

SONNETS

OUTWARD BOUND

Doors slam ; men shout and whistle ; the wheels turn !
We are astir at last for Paradise !
Through the Kent towns (one dearest !) the train flies,
Glorious with summer ; soon from the ship's stern
We watch the cliffs of England melt and burn
Into forgetfulness, and face the rise
And whisk of spray flung headlong in our eyes,
Hilarious sharp salute to our return.

Clanking the iron leagues, as darkness falls,
We speed, refreshed and mellowed with the fare
Of France, so wise and welcoming ; the air
Tingles our night-worn faces, and instals
The first clean hint of mountain height, till there
We rest at length within the towering walls.

ZERO HOUR

Impenetrable dark ! Outside the inn
Only a lantern-flicker stabs the cold.
With food unpalatable half-consoled
We shuffle on the track ; and now begin
Those monstrous irritations, which some Djinn
Or Demon has contrived : the overbold
Plunge into water holes, and all the old
Tricks of the rucksack ; tempers wearing thin.

Well might one ask, ' Why choose to undergo
Such purgatory ? ' When the steely sky
Swells into mauve, and flings her pageantry
About the sailing summits, and the glow
Of sunshine strikes us home ; ah, then we know
That tribulation has her victory.

THE ASCENT

Press to the summit ! High the granite pile
Mounts into streaks and arrowy threads of snow,
Red-royal causeway, mid the seething glow
Of dancing glaciers sunbewitched the while.

Such glorious work ahead would wrest a smile
 Even from the sourest waverer ; blow by blow
 The ice tracks climb, and the tall ramparts throw
 Cool shadows down to cheer the mounting file.

The clefts and ledges, slowly overcome
 Linger beneath us, as the hours slip by,
 Further and further downwards ; and the hum
 Of voices now expectant breaks the dumb
 Routine of toil. Now close before the eye
 The cairn's broad level platform rides on high.

THE SUMMIT

No word can tell how blessed is this repose,
 Cradled in liquid sunshine and blue air,
 Where not one light wind ventilates, to tear
 A coil of rising pipe-smoke. Thus to close
 The door of toil and hazard, and to doze
 Half dreaming in the daylight, is a fair
 Rich guerdon for the hardship and the care,
 Jars and discomforts, melted now as snows.

And o'er the sleeping body's sense there steals
 The distant triumph song of heroes old,
 Strange strains of faery music manifold ;
 While now the clear-eyed soul awakened feels
 The throb and pulse and the eternal peals
 Of all the heavenly concord's chime of gold.

THE STORM

A cloud as a man's hand, a sudden chill,
 And a quick flurry of snow across the gloom !
 Vanished the happy sun-dream ! Little room
 Is now for loitering. Slithery snow-slabs fill
 The holds and stances ; stones and torrents spill
 From every gully, while the echoes boom
 Of death and danger uttering final doom
 Upon the climbers, whose undaunted will

Calls upon heart and sinew, not in vain,
 And skill and long apprenticeship, to show
 Their quality. At last the vapours grow
 Thinner across the drab white glacier's plain ;
 In sight, the murky welcoming moraine,
 And thoughts of pleasant pastures far below !

JOURNEY'S END

The grey-slag wisp of track behind, we gain
Once more the high green terraces ; when lo !
Scattering the mist, the sun, now late and low,
Lights up new gleams, and many a shadow-vein.
And as the flowers set free from chilling rain
Uncurl their tender faces to the glow,
So, too, the climbers, haggard, tired, and slow,
Renew their spirits and fair hopes again.

Through purple evening to the valley floor,
Down many a winding steep and rocky stair,
Into the twilight's cool and humid air
Quietly on we trudge, at the heart's core
Deeply contented. Soon the hostel door
Welcomes with light and shelter and good fare.

ENVOI

Sunset and silence and the star-sown lake
Entrance the lingering moments of farewell ;
As though the light note of a silver bell
Might from some crystal fastness echoes wake.
Homeward we turn, contented now to take,
Locked safe within the soul, and cherished well,
Treasure, and daily bread, and a sure spell
To calm the fitful fevers of daybreak.

For when the mind may turn from toil and care
To the dear vision of eternal snows,
Battle again with stalwart mountain foes,
Happy in trusted comradeship to share ;
Down the long avenues of duty bare
Again the keen clear wind of purpose blows.

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