

# **The Burning Marl**

**Brereton, John Le Gay (1871-1933)**

**University of Sydney Library**

**Sydney**

**1999**



**<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozlit>**

© 1999 University of Sydney Library.

The texts and images are not to be used for commercial purposes without  
permission

**Source Text:**

Prepared against the printed edition published by Fellowship,  
Melbourne, 1919

---

All quotation marks retained as data

First Published: 1919

821.91 *Australian Etexts poetry 1910-1939 verse*

**18th August 1999**

Vanessa KirkpatrickStaff

Proof-reading and correction of spelling errors against printed edition.

# **The Burning Marl**

**Melbourne**

**Fellowship**

**1919**

TO ALL WHO HAVE FOUGHT NOBLY

The verses in this collection are reprinted from The Anzac Memorial, The Australian Soldiers' Gift Book, Fellowship, Hermes, The Lone Hand, Ross's Magazine, and The Sydney Morning Herald.

# **The Burning Marl**

# War

## I.

THE beast exultant spreads the nostril wide,  
    Snuffing a sickly hate-enkindling scent;  
Proud of his rage, on sudden carnage bent,  
He leaps, and flings the helpless guard aside.  
Again, again the hills are gapped and dyed,  
    Again the hearts of waiting women spent.  
Is there no cooler pathway to content?  
Can we not heal the insanity of pride?

Silence the crackle and thunder of battling guns,  
    And drive your men to strategy of peace;  
    Crush ere its birth the hell-begotten crime;  
Still there's a war that no true warrior shuns,  
    That knows no mercy, looks for no surcease,  
    But ghastlier battles, victories more sublime.

## II.

Envy has slid in silence to its hole,  
    And Peace is basking where the workers meet,  
    And fire has purged the fever of the street  
Where raucous tradesmen grinned and gave and stole.  
Yet louder now the tides of battle roll,  
    With cheer or sob of charge or stern retreat,  
    And sullen thud and rumble of cannon beat  
About the heights and passes of the soul.

Not only that amid the hush we hear  
    The sounds that once were blurred by market cries,  
    Or classes wrangling in affairs of state:  
But forces now set free from sordid fear  
    No longer work as Mammon's murdering spies,  
    But storm the very citadels of hate.

## Belgium

THE Blatant Beast saw meadows, made for peace,  
Sunlit and gently asway, and held them light,  
Till each green blade grew rigid in the night  
And ruddied with a glorious morn's increase.  
Thou hast suffered; nor till Freedom find release  
And set for ever on the shining height  
The eternal rolling banner of her might  
Shall thy great gift of strife and suffering cease.

We, bred of one small island in the west,  
A little shrine of Freedom, far away  
— We, who can bow at no strong tyrant's hest,  
Bend low our heads in pride to thee to-day,  
For all unknown, a smiling babe at rest,  
Within thy lowly manger Freedom lay.

## ANZAC

WITHIN my heart I hear the cry  
Of loves that suffer, souls that die,  
And you may have no praise from me  
For warfare's vast vulgarity;  
Only the flag of love, unfurled  
For peace above a weeping world,  
I follow, though the fiery breath  
Of murder shrivel me in death.  
Yet here I stand and bow my head  
To those whom other banners led,  
Because within their hearts the clang  
Of Freedom's summoning trumpets rang,  
Because they welcomed grisly pain  
And laughed at prudence, mocked at gain,  
With noble hope and courage high,  
And taught our manhood how to die.  
Praise, praise and love be theirs who came  
From that red hell of stench and flame,  
Staggering, bloody, sick, but still  
Strong with indomitable will,  
Happy because, in gloomiest night,  
Their own hearts drummed them to the fight.

## For Valour

HAIL to you, comrades, who have won,  
Where the torn lines of battle run  
    By tattered town and ruined mead,  
The honour that men give with pride  
To those who, daffing death aside,  
    Have done the valorous deed.

And has the war, then, brought to birth,  
As flowers that spring from western earth  
    At summons of the pelting rain,  
The courage that can force its way,  
And hold the shadowing wings at bay,  
    And smile at lingering pain?

And is it true that only now  
Life lifts from her heroic brow  
    The smothering shroud of deadly peace,  
And laughs to sniff the morning air,  
And bids a thousand bonfires flare  
    The news of her release?

Hell's throat may swallow down its lie,  
For men knew how to live and die  
    And take the gifts of motley fate,  
Before the fiends of fear and greed,  
Clasping, engendered from their seed  
    The hissing brood of hate.

Are they not sightless fools who crave  
The sombre splendours of the grave  
    To prove that man is more than dust;  
Who dabble fingers in the side  
Of him who lives because he died,  
    Believing, when they must?

## **Light Loss**

“OUR loss was light,” the paper said,  
“Compared with damage to the Hun”:  
She was a widow, and she read  
One name upon the list of dead  
— Her son — her only son.

## Death

HE, born of my girlhood, is dead, while my life is yet young in my heart  
—Ere the breasts where his baby lips fed have forgotten their softness, we part.  
We part. He was mine, he was here, though he travelled by land and by sea,  
My son who could trample on fear, my babe who was moulded in me.  
As I sat in the darkness, it seemed I could still feel his touch on my head;  
He came in the night as I dreamed, and he knelt at the side of my bed;  
He murmured the words I had taught when his lips were the lips of a child,  
Ere the strength of his arm had been bought and the love that upheld him defiled;  
Then my faltering spirit grew bold, and my heart had forgotten its drouth,  
And I crooned little songs as of old, till I woke at his kiss on my mouth.  
Now waking and sleeping are pain. Nevermore will he kiss, nevermore  
Shall I hear his low whistle again at the gate, or his step on the floor,  
For to-night he was here while I slept, and this is the end of it all.  
Now that welter of darkness has swept us apart, can he come if I call?  
Can he come, little chap with the eyes that brought light out of heaven to earth?  
Can he come, though the soul of me cries for the joy that I bought by his birth?  
I can see but the horror that bids the heart of the mother despair,  
The vision that burns on my lids, the face that will always be there,  
For he holds out his hands to me, red, and his eyes tell the truth as he stands.  
He is dead. He is dead. He is dead. He is dead, with the blood on his hands.

## Trade

WHERE yonder ruddy-misted star  
    Is tumbling down the placid sky  
    The people's aims were not so high  
As our heroic motives are;  
To love and trust they set a bar,  
    And "Profit" was their only cry;  
    They paid but little heed how nigh  
Came thundering the iron car.

It rushed upon them and it passed  
    Leaving a ghost of pain and fear  
    To haunt the ruin it had made.  
But surely they have learnt at last?  
    What far faint murmur can we hear  
    Of frantic howling? Listen! . . . "TRADE."

## **The Power Of Hell**

“THERE is no place,” he said,  
“For love or pity here;  
We dread and only dread  
The moods that once were dear.

“We break the ancient spell,  
And arm to take our part  
Against the power of Hell.”  
And Hell was in his heart.

# The War After The War

## I.

YONDER, with eyes that tears, not distance, dim,  
With ears the wide world's thickness cannot daunt,  
We see tumultuous miseries that haunt  
The night's dead watches, hear the battle hymn  
Of ruin shrieking through the music grim,  
Where the red spectre straddles, long and gaunt,  
Spitting across the seas his hideous taunt  
At those who nurse at home the unwounded limb.

What shall we say, who, drawing indolent breath,  
Mark the quick pant of those who, full of hate,  
Drive home the steel or loose the shrieking shell,  
Heroes or Huns, who smite the grin of death  
And laugh or curse beneath the blows of fate,  
Swept madly to the thudding heart of hell?

## II.

O peace, be still! Let no drear whirlwind sweep  
Our souls about the vault, that groans or yells  
In travail of the brood of Fear, and swells  
Stupendous with new monsters of the deep.  
This is no day to wring the hands and weep,  
No hour for hopeless tolling and clash of bells.  
Faith is no faith if god or demon quells  
One hope or drugs it to uneasy sleep.

What you have shed man's blood for, fight for still  
In world-wide conflict, joining hand with hand;  
Hate fear and hatred and the seed thereof,  
And, since you have struck for Freedom, do her will  
And smash the barriers parting land from land,  
Unfaltering armies of immortal love.

# Hymn To The God Of War

FROM every quarter we,  
Who bent the trembling knee  
And covered or grovelled prostrate day and night,  
Now come once more to sing  
A dirge before thee, King,  
Once more with earnest heart to do thee right.

Have we not hailed thee God?  
Our weary feet have trod  
The vasty barren sands and treacherous ice,  
With many a bitter cry,  
To pile thine altar high  
With pallid human hearts in sacrifice.

We hated thee and came  
With eyes of shifty shame,  
With heavy steel above the craven breast,  
Yet evermore we did  
The ill thy servants bid,  
For everywhere thy might was manifest.

At thy sibilant word  
We were filled with distrust,  
And we glared on each other,  
All horribly stirred  
Against sister and brother;  
Our green hopes were wilted and riven, our red-running blood was as dust.

And a foul poison ran  
Through the veins of the world,  
And we waited and wondered.  
By magical ban  
We were cruelly sundered,  
Then a maniac hatred upcaught us and deep into hell we were hurled.

We have crept to thee, God,  
In the day of thy wrath,  
We have wept, we have fasted,  
We have crimsoned the sod  
That thy worship has blasted,  
And have seen thee stalk pale and triumphant where nations fell flat in thy path.

Yet out of the dust and the flame,  
The squalor and muddle of crime,  
A red waving blossom there came  
And a scent on the tempest of time.

Heroic and splendid, we threw  
Our lives to be oil in the fire,  
But a marvel of fellowship grew  
As the blaze bickered broader and higher,  
And the soul of a people stood up, and spoke to us all from the pyre.

And lo, we are come to thy shrine,  
O God, but we ask for no grace,  
For our hearts are made glad with a wine  
That is death to the craven and base,  
And thy shrine shall be burnt for our mirth  
And thine altar be turned to thy bier,  
For, if Love be our Lord upon earth,  
What corner is left for thee here?  
The veil of thy temple is rent — and behold, thou hast vanished, O Fear!

## The Patriot

*THE patriot from his walls of brass  
Is singing loudly as I pass;  
With fearless heart and open eyes,  
He shouts the ancient battle cries;  
And, where I pause to hear him sing,  
A silent crowd is listening.*

My country, God bestows by thee  
The glory of the world to be  
—The glory thou alone canst give  
To last amid things fugitive.

My country, an ideal form  
I see thee splendid in the storm,  
Directress of the power divine  
That makes the expectant future thine.

My country, all the world shall bow  
Before thy peace-conceiving brow,  
And all the peoples humbly stand  
Submissive to thy blessing hand.

My country, yea, the foes who raise  
A tyrant flag shall learn to praise  
Thy steadfast love that dares to fight  
The horde of Satan for the right.

My country, loveliest, strongest, best,  
Thou hast a mission to the rest,  
And greater wealth and love shall be  
The guerdon of thy ministry.

*In every land I hear him sing;  
In every land I see him fling  
His country's flag against the skies  
And gaze aloft with dazzled eyes;  
And then his loud applause rings round  
His walls of brass with brazen sound;  
And deep below his cheering loud  
I mark the murmur of the crowd.*

## **Kretschmann**

LOVE may trace his echoing footsteps, yet we never more shall meet  
Rugged Kretschmann, the musician, plodding down a Sydney street,  
Never see the low broad figure, massive head and shaggy mane  
And the quiet furrowed features, never hear his voice again.

But from many a home there rises many a note that lingering rings  
Ever since his cunning fingers touched and drew it from the strings;  
All our land is full of noises; happy phantom fields of scent,  
Bright with sunlit blossoms, echo birdlike music where he went.

He was old and grey and weary, death and he were long at grips,  
Evil whispers hissed behind him, German to the finger-tips,  
War's wild fury snarled about him, so he gently stepped aside,  
Loving us and loving Germans, heavy-hearted, and he died.

Crusted shells, by ocean battered, taken from the barren shore  
Bear within their hearts a murmur of the sea's eternal roar;  
Who shall say what vital music, all unheard by duller ears,  
Swept the soul of good old Kretschmann to his home amid the spheres?

Harmony was all his being, and he held the music sweet  
Welling up in baby voices, beaten out by tiny feet;  
Still with playthings in his pockets, rest and solace may he know,  
Welcomed gladly to the kingdom where the little children go.

## What Of The Night?

THE doom is imminent of unholy hate.

Hail to the light that glimmers where the leaves  
Are shaken by winds of dawning, and the sheaves  
Of hemlock swirl and scatter in the spate!  
Love, that has learned in faith to sorrow and wait,  
Sings loud his glorious charm and subtly weaves  
The spell subduing madness that receives  
The madman at his own mad estimate.

Ah, but the ponderous horror! Nay, not yet  
The cloud of sorrow leeward growls and rolls;  
The eyes that meet the morn are heavy and wet.  
The loss the military mind enscrolls,  
Spilt blood and battered bones, we may forget,  
But not the wastage of beloved souls.

## Transports

BEHIND us lay the homely shore  
    With youthful memories aureoled;  
A sky of dazzling blue before,  
    We sailed a sea of molten gold.

To our old haven we return;  
    By smoky hills as grey as mud  
We see the sullen sunset burn  
    Malignant on a lake of blood.

Yes, we return: but memory roams  
    A foul, bleak age of pain that yields  
The smoke and flame of ruined homes,  
    The muck of cannon-pitted fields.

## The Wounded

STUPIDITY and Selfishness and Fear,  
Who hold enslaved the intellect of Man,  
Have found their victims here.

We saw them go, alert to seek the van  
Where phantom Glory showered her withering leaves;  
Now they return who can.

Slowly, full-fraught with pain, the vessel heaves  
From labouring seas, and creeps along the bay  
To where the city grieves.

Happy are those who limp the dusty way;  
And those whose eyes can meet the loving glance,  
Happy indeed are they.

But mock them not with babble of romance:  
They have glared at death across the orient rocks  
Or in the mire of France.

O welcome to your land of herds and flocks  
And fields that pray toward a fairy sky  
That promises and mocks.

Welcome! our eyes are strained and sorrow-dry,  
Watching for peace and you, and every heart  
Would fain, but cannot, cry.

For you who, led by love, have borne your part  
Where war's black ploughshare turns the bloody sand  
And crops of hatred start —

For you and by your help, heroic band,  
We swear by love and labour to make this  
A lovelier, worthier land.

Nor shall we let the home-bred serpent hiss  
Unscotched upon our hearth, if ever here  
Our hope and fortune kiss.

The workers of the battered world draw near,  
Scorning a foeman's name. The heart of Man  
In every land is dear.

## The Dead

HAIL and farewell to those who fought and died,  
Not laughingly adventurous, nor pale  
With idiot hatred, nor to fill the tale  
Of racial selfishness and patriot pride,  
But merely that their own souls rose and cried  
Alarum when they heard the sudden wail  
Of stricken freedom and along the gale  
Saw her eternal banner quivering wide.

Farewell, high-hearted friends, for God is dead  
If such as you can die and fare not well  
—If when you fall your gallant spirit fail.  
You are with us still, and can we be adread  
Though hell gape, bloody-fanged and horrible?  
Glory and hope of us who love you, Hail!

## The Fugitive

HIS shatter'd Empire thunders to the ground:

    A myriad hearts peal laughter as it falls,

    While red flags flutter on its ruined walls

And living joy darts all the world around.

The imperial criminal, naked and uncrowned,

    Breathing a shuddering air of curses, crawls,

    Baffled and beaten, from his gorgeous halls,

While Vengeance halloos lapdog, cur and hound.

Behold the arrogant humbled, and rejoice

    The grasping hand holds naught but flying dust,

    And Envy meets the pitiless grin of Fate.

Take warning of your own heart's inward voice,

    Bid your own soul be humble and distrust

    The yelping promises of greed and hate.

# The Dirge

January, 1918

OUT of the pregnant darkness, where from fire  
To glimmering fire the watchword leaps,  
The dirge floats up from those who build the pyre  
High and still higher  
That yet shall blaze across the verminous deeps.

*Farewell, O brother-heart,  
Yet we shall not forget;  
Though hand from hand must part,  
Your hope is with us yet.  
The clank of the swaggerer's sword  
And clink of the grasper's gold  
Are not so loud as the lover's word  
In a thousand echoes rolled.*

The lords of the tottering order sit and plot,  
With cunning courtesy haggling still:  
The insistent chorus cannot be forgot —  
Its words are shot  
Like summoning rockets from the eastern hill.

*You, it was you who showed  
How Murder made his pact  
In busy Greed's abode,  
Preparing for the act.  
To save the fatherland  
They bade your comrades die,  
And full in their path you took your stand  
To kill the patriot lie.*

Now, lest their flags and bags be lost in flame.  
The desperate pair have summoned those  
Whose love is moderate and whose life is tame  
To quench in shame  
The light that streams where wind of warning blows.

*The ranks of freedom swell,  
The flag of love rolls out:  
The efficient ranks of hell  
Close up in deadly doubt.  
Moulded in battle's mire,  
The bullet found its mark;  
A living spirit, winged with fire,*

*Flares homeward from the dark.*

## The Peace Of God

THE seeking souls, by baleful fires made blind,  
Torn by entrapping brambles, thirsty and mad,  
Hear on the lonely waste the stealthy pad  
And half-held breath of glaring beasts behind;  
Then soft hands lead them where the weary find  
A refuge from thought's hunting and are glad.  
Why to their certain misery should they add?  
They rest secure, to freedom's loss resigned.

So, in the bitter years when love and age  
Sneered at the youth whose sturdy heart withheld  
His hand from slaughter, till, in desperate plight,  
He flung into the trampling equipage,  
I have heard him mutter, as the music swelled,  
“The peace of God is on me. They were right.”

---