Fate
Is not the Caesar but the celibate;
And he at whom no woman ever smiled
Is everlasting Heaven's favoured child
Ordained (who knows?) in what benignant star
As Baptist of some glorious Avatar,
Whose Word shall cause all flesh to cease to be
And man be one again with Deity!. . .

* * *

Or when the veil we call Reality
Rifts, and the meaning of it all we see,
Will Good and Evil kiss and understand?
God walk with brother Satan hand in hand?
The cool-haired Night repose beside the Sun?
Pandemos prove with Love Uranian one?

* * *

The Tree of Life mature its golden fruits
From bark so sinister and those wan roots?
Slowly our interrogating eyes
Sobered with long deception recognize,
'Mid older clues dissolved to flecks, at last
One signal flashing from the Outer Vast,
Fell or benign (as falls or rises faith),
Comet or guiding star-Your rosy wraith!
Your rosy wraith that both in man and weed

'Writes deep and undeniable Your creed-
'Beget or hear, though ye to-morrow die,
Beget or bear, nor ask the reason why 1
Though sun and earth shall duly pass away,
Though all the gods shall ripen and decay,
It is Their Will Who bade the world exist:
And woe to him or her who doth not list
The sole clear mandate from the Otherwhere
Flushed through the Universe-Beget or bear 1'
Love we or dread we may not all ignore
The single beacon on the circling shore
Where Being laps upon the caverned steep
Wherefrom we drifted and whereto we creep.
Beacon 1 although You lead us but to gloom!
A guiding star, it may be, to the tomb!
Comet flung from the Void through trackless Light!
Yet is Your rosy flame in ion mite
And great pathetic man the only trace
Of something more than chance in Time and Space,
That purpose dimly threads the crazy web,
That tides of anguish ultimately ebb,
That green hope signals underground a Nile,
That faith is wiser than an ostrich wile,
That there is something in us will elude
The withering fingers of vicissitude,

* * *

And man's ripe earth by a guttering sun betrayed
Will not in cold and useless ruin fade.
Question the sibyl grottoes near or far
Whither or whence we sail or why we are!
Listen at Nature's beating heart for clue,
And every oracle we know or knew!
From Zodiac round of older destiny,
From tiny orbit of an atomy,
From Pythoness or oak or Magian fire,
Augur antique or wizard new inquire,
Austral churinga or the crystal ball,
'Wherefore does anything exist at all?'
Of star or fungus seek, of life or death,
Whence Being came and whither wandereth!

Ask of the gloom that locks the secret in,
Ask of the light that saw the world begin!

The day, the night, and death and life are dumb:
From fungus, star or ball no answers come:
Silent, churinga, table, passing bird:
From fire or Druid oak no guiding word:
The Pythoness ambiguously sighs:
Orbit minute nor Zodiac house replies:
But dim the beating heart amid its sobs
With 'Alma Venus!' 'Alma Venus!' throbs;
While on two sibyl leaves, by a world-wind strange
Blown to our shore across the gulf of Change,
'Increase and multiply' on one is scrolled
In ochre crude, on one, in glowing gold
Around the pearly nimbus of a dove,
The script imperishable-'God is Love.'

Bernard O'Dowd

Auster Rampant!

A larger Argo ploughs our clearer blue!
Your Zephyr won no such auroral bride
As her I woo! The South is whence the tide
Springs downhill to refresh the North and you!
To melt your adamantine basements too,
When, as your sagas sang, the flaming-eyed
Children of Southern Muspel scatter wide
Your world, your gods, when Ragnarok is due!

Antipodean? Whew! We are the head,
The oceanic head, while you, slung low
With lands that scrape the floor of heaven, gaze,
Par o'er the Bull your odd Europa wed,
Up to the Chambers of the South where glow
Our pennant stars, our wider Milky Ways!

Bernard O'Dowd

Australia

LAST sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?
Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race?
Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
Or but a Will o' Wisp on marshy quest?
A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
Or lurks millennial Eden 'neath your face?

The cenotaphs of species dead elsewhere
That in your limits leap and swim and fly,
Or trail uncanny harp-strings from your trees,
Mix omens with the auguries that dare
To plant the Cross upon your forehead sky,
A virgin helpmate Ocean at your knees.

Bernard O'Dowd

Bacchus [excerpt]

I am the gift of tongues that flame
Inspired resolve above:
I wither the weeds of paltry aim
That choke the growth of love.

Though sometimes thro' forbidden gates,
The drugged and drunken may
Intrude among initiates
And misconceive the play,

No self-indulgence walks my stage;
My frenzies make divine:
My banqueter is saint and sage,
A eucharist my wine:

No desecrated home shall be,
No vice-predestined birth,
No stews of maudlin gluttony,
When Bacchus rules the earth.

My rage that lit the cold Greek brow
And burned from Orphic lyre,
Flames down the years to Tolstoi now
And back to Celtic fire.

I glowed in Hermit Peter's words,
Savonarola's grim,
St. Francis understood the birds
Because I cherished him.

I am the surging Energy
No wintry Law can tame:
Nay, the god that overpowers me
Is Bacchus save in name.

'Tis not alone on Naxian sod
Or mythic welkin, where
Pale Ariadne meets her god,
And Bacchus gladdens her,

I shine as bright from Nietzsche's eyes
And grave Salvationist's,
As once in Soma sacrifice
Or through Thessalian mists.

And equally to fast and feast
I give my benison-
Now, Father Mathew is my priest,
And now Anacreon.

'Tis not enough that you avow
Allegiance at my gates;
Many who bear the wattle-bough
Are not initiates;

Nor all the revellers, though dear,
Who beat my doors with prayers,
But sing so sweet they cannot hear
The poor who knock at theirs:

For 'Truth for Truth' and 'Art for Art'
And Song for the sake of Song,
Must wait the turn of the breaking heart,
Till Bacchus purges Wrong.

All that in Love ye cannot buy,
In genius baffling prayer,
In Art beyond the measuring eye,
Is immanent Bacchus there.

But fearful are my Mystae when,
To Bacchanalian hymn,
They wrench the brute from the souls of men
And tear it limb from limb:

The old gods shuddered; for they saw
Their altar flames expire
Before the breath of a Higher Law
That crucifies Desire:

The old priests paled; till some more wise

Built fanes where're I trod,
Carried my throne to Olympian skies,
And named me the Son of God. . . .

Bernard O'Dowd

Dominions Of The Boundary

The Survival Of The Gods

1 Twilight

The gods of Nature abdicate
When man intrudes too far:
The Dryad leaves her woodland state,
And Jove his thunder-car:

No more Apollo reins the sun
Or Neptune rides the sea,
The race of Oread is run,
And Pan has ceased to be:

The formless Winds are roaming through
Druidic grove and vale:
Deserted Asgard and Meru
For Thor and Indra wail:

Majestic Forms oblivion 'scape
As kelpie, sylph, and gnome,
Astarte hides in gentler shape,
And Vestals hearthless roam:

Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers,
Fall from Their Mystic Tree,
And sacrilegious Time devours
Each Principality.

2 Sceptic:

Whatever dramas of the Vast
About our drama play,
Or necromancies from the past

Project their gloom to-day,
We seem to hear the Uncreate
Slowly let this be known-
That man has fashioned all his fate
And stands, on earth, alone:

That all he needs was in him stored,
Material and plan;
That ne'er was deity adored
But first was made by man.

3 The Abiding Gods:

But tho' we mumble sceptic saw,
Or sweet old prayers forget;
And tho' we dream of Higher Law,
The gods are living yet:

For they who will no Monitor,
Save One Unnamed, allow,
Allegiance deep to Love or War,
Or Chance or Wind avow:

Avow by no mere cult of names,
No pattering of creeds,
But by the sacrificial flames
Of lifelong thoughts and deeds.

When mediaeval hurricane
The gods in exile drove,
'Thrice-greatest' Hermes and his train
Usurped the seats of Jove:

Where still their Wisdom rules the spheres
Of yet uncharted Law,
By building in our nerves the fears
Our sires in Nature saw:

In other garments everywhere,
Behold, the prophetess,
Clairaudient interpreter,
Clairvoyant Pythoness!

Suburban Delphis for the rich,
The Gnosis for the staid!
Perennial by the road, the witch
Of Endor plies her trade!

4 Mystic:

All is not daylight in the day,
Or knowledge in the known;
The life we are, the prayer we pray,
From deep, to deep, is blown.

Though Reason claim omniscient worth
And lush her dogmas thrive:
Our present home is more than earth,
Our senses more than five.

And the mystic who sees the star-folk throng,
Where we but the noonday blue,
Knows no religion yet was wrong
And never a myth untrue.

The wrong road now was the old high way
Of young Truth's caravan;
To-morrow is not to-day, to-day,
Or the baby yet a man.

Though mountain watchmen daily see
Horizons widen far,
Dominions of the Boundary
Have ever ruled, and are.

5 Heracleitic:

The lines of godhood all converge
At last to unity:
And the images of all emerge
From every god we see.

So Hermes here and Venus there
Are Memory, are Fate;
And all are Winds; and the Sirens fair
Mute in the Wisdoms wait.

All life is a stream and mortals stand
On a heaving and passing earth:
And the land of gods is a changing land
As the land that gave it birth.

Life is a stream: through a gorge we go
'Tween a deep and a living deep:
Form is the gorge, and change is the flow,
And the source and the mouth are sleep.

6 Historic:

Torrential barbarisms need
Charioteers of Pain:
And wise gods sleep when men recede
To callow youth again.

But in that age-long sleep have waned
A myriad gods, or fled:
Olympic altars are disdained
And Gnostic Wisdom dead.

For what to Vandals or to Huns,
When Rome's red lips were ripe,
Were calm Hellenic Shining Ones,
Or Gnostic Archetype?

Yet Time matured to mellow wine
The Roman-Gothic must,
For Mercy and a Maid Divine
Subdued the hate and lust:

Till Hedonist and Stoic hold
Antique debates anew:
And hither return the virtues old
(Alas! and old vice too!).

Marooned no more, we sail the sea,
Ere sad gods were, we knew:
And from Platonic prows decree-
'The gods are Me, are You!'

7 Omni-Benevolence:

Yet, shaping slowly through the storm
And bidding darkness fade,
Evolving eyes discern a Form
No clay-creator made:

A Symbol Form that mirrors ours,
That is, yet is not, we,
That seems to hint of Higher Powers
Than Fate or Memory:

That takes the image as we gaze
Of the Holiest Ones that were:
For here It looks from Jesus' face,
And from Mohammed's, there:

'Tis Moses, yea, 'tis Krishna's form;
'Tis fire, 'tis star, 'tis sun:
A myriad now Its faces swarm,
Now, All and It are One:

The Chinese 'Way' one watcher sees,
And one a Brooding Dove,
One Baldur, Buddh or Socrates-
But always It is Love.

Bernard O'Dowd

Envy

Black drips the ooze that you secrete on all
That Honour's burin graves or Love holds dear:
At sacrifice you laugh, at virtue sneer,
And sour rebellion's must, the waking thrall
Would ripen into Freedom, with the gall
Of green suspicion. God of drones, you hear
Mutter of plots in all Success: on seer
And saint behold your own foul motives crawl.
O Gluttony that would but dare not gorge!
Theft of the heart that dreads the handcuff! Hate,
Too cowardly to hurl the bolts you forge!
And Lust that fears to pluck the flowers you smell!
Too low your lintel to seduce the great!
The meanest of the Seven doors of Hell!

Bernard O'Dowd

Evensong

There was a time we had the power
To build with Silent Thought
The perfect heaven-reaching tower,
As ancient seers have taught.
And periods have been when all
Felt subtle agencies
Envelop life with gloomy pall
Or glad sublimities:

When each felt safe in God's own care,
When eyes had farther sweep,
When angels' visits were not rare,
And Conscience dared not sleep:

'When Silent Lands, that no one heeds
But sentries of the van,
Displayed their good or evil deeds
Before the eyes of man:

'When all could read the Silent Script,
And ope the Temple's bars:
When every blade of grass was tipped
With signals from. the stars.

But now, for trust mayhap betrayed
Or pride too loosely checked,
The Silent Oracles evade
Our questions too direct.

Precisian pundits bid us think
The gods have never been:
The daylight pales the forms that link
The Silence -with the Seen:

Usurping Sun the sky-folk pens
Unwindowed in his blue;
The trumpet blare of common-sense
Our hearing deafens too:

But when we bid the band retire,
And the Sun unhorse his cars,
We hear an empyrean choir
And see-the Silent Stars.

Bernard O'Dowd

Last Stanzas Of The Bush

WHERE is Australia, singer, do you know?
These sordid farms and joyless factories,
Mephitic mines and lanes of pallid woe?
Those ugly towns and cities such as these
With incense sick to all unworthy power,
And all old sin in full malignant flower?
No! to her bourn her children still are faring:
She is a temple that we are to build:
For her the ages have been long preparing:
She is a prophecy to be fulfilled!

All that we love in olden lands and lore
Was signal of her coming long ago!
Bacon foresaw her, Campanella, More,
And Plato's eyes were with her star aglow!
Who toiled for Truth, whate'er their countries were,
Who fought for Liberty, they yearned for her!
No corsair's gathering ground, nor tryst for schemers,
No chapman Carthage to a huckster Tyre,
She is the Eldorado of old dreamers,
The Sleeping Beauty of the world's desire.

She is the scroll on which we are to write
Mythologies our own and epics new:
She is the port of our propitious flight
From Ur idolatrous and Pharaoh's crew.
She is our own, unstained, if worthy we,
By dream, or god, or star we would not see:
Her crystal beams all but the eagle dazzle.
Her wind-wide ways none but the strong-winged sail:
She is Eutopia, she is Hy-Brasil,
The watchers on the tower of morning hail!

Yet she shall be as we, the Potter, mould:
Altar or tomb, as we aspire, despair:
What wine we bring shall she, the chalice, hold:
What word we write shall she, the script, declare:
Bandage our eyes, she shall be Memphis, Spain:
Barter our souls, she shall be Tyre again:

And if we pour on her the red oblation,
All o'er the world shall Asshur's buzzards throng:
Love-lit, her Chaos shall become Creation:
And dewed with dream, her silence flower in song.

Bernard O'Dowd

Love And Sacrifice

CAN we not consecrate
To man and God above
This volume of our great
Supernal tide of love?

'Twere wrong its wealth to waste
On merely me and you,
In selfish touch and taste,
As other lovers do.

This love is not as theirs:
It came from the Divine,
Whose glory still it wears,
And print of Whose design.

The world is full of woe,
The time is blurred with dust,
Illusions breed and grow,
And eyes' and flesh's lust.

The mighty league with Wrong
And stint the weakling's bread;
The very lords of song
With Luxury have wed.

Fair Art deserts the mass,
And loiters with the gay;
And only gods of brass
Are popular to-day.

Two souls with love inspired,
Such lightning love as ours,
Could spread, if we desired,
Dismay among such powers:

Could social stables purge
Of filth where festers strife:
Through modern baseness surge
A holier tide of life.

Yea, two so steeped in love
From such a source, could draw
The angels from above
To lead all to their Law.

We have no right to seek
Repose in rosy bower,
When Hunger thins the cheek
Of childhood every hour:

Nor while the tiger, Sin,
'Mid youths and maidens roams,
Should Duty skulk within
These selfish cosy homes.

Our place is in the van
With those crusaders, who
Maintain the rights of man
'Gainst despot and his crew.

If sacrifice may move
Their load of pain from men,
The greatest right of Love
Is to renounce It then.

Ah, Love, the earth is woe's
And sadly helps needs:
And, till its burden goes,
Our work is—where it bleeds.

Bernard O'Dowd

May Day

Come Jack, our place is with the ruck
On the open road today,
Not with the tepid "footpath sneak"
Or with the wise who stop away.

A straggling, tame procession, perhaps,
A butt for burgess scorn;
Its flags are ragged sentiments,
And its music's still unborn.

Though none respectable are here,
And trim officials ban,
Our duty, Jack, is not with them,
But here with Hope and Man.

Nor have we cause for shame, who see,
In the glory-lighted street,
The Old Brigade of Liberty
The partial ranks complete.

There's Shelley, Byron, arm in arm,
With Schiller, Uhland, near:
While cheek by jowl with anarch "crank"
See young Camille appear.

Marat keeps line with Spartacus,
Lone Dantes grimly stalk;
The meagre Knights of Labour "push"
With the Twelve Apostles walk.

Bakunin, Marx, Lassalle are there,
Grey Whitman's with the Greeks,
Dutch "Beggar" chums with Ironside,
Or to Bastille hero speaks.

Valliant and Brutus, Vane, Kossuth,
Find here a fitting tryst;
That Yarra-banker far ahead
Is keeping step with Christ.

Before, behind, around, surge on
Those unknown Great, whose yeast,
Impermeant, ensures result,
Tho' Hope's own song had ceased.

With flowers today the sky's festooned;
To yearning hosts a-sigh
On winds perfumed with memories
May's fair-winged forecasts fly.

No longer prostitute to Wealth,
among the aery show
The Lyric Muse accompanies
The Marseillaise below.

And how the gales of Freedom move,
Like wildfire's leap and fall,
Or north wind's through autumnal grass,
The red flags over all.

Yes! Ther's our place, whatever flames
Those nearing clouds display,
Tho' much they mean to footpath sneaks
And the wise who stop away.

Bernard O'Dowd

Proletaria

THE SUNNY rounds of Earth contain
An obverse to its Day,
Our fertile Vagrancy's domain,
Wan Proletaria.

From pole to pole of Poverty
We stumble through the years,
With hazy-lanterned Memory
And Hope that never nears.

Wherever Plenty's crop invites
Our pitiful brigades,
Lurk cannoneers of Vested Rights,
Juristic ambushades;

And here hangs Rent, that squalid cage
Within which Mammon thrusts,
Bound with the fetter of a wage,
The helots of his lusts.

With palsied Doubt as guide, we wind
Among the lanes of Need,
Where meagre Hungers scouting find
But slavered baits of Greed.

The wet-lipped Lamias of Caste,
Awaiting our advance,
Our choicest squadrons' fealty blast
With magic smile and glance:

Delilah-limbed temptations flit
Among our drowsy rows,
And on our willing captains fit
The badges of our foes.

What wonder sometimes if in stealth
Our starker outposts wait,
And, in the prowling eyes of Wealth,
Dash vitriol of Hate;

Or if our Samsons, ere too late,
Their treasons should make good
By whelming in the temple's fate
Their viper owners' brood!

Our polyandrous dam has borne
To Satan and to God
The hordes of Night, the clans of Morn,
That through our valleys plod.

Ah, motherhood of misery
For Christ-child as for pest!
The greater her fertility
The drier grows her breast!

Too many linger on the track;
A few outstrip the time:
Some, God has tattooed yellow, black,
And some disguised with crime.

Art's living archives here abound,
Carraras of Despair,
And those weird masks of Sight and Sound
The Tragic Muses wear.

Tho' blind and dull, 'tis we supply
The Painter's dazzling dreams;
The rolling flood of Poetry
From our dumb chaos streams.

Nay, when your world is over-tired,
And Genius comatose,
Our race, by Nemesis inspired,
Old Order overthrows:

With earthquake-life we thrill your land,
Refill the cruse of Art,
Revitalize spent Wisdom, and—
Resume our weary part.

The palace of successful Guilt

Is mortared with our shame;
On hecatombs of Us are built
The soaring towers of Fame.

We are the gnomes of Titan works
Whose throbbings never cease;
Our unregarded signet lurks
On every masterpiece.

The floating isles, that shuttling tie
All peoples into one
By adept steermen's sorcery
Of magnet, steam, and sun;

Religion's dolmens, Sphinxes, spires,
Her Biblic armouries;
The helot lightning of the wires
That mesh your lands and seas;

The viaducts 'tween Near and Far,
Whereon, o'er range and mead,
Bacchantic Trade's triumphant car
And iron tigers speed;

The modern steely crops that rise
Where technic Jasons sow:
—All these but feebly symbolize
The largesse we bestow.

And our reward? In this wan land,
In clientage of Greed,
Despised, polluted, maimed and banned,
To wander and—to breed

Bernard O'Dowd

Prosperity

Enlaced with gardened jewelry
My basking villas nest
Where sifted sunshine soothes the eye
And cosy hillocks rest.

Convention's fronds here screen from view
Immodest Nature's haunt,
And wizard Distance veils in blue
The haggard peaks of Want.

The millions fast that I may feast,
And drudge that I may play;
But Average, complacent priest,
Condone the wrong away:

Finesse, my statesman, calculates
Subjection's breaking strain,
And Comfort crooning mitigates
The drifting moan of pain.

My sages God's commandments frame
From maxims of the desk:
My Art, from poverty and shame,
Evolves the Picturesque:

By glamour haloed, leering Lust
So angel-like appears
That Scruple loses her distrust,
And Innocence her fears.

Secure I lounge upon the shore
Where Anger's breakers throb,
Or, high above the marsh, ignore
Its ague-smitten mob.

The highways to Desire I hold,
And fatten on the fees;
My hungry Science gathers gold
From limbecks of disease.

Success, my sorcerer, refines
My murder-tainted hoard,
And hides the felon weals and lines
With which my back is scored:

He perfumes from my women's gowns
Their tainted makers' shame;
In Glory cyclic Wrong he drowns,
And Treachery in Fame.

Who reaches me a stream must ford
Whose popped waters dim
Old dreams of wielding Freedom's sword
And chanting Freedom's hymn:

Must hold the claims of Discontent
Mere envies of the mass;
That Life's repose was only meant
To dower the ruling class:

Must learn that Nature weakness scorns,
That God the serfs ignores,
That Toil deserves its crown of thorns,
And Poverty its sores;

That tho' 'tis wise with Charity
Torrential Need to dam,
The Hope of Progress is a lie
And Brotherhood a sham.

Bernard O'Dowd

Sloth (I) & (II)

Sloth (I)

Too many a Samsan lip your teeth indent:
Too many a Sybil girl you lure to make
The Great Refusal for a fireside sake:
And glamoured poet many a look has sent
Into those eyeballs bear-brown, somnolent,
Nor dreamed that devils in each muddy lake
Were sucking his devotion in to slake
The furrowed belly of your fanged content!
Religion's bane and Freedom's subtlest foe!
Behold the popped freight your barges bring
The dim-lit souls that crave the prophet's gleam,
Or fettered people's writhing 'neath their woe--
Gossamer clips and thriftless harvesting
Of phantom flocks and shadowy tilth of dream!

Sloth (II)

My dreams dissolve the day's illusive net:
While crested Action's billows blinding beat,
Omniscient Eyes in troughs of Faith I meet:
I wait with ancient stars until they set
Lest forward progress should their runes forget:
I am the rest that makes the bar complete:
And, in the shackled body of Defeat,
The womb of Baby Triumph living yet!
I am the blende of sleeping radiance:
The Siding where belated Industry
Draws from a Silent Tank tomorrow's zest:
Prophetic Art's preparatory Trance:
Dilating Force's Sabbath systole:
The Night of Brahm when worn Creators rest!

Bernard O'Dowd

The Bush

I wonder if the spell, the mystery,
That like a haze about your silence clings,
Moulding your void until we seem to see
Tangible Presences of Deathless Things,
Patterned but little to our spirits' woof,
Yet from our love or hate not all aloof,
Can. be the matrix where are forming slowly
Troy tales of Old Australia, to refine
Eras to come of ordered melancholy
'Neath lily-pale Perfection's anodyne.

For Troy hath ever been, and Homer sang
Its younger story for a lodging's fee,
While o'er Scamander settlers' axes rang
Amid the Bush where Ilium was to be.
For Cretan Art, dim centuries before,
Minoan Dream-times some Briseis bore.
Sumerian Phoebus by a willowed water
Song-built a Troy for far Chaldea, where
The sons of God, beholding Leda's daughter,
Bartered eternal thrones for love of her.

Across each terraced aeon Time hath sowed
With green tautology of vanished years,
Gaping aghast or webbed with shining lode,
Achilles' anger's earthquake-rift appears.
The towers that Phoebus builds can never fall:
Desire that Helen lights can never pall:
Yea, wounded Love hath still but gods to fly to,
When lust of war inflames Diomedes:
Must some Australian Hector vainly die, too?
Captives in ships? (O change that omen, Trees!)

Yea, Mother Bush, in your deep dreams abide
Cupids alert for man and maid unborn,
Apprentice Pucks amid your saplings hide,
And wistful gorges wait a Roland horn:
Wallet of Sigurd shall this swag replace,
And centaurs curvet where those brumbies race.

That drover's tale of love shall greaten duly
Through magic prisms of a myriad years,
Till bums Isolde to Tristram's fervour newly,
Or Launcelot to golden Guinevere's.

The miner cradling washdirt by the creek,
Or pulled through darkness dripping to the plat:
The navvy boring tunnels through the peak:
The farmer grubbing box-trees on the flat:
The hawker camping by the roadside spring:
The hodman on the giddy scaffolding:
Moths that around the fashion windows flutter:
The racecourse spider and the betting fly:
The children romping by the city gutter,
While baby crows to every passer-by-

From these rough blocks strewn o'er our ancient stream
Sculptors shall chisel brownie, fairy, faun,
Any myrmidons of some Homeric dream
From Melbourne mob and Sydney push be drawn.
The humdrum lives that now we tire of, then
Romance shall be, and 'we heroic men
Treading the vestibule of Golden Ages,
The Isthmus of the Land of Heart's Desire:
For lo! the Sybil's final volume's pages
Ope with our Advent, close when we expire.

Forgetful Change in one 'antiquity'
Boreal gleams shall drown, and southern glows;
Out of some singing woman's heart-break plea
Australia's dawn shall flush with Sappho's rose:
Strong Shirlow's hand shall trace Mantegna's line,
And Soma foam from Victor Daley's wine:
Scholars to be our prehistoric drama
From Esson's 'Woman Tamer' shall restore,
Or find in Gilbert's 'Lotus Stream and Lama'
An Austral Nile and Buddhas we adore.

The sunlit Satyrs follow Hugh McCrae,
Quinn spans the ocean with a Celtic ford,
And Williamson the Pan-pipe learns to play
From magpie-songs our schoolboy ears ignored:

A sweeter woe no keen of Erin gave
Than Kendall sings o'er Araluen's grave:
Tasmanian Wordsworth to his chapel riding
The Burning Bush and Ardath mead shall pass,
Or, from the sea-coast of Bohemia gliding
On craft of dream, behold a shepherd lass.

Jessie Mackay on Southern Highlands sees
The elves deploy in kem and gallowglass:
Our Gilbert Murray writes 'Euripides':
Pirani merges in Pythagoras:
Marsyas plunges into Lethe, flayed,
From Rhadamanthine Stephens' steady blade:
While Benvenuto Morton, drunk with singing,
Sees salamanders in a bush-fire's bed,
And Spencer sails from Alcheringa bringing
Intaglios, totems and Books of the Dead.

On Southern fiords shall Brady's Long Snakes hiss,
Heavy with brides he wins to Viking troth:
O'Reilly's Sydney shall be Sybaris,
While Melbourne's Muses sup their Spartan broth:
Murdoch, Zenobia's counsellor, in time,
Redacts from Burke his book on The Sublime:
By Way was Homer into Greek translated:
And Shakespeare's self is Sophocles so plain
They know the kerb whereon the Furies waited
Outside the Mermaid Inn in Brogan's Lane.

Vane shall divide with Vern Eureka's fame;
Tillett and Mann are Tyler then and Cade:
Dowie's entwines with Cagliostro's name,
And in Tarpeia's, lo, those fair forms fade
Who drug the poor, for social bread and wine,
And lift the furtive latch to Catiline:
There, where the Longmore-featured Gracchi hurry,
And Greek-browed Higinbotham walks, anon,
The 'wealthy lower orders' leap the Murray
Before the stockwhip cracks of Jardine Don.

Cleons in 'Windsor dress at Syracuse
Their thin plebeians' promised meal delay;

And Archibald begets Australia's Muse
Upon an undine red of Chowder Bay:
Paterson's swan draws Amphitrite's car,
And Sidon learns from Young what purples are:
Rose Scott refutes dogmatic Cyril gaily,
Hypatia turns the anti-suffrage flank,
And Herod's daughter sools her 'morning daily'
On John the Baptist by the Yarra Bank.

Yon regal bustard, fading hence ere long,
Shall seem the guide we followed to the Grail;
This lyre-bird on his dancing-mound of song
Our mystagogue of some Bacchantic vale,
Where feathered Pan guffaws 'Evoe!' above,
And Maenad curlews shriek their midnight love:
That trailing flight of distant swans is bearing
Sarpedon's soul to its eternal joy:
This ibis, from the very Nile, despairing,
Memnon our own would warn from fatal Troy.

Primeval gnomes distilled the golden bribes
That have impregnated your musing waste with men;
But shall the spell of your pathetic tribes
Curl round, in time, our fairer limbs again?
Through that long tunnel of your gloom, I see
Gardens of a metropolis to be!
Out of the depths the mountain ash is soaring
To embryo gods of what unsounded space?
Out of the heights what influence is pouring
Thin desolation on your haunted face?

Many there are who see no higher lot
For all your writhing centuries of toil
Than that the avaricious plough should blot
Their wilding burgeon, and the red brand spoil
Your cyclopean garniture, to sow
The cheap parterres of Europe on your woe.
They weave all sorceries but yours, and borrow
The tinkling spells of alien winds and seas
To drown the chord of purifying sorrow,
Bom ere the world, that pulses through your trees.

For, save when we, in not o'er-subtle mood,
Hear magpies warbling soft November in,
Or, hand in hand with Love, a dreaming wood
Or bouldered crest of crisper April win,
Your harps, unblurred by glozing strings, intone
The dirges that behind Creation moan-
'Where, riding reinless billows, new lives dash on
The souring beach of yesterday's decay,
Where Love's chord leaps from mandrake shrieks of passion,
And groping gods mould man from quivering clay.

(Is Nature deaf and blind and dumb? A cruse
Unfilled of wine? Clay for an unbreathed soul?
Alien to man, till his desires transfuse
Their flames through wind and water, leaf and bole,
And each crude fane elaborately fit
With oracles that echo all his wit?
The living wilds of Greece saw death returning
When Pan that men had made fell from his throne:
Till through her sap our very blood is churning
The Bush her lonely alien woe shall moan!
Or is she reticent but to be kind?
Whispers she not beneath her mask of clods-
'Who asks he shall receive, who seeks shall find,
Who knocks shall open every door of God's?'
Dumb Faith's, blind Hope's eternal consort she,
Gravid with all that is on earth to be;
Corn, wine and oil in hungry granite hiding,
All Beauty under sober wings of clay,
All life beneath her dead heart long abiding,
Yea, all the gods her sons and she obey!)

What sin's wan expiation strewed your Vast
With mounded pillage of what conquering fire?
Slumbering throes of what prodigious Past
Exhale these lingering ghosts of its desire?
Sunshine that bleached corruption out, that glare?
Desolate blue of Purgatory, there?
Flagellant winds through guilty Eden scouring?
Sahara drowning Prester John's domain?
Saturnian dam her progeny devouring?
Hath dawn-time Hun these footprints left? Hath Cain?

Even the human wave, that shall at length
To man's endurance key your strident surge,
Sings in your poignant tones and sombre strength,
And makes, as yet, its own your primal dirge:
A gun-shot startles dawn back from the sky,
And mourning tea-trees echo Gordon's sigh:
Nardoo with Burke's faint sweat is dank for ever:
Spectral a tribe round poisoned rations shrieks:
Till doomday Leichhardt walks die Never Never:
Pensive, of Boake, the circling stock-whip speaks.

The wraiths unseen of roadside crimes unnamed
About that old-time shanty's ruins roam:
This squatter's fenceless acres hide ashamed
The hearth and battered zinc of Naboth's home:
Deserted 'yam-holes' pit your harmonies
With sloughing pock-marks of the gold-disease:
The sludgy creek 'mid hungry rushes rambles,
Where teal once dived and lowan raised her mound:
That tree, with crows, o'erlooks the township shambles:
These paddocks, ordure-smear'd, the city bound.

O yield not all to factory and farm!
For we, who drew a milk no stranger knows
From her scant paps, yearn for the acrid charm
That gossamers the Bush Where No Tree Grows.
And we have ritual moments when we crave
For worship in some messmate-pillared nave,
Where contrite 'bears' for woodland sins are kneeling,
And, 'mid the censers of the mountain musk,
Acolyte bell-birds the Angelus are pealing,
And boobooks moan lone vespers in the dusk,

And you have Children of the Dreaming Star,
Who care but little for the crowded ways
Where meagre spirits' vapid prizes are,
Or for the paddocked ease of dreamless days
And hedges clipped of every sunny growth
That plights the soul to God in daily troth:
Their wayward love prefers your desolation,
Or (where the human trail hath seared its charm)

The briar-rose on some abandoned 'station',
To all the tilled obedience of the farm.

Vineyards that purblind thrift shall never glean
The weedy waste and thistly gully hold:
No mint shall melt to currency unclean
Yon river-rounded hillock's Cape-broom gold:
The onion-grass upon that dark green slope
Returns our gaze from eyes of heliotrope:
But more we seek your underflowered expanses
Of scrub monotonous, or, where, O Bush,
The craters of your fiery noon's romances,
Like great firm bosoms, through the bare plains push.

As many. Mother, are your moods and forms
As all the sons who love you. Here, you mow
Careering grounds for every brood of storms
The wild sea-mares to desert stallions throw;
Anon, up through a sea of sand you glance
With green ephemeral exuberance,
And then quick seeds dive deep to years of slumber
From hot-hoofed drought's precipitate return:
There, league on league, the snow's cold fingers number
The shrinking nerves of supple-jack and fern.

To other eyes and ears you are a great
Pillared cathedral tremulously green,
An odorous and hospitable gate
To genial mystery, the happy screen
Of truants or of lovers rambling there
'Neath sun-shot boughs o'er miles of maidenhair.
Wee rubies dot the leaflets of the cherries,
The wooing wagtails hop from log to bough,
The bronzewing comes from Queensland for the berries,
The bell-bird by the creek is calling now.

And you can ride, an Eastern queen, they say,
By living creatures sumptuously borne,
With all barbaric equipages gay,
Beneath the torrid blue of Capricorn.
That native lotus is the very womb
That was the Hindoo goddess' earthly tomb.

The gang-gang screams o'er cactus wildernesses,
Palm trees are there, and swampy widths of rice,
Unguents and odours ooze from green recesses,
The jungles blaze with birds of Paradise.

But I, in city exile, hear you sing
Of saplinged hill and box-tree dotted plain,
Or silver-grass that prays the North Wind's wing
Convey its sigh to the loitering rain:
And Spring is half distraught with wintry gusts,
Summer the daily spoil of tropic lusts
The sun and she too fiercely shared together
Lingering thro' voluptuous Hindoo woods,
But o'er my windless, soft autumnal weather
The peace that passes understanding broods.

When, now, they say 'The Bush!', I see the top
Delicate amber leanings of the gum
Flutter, or flocks of screaming green leeks drop
Silent, where in the shining morning hum
The gleaning bees for honey-scented hours
'Mid labyrinthine leaves and white gum flowers.
Cantering midnight hoofs are nearing, nearing,
The straining bullocks flick the harpy flies,
The 'hatter' weeds his melancholy clearing,
The distant cow-bell tinkles o'er the rise.

You are the brooding comrade of our way,
Whispering rumour of a new Unknown,
Moulding us white ideals to obey,
Steeping whate'er we learn in lore your own,
And freshening with unpolluted light
The squalid city's day and pallid night,
Till we become ourselves distinct, Australian,
(Your native lightning charging blood and nerve),
Stripped to the soul of borrowed garments, alien
To that approaching Shape of God you serve.

Brooding, brooding, your whispers murmur plain
That searching for the clue to mystery
In grottos of decrepitude is vain,
That never shall the eye of prophet see

In crooked Trade's tumultuous streets the plan
Of templed cities adequate to man.
Brooding, brooding, you make us Brahmins waiting
(While uninspired pass on the hurtling years),
Faithful to dreams your spirit is creating,
Till Great Australia, born of you, appears.

For Great Australia is not yet: She waits
(Where o'er the Bush prophetic auras play)
The passing of these temporary States,
Flaunting their tawdry flags of far decay.
Her aureole above the alien mists
Beacons our filial eyes to mountain trysts:
'Mid homely trees with all ideals fruited,
She shelters us till Trade's Simoom goes by,
And slakes our thirst from cisterns unpolluted .
For ages cold in brooding deeps of sky.

We love our brothers, and to heal their woe
Pluck simples from the known old gardens still:
We love our kindred over seas, and grow
Their symbols tenderly o'er plain and hill;
We feel their blood rebounding in our hearts,
And speak as they would speak our daily parts:
But under all we know, we know that only
A virgin womb unsoiled by ancient fear
Can Saviours bear. So, we, your Brahmins, lonely,
Deaf to the barren tumult, wait your Year.

The Great Year's quivering dawn pencils the Night
To be the morning of our children's prime,
And weave from rays of yet ungathered Light
A richer noon than e'er apparelled Time.
If it must be, as Tuscan wisdom knew,
Babylon's seer, and wistful Egypt too,
That mellow afternoon shall pensive guide us
Down somnolent Decay's ravine to rest,
Then you, reborn, O Mother Bush, shall hide us
All the long night at your dream-laden breast.

Australian eyes that heed your lessons know
Another world than older pilgrims may:

Prometheus chained in Kosciusko's snow
Sees later gods than Zeus in turn decay:
Boundless plateaux expand the spirit's sight,
Resilient gales uphold her steeper flight:
And your close beating heart, O savage Mother,
Throbs secret words of joy and starker pain
Than reach the ears all old deceptions smother
In Lebanon, or e'en in Westermain.

We marvel not, who hear your undersong,
And catch a glimpse in rare exalted hours
Of something like a Being gleam along
Festooned arcades of flossie creeper flowers,
Or, toward the mirk, seem privileged to share
The silent rapture of the trees at prayer-
We marvel not that seers in other ages,
With eyes unstrained by peering logic, saw
The desolation glow with Koran pages,
Or Sinai stones with Tables of the Law.

Homers are waiting in the gum trees now,
Far driven from the tarnished Cyclades:
More Druids to your green enchantment bow
Than 'neath unfaithful Mona's vanished trees:
A wind hath spirited from ageing France
To our fresh hills the carpet of Romance:
Heroes and maids of old with young blood tingling
In ampler gardens grow their roses new:
And races long apart their manas mingling
Prepare the cradle of an Advent due.

And those who dig the mounded eld for runes
To read Religion's tangled cipher, here,
Where all Illusion haunts the fainting noons
Of days hysteric with the tireless leer
Of ravenous enamoured suns, shall find
How May a flings her mantle o'er the mind,
Till sober sand to shining water changes,
Dodona whispers from the she-oak groves,
Afreet upon the tempest cross the ranges,
And Fafnir through the bunyip marshes roves.

Once, when Uranian Love appeared to glow
Through that abysmal Night that bounds our reign-
Love that a man may scarcely feel and know i
Quite the same world as other men again-
With earthward-streaming frontier wraiths distraught,
Your oracles, O Mother Bush, I sought:
But found, dismayed, that eerie light revealing
Those wraiths already in your depths on sleuth,
Termagant Scorns along your hillsides stealing,
Remorse unbaring slow her barbed tooth.

My own thoughts first from far dispersion flew
Back to their sad creator, with the crops
Of woes in flower and all the harvests due
Till tiring Time the fearful seeding stops:
In pigmy forms of friends and foes, anon
In my own image, they came, stung, were gone:
And then I heard the voice of Him Who Questions,
Knowing the faltered answer ere it came,
Chilling the soul by hovering suggestions
Of wan damnation at a wince of blame.

And all your leaves in symbols were arranged,
Despairs long dead would leap from bough to bough,
A gum-tree buttress to a goblin changed
Grinning the warmth of some old broken vow:
Furtive desires for scarce-remembered maids
Glanced in a fearful bo-peep from your shades:
Till you became a purgatory cleansing
With rosy flakes in form of manikins,
To fiercer shame within my soul condensing,
The dim pollution of forgotten sins.

And She, the human symbol of that Love,
Would, as my cleansed eyes forgot their fear,
Comrade beside me. Comforter above,
With sunny smile ubiquitous appear:
Run on before me to the nooks we knew,
Walk hand in hand as glad young lovers do,
Gravely reprove me toying with temptation,
Show me the eyes and ears in roots and clods,
Bend with me o'er some blossom's revelation,

Or read from clouds the judgments of the gods.

My old ideals She would tune until
The grating note of self no longer rang:
She drove the birds of gloom and evil will
Out of the cote wherein my poems sang.
Time at Her wand annulled his calendar,
And Space his fallacy of Near and Far,
For through my Bush along with me She glided,
And crowded days of Beauty made more fair,
Though lagging weeks and ocean widths divided
Her mortal casing from Her Presence there.

Her wetted finger oped my shuttered eyes
To boyhood's scership of the Real again:
Upon the Bush descended from the skies
The rapt-up Eden of primordial men:
August Dominions through the vistas strode:
On white-maned clouds the smiling cherubs rode:
Maltreated Faith restored my jangled hearing
Till little seraphs sang from chip and clod:
And prayers were radiant children that, unfearing,
Floated as kisses to the lips of God.

It matters not that for some purpose wise
Myopic Reason censored long ago
The revelations of that Paradise,
When, back of all I feel or will or know,
Its silent angels beacon through the Dark
And point to harbours new my drifted ark.
Nor need we dread the fogs that round us thicken
Questing the Bush for Grails decreed for man,
When Powers our fathers saw unseen still quicken
Eyes that were ours before the world began.

'Twas then I saw the Vision of the Ways,
And 'mid their gloom and glory seemed to live,
Threaded the coverts of the Dark Road's maze,
Toiled up, with tears, the Track Retributive,
And, on the Path of Grace, beheld aglow
The love-lit Nave of all that wheeled below.
And She who flowered, my Mystic Rose, in Heaven,

And lit the Purging Mount, my Guiding Star,
Trudged o'er the marl, my mate, through Hell's wan levin,
Nor shrank, like lonely Dante's love, afar.

High towered a cloud over one leafy wild,
And to a bridged volcano grew. Above,
A great Greek group of father, mother, child,
Illumed a narrow round with radiant love.
Below, a smoke-pool thick with faces swirled,
The mutinous omen. of an Under-world,
Defeated, plundered, blackened, but preparing,
E'en though that calm, white dominance fell down,
To overflow the rim, and, sunward faring,
Shape myriad perfect groups from slave and clown.

Or thus I read the symbol, though 'twas sent
To hound compunction on my wincing pride,
That dreamed of raceless brotherhood, content
Though all old Charm dissolved and Glory died.
For often signs will yield their deeper signs,
Virginal Bush, in your untrodden shrines,
Than where the craven ages' human clamour
Distorts the boldest oracle with fear,
Or where dissolving wizards dew with glamour
Arden, Broceliande, or Windermere.

Once while my mother by a spreading tree
Our church's sober rubric bade me con,
My vagrant eyes among the boughs would see
Forbidden wings and wizard aprons on
Father's 'wee people' from their Irish glades
Brighten and darken with your lights and shades.
And I would only read again those stern leaves
For whispered bribe that, when their tale I told,
We would go and look for fairies in the fern-leaves
And red-capped leprechauns with crocks of gold.

Anon, my boyhood saw how Sunbursts flamed
Or filmy hinds lured on a pale Oisin,
Where lithe indignant saplings crowding claimed
The digger's ravage for their plundered queen:
And heard within yon lichened 'mullock-heap'

Lord Edward's waiting horsemen moan in sleep:
Or flew the fragrant path of swans consoling
Lir's exiled daughter wandering with me,
And traced below the Wattle River rolling
Exuberant and golden toward the sea.

Here, would the •waving wings of heat uplift
Some promontory till the tree-crowned pile
Above a phantom sea would swooning drift,
St. Brendan's vision of the Winged Isle:
Anon, the isle divides again, again,
Till archipelagos poise o'er the main.
There, lazy fingers of a breeze have scattered
The distant blur of factory chimney smoke
hi poignant groups of all the young lives shattered
To feed the ravin of a piston-stroke!

Or when I read the tale of what you were
Beyond these hungry eyes' home-keeping view,
I peopled petrel rocks with Sirens fair,
In Maid Mirage the Fairy Morgan knew,
Steered Quetzalcoatl's skiff to coral coasts,
On Chambers' Pillar throned the Olympian hosts,
Heard in white sulphur-crested parrots' screeches
Remorseful Peris vent their hopeless rage,
Atlantis' borders traced on sunken beaches,
m Alcheringa found the Golden Age.

Sibyl and Siren, with alternate breaths
You read our foetal nation's boon and bane,
And lure to trysts of orgiastic Deaths
Adventurous love that listens to your strain:
Pelsarts and Vanderdeckens of the world
Circle your charms or at your feet are hurled:
And, Southern witch, whose glamour drew De Quiros
O'er half the earth for one unyielded kiss,
Were yours the arms that healed the scalded Eros
When Psyche's curious lamp darkened their bliss?

Ye, who would challenge when we claim to see
The bush alive with Northern wealth of wings,
Forget that at a common mother's knee

We learned, with you, the lore of Silent Things.
There is no New that is not older far
Than swirling cradle of the first-born star:
Our youngest hearts prolong the far pulsation
And churn the brine of the primordial sea:
The foetus writes the précis of Creation:
Australia is the whole world's legatee.

Imagination built her throne in us
Before your present bodies saw the sky:
Your myths were counters of our abacus,
And in your brain developed long our eye:
We from the misty folk have also sprung
Who saw the gnomes and heard the Ever Young:
Do Southern skies the fancy disinherit
Of moly flower and Deva-laden breeze?
Do nerves attuned by old defect and merit
Their timbre lose by crossing tropic seas?

All mysteries ye claim as yours alone
Have wafted secrets over oceans here:
Our living soil Antiquity hath sown
With just the corn and tares ye love and fear:
Romance and song enthral us just as you,
Nor change of zenith changes spirit too:
Our necks as yours are sore with feudal halters:
To the Pole ye know our compasses are set;
And shivering years that huddled round your altars
Beneath our stars auspicious tremble yet.

Who fenced the nymphs in European vales?
Or Pan tabooed from all but Oxford dreams?
Warned Shakespeare off from foreign Plutarch's tales?
Or tethered Virgil to Italian themes?
And when the body sailed from your control
Think ye we left behind in bond the soul?
Whate'er was yours is ours in equal measure,
The Temple was not built for you alone,
Altho' 'tis ours to grace the common treasure
With Lares and Penates of our own!

Ye stole yourselves from gardens fragrant long

The sprouting seed-pods of your choicest blooms,
And wove the splendid garments of your song
From Viking foam on grave Hebraic looms:
'Twas Roman nerve and rich Hellenic lymph
Changed your pale pixie to a nubile nymph:
Yea, breathed at dawn around Atlantis' islands,
Wind-home o'er some Hesperidean road,
The morning clouds on dim Accadian highlands
Spring-fed the Nile that over Hellas flowed!

As large-eyed Greek amid Sicilian dews
Saw Dis, as ne'er before, pursue the Maid,
Or, safe 'neath screening billows, Arethuse
Alpheus' rugged sleuth unsoiled evade:
We shall complete the tale ye left half-told,
Under the ocean lead your fountains old,
To slake our sceptic thirst with haunted water,
And tame our torrents with a wedding kiss,
Shall loose, mayhap, the spell on Ceres' daughter,
And show, unclouded, God in very Dis.

(Yet, there are moods and mornings when I hear,
Above the music of the Bush's breath,
The rush of alien breezes far and near
Drowning her oracles to very death:
Exotic battle-cries the silence mar,
Seductive perfumes drive the gum-scent far;
And organ-tones august a moment show me
Miltonic billows and Homeric gales
Until I feel the older worlds below me,
And all her wonder trembles, thins and fails.)

Yea, you are all that we may be, and yet
In us is all you are to be for aye!
The Giver of the gifts that we shall get?
An empty womb that waits the wedding day?
Thus drifting sense by age-long habit buoyed
Plays round the thought that knows all nature void!
And so, my song alternate would believe her
Idiot Bush and Daughter of the Sun,
A worthless gift apart from the receiver,
An empty womb, but in a Deathless One.

To shapes we would of Freedom, Truth and Joy
Shall we your willing plasm mould for man:
Afresh rebuild the world, and thus destroy
What only Ragnarok in Europe can:
There is no Light but in your dark blendes sleeps,
Drops from your stars or through your ether leaps:
Yea, you are Nature, Chaos since Creation,
Waiting what human Word to chord in song?
Matrix inert of what auspicious nation?
For what far bees your nectar hiving long?

Exhausted manas of the conquering North
Shall rise refreshed to vivid life again
At your approach, and in your lap pour forth
Grateful the gleanings of his mighty reign:
As, when a tropic heat-king southward crawls,
Blistering the ranges, till he hears the calls
Of some cold high-browed bride, her streaming tresses,
Sprinkled with rose-buds, make his wild eyes thrill
To such desire for her superb caresses
He yields his fiery treasures to her will.

'Where is Australia, singer, do you know?
These sordid farms and joyless factories,
Mephitic mines and lanes of pallid woe?
Those ugly towns and cities such as these
With incense sick to all unworthy power,
And all old sin in full malignant flower?
No! to her bourn her children still are faring:
She is a Temple that we are to build:
For her the ages have been long preparing:
She is a prophecy to be fulfilled!

All that we love in olden lands and lore
Was signal of her coming long ago!
Bacon foresaw her, Campanella, More
And Plato's eyes were with her star aglow!
Who toiled for Truth, whate'er their countries were,
Who fought for Liberty, they yearned for her!
No corsair's gathering ground, or tryst for schemers,

No chapman Carthage to a huckster Tyre,
She is the Eldorado of old dreamers,
The Sleeping Beauty of the world's desire!

She is the scroll on which we are to write
Mythologies our own and epics new:
She is the port of our propitious flight
From Ur idolatrous and Pharaoh's crew.
She is our own, unstained, if worthy we,
By dream, or god, or star we would not see:
Her crystal beams all but the eagle dazzle;
Her wind-wide ways none but the strong-winged sail:
She is Eutopia, she is Hy-Brasil,
The watchers on the tower of morning hail I

Yet she shall be as we, the Potter, mould:
Altar or tomb, as we aspire, despair:
What wine we bring shall she, the chalice, hold:
What word we write shall she, the script, declare:
Bandage our eyes, she shall be Memphis, Spain:
Barter our souls, she shall be Tyre again:
And if we pour on her the red oblation
All o'er the world shall Asshur's buzzards throng:
Love-lit, her Chaos shall become Creation:
And dewed with dream, her silence flower in song.

Bernard O'Dowd

The Cow

THIS is a rune I ravelled in the still,
Arrogant stare of an Australian cow—
'These pranked intruders of the hornless brow,
Puffed up with strange illusions of their skill
To fence, to milk, to fatten and to kill,
Once worshipped me with temple, rite and vow,
Crowned me with stars, and bade rapt millions bow
Before what abject guess they called my will!

'To-day, this flunkey of my midden, Man,
Throws child-oblations in my milking byre,
 Stifles in slums to spare me lordly fields,
Flatters with spotless consorts my desire,
 And for a pail of cream his birth-right yields,
As once in Egypt, Hellas, Ind, Iran!'

Bernard O'Dowd

The Poet

THEY tell you the poet is useless and empty the sound of his lyre,
That science has made him a phantom, and thinned to a shadow his fire:
Yet reformer has never demolished a dungeon or den of the foe
But the flame of the soul of a poet pulsated in every blow.

They tell you he hinders with tinklings, with gags from an obsolete stage,
The dramas of deed and the worship of Laws in a practical age:
But the deeds of to-day are the children of magical dreams he has sung,
And the Laws are ineffable Fires that from niggardly heaven he wrung!

The bosoms of women he sang of are heaving to-day in our maids:
The God that he drew from the Silence our woes or our weariness aids:
Not a maxim has needled through Time, but a poet had feathered its shaft,
Not a law is a boon to the people but he has dictated its draft.

And why do we fight for our fellows? For Liberty why do we long?
Because with the core of our nerve-cells are woven the lightnings of song!
For the poet for ages illumined the animal dreams of our sires,
And his Thought-Become-Flesh is the matrix of all our unselfish desires!

Yea, why are we fain for the Beautiful? Why should we die for the Right?
Because through the forested æons, in spite of the priests of the Night,
Undeterred by the faggot or cross, uncorrupted by glory or gold,
To our mothers the poet his Vision of Goodness and Beauty has told.

When, comrades, we thrill to the message of speaker in highway or hall,
The voice of the poet is reaching the silenter poet in all:
And again, as of old, when the flames are to leap up the turrets of Wrong,
Shall the torch of the New Revolution be lit from the words of a Song

Bernard O'Dowd

True America's Message

OUR manlier spirits hear and will obey
The Word YOU waft Australia o'er the sea—
'Be true, be brave, be merciful, be free!'
Not you, who, braggart, sent this wan array
Of hell-ships vomiting their Will-to-Slay, 5
These armoured Hates and pallid Envies we,
'Mid rattled mobs and flags hysteric, see
Tarnish the chaste horizon of our Bay:

But YOU we hear, our Comrades of the Cause,
Who face hyæna Mammon in his den: 10
 And YOU, who dared your seas of blood to spill
To drag the swooning slave from vampire jaws:
Yea, YOU who freed unborn Australia, when
 You singed King George's beard at Bunker's Hill.

Bernard O'Dowd

Witch Of Our Wilderness

I know not why I love your baffling face,
Or, lonely, to your cold caresses steal,
Or what the charm persuades my wearied eyes
Follow the clues that gleam and, wavering, go,
Or spell the syllables of poems new
I fancy floating through your gloom or grace!
Sphinx of green riddles Time shall not unseal!
Mystical knot no stratagem, unties!
I do not comprehend you, but I know
I am not happy long away from you!

Ardent we come, but that averted gaze
Discrowns emotion, and your lips austere,
Native to one in whom the gods confide,
For us breathe only murmurs dim and lone
As are the lullabies of crooning dew
Or dwindling dirges of benighted fays
For queen marooned in a forgotten mere;
Yet though 'tis not for man your witch-words ride
Forsaken winds that know not why they moan,
I am not happy long away from you!

Do you ignore our presence, or disdain
Our pert intrusion on your fettered trees?
Is all our knowledge darkness to the light
That through their woody crevices you pour,
Garnered for them from suns we never knew?
Or can it be your brooding peace is pain?
Do sighs innumerable build the breeze
That mournful walks the souging waste to-night?
But tell me why, if woe be all your store,
I am not happy long away from you!

You sprawl your reticence of green and gray
Over the no more mute basaltic deep,
Below the sister deafness of the sky;
Nor myriad boughs' hypnotic undertones,
Shadows in orgy, nor haphazard hue
Of flower, nor green delirium will say

One shining word to beacon us who creep
Amid their bedlamry and forms awry:
Yet, Miser, though for bread you give me stones,
I am not happy long away from you!

Although we gather only in your glades
The tasteless berries of monotony,
Withering leaf, frustrated blossom, white
Skeleton eucalypt's unmeaning woe,
Or wrack of huddled tea-trees, knouted all askew
To serve an old wind's whim, yet from wan shades
Entities ambushed seem to bear to me,
On a rhythm craftsman never tameth quite,
The Song all poets soaring seek, and so
I am not happy long away from you!

Are you the long-forgotten hermitage
Wherein immortal cities crept to sleep?
And do their rooted folk unresting try,
With perfumes wild of some Atlantis old,
To link our dormant hearts akin anew?
Or young auspicious years do they presage
To something watching in me cradled deep,
That knows unknown to me the reason why,
In an orb's dim throes, by iron stars controlled,
I am not happy long away from you!

Though fierce assault not pilgrim prayer avail,
Nor shall we glimpse, however far we seek,
The long importuned palace of your pride,
Yet you-if darkly-to my faith disclose
That duly will Hy-Brasil globe in view!
Ay, can it be that glinting is the Grail?
Do fairies gather ferns along that creek?
Is very God the Merlin that you hide?
Ah, can I wonder, necromantic Rose,
I am not happy long away from you!

We listen long for words the world awaits,
Nor quite lose hope that we shall overhear
Strange Huntsmen faint hallooing, or surprise
The filmy spears the dark earth-legions throw

Across the void against the retinue
Auroral of the solar potentates;
Yet, though your tongues betray the expectant ear
And dappled melancholy foils our eyes,
Your trees of whispering knowledge call me so,
I am not happy long away from you!

Bernard O'Dowd

Young Democracy

HARK! Young Democracy from sleep
Our careless sentries raps:
A backwash from the Future's deep
Our Evil's foreland laps.

Unknown, these Titans of our Night
Their New Creation make:
Unseen, they toil and love and fight
That glamoured Man may wake.

Knights-errant of the human race,
The Quixotes of to-day,
For man as man they claim a place,
Prepare the tedious way.

They seek no dim-eyed mob's applause,
Deem base the titled name,
And spurn, for glory of their Cause,
The tawdry nymphs of Fame.

No masks of ignorance or sin
Hide from them you or me:
We're Man—no colour shames our skin,
No race or caste have we.

The prognathous Neanderthal,
To them, conceals the Bruce;
They see Dan Aesop in the thrall;
From swagmen Christ deduce.

Tho' butt for lecher's ribaldry
And scarred by woman's scorn,
In baby-burdened girl they see
God-motherhood forlorn.

With them, to racial siredom glides
The savage we deprave;
That eunuch brilliant Narses hides:
A Spartacus, that slave.

They Jesus find in manger waif;
In horse-boys Shakespearehood:
And earthquake-Luthers nestling safe
In German miner's brood.

The God that pulses everywhere
They know fills Satan's veins;
No felon but they see Him there
Behind His mirror's stains.

'Tis theirs Earth's charnel rooms to clear,
And ruthless sweep away
The Lares and Penates dear
To man in his decay.

Their restless energy supplies
Munitions that will wreck
The keeps whence feudal enemies
Our free banditti check.

Their unrelenting wars they wage,
These Furies of the Right,
Where myriad Falsehood's legions rage,
Artilleried by Might;

Where Fashion's stupid iron clamps
Young Innovation's head,
And Law the stalwart Present cramps
In Past's Procrustes-bed;

Where Pride of learning, substance, blood,
Or prowess in the strife,
Exacts from teeming lowlihood
The lion's share of life;

Where Gluttony would to the brutes
Degrade his loose-lipped gangs;
Where Tyranny his venom shoots
From one or million fangs;

Where Cruelty, in Wisdom's mask,

Piths fame from writhing beasts;
Where blest is racial Murder's task
By Christ's apostate priests.

In Punic or in Persian fray
With Love's and Conscience' foes,
Unadvertising Romans they,
And Spartans free from pose.

Abused as mad or traitors by
The trolls they would eject;
Cold-shouldered by wan Apathy;
Of motives mean suspect;

Outcast from social gaieties;
Denied life's lilled grace;
They mount their hidden Calvaries
To save the human race.

The bowers of Art a few may know;
A few wait highly placed:
Most bear the hods of common woe,
And some you call disgraced.

But whether in the mob or school,
In church or poverty,
They teach and live the Golden Rule
Of Young Democracy:—

'That culture, joy and goodliness
Be th' equal right of all:
That Greed no more shall those oppress
Who by the wayside fall:

'That each shall share what all men sow:
That colour, caste's a lie:
That man is God, however low—
Is man, however high.'

Bernard O'Dowd