

The Song of Honour.

by

Ralph Hodgson.

I climbed a hill as light fell short,
and rooks came home in scramble sort,
and filled the trees and flapped and fought
and sang themselves to sleep;
An owl from nowhere with no sound
Swung by and soon was nowhere found,
I heard him calling half-way round,
Holloing loud and deep;
A pair of stars, faint pins of light,
Then many a star, sailed into sight,
and all the stars, the flower of night,
Were round me at a leap;
To tell how still the valleys lay
I heard a watch dog miles away
and bells of distant sheep.

I heard no more of birds or bell,
The mastiff in a slumber fell,
I stared into the sky,
As wondering men have always done
Since beauty and the stars were one,
Though none so hard as I.

It seemed, so still the valleys were,
 As if the whole world knelt at prayer,
 Save me and me alone;
 So pure and wide the silence was
 I feared to bend a blade of grass,
 And there I stood like stone.

There, sharp and sudden, there I heard—
 'Oh, some wild bore-sick singing bird
 Woke singing in the trees?
 The nightingale and babble-wren
 Were in the English greenwood then,
 And you heard one of these?'

The babble-wren and nightingale
 Sang in the Libyanian vale
 That season of the year!
 Yet, true enough, I heard them plain,
 I heard them both again, again,
 As sharp and sweet and clear
 As if the Libyanian tree
 Had thrust a bough across the sea,
 Had thrust a bough across to me
 With music for my ear!
 I heard them both, and oh! I heard
 The song of every singing bird
 That sings beneath the sky,
 And with the song of lark and wren
 The song of mountains, moths and men
 And seas and rainbows vie.

I heard the universal choir
 The Sons of Light exalt their sire
 With universal song,
 Earth's lowliest and loudest notes,
 Her million times ten million throats
 Exalt Him loud and long,
 And lips and lungs and tongues of Grace
 From every part and every place
 Within the shining of His face
 The universal throng.

I heard the hymn of being sound
 From every well of honour found
 For human sense and soul:
 The song of poets when they write
 The testament of Beautysprite
 Upon a flying scroll,
 The song of painters when they take
 A burning brush for Beauty's sake
 And limn her features whole —
 The song of men divinely wise
 Who look and see in starry skies
 Not stars so much as robin's eyes
 And when these pale away
 Hear flocks of shiny pleiades
 Among the plums and apple trees
 Sing in the summer day —

The song of all both high and low
 To some blest vision true,
 The song of beggars when they throw
 The crust of pity all men owe
 To hungry sparrows in the snow,
 Old beggars hungry too —
 The song of kings and kingdoms when
 They rise above their fortune men,
 And crown themselves anew, —

The song of courage, heart and will
 And gladness in a fight,
 Of men who face a hopeless hill
 With sparkling and delight,
 The bells and bells of song that ring
 Round banners of a cause or king
 From armies bleeding white —

The songs of sailors every one
 When monstrous tide and tempest run
 All ships like bulls at red,
 When stately ships are twirled and spun
 Like whipping-tops and help there's none
 And mighty ships ten thousand ton
 Go down like lumps of lead. —

And songs of fighters stern as they
 At odds with fortune night and day,
 Crammed up in cities grim and grey
 As thick as bees in hives,
 Horannas of a lowly throng
 Who sing unconscious of their song,
 Whose lips are in their lives—

And song of some at holy war
 With spells and ghouls more dread by far
 Than deadly seas and cities are,
 Or hordes of quarrelling kings—
 The song of fighters great and small,
 The song of pretty fighters all,
 And high heroic things—

The song of lovers — who knows how
 Twisted up from place and time
 Upon a sigh, a blush, a vow,
 A curve or hue of cheek or brow,
 Borne up and off from here and now
 Into the void sublime!
 And crying loves and passions still
 In every key from soft to shrill
 And numbers never done,
 Dog-loyalties to faith and friend,
 And loves like Ruth's of old no end,
 And intermission none —

And burst on burst for beauty and
 For numbers not behind,
 From men whose love of motherland
 Is like a dog's for one dear hand,
 Sole, selfless, boundless, blind —
 And song of some with hearts beside
 For men and sorrows far and wide,
 Who watch the world with pity and pride
 And warm to all mankind —

And endless joyous music rise
 From children at their play,
 And endless soaring lullabies
 From happy, happy mothers' eyes,
 And answering crows and baby cries,
 How many who shall say!
 And many a song as wondrous well
 With pangs and sweets intolerable
 From lonely hearths too gray to tell,
 God knows how utter gray!
 And song from many a house of care
 When pain has forced a footing there
 And there's a Darkness on the stair
 Will not be turned away —

And song — that song whose singers come
 With old kind tales of pity from
 The Great Compassion's lips,
 That makes the bells of Heaven to peal
 Round pillows frosty with the feel
 Of Death's cold finger tips —

The song of men all sorts and kinds,
 As many tempers, moods and minds
 As leaves are on a tree,
 As many faiths and casts and creeds,
 As many human bloods and breeds
 As in the world may be;

The song of each and all who gaze
 On Beauty in her naked blaze,
 Or see her dimly in a haze,
 Or get her light in fitful rays
 And tiniest needles even,
 The song of all not wholly dark,
 Not wholly sunk in stupor stark
 Too deep for groping Heaven —

And alleluias sweet and clear
 And wild with beauty men mishear,
 From choirs of song as near and dear
 To Paradise as they,
 The everlasting pipe and flute
 Of wind and sea and bird and brute,
 And lips deaf men imagine mute
 In wood and stone and clay;

The music of a lion strong
 That shakes a hill a whole night long,
 As loud as he,
 The twitter of a mouse among
 Melodious greenery,
 The ruby's and the rainbow's song,
 The nightingale's — all three,
 The song of life that wells and flows
 From every leopard, lark and rose
 And everything that gleams or goes
 Lacklustre in the sea.

I heard it all, each, every note
 Of every lung and tongue and throat,
 Lay, every rhythm and rhyme
 Of everything that lives and loves
 And upward, ever upward moves
 From lowly to sublime!

Earth's multitudinous Sons of Light,
 I heard them lift their lyric might
 With each and every chanting sprite
 That lit the sky that wondrous night
 As far as eye could climb!

I heard it all, I heard the whole
 Harmonious hymn of being roll
 Up through the chapel of my soul
 And at the altar die,
 And in the awful quiet then
 Myself I heard Amen, Amen,
 Amen I heard me cry!

I heard it all, and then although
 I caught my flying senses, oh,
 A dizzy man was I!

I stood and stared; the sky was lit,
 The sky was stars all over it,
 I stood, I know not why,
 Without a wish, without a will,
 I stood upon that silent hill
 And stared into the sky until
 My eyes were blind with stars, and still
 I stared into the sky.