

Classic Poetry Series

Patrick Barrington
- poems -

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Patrick Barrington(1908-1990)

Patrick William Daines Barrington, 11th Viscount Barrington of Ardglass (29 October 1908 – 6 April 1990) was an Irish peer and a writer of humorous verse.

He was the son of the Hon. Walter Bernard Louis Barrington and Eleanor Nina Snagge. He was educated at Eton College and at Magdalen College, Oxford University. He is remembered for his humorous verse, which was featured in Punch Magazine during the 1930s. A collection of his poems, including his best-known work, *The Diplomatic Platypus*, was published:

On 4 October 1960 he succeeded to the titles of 5th Baron Shute of Becket, co. Berks; 11th Viscount Barrington of Ardglass, co. Down; and 11th Baron Barrington of Newcastle, Co. Limerick. On his death, his titles became extinct.

Battle Song

There's havoc on the staircase where the guests come streaming,
Shirt-fronts shining and tiaras gleaming,
Frail folk shuddering and stout folk steaming --
Steaming in the heat of the fray.
Midnight striking and the strife appalling,
Strong men staggering and weak men falling,
And deep in the heart of me a still voice calling:
'Make for the buffet while you may.

'Make for the buffet while you may, poor stranger,
Make for the buffet while you can;
There's hope for the stale there, strength for the frail there,
Drink for the thirsty man.
Thrust through the throng! Be obstreperous and strong!
Fight till your strength is sped.
Fight and prevail; do not falter, do not fail,
Make for the buffet and be fed!

'Make for the buffet and be fed, poor stranger,
Make for the buffet and be strong;
Dense is the press and the air is growing less,
Fierce is the fight and long.
Fierce is the fight and oppressive is the night,
Stern is the strife and fell;
Pale is your cheek; you are wan and you are weak;
Make for the buffet and be well!'

Painfully and wearily the hours are dragging,
Old men are falling now and young men flagging;
White ties weakening and stiff shirts sagging --
Sagging as the hours go by.
Consciousness is failing me and outlines merging,
Thunder in my ears as of sea-foam surging,
And deep in the heart of me a faint voice urging:
'Make for the buffet lest you die.

'Make for the buffet lest you die, poor stranger;
Make for the buffet while you can;
Fight your way through like a woman in a queue,

Fight like a jungle-man!
Batter the élite with your hands and your feet,
Butt them in the backs with your head:
Strike for your own! You are hungry and alone;
Make for the buffet and be fed.

'Make for the buffet and be fed, poor stranger,
Make for the buffet lest you die.
There's hope for stale there, strength for the frail there,
Drink for the throat that's dry.
Courage and strength will rewarded be at length;
Weight in the end will tell.
Up, then, and on! Are you weary? Are you wan?
Make for the buffet and be well,
Poor stranger!
Make for the buffet and be well,
Poor ranger!
Make for the buffet and be well!'

Patrick Barrington

I Had A Hippopotamus

I had a Hippopotamus, I kept him in a shed
And fed him upon vitamins and vegetable bread
I made him my companion on many cheery walks
And had his portrait done by a celebrity in chalk

His charming eccentricities were known on every side
The creatures' popularity was wonderfully wide
He frolocked with the Rector in a dozen friendly tussles
Who could not but remark on his hippopotamuscles

If he should be affected by depression or the dumps
By hippopotameasles or the hippopotamumps
I never knew a particle of peace 'till it was plain
He was hippopotamasticating properly again

I had a Hippopotamus, I loved him as a friend
But beautiful relationships are bound to have an end
Time takes alas! our joys from us and rids us of our blisses
My hippopotamus turned out to be a hippopotamisses

My house keeper regarded him with jaundice in her eye
She did not want a colony of hippotami
She borrowed a machine gun from from her soldier nephew, Percy
And showed my hippopotamus no hippopotamercy

My house now lacks that glamour that the charming creature gave
The garage where I kept him is now as silent as the grave
No longer he displays among the motor tyres and spanners
His hippopotomastery of hippopotamanners

No longer now he gambols in the orchards in the spring
No longer do I lead him through the village on a string
No longer in the morning does the neighbourhood rejoice
To his hippopotamusically-modulated voice.

I had a hippopotamus but nothing upon earth
Is constant in its happines or lasting in its mirth
No joy that life can give me can be strong enough to smother
My sorrow for that might-have-been-a-hippopota-mother

Patrick Barrington

I Met A Lady In The Wood

I met a lady in the wood.
No mortal maid, I knew, was she;
She was no thing of flesh and blood,
No child of human ancestry.

Her beauty held my eyes in thrall.
I spoke to her sweet words, soft-toned.
She answered me no word at all,
But only looked at me and moaned.

I spoke to her about Exchange,
Of Sterling and its recent rise.
The subject was beyond her range;
She stared at me with haunting eyes.

I touched upon the price of Rye
And its effect upon the Pound.
She walked beside me silently,
Like one that treads on charmé ground.

She witched me with her elfin grace.
I spoke of Wages and the Dole
And briefly sketched for her the case
For International Control.

She gazed upon me as I talked;
Some elfin thing she seemed to be.
I knew her, by the way she walked,
A creature of the Faëry.

Through green and leafy glades we went,
Knee-deep among the dewy ferns;
I touched upon the Law of Rent
And of Diminishing Returns.

And, as we wandered through the wood
Mid oaks and elm-tree boles rotund,
Explained to her as best I could
The workings of a Sinking Fund.

I said that Rubber was depressed
By recent rumours from Malay.
She only moaned and beat her breast
And cried aloud, 'Alack-a-day!'

I said my brokers had foreseen
A rise in Oil, and asked her view
As to the trend of Margarine,
She only answered 'Willaloo!'

I took her to a green-lit glade
Where tall trees twined their branches high
And a moss-muted streamlet made
Unmeditating melody;

And there I paused awhile; and there
I offered her my heart and hand,
And bade her take me in her care
To dwell with her in Fairyland.

I said I was a Whale-oil King,
With gold and goods and gear in plenty.
She said she was a Mrs. Byng
And had a family of twenty.

She turned and left me where I stood.
While round her elfin pipes were fluting
She walked away into the wood,
And I walked home to Lower Tooting.

Patrick Barrington

I Was A Bustlemaker Once, Girls

When I was a lad of twenty and was working in High Street, Ken.,
I made quite a pile in a very little while - I was a bustle maker then.
Then there was work in plenty, and I was a thriving man
But things have decayed in the bustle making trade, since the bustle making
trade began.

I built bustles with a will then, I made bustles with a wit,
I made bustles as a Yankee hustles, simply for the love of it.
I built bustles with a skill then, surpassed, they say, by none,
But those were the days when bustles were the craze, and now those days are
done.

I was a bustle maker once, girls, many many years ago,
I put my heart in the bustle maker's art and I don't mind saying so.
I may have had the brains of a dunce, girls, I may have had the mind of a muff,
I may have been plain and deficient in the brain but I did know a bustle maker's
stuff.

I built bustles for the slender, I built bustles for the stout,
I built bustles for the girls with muscles, and bustles for the girls without.
I built bustles by the thousands, in the good old days of yore,
But things have decayed in the bustle making trade and I don't build bustles any
more.

Many were the models worn once; but mine were unique, tis said,
No rival design was so elegant as mine; I was a bustle maker bred.

I was a bustle maker born once, an artist through and through,
But things have decayed in the bustle making trade
And what can a bustle maker do?

I built bustles to enchant, girls, I built bustles to amaze,
I built bustles for the skirt that rustles, and bustles for the skirt that sways.
I built bustles for my aunt, girls, when other business fled,
But a bustle maker can't make bustles for his aunt when a bustle maker's aunt is
dead.

I was a bustle maker once, girls, once in the days gone by,
I lost my heart to the bustle maker's art, and that I don't deny.
I may have had the brains of a dunce, girls, as many men appear to suppose,
I may have been obtuse and of little other use
But I could make a bustle when I chose.

I built bustles for the bulging, I built bustles for the lithe,
I built bustles for the girls in Brussels and bustles for the girls in Hythe.
I built bustles for all Europe once, but I've been badly hit,
Things have decayed in the bustle making trade

And that it the truth of it.

Patrick Barrington

My Love Is Theosophist

My love is a Theosophist
And reads the Ramayana;
Her luncheon is a pot of tea,
Her breakfast a banana.
She says that matter tends to clog
The spirit-force behind it.
My love is a Theosophist,
And very tough I find it.

My love is a Theosophist
And wears no combinations;
She says they get her thought-urge weak
And lower her vibrations.
She tells me flannel next the skin
Impedes the astral motions.
My love is a Theosophist,
And has the strangest notions.

My love is a Theosophist,
And few things I deplore as
Sincerely as the thoughtless way
She crabs her neighbours' auras.
She sensed Miss Hope's as bilious green,
And got some quack to vet it.
My love is a Theosophist,
And many folk regret it.

My love is a Theosophist,
And though distinctly stouter
She moves on a more mental plane
Than do the folks about her.
She moved into a potted plant
Last week at Mrs Reece's.
My love is a Theosophist,
So I picked up the pieces.

My love is a Theosophist,
And has an intimation
That she was Florence Nightingale

In her last incarnation.
She senses me as Titus Oates,
More Ape-man than Apollo,
My love is a Theosophist,
And difficult to follow.

My love is a Theosophist,
And does not seem to worry
If they forget to send the fish
Or fail to cook the curry.
As my potatoes grow more burnt
Her temper grows the sweeter.
My love is a Theosophist,
And lives on Veeta Weeta.

My love is a Theosophist--
Or, rather, is no longer;
For, though her Ego-urge was strong,
The Cosmic Will as stronger.
While moving on the Higher Plane
She moved into a lorry.
My love was a Theosophist,
And really I'm not sorry.

Patrick Barrington

The Diplomatic Platypus

I had a duck-billed platypus when I was up at Trinity,
With whom I soon discovered a remarkable affinity.
He used to live in lodgings with myself and Arthur Purvis,
And we all went up together for the Diplomatic Service.
I had a certain confidence, I own, in his ability,
He mastered all the subjects with remarkable facility;
And Purvis, though more dubious, agreed that he was clever,
But no one else imagined he had any chance whatever.
I failed to pass the interview, the board with wry grimaces
Took exception to my boots and then objected to my braces,
And Purvis too was failed by an intolerant examiner
Who said he had his doubts as to his sock-suspender's stamina.
Our summary rejection, though we took it with urbanity
Was naturally wounding in some measure to our vanity;
The bitterness of failure was considerably mollified,
However, by the ease with which our platypus had qualified.
The wisdom of the choice, it soon appeared, was undeniable;
There never was a diplomat more thoroughly reliable.
He never made rash statements his enemies might hold him to,
He never stated anything, for no one ever told him to,
And soon he was appointed, so correct was his behaviour,
Our Minister (without Portfolio) to Trans-Moravia.
My friend was loved and honoured from the Andes to Esthonia,
He soon achieved a pact between Peru and Patagonia,
He never vexed the Russians nor offended the Rumanians,
He pacified the Letts and yet appeased the Lithuanians,
Won approval from his masters down in Downing Street so wholly, O,
He was soon to be rewarded with the grant of a Portfolio.
When on the Anniversary of Greek Emancipation,
Alas! He laid an egg in the Bulgarian Legation.
This untoward occurrence caused unheard-of repercussions,
Giving rise to epidemics of sword-clanking in the Prussians.
The Poles began to threaten, and the Finns began to flap at him,
Directing all the blame for this unfortunate mishap at him;
While the Swedes withdrew entirely from the Anglo-Saxon dailies
The right of photographing the Aurora Borealis,
And, all efforts at rapprochement in the meantime proving barren,
The Japanese in self-defence annexed the Isle of Arran.
My platypus, once thought to be more cautious and more tentative

Than any other living diplomatic representative,
Was now a sort of warning to all diplomatic students
Of the risks attached to negligence, the perils of imprudence,
And, branded in the Honours List as 'Platypus, Dame Vera',
Retired, a lonely figure, to lay eggs in Bordighera.

Patrick Barrington

When I Was Young And Ignorant

When I was young and ignorant I loved a Miss McDougall,
Our days were spent in happiness, although our means were frugal;
We did not sigh for worldly wealth, for vain and tawdry treasures,
We were a simple country pair with simple country pleasures.
Beneath the village chestnut-tree it was our joy to meet once;
We used to tread the dewy fields with wonder-waking feet once;
We wandered once in leafy lanes and walked in Woodlands shady;
But now she's gone to Birmingham to be a Bearded Lady

I loved her as I loved my life when I was young and tender,
And happily our time was spent although our means were slender.
We used to pass the golden days in countrified pursuits once;
We walked through simple country bogs in simple country boots once.
High hopes of happiness I had, but now my hopes are zero,
Alas! My love has left me now to carve her own career O;
Not all the hopes of her I had of her are worth a maravedi;
My love has gone to Birmingham to be a Bearded Lady.

My love now dwells in circus halls with clowns and tight-rope dancers,
Where dromedaries play bassoons and sea-lions do the lancers;
She moves amongst trick-bicyclists, buffoons and comic waiters,
With elephants and acrobats and prestidigitators.
No longer daily by my side she wanders through the hay now,
The glamour of the public eye has lured her far away now.
Remorseless Fates, my tender hopes how cruelly betrayed ye!
My love has gone to Birmingham to be a Bearded Lady.

When I was young and ignorant I loved a Miss McDougall;
But that was e'er she heard the call of Fame's imperious bugle.
I thought her kind as she was fair, but I was green and calfish;
My love, though brighter than a star, was colder than a starfish.
High hopes of happiness I had when I was young and tender;
But time and tide have falsified my juvenile agenda.
Farewell, my castle is in the air! Phantasmal mansions, fade ye!
My love has gone to Birmingham to be a Bearded Lady.

Patrick Barrington