

Selected Poems eBook

Selected Poems

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WILLIAM FRANCIS BARNARD

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=The Tongues of Toil=

Do you hear the call from a hundred lands.
Lords of a dying name?
We are the men of sinewed hands
Whom the earth and the seas acclaim.
We are the hoards that made you lords.
And gathered your gear and spoil.
And we speak with a word that should be heard—
Hark to the tongues of toil!

The power of your hands it falls at last,
The strength of your rule is o'er,
Where the might of a million slaves is massed
To the shouts of a million more.
We rise, we rise, 'neath the western skies,
And the dawns of the east afar;
And our myriads swarm in the southlands warm,
And under the northern star!

We take no thought of the fears you feel,
And the rage you hold at heart,
Nor of all your strength of the gold and steel
Enthroned at the gates of mart.
We have no care for the deeds you dare,
For the force of your armies hurled;
You stand but few, and we challenge you—
Strong men of all the world!

We served as your fools when time was young,
And long, long we forbore.
Glad of the niggard boons you flung,
The least of your ample store;
But the gnawing pain of a starving brain
Is great as the belly need—
We have learned at last from a hungry past
The joys of a rebel deed!



We come, we come, with the force of fate;
We are not weak, but strong.
We parley not, and we cannot wait;
We march with a freeman's song.
We claim for meed what a life we can need
That lives as a life should live—
Not less, not more, From the plenteous store
Which freeborn labors give!

We shall shape a world as a world should be,
With room enough for all.
We will rear a race of the wise and free,
And not of the great and small.
And the heart and the mind of humankind
Shall drink to the dregs of good,
Forgetting the tears of the darker years,
And the curse of bondman's blood.

In vain you soften the voice of greed,
In vain you speak us fair;
The time is late, and we hark nor heed;
In gladness still we dare.
Yield, then, yield to the force we wield,
To the masses of our might;
We are countless strong at the throat of wrong
The warriors of the right!

Yes, we are the captains of the earth
And the warders of the sea—
Of a race new born in nobler birth,
The mighty and the free!
We clasp all hands, to the farthest lands;
We swear by our mother soil,
To take the meed who have done the deed!
Hark to the tongues of toil!

=The Hangman=

The hangman's hands are dyed with blood,
And all they touch or hold
Is stained and streaked with clotted blood
E'en to his bloody gold—
The coins that are paid for human breath
And the lives which he has sold.



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In scarlet hue stand old and new—
His clothes, his board, his bed.
There is blood in the cup he lifts up,
And crimson in his bread;
And e'en his floors and walls and doors
Are marked with gory red.

The hangman's face is dull and grey,
And soulless are his eyes;
That he may live from day to day,
Some fellow-being dies.
The tears of the young are naught to him,
Nor ages stifled cries.

He does not know the sob of woe;
Black fear he does not know;
Hardly a word from his lips are heard,
And his ears heed no appeal.
His cruel chin reveals within
A nature hard as steel,
The hangman's thoughts are not of love,
Nor are they yet of hate;
They do not lift themselves above
The dungeon's iron gate;
Their interests are the knotted rope
And the heavy gallows weight.

His mind is filled with the counted killed
And the hope of more to come.
And the price they fling when men must swing,
Which makes a goodly sum;
For his reason waits on the law's black hates,
And, save for this, stands dumb.

The hangman's soul lies stiff and stark.
The hangman's heart is dead;
And the need of friends is a burnt out spark
For he is marked with the murder's mark.
And with blood upon his head.

In times of rest he knows no guest—
No hand will touch him, none!
Nor woman mild nor happy child
Greets him when day is done;



And he walks the night, a poison blight,
An outcast of the sun

=The Children of the Looms=

Oh, what are these that plod the road
At dawn's first hour and evening's chime,
Each back bent as beneath a load;
Each sallow face afoul with grime?
Nay, what are these whose little feet
Scarce bear theme on to toil or bed!
Do hearts within their bosoms beat?
Surely, 'twere better that they were dead.

Babes are they, domed to cruel dooms.
Who labor all the livelong day;
Who stand beside the roaring looms
Nor ever turn their eyes away;
Like parts of those machines of steel:
Like wheels that whirl, like shuttles thrown;
Without the power to dream or feel;
With all of childishness.

Brothers and sisters of the flowers,
Fit playmates of the bird and bee.
For you grow soft the springtime hours;
For you the shade lies neath the tree.
For you life smiles the whole day long;
For you she breathes each breath in bliss,
And turns all sound into song;
And you, and you have come to this!

Is't not enough that man should toil
To fill the hands that clutch for gold?
Is't not enough that women toil.
And in life's summertime grow old?
Is't not enough that death should pale
To see men welcome him as rest;
But must the children drudge and fall,
And perish on the mothers breast?



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See, lovers, wed at tender eve;
See, mothers, with your new-born young;
See, fathers—if you can, believe;
From infant blood, lo, wealth is wrung!
See homes; see towns; see cities; states;
Earth, show it to the skies above!
Lovers who pass through rapture's gates,
Are these, are these your fruits of love?

O man who boast your lands subdued,
Your conquered air, your oceans tamed,
Who mold all nature to your mood,
Look on these babes and be ashamed!
Dull looks from out each weary face,
Cold words upon each little tongue—
Dead lives that know not childhoods grace,
Grown old before they can be young.

Hear, world of Mammon, brutal, bold,
Goring with life the maw of greed,
Measuring everything by gold;
The good deed with the evil deed—
The pangs of suffering childhoods care,
Now coined in coins to fill a purse,
These things shall haunt you everywhere,
And rest upon you for a curse!

=The Hymn of Labor=

The world was made with labor:
Strong fusing air and fire
Strove before the years of birth,
With awful deed and dire,
And wrought from primal chaos
Amidst the ancient night.
The seas and shores which are the earth,
And shapes of morning light.

Yea, bound in frenzied orbits,
The solar substance sped
With travail of the moon and stars,
And planets live and dead;
And wombed and birthed in anguish,
As heirs of all its toil,



Earth's vale and hill and ribs of rock,
And the rivers in her soil.

Life was formed by labor:
From out of the bubbling ooze.
By cosmic ferment molded well,
And tropic suns and dews,
With stress of chemic struggle
Were built with warding care
The potent powers of earth and sea,
And the wings of all the air.
Yea, through the mystic process
Of crystallizing form,
To green growths sprung across the land,
And bloods of cold and warm,
The vital stream of being
In flooding efforts swirled,
And beast and bird and swimming fish
Made animate the world.

Man was wrought by labor:
Fierce things of growth and might,
Where waring species hold their sway,
Keen eared and clear of sight.
Toiled in craft and cunning
And strength of ripening brain,
Till rose the form that grasped the world
And made it his domain.

Yea, with red feud and ravage
Of saber tooth and claw.
With banding of the pack for might
And filled or starving maw;
From floundering saurians welter,
Through grin and screech of ape,
Struggled the deathless seed of life
Up to human shape.

And man hath made with labor:
From his wild primal hour,
Potent with transforming deeds.
He hath wed will to power;
Through war and peace untiring,
To industry and art,
Spending the might of all his thought
And the hope of all his heart.



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Yea, tried in stress of effort
And passions wise and vain,
His zeal hath gathered wisdoms seed
From fruits of joy and pain.
His millioned cities echo;
His ships have pathed the sea;
And with bent brow he toils to make
The world that yet will be.

=To the Masters=

You drive your beasts of burden forth to
drink?
You herd your oxen, each one in his stall?
You whip and goad until they heed your call?
You own, and use? Are these your cattle?
Think!
Although the while they cringe to you and
shrink.
And watch their fate in your least finger fall,
Mistake not, lest they rise and ravage all,
And your vast piled-up power to chaos sink!

The earthquake gives slight time to ward its
shock;
But racks the earth, nor warns of where or
when;
The hurricane that makes the city rock,
Speaks not with previous voice unto your ken;
Vesuvius and Aetna horror mock,
And tidal waves. Think: These you crush are
Men!

=To the Enemies of Free Speech=

As well to lay your hands upon the sun
And try with bonds to bind the morning light,
As well on the four winds to spend your might,
As well to strive against the streams that run;
As well to bar the seasons, bid be done
The rain which falls; as well to blindly fight
Against the air, and at your folly's height
Aspire to make all power that is none.



As well to do this as to impeach
Man's tongue, and bid it answer to the schools;
As well to do all this, as give us rules.
And bid us hold our words within your reach;
As well as this, as try to chain man's speech.
So others learned before ye lived, O fools!

=Magdalene Passes=

What one is this, that bears the band of
shame within her breast,
And wanders through the mocking land, denied
a place of rest?
What one is this, your hue and cry pursue
with withering hate,
Until her best hope is to die, nor meet a
harder fate?

This, this is she who hides her head in shame
to gloom the sun;
Who waits, as in their graves the dead, until
the day is done;
Whose tasks make pitiful the dark, and dreadful
all the night,
And leave her spirit stricken stark and crushed
at morning light.

Beneath the shadows of silk and lace her form
is spare and shrunk,
And through the rogue upon her face see how
her cheeks have sunk,
Her lightsome laugh hides not her thought;
her brow is scarred with care.
And her flashing rings with jewels wrought,
but gild and grace despair.

Has she no tears to weep for grief, no voice to
cry with woe,
No memories panged beyond belief for joys
of long ago,
Has she no tortured dreams to smart, no anguish
for her brow,
Has she no broken bleeding heart, that you
must curse her now?



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Is here no innocence o'erthrown, no wrecked
sweet maidenhood,
No sense of loss, like heavy stone, to make her
doubt all good?
Are here no women's ruined charms, no dead
and withering breasts?
Are here no hapless, vacant arms, which
should lull babes to rest?

And what are you, who at her gird, and deem
yourselves unstained;
Do you forget your black false word, the righteous
act disdain,
Your lust of power, the debtors tears, cold
hunger's starving cries,
And all the evil of your years, that clamors
to the skies!

Your horror is a vail to wear and cover o'er
your deeds;
Your wrongs are pointed at you there, though
none your presence heeds.
Your vileness would itself deny in falsest hate
of hers;
Gaze at yourself with inward eye, you whited
sepulchers!

Repent! Your vanity betrays, and wrenches
reason strong,
Until it wraps the truth to ways which shape
a right of wrong;
But every sin is still a sin; and if your hands
be shriven,
Her heart is no more black within, and she
shall be forgiven.

You ask not where those siren lips learned
their unworthy skill,
Nor reck of how shame's black eclipse obscured
her purer will.
You think not whence fair thoughts like
flowers gave room to passions low;
You know not of her girlhood's hours; you
do not care to know.



Nay! But the truth cries for the light, and
struggles to be heard;
The story of her bruise and blight shall out
in burning word—
Yours was the power which crushed that
grace and gave it to despair,
And the mask of beauty on that face, your
hands have painted there!

She was the temple of your lust, the altar of
your greed;
The sacrifice of faith and trust you made with
careful heed.
She was the price of pleasure's worth, the
weight against your gold,
Where love and truth repine in dearth, and all
is bought and sold.

And will you loathe your work at last, and
spurn her with disgust?
And shall your pride blot out the past and
hide her murdered trust?
And will you brand upon her brow the deeds
which she doth do?
Speak; Will you dare to hate her now, who
weeps, and pardons you?

Nay, more scoff to see her sink, nor laugh
upon her tears;
You shall not hand hate's baneful drink, and
mock her with your jeers.
Bow down and hide your head for shame, and
for your acts atone,
Accept your guilt; abide your blame; nor cast
a single stone.

And crimson sin shall balance sin, and none
shall be denied,
Till every heart is soft within and humbled
in its pride.
And each with each shall equal stand, and all
be one in worth,
Till every hand shall clasp a hand and love
shall fill the earth.



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=The Red Flag=

Banner of crimson waving there,
Thou shalt have full homage from me;
First among flags thou gleamest fair,
Symbol of love and of life made free.
The nations have chosen standards of state
To flaunt to the winds since time began;
Emblems of rivalry, pride and hate;
But thou are the flag of the world, of Man.

Red as the blood of freedom's dead,
Thy hues might well have flowed from their veins.
Red as the one blood of man is red,
Holy thou art in thy sanguine stains.
Holy as truth and holy as right;
Sacred as wisdom and sacred as love;
Worthy the rapture that lifted to light
Thy glorious shape where it ripples above.

Unto the spirit of friendliness
Thou was fashioned, to comfort man's hungry thought;
To shine for the deeds that alone can bless,
And the life of brotherhood nobly wrought
Unto the spirit that rends the gyves
And shatters the bonds that make men slaves;
The spirit that suffers and sinks and strives.
Till it strengthens hope, till it lifts and saves.

Thou art no new thing; thou hast waved from of old.
Thou hast seen the day be born from the night;
And hast streamed for truth where the truth was bold
As time fled on to the future's light.
Beyond all the seas, on many a shore,
Thou hast buttressed the heart and stiffened the hand
To struggle for fellowship o're and o're,
From the youth to the age of the eldest land.

Thou hast called to battle! Yea, thou hast led
Where men have followed, forgetting fears
And hast solaced the dying and graced the dead,
Stained with blood and with dust and tears
—Blood, a full tribute paid for peace;
Tears shed free o're humanity's wrongs,



With faith in thy cause, that could never cease,
Met tyranny's swords, and fell, singing thy songs.

As thou art loved, thou art loathed, full well;
Loathed and cursed by the lords of power.
Ever they name thee the flag of hell,
And rage in the fear of thy triumph hour.
But their grasp grows weak on the wills of men;
Their armies falter; their guns are rust;
As from prison, and labor of poverty's den
Thy hosts speak *no* to their crumbling lust.

See! Now there greet the ten million eyes,
And lips uncounted smile to thy red.
Yes, those who bow to thy crimson dyes,
Are myriads more than all of thy dead.
Lo! The young clap hands at thy bright unrest;
And the child in arms it leaps in its glee.
Nay, babes unborn, 'neath the mother's breast
And given and pledged to thy cause and to thee!

Banner of freedom and freedom's peace.
Float in thy beauty, in sign of the day
When ravage of power and conquest shall cease,
And mouldering tyranny pass away.
Who would not all for thy promise give?
As I gaze on the fools, one wish have I—
To love thee and honor thee while I live,
And fold thee around me when I must die!



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=The Agitator=

Where hurrying thousands meet,
And poor in living streams on either hand.
Amidst the richest street,
With set and stubborn face he takes his stand.
The lesson to repeat
Of evil days and acts which curse the land.

Indifference cools him not;
And jeers and blows he takes, perchance, beside.
Brave, he accepts his lot;
At worst he meets it with a martyr's pride.
To bear, he knows not what,
He seeks the crowd and will not be denied.

His voice is loud and strong,
And vigorous gestures add their potent force,
As to the restless throng
He pictures clear corruption's crafty course,
Or challenges the wrong
Which in some unjust privilege finds its source.

A true son of the soil,
And feeling, as the hard-pressed masses feel,
The things which mar and spoil,
And bind life down with bonds as strong as steel,
He knows the men who toil,
And truth to these he can most clear reveal.

No knotty theories
He offers to the listeners who attend,
Or generalities,
Which glitter with the gilt that fine words lend;
He sets forth what he sees
So simply that who hears can comprehend.

The deep philosopher,
The pedant wise, whose wisdom makes him cold.
Instructs, but cannot stir
The heart of work, whose hope is tried and old;
But this one strives to spur
The rebel in the blood and make it bold.



He lifts the common thought,
And e'en the common heart up to the light;
Till, by his teaching wrought
To understand their wrongs and know their might
Plain men at last are brought
To rouse in truceless struggle for the right.