

Classic Poetry Series

Bernard Gutteridge

- poems -

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Bernard Gutteridge(1916 - 1985)

Bernard Gutteridge (1916 – 1985) was an English poet, known for poems about the Spanish Civil War, or from his World War II experiences in Madagascar, India and with the 36th Division of the British Army in Burma (with Alun Lewis).

He was born in Southampton and educated at Cranleigh. He worked in advertising both before and after the war (part of the time for the J. Walter Thompson agency). His 1954 novel *The Agency Game* is set in the advertising world.

Man Into A Churchyard

He comes unknown and heard and stands there
Breathes there hardly and hands grip
Flesh and walking stick. Skips over mounds
To land flat footed in a bowl of roses.

Flicks at the crazy gravestones
Spitting loud desires wood crosses for himself:
Heaves them up with laughter to hang them,
Dangling on the atheist's fig tree.

Handsprings through the open door,
Signs with a swastika on the visitors' book
And goes through the shut iron gate
With a pansy in his buttonhole.

Bernard Gutteridge

Sniper

Moves in the rocks with inching fingers.
We among the feathery banana trees
Imagine for him his aim: the steel helmet
And English face filling the backsight's V.
Again as it was last time, that spurting noise,
Thud, and the writhing figure in long grass.
until we match precision with precision:
We move ten men to one and have him then.

I saw the sniper in the afternoon. The rifle
Lay there beside him neatly like his shooting,
The grass twined all about his cap.
He had killed neatly but we had set
Ten men about him to write death in jags
Cutting and spoiling on his face and broken body.

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