

Selected Poetry

THE BIRDS

When Jesus Christ was four years old,
The angels brought Him toys of gold,
Which no man ever had bought or sold.

And yet with these He would not play.
He made Him small fowl out of clay,
And blessed them till they flew away:
Tu creasti, Domine.

Jesus Christ, Thou child so wise,
Bless mine hands and fill mine eyes,
And bring my soul to Paradise.

—HELAIRE BELLOC in *An Anthology of Modern Verse*.

RIME OF A PROLETAR BOY

Translated by William A. Drake.

My father works from morn till night,
Toiling his life away;
There is no better man than he,
Search for him where you may.

My father's coat is frayed and worn,
Mine new; but when I show
That I shall soon be grown a man,
His old eyes seem to glow.

My father's masters are the rich,
Whose taunts his spirit grieve;
But he brings with him hope and cheer
When he comes home at eve.

My father is a valiant man:
He spends his strength for us;
He bends his pride, but not for gold
Is he most covetous.

My father is a sad, poor man,
And were it not for me
And for my hopes he'd flee this vast
And weary comedy.

And did my father not consent,
No rich man should remain
And every little boy would be
Like me, as poor and plain.

And did my father say the word,
The mighty rich would quake:
And there would be increased those few
Who joy in life can take.

My father works and sweats and stints,
Though strongest of them all;
He is more mighty than the king
Of those who hold him thrall!

—ENDRE ADY in the *New York Herald Tribune*.

THE BREAKING POINT

Often at night I've passed her in the street,
Poor stunted Ellen in the beaded cape
That once was velvet; rusty draggled crape
Around the hat that crowned her grizzled head
And broken widespread boots upon her feet;
But "that's the lovely night!" was all she said.

Although the north wind brought the stinging rain

If she was chilled and sad she made no sign,
For if you asked her of her health—"I'm fine,

Now glory be to God! I can't complain."

They say her man is just a porter shark,
Who drinks the money if it comes his way.
You'll see him propping walls up every day,
Or with drink taken reeling home at night,
For many times I've passed him in the dark
And pitied her, poor woman, for her plight.
All day she must contend with work to earn
The scanty wage that goes to pay the rent
And feed the children, yet no discontent
Shadows the face her neighbors see return.

We thought she would lose heart when Josie left

And joined the army, leaving her for good.
Her eldest boy and best. But "now his food
Will never fail, he'll grow a man," said she,
And waved farewell, though with a heart bereft

She went to work each morning steadfastly.
The younger lads were idle, for a strike
Had stopped the work they'd sought so long in vain.

"No matter, so," said she, "they'll work again.

The Ganger sure can seldom get their like."
When 'Stasia died, the youngest of them all,
She set her face and had no tears to shed.

"Maybe the child is lucky being dead,"
She muttered and went out to seek the price
Of coffin, grave and decent funeral.

She had to beg, her pride made sacrifice.
Sickness, it seemed, was ever at her door.
But she had never time to heed her health.

"Let them go sick," she said, "that have the wealth,

The like o' that comes hard upon the poor."
So on a sea of sorrow did she toss

Like some forlorn and shabby little boat
Storm-beaten, drenched with spray, yet still afloat

Until the day when Fortune for surprise
Gave gold for cargo where there had been dross.

Ellen was dazzled by the radiant guise
Of Death who came to her while yet she slept.
She woke to a new life with an angel's kiss
That bade her welcome to unending bliss.

"'Tis joy that breaks my heart," she said—and wept.

—W. M. LETTS in the *Irish Statesman*.

THE HOUND

Some are sick for Spring and warm winds blowing

Over close-sheathed buds and a patch of old snow,

With the early arc-lamps delicately bowing
Across thin sunshine that hesitates to go.

But it's not for any April promises I sicken,
Though their stammering sweetness be a plucked string;

My mind is bent toward Autumn, I am shaken

More by her denials than by all the hopes of Spring.

The curt cold days, the blue and windy weather,

The smoke of burning brushwood keener than a frost,

An orchard full of odors night is wise to gather,

The fur-collared stubble where the flower is lost.

A clear green sunset and a pale moon showing,

A sense of dawning ends, like the light in the sky,

Autumn is a hound that shrills, my heart is for her gnawing,

The quarry goes to Autumn, let Spring die.
—BABETTE DEUTSCH in the *New Republic*.

THE BARGAIN

My true love hath my heart, and I have his
By just exchange one for another given;
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss,
There never was a better bargain driven:
My true love hath my heart, and I have his.

His heart in me keeps him and me in one,
My heart in him his thought and senses guides;

He loves my heart, for once it was his own,
I cherish his because in me it bides:

My true love hath my heart, and I have his.
—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY, (1554-1586.)

WALL PAPER

Aunt Sophronia lives alone
In a great, high box of a house
Fringed by a stiff, white fence
That leans over in places
Like trees bent by the wind.

Its tall rooms bewail the emptiness
Of their precision,
And through all the house
Weary ghosts of forgotten yesterdays
Stalk ceaselessly,
Prisoners
Behind the doors of tradition.

Narrow slits of sunlight
Steal through the shuttered windows,
And light up family albums and portraits
In stiff frames.
Bric-a-brac
Reclines in every posture
On shelf and what-not.

Aunt Sophronia sleeps in a room
Where blue wall-paper roses
Stare at her from every angle—
A thousand mocking eyes
Peering into her old age, asking,
"How much longer must we cling here?"

At night she twists her thin, gray hair
Into a knot upon her head,
And places her black-lace shoes
Side by side

On a footstool covered with patchwork,
In her ruffled, long-sleeved night-gown
By her high-backed walnut bed,
She reminds me somehow, of those blue roses
That should have been pink, instead.

—BEATRICE REYNOLDS in the *Buccaneer*.

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