

Collected Poems

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by

Arthur Conan Doyle



Collected Poems, by Arthur Conan Doyle

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DEDICATION

TO

J. C. D.

THIS—AND ALL

February 1911

FOREWORD

If it were not for the hillocks
 You'd little think of the hills;
The rivers would seem tiny
 If it were not for the rills.
If you never saw brushwood
 You would under-rate the trees;
And so you see the purpose
 Of such little rhymes as these.

PREFACE

This volume contains nearly the wholeⁱ of the three small collections named "Songs of Action," "Songs of the Road," and "The Guards came through." To these are added a number of new pieces: "The Farewell," "Now then, Smith!" "To my Lady," "A Reminiscence of Cricket," "The Bugles of Canada," "Christmas in Trouble," "To Carlo," "To Ronald Ross," "Little Billy," "Take Heart," "Retrospect," and "Comrades." There is also added a short poetical one-act play, "The Journey."

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

March 1922.

SONGS OF ACTION

The Song of the Bow

WHAT of the bow?

The bow was made in England
Of true wood, of yew-wood,
The wood of English bows;
So men who are free
Love the old yew-tree
And the land where the yew-tree grows.

What of the cord?

The cord was made in England:
A rough cord, a tough cord,
A cord that bowmen love;
And so we will sing
Of the hempen string
And the land where the cord was wove.

What of the shaft?

The shaft was cut in England:
A long shaft, a strong shaft,
Barbed and trim and true;
So we'll drink all together
To the grey goose-feather
And the land where the grey goose flew.

What of the mark?

Ah, seek it not in England,

A bold mark, our old mark

Is waiting over-sea.

When the strings harp in chorus,

And the lion flag is o'er us,

It is there that our mark will be.

What of the men?

The men were bred in England:

The bowmen—the yeomen,

The lads of dale and fell.

Here's to you—and to you!

To the hearts that are true

And the land where the true hearts dwell.

Cremona

(The French Army, including a part of the Irish Brigade, under Marshal Villeroy, held the fortified town of Cremona during the winter of 1702. Prince Eugène, with the Imperial Army, surprised it one morning, and, owing to the treachery of a priest, occupied the whole city before the alarm was given. Villeroy was captured, together with many of the French garrison. The Irish, however, consisting of the regiments of Dillon and of Burke, held a fort commanding the river gate, and defended themselves all day, in spite of Prince Eugène's efforts to win them over to his cause. Eventually Eugène, being unable to take the post, was compelled to withdraw from the city.)

THE Grenadiers of Austria are proper men and tall;
The Grenadiers of Austria have scaled the city wall;
 They have marched from far away
 Ere the dawning of the day,
And the morning saw them masters of Cremona.

There's not a man to whisper, there's not a horse to neigh,
Of the footmen of Lorraine and the riders of Dupres;
 They have crept up every street,
 In the market-place they meet,
They are holding every vantage in Cremona.

The Marshal Villeroy he has started from his bed;
The Marshal Villeroy has no wig upon his head;
 "I have lost my men!" quoth he,
 "And my men they have lost me,
And I sorely fear we both have lost Cremona."

Prince Eugène of Austria is in the market-place;
Prince Eugène of Austria has smiles upon his face;
Says he, "Our work is done,
For the Citadel is won,
And the black and yellow flag flies o'er Cremona."

Major Dan O'Mahony is in the barrack square,
And just six hundred Irish lads are waiting for him there;
Says he, "Come in your shirt,
And you won't take any hurt,
For the morning air is pleasant in Cremona."

Major Dan O'Mahony is at the barrack gate,
And just six hundred Irish lads will neither stay nor wait
There's Dillon and there's Burke,
And there'll be some bloody work
Ere the Kaiserlics shall boast they hold Cremona.

Major Dan O'Mahony has reached the river fort,
And just six hundred Irish lads are joining in the sport
"Come, take a hand!" says he,
"And if you will stand by me,
Then it's glory to the man who takes Cremona!"

Prince Eugène of Austria has frowns upon his face,
And loud he calls his Galloper of Irish blood and race:

"MacDonnell, ride, I pray,
To your countrymen, and say
That only they are left in all Cremona!"

MacDonnell he has reined his mare beside the river dyke,
And he has tied the parley flag upon a sergeant's pike;
Six companies were there
From Limerick and Clare,
The last of all the guardians of Cremona.

"Now, Major Dan O'Mahony, give up the river gate,
Or, Major Dan O'Mahony, you'll find it is too late;
For when I gallop back
'Tis the signal for attack,
And no quarter for the Irish in Cremona!"

And Major Dan he laughed: "Faith, if what you say be true,
And if they will not come until they hear again from you,
Then there will be no attack,
For you're never going back,
And we'll keep you snug and safely in Cremona."

All the weary day the German stormers came,
All the weary day they were faced by fire and flame,
They have filled the ditch with dead,
And the river's running red;
But they cannot win the gateway of Cremona.

All the weary day, again, again, again,
The horsemen of Duprés and the footmen of Lorraine,
 Taafe and Herberstein,
 And the riders of the Rhine;
It's a mighty price they're paying for Cremona.

Time and time they came with the deep-mouthed German roar,
Time and time they broke like the wave upon the shore;
 For better men were there
 From Limerick and Clare,
And who will take the gateway of Cremona?

Prince Eugène has watched, and he gnaws his nether lip;
Prince Eugène has cursed as he saw his chances slip:
 "Call off! Call off!" he cried,
 "It is nearing eventide,
And I fear our work is finished in Cremona."

Says Wauchop to McAulliffe, "Their fire is growing slack."
Says Major Dan O'Mahony, "It is their last attack;
 But who will stop the game
 While there's light to play the same,
And to walk a short way with them from Cremona?"

And so they snarl behind them, and beg them turn and come,
They have taken Neuberg's standard, they have taken Diak's drum;

And along the winding Po,
Beard on shoulder, stern and slow
The Kaiserlics are riding from Cremona.

Just two hundred Irish lads are shouting on the wall;
Four hundred more are lying who can hear no slogan call;
But what's the odds of that,
For it's all the same to Pat
If he pays his debt in Dublin or Cremona.

Says General de Vaudray, "You've done a soldier's work!
And every tongue in France shall talk of Dillon and of Burke!
Ask what you will this day,
And be it what it may,
It is granted to the heroes of Cremona."

"Why, then," says Dan O'Mahony, "one favour we entreat,
We were called a little early, and our toilet's not complete;
We've no quarrel with the shirt,
But the breeches wouldn't hurt,
For the evening air is chilly in Cremona."

The Storming Party

SAID Paul Leroy to Barrow,
"Though the breach is steep and narrow,
 If we only gain the summit
 Then it's odds we hold the fort.
I have ten and you have twenty,
And the thirty should be plenty,
With Henderson and Henty
 And McDermott in support."

Said Barrow to Leroy,
"It's a solid job, my boy,
 For they've flanked it, and they've banked it,
 And they've bored it with a mine.
But it's only fifty paces
Ere we look them in the faces;
And the men are in their places,
 With their toes upon the line."

Said Paul Leroy to Barrow,
"See that first ray, like an arrow,
 How it tinges all the fringes
 Of the sullen drifting skies.

They told me to begin it
At five-thirty to the minute,
And at thirty-one I'm in it,
Or my sub will get his rise.

"So we'll wait the signal rocket,
Till...Barrow, show that locket,
That turquoise-studded locket,
Which you slipped from out your pocket
And are pressing with a kiss!
Turquoise-studded, spiral-twisted,
It is hers! And I had missed it
From her chain; and you have kissed it:
Barrow, villain, what is this?"

"Leroy, I had a warning,
That my time has come this morning,
So I speak with frankness, scorning
To deny the thing that's true.
Yes, it's Amy's, is the trinket,
Little turquoise-studded trinket,
Not her gift—oh, never think it!
For her thoughts were all for you.

"As we danced I gently drew it
From her chain—she never knew it,
But I love her—yes, I love her:
I am candid, I confess.

But I never told her, never,
For I knew 'twas vain endeavour,
And she loved you—loved you ever,
Would to God she loved you less!"

"Barrow, Barrow, you shall pay me!
Me, your comrade, to betray me!
Well I know that little Amy
 Is as true as wife can be.
She to give this love-badged locket!
She had rather...Ha, the rocket! Hi,
McDougall! Sound the bugle!
 Yorkshires, Yorkshires, follow me!"

* * * * *

Said Paul Leroy to Amy,
"Well, wifie, you may blame me,
For my passion overcame me,
 When he told me of his shame;
But when I saw him lying,
Dead amid a ring of dying,
Why, poor devil, I was trying
 To forget, and not to blame.

"And this locket, I unclasped it
From the fingers that still grasped it;
He told me how he got it,
 How he stole it in a valse."

And she listened leaden-hearted:
Oh, the weary day they parted!
For she loved him—yes, she loved him—
For his youth and for his truth,
 And for those dying words, so false.

The Frontier Line

WHAT marks the frontier line?

Thou man of India, say!

Is it the Himalayas sheer,
The rocks and valleys of Cashmere,
Or Indus as she seeks the south
From Attoch to the fivefold mouth?

"Not that! Not that!"

Then answer me, I pray!

What marks the frontier line?

What marks the frontier line?

Thou man of Burmah, speak!

Is it traced from Mandalay,
And down the marches of Cathay,
From Bhamo south to Kiang-mai,
And where the buried rubies lie?

"Not that! Not that!"

Then tell me what I seek:

What marks the frontier line?

What marks the frontier line?

Thou Africander, say!

Is it shown by Zulu kraal,
By Drakensberg or winding Vaal,

Or where the Shire waters seek
Their outlet east at Mozambique?

"Not that! Not that!

There is a surer way
To mark the frontier line."

What marks the frontier line?

Thou man of Egypt, tell!

Is it traced on Luxor's sand,
Where Karnak's painted pillars stand,
Or where the river runs between
The Ethiop and Bishareen?

"Not that! Not that!

By neither stream nor well
We mark the frontier line.

"But be it east or west,

One common sign we bear,

The tongue may change, the soil, the sky,
But where your British brothers lie,
The lonely cairn, the nameless grave,
Still fringe the flowing Saxon wave.

'Tis that! 'Tis where

They lie—the men who placed it there,
That marks the frontier line."

Corporal Dick's Promotion

A BALLAD OF '82

THE Eastern day was well-nigh, o'er
When, parched with thirst and travel sore,
Two of McPherson's flanking corps
 Across the Desert were tramping.
They had wandered off from the beaten track
And now were wearily harking back,
Ever staring round for the signal jack
 That marked their comrades camping.

The one was Corporal Robert Dick,
Bearded and burly, short and thick,
Rough of speech and in temper quick,
 A hard-faced old rascalion.
The other, fresh from the barrack square,
Was a raw recruit, smooth-cheeked and fair,
Half grown, half drilled, with the weedy air
 Of a draft from the home battalion.

Weary and parched and hunger-torn
They had wandered on from early morn,
And the young boy-soldier limped forlorn,
 Now stumbling and now falling.

Around the orange sand-curves lay,
Flecked with boulders, black or grey,
Death-silent, save that far away
 A kite was shrilly calling.

A kite? Was *that* a kite? The yell
That shrilly rose and faintly fell?
No kite's, and yet the kite knows well
 The long-drawn wild halloo.
And right athwart the evening sky
The yellow sand-spray spurtled high,
And shrill and shriller swelled the cry
 Of "Allah! Allahu!"

The Corporal peered at the crimson West,
Hid his pipe in his khaki vest,
Growled out an oath and onward pressed,
 Still glancing over his shoulder.
"Bedouins, mate!" he curtly said;
"We'll find some work for steel and lead,
And maybe sleep in a sandy bed,
 Before we're one hour older.

"But just one flutter before we're done.
Stiffen your lip and stand, my son;
We'll take this bloomin' circus on:
 Ball-cartridge load! Now, steady!"

With a curse and a prayer the two faced round,
Dogged and grim they stood their ground,
And their breech-blocks snapped with a crisp clean sound
As the rifles sprang to the "ready."

Alas for the Emir Ali Khan!
A hundred paces before his clan,
That ebony steed of the Prophet's breed
Is the foal of death and of danger.
A spurt of fire, a gasp of pain,
A bluish blur on the yellow plain,
The chief was down, and his bridle rein
Was in the grip of the stranger.

With the light of hope on his rugged face,
The Corporal sprang to the dead man's place,
One prick with the steel, one thrust with the heel,
And where was the man to outride him?
A grip of his knees, a toss of his rein,
He was settling her down to her gallop again,
When he stopped, for he heard just one faltering word
From the young recruit beside him.

One faltering word from pal to pal,
But it found the heart of the Corporal.
He had sprung to the sand, he had lent him a hand,
"Up, mate! They'll be 'ere in a minute;

Off with you! No palaver! Go!
I'll bide be'ind and run this show.
Promotion has been cursed slow,
 And this is my chance to win it."

Into the saddle he thrust him quick,
Spurred the black mare with a bayonet prick.
Watched her gallop with plunge and with kick
 Away o'er the desert careering.
Then he turned with a softened face,
And loosened the strap of his cartridge-case,
While his thoughts flew back to the dear old place
 In the sunny Hampshire clearing.

The young boy-private, glancing back,
Saw the Bedouins' wild attack,
And heard the sharp Martini crack.
 But as he gazed, already
The fierce fanatic Arab band
Was closing in on every hand,
Until one tawny swirl of sand,
 Concealed them in its eddy.

* * * * *

A squadron of British horse that night,
Galloping hard in the shadowy light,
Came on the scene of that last stern fight,
 And found the Corporal lying

Silent and grim on the trampled sand,
His rifle grasped b his stiffened hand,
With the warrior pride of one who died
 'Mid a ring of the dead and the dying.

And still when twilight shadows fall,
After the evening bugle call,
In bivouac or in barrack-hall,
His comrades speak of the Corporal,
 His death and his devotion.

And there are some who like to say
That perhaps a hidden meaning lay
In the words he spoke, and that the day
When his rough bold spirit passed away
 Was the day that he won promotion.

A Forgotten Tale

(The scene of this ancient fight, recorded by Froissart, is still called "Altura de los Inglesos." Five hundred years later Wellington's soldiers were fighting on the same ground.)

"SAY, what saw you on the hill,
Campesino Garcia?"

"I saw my brindled heifer there,
A trail of bowmen, spent and bare,
And a little man on a sorrel mare
Riding slow before them."

"Say, what saw you in the vale,
Campesino Garcia?"

"There I saw my lambing ewe
And an army riding through,
Thick and brave the pennons flew
From the lances o'er them."

"Then what saw you on the hill,
Campesino Garcia?"

"I saw beside the milking byre,
White with want and black with mire,
The little man with eyes afire
Marshalling his bowmen."