



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

LYRA HEROICA

William Ernest Henley

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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by

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY



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Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
To all the sensual world proclaim
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.

Sir Walter Scott.

PREFACE

This book of verse for boys is, I believe, the first of its kind in English. Plainly, it were labour lost to go gleaning where so many experts have gone harvesting; and for what is rarest and best in English Poetry the world must turn, as heretofore, to the several 'Golden Treasuries' of Professor Palgrave and Mr. Coventry Patmore, and to the excellent 'Poets' Walk' of Mr. Mowbray Morris. My purpose has been to choose and sheave a certain number of those achievements in verse which, as expressing the simpler sentiments and the more elemental emotions, might fitly be addressed to such boys—and men, for that matter—as are privileged to use our noble English tongue.

To set forth, as only art can, the beauty and the joy of living, the beauty and the blessedness of death, the glory of battle and adventure, the nobility of devotion—to a cause, an ideal, a passion even—the dignity of resistance, the sacred quality of patriotism, that is my ambition here. Now, to read poetry at all is to have an ideal anthology of one's own, and in that possession to be incapable of content with the anthologies of all the world besides. That is, the personal equation is ever to be reckoned withal, and I have had my preferences, as those that went before me had theirs. I have omitted much, as Aytoun's 'Lays,' whose absence many will resent; I have included much, as that brilliant piece of doggerel of Frederick Marryat's, whose presence some will regard with distress. This without reference to enforcements due to the very nature of my work.

I have adopted the birth-day order: for that is the simplest. And I have begun with—not Chaucer, nor Spenser, nor the ballads, but—Shakespeare and Agincourt; for it seemed to me that a book of heroism could have no better starting-point than that heroic pair of names. As for the ballads, I have placed them, after much considering, in the gap between old and new, between classic and romantic, in English verse. The witness of Sidney and Drayton's example notwithstanding, it is not until 1765, when Percy publishes the 'Reliques,' that the ballad spirit begins to be the master influence that Wordsworth confessed it was; while as for

the history of the matter, there are who hold that 'Sir Patrick Spens,' for example, is the work of Lady Wardlaw, which to others, myself among them, is a thing preposterous and distraught.

It remains to add that, addressing myself to boys, I have not scrupled to edit my authors where editing seemed desirable, and that I have broken up some of the longer pieces for convenience in reading. Also, the help I have received while this book of 'Noble Numbers' was in course of growth—help in the way of counsel, suggestion, remonstrance, permission to use—has been such that it taxes gratitude and makes complete acknowledgment impossible.

W. E. H.

For I trust, if an enemy's fleet came yonder round by the
hill,
And the rushing battle-bolt sang from the three-decker out
of the foam,
That the smooth-faced snub-nosed rogue would leap from
his counter and till,
And strike, if he could, were it but with his cheating yard-
wand, home.

Tennyson.

AGINCOURT

INTROIT

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
 The brightest heaven of invention,
 A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
 And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
 Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
 Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
 Leashed in like hounds, should Famine, Sword and Fire
 Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,
 The flat unraisèd spirits that have dared
 On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
 So great an object. Can this cockpit hold
 The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
 Within this wooden O the very casques
 That did affright the air at Agincourt?
 O pardon! since a crooked figure may
 Attest in little place a million,
 And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
 On your imaginary forces work.
 Suppose within the girdle of these walls
 Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
 Whose high uprearèd and abutting fronts
 The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder:
 Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
 Into a thousand parts divide one man,
 And make imaginary puissance;
 Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
 Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
 For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
 Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
 Turning the accomplishment of many years
 Into an hour-glass.

INTERLUDE

Now all the youth of England are on fire,
And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies:
Now thrive the armourers, and honour's thought
Reigns solely in the breast of every man:
They sell the pasture now to buy the horse,
Following the mirror of all Christian kings,
With wingèd heels, as English Mercuries:
For now sits Expectation in the air,
And hides a sword from hilts unto the point
With crowns imperial, crowns and coronets,
Promised to Harry and his followers.
The French, advised by good intelligence
Of this most dreadful preparation,
Shake in their fear, and with pale policy
Seek to divert the English purposes.
O England! model to thy inward greatness,
Like little body with a mighty heart,
What mightst thou do, that honour would thee do,
Were all thy children kind and natural!
But see thy fault: France hath in thee found out
A nest of hollow bosoms, which he fills
With treacherous crowns; and three corrupted men,
One, Richard Earl of Cambridge, and the second,
Henry Lord Scroop of Masham, and the third,
Sir Thomas Grey, knight, of Northumberland,
Have for the gilt of France—O guilt indeed!—
Confirmed conspiracy with fearful France;
And by their hands this grace of kings must die,
If hell and treason hold their promises,
Ere he take ship for France, and in Southampton!—

HARFLEUR

Thus with imagined wing our swift scene flies
In motion of no less celerity
Than that of thought. Suppose that you have seen

The well-appointed king at Hampton Pier
Embark his royalty, and his brave fleet
With silken streamers the young Phœbus fanning:
Play with your fancies, and in them behold
Upon the hempen tackle ship-boys climbing;
Hear the shrill whistle which doth order give
To sounds confused; behold the threaten sails,
Borne with the invisible and creeping wind
Draw the huge bottoms through the furrowed sea
Breasting the lofty surge. O, do but think
You stand upon the rivage and behold
A city on the inconstant billows dancing!
For so appears this fleet majestical,
Holding due course to Harfleur. Follow, follow:
Grapple your minds to sternage of this navy,
And leave your England, as dead midnight still,
Guarded with grandsires, babies and old women,
Or passed or not arrived to pith and puissance;
For who is he, whose chin is but enriched
With one appearing hair, that will not follow
These culled and choice-drawn cavaliers to France?
Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege:
Behold the ordnance on their carriages,
With fatal mouths gaping on girded Harfleur.
Suppose the ambassador from the French comes back;
Tells Harry that the king doth offer him
Katharine his daughter, and with her to dowry
Some petty and unprofitable dukedoms.
The offer likes not: and the nimble gunner
With linstock now the devilish cannon touches,
And down goes all before them!

THE EVE

Now entertain conjecture of a time
When creeping murmur and the poring dark
Fills the wide vessel of the universe.
From camp to camp through the foul womb of night

The hum of either army stilly sounds,
 That the fixed sentinels almost receive
 The secret whispers of each other's watch:
 Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames
 Each battle sees the other's umbered face;
 Steed threatens steed, in high and boastful neighs
 Piercing the night's dull ear, and from the tents
 The armourers, accomplishing the knights,
 With busy hammers closing rivets up,
 Give dreadful note of preparation.
 The country cocks do crow, the clocks do toll,
 And the third hour of drowsy morning name.
 Proud of their numbers and secure in soul,
 The confident and over-lusty French
 Do the low-rated English play at dice,
 And chide the cripple, tardy-gaited night
 Who like a foul and ugly witch doth limp
 So tediously away. The poor condemnèd English,
 Like sacrifices, by their watchful fires
 Sit patiently and inly ruminate
 The morning's danger, and their gesture sad,
 Investing lank-lean cheeks and war-worn coats,
 Presenteth them unto the gazing moon
 So many horrid ghosts. O now, who will behold
 The royal captain of this ruined band
 Walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent,
 Let him cry 'Praise and glory on his head!'
 For forth he goes and visits all his host,
 Bids them good-morrow with a modest smile,
 And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen.
 Upon his royal face there is no note
 How dread an army hath enrouned him;
 Nor doth he dedicate one jot of colour
 Unto the weary and all-watchèd night,
 But freshly looks and over-bears attain
 With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty,
 That every wretch, pining and pale before,
 Beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks.

A largess universal like the sun
His liberal eye doth give to every one,
Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all,
Behold, as may unworthiness define,
A little touch of Harry in the night—
And so our scene must to the battle fly.

Shakespeare.

THE BATTLE

Fair stood the wind for France,
When we our sails advance,
Nor now to prove our chance
 Longer will tarry;
But putting to the main,
At Caux, the mouth of Seine,
With all his martial train,
 Landed King Harry.
And taking many a fort,
Furnished in warlike sort,
Marched towards Agincourt
 In happy hour,
Skirmishing day by day
With those that stopped his way,
Where the French gen'ral lay
 With all his power:
Which, in his height of pride,
King Henry to deride,
His ransom to provide
 To the king sending;
Which he neglects the while
As from a nation vile,
Yet with an angry smile
 Their fall portending.

And turning to his men,
Quoth our brave Henry then,

‘Though they to one be ten,
 Be not amazèd.
Yet have we well begun,
Battles so bravely won
Have ever to the sun
 By fame been raisèd.

And for myself, quoth he,
This my full rest shall be:
England ne’er mourn for me,
 Nor more esteem me;
Victor I will remain
Or on this earth lie slain;
Never shall she sustain
 Loss to redeem me.

Poitiers and Cressy tell,
When most their pride did swell,
Under our swords they fell;
 No less our skill is
Than when our grandsire great,
Claiming the regal seat,
By many a warlike feat
 Lopped the French lilies.’

The Duke of York so dread
The eager vaward led;
With the main Henry sped,
 Amongst his henchmen;
Excester had the rear,
A braver man not there:
O Lord, how hot they were
 On the false Frenchmen!

They now to fight are gone,
Armour on armour shone,
Drum now to drum did groan,
 To hear was wonder;

That with the cries they make
The very earth did shake,
Trumpet to trumpet spake,
Thunder to thunder.

Well it thine age became,
O noble Erpingham,
Which did the signal aim
To our hid forces!
When from the meadow by,
Like a storm suddenly,
The English archery
Struck the French horses.

With Spanish yew so strong,
Arrows a cloth-yard long,
That like to serpents stung,
Piercing the weather;
None from his fellow starts,
But playing manly parts,
And like true English hearts
Stuck close together.

When down their bows they threw,
And forth their bilbos drew,
And on the French they flew,
Not one was tardy;
Arms were from shoulders sent,
Scalps to the teeth were rent,
Down the French peasants went;
Our men were hardy.

This while our noble king,
His broadsword brandishing,
Down the French host did ding
As to o'erwhelm it,
And many a deep wound lent,
His arms with blood besprent,

And many a cruel dent
Bruisèd his helmet.

Glo'ster, that duke so good,
Next of the royal blood,
For famous England stood,
With his brave brother;
Clarence, in steel so bright,
Though but a maiden knight,
Yet in that furious fight
Scarce such another!

Warwick in blood did wade,
Oxford the foe invade,
And cruel slaughter made,
Still as they ran up;
Suffolk his axe did ply,
Beaumont and Willoughby
Bare them right doughtily,
Ferrers and Fanhope.

Upon Saint Crispin's Day
Fought was this noble fray,
Which fame did not delay,
To England to carry.

O, when shall Englishmen
With such acts fill a pen,
Or England breed again
Such a King Harry?

Drayton.

AFTER

Now we bear the king
Toward Calais: grant him there; there seen,
Heave him away upon your wingèd thoughts
Athwart the sea. Behold, the English beach

Pales in the flood with men, with wives and boys,
Whose shouts and claps out-voice the deep-mouthed sea,
Which like a mighty whiffler 'fore the king
Seems to prepare his way: so let him land,
And solemnly see him set on to London.
So swift a pace hath thought that even now
You may imagine him upon Blackheath;
Where that his lords desire him to have borne
His bruised helmet and his bended sword
Before him through the city: he forbids it,
Being free from vainness and self-glorious pride,
Giving full trophy, signal and ostent,
Quite from himself to God. But now behold,
In the quick forge and working-house of thought,
How London doth pour out her citizens!
The mayor and all his brethren in best sort,
Like to the senators of the antique Rome,
With the plebeians swarming at their heels,
Go forth and fetch their conquering Cæsar in!

Shakespeare.

II

LORD OF HIMSELF

How happy is he born or taught
Who serveth not another's will;
Whose armour is his honest thought,
And simple truth his highest skill;
Whose passions not his masters are;
Whose soul is still prepared for death—
Not tied unto the world with care
Of prince's ear or vulgar breath;
Who hath his ear from rumours freed;
Whose conscience is his strong retreat;
Whose state can neither flatterers feed,
Nor ruin make oppressors great;

Who envies none whom chance doth raise,
Or vice; who never understood
How deepest wounds are given with praise,
Nor rules of state but rules of good;

Who God doth late and early pray
More of his grace than gifts to lend,
And entertains the harmless day
With a well-chosen book or friend—

This man is free from servile bands
Of hope to rise or fear to fall:
Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And, having nothing, yet hath all.

Wotton.

III

TRUE BALM

High-spirited friend,
I send nor balms nor corsives to your wound;
Your faith hath found
A gentler and more agile hand to tend
The cure of that which is but corporal,
And doubtful days, which were named critical,
Have made their fairest flight
And now are out of sight.
Yet doth some wholesome physic for the mind,
Wrapped in this paper lie,
Which in the taking if you misapply
You are unkind.
Your covetous hand,
Happy in that fair honour it hath gained,
Must now be reined.
True valour doth her own renown commend
In one full action; nor have you now more

To do than be a husband of that store.
Think but how dear you bought
This same which you have caught—
Such thoughts will make you more in love with truth
‘Tis wisdom, and that high,
For men to use their fortune reverently,
Even in youth.

Jonson.

IV

HONOUR IN BUD

It is not growing like a tree
In bulk doth make man better be:
A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May:
Although it fall and die that night,
It was the plant and flower of light.

Jonson.

V

THE JOY OF BATTLE

Arm, arm, arm, arm! the scouts are all come in;
Keep your ranks close, and now your honours win.
Behold from yonder hill the foe appears;
Bows, bills, glaives, arrows, shields, and spears!
Like a dark wood he comes, or tempest pouring;
O view the wings of horse the meadows scouring!
The vanguard marches bravely. Hark, the drums!
Dub, dub!

They meet, they meet, and now the battle comes:
See how the arrows fly
That darken all the sky!

Hark how the trumpets sound!
Hark how the hills rebound—
Tara, tara, tara, tara, tara!

Hark how the horses charge! in, boys! boys, in!
The battle totters; now the wounds begin:
O how they cry!
O how they die!
Room for the valiant Memnon, armed with thunder!
See how he breaks the ranks asunder!
They fly! they fly! Eumenes has the chase,
And brave Polybius makes good his place:
To the plains, to the woods,
To the rocks, to the floods,
They fly for succour. Follow, follow, follow!
Hark how the soldiers hollow!
Hey, hey!
Brave Diocles is dead,
And all his soldiers fled;
The battle's won, and lost,
That many a life hath cost.

Fletcher.

VI

IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Mortality, behold and fear!
What a change of flesh is here!
Think how many royal bones
Sleep beneath this heap of stones!
Here they lie had realms and lands,
Who now want strength to stir their hands.
Here from their pulpits sealed with dust
They preach, 'In greatness is no trust.'
Here is an acre sown indeed
With the richest, royall'st seed

That the earth did e'er suck in,
Since the first man died for sin.
Here the bones of birth have cried,
'Though gods they were, as men they died.'
Here are sands, ignoble things,
Dropt from the ruined sides of kings.
Here's a world of pomp and state,
Buried in dust, once dead by fate.

Beaumont.

VII

GOING A-MAYING

Get up, get up for shame! The blooming morn
Upon her wings presents the god unshorn:
 See how Aurora throws her fair
 Fresh-quilted colours through the air:
 Get up, sweet slug-a-bed, and see
 The dew-bespangled herb and tree!
Each flower has wept and bowed toward the east,
Above an hour since, yet you not drest,
 Nay, not so much as out of bed?
 When all the birds have matins said,
 And sung their thankful hymns, 'tis sin,
 Nay, profanation, to keep in,
Whenas a thousand virgins on this day
Spring sooner than the lark to fetch in May.

Rise, and put on your foliage, and be seen
To come forth like the spring-time fresh and green,
 And sweet as Flora. Take no care
 For jewels for your gown or hair:
 Fear not; the leaves will strew
 Gems in abundance upon you:
Besides, the childhood of the day has kept,