

Classic Poetry Series

Ernest O'Ferrall
- poems -

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Ernest O'Ferrall()

The Mad Poet

'I am the sun!' the poet yelled,
And danced upon the strand.
'I am the sun!' He tightly held
Some money in his hand;
'I gild the clouds with good red gold
Each evening when I sink!
'Tis better far, so I am told,
Than spending it on drink!'

'I am the moon!' he shouted then,
And leaped with joy insane.
'I spill my silver freely when
I've earned it with my brain;
It floats on water easily
And winks up at the stars;
I'll rather dropp it in the sea
Than in the private bars!'

'Observe me gild the clouds!' (He cast
A gold coin at the blue.)
'Here's moonlight!' (And a shilling passed
And fell the sea into.)
'That's all I've got,' the madman said;
'Now, honest people, mark!
You'd better all go home to bed
The whole world now is dark!'

Ernest O'Ferrall

The Man Next Door

Fragments of song around me lie,
Fair ballads of delight,
Sweet things an editor would buy
And treasure at first sight;
All broken now, they're but a heap
Of paper on the floor.
(Some night, armed with an axe, I'll leap
Upon the fiend next door!)

Whene'er a verse I try to write,
Or spin a story gay,
There comes a howling in the night
That chases thought away;
Then, throwing down the pen, I call
Down curses on his roar.
(Some night, with daggers three, I'll fall
On him who shrieks next door!)

If I am feeling fit and well,
And forth the inkpot bring,
He gives a wild and dismal yell
And starts his bellowing.
I glare upon him from above
As round his room he prowls,
While all the songs I most do love
He mangles into howls.

The golden guineas fade away,
The bailiff waits without;
I curse each agonising bray,
I curse each empty shout;
My pen is still, my brain is numb,
My senses sick and sore.
(I've asked for something swift to come
And slay the Noise next door!)

Ernest O'Ferrall

The Poet

To be a poet is to bring
A furrowed brow, a piece of string,
And pen and ink and paper white Into a lonely room at night,
And, while the wingéd hours do fly,
To write a rhyme a crown will buy.
Whereas, when first ye sat ye down,
Ye dreamed the rhyme would buy a crown.

To be a poet is to owe,
And here and there in stealth to go;
To fly on swift impassioned feet
From wrathful traders in the street;
For odes and lyrics, tho' they be
Exquisite, are not currency.
No butcher will an MS. take
As fair exchange for good rump steak.

To be a poet is to graze
Old Pegagusus for many days
Upon the dismal fields of hash,
And afterwards to flog and lash
The ancient steed, who loudly squeals,
And spurns the paper with his heels,
Till he arrives, foam-splashed and spent,
Where the ode ends that pays the rent.

To be a poet, I'm afraid,
Is but a sorry sort of trade.
The poet never can compete
With grocers who sell things to eat;
And golden dreams, and visions bright,
Will never stay an appetite.
Likewise the yearnings of the soul
Don't equal one small sausage-roll.

Ah! often from my attic high
I've watched banana-men go by.
And thought how vain 'twould be to shove
A truck piled high with odes to Love,

And lyrics sweet, and sonnets too,
About the suburbs, as they do
The yellow fruit we know so well,
Which seems so readily to sell.

He is a wretched fool indeed
Who yearns the intellect to feed.
A poet cannot sink his teeth Into the freshest laurel-wreath.
Oft, when from lodgings I've been sent,
I've thought 'There's little nourishment
In writing verse. At any price,
A poem is but food for mice.'

Ernest O'Ferrall

The Settled Bards

These be the grim suburban days,
And, tho' in verse we frolic,
All soberly we go our ways
Writing our sweet commercial lays
And any sort of stuff that pays
(Our Johnnie's got the colic).

When Omar was our guiding star
We drank and quoted gaily,
But Middle Age said 'Here you are!'
And now we live in suburbs far,
And watch the fleeting railway car,
And rush to catch it daily.

We're settled down and going bald,
And when we sit at table
The wife recites the Ones Who've Called
(Some years ago it would have palled,
But - Pegasus is snugly stalled
And champing in his stable).

We've done with dreams - we've done with drinks
(Could anything be stranger!)
And when we ask Peg. thro' the chinks
Of his abode just what he thinks,
The old steed whisks his tail, and winks
Into his well-filled manger.

Ernest O'Ferrall

The Victor

A fierce, gray wind blows out of the north,
And the ghosts go forth in pairs.
The ARGUS rises in holy wrath
And the lodger falls down the stairs.

The crimson eye of the candle wick
Looks out of its cowl of flame;
A bailiff pounds with a heavy stick,
And calleth aloud my name.

I see no gold in the inkpot dry
(I KNOW there's none in my purse),
And so I list to his hopeless sigh,
And hearken unto his curse.

And then I mount to the fanlight high,
And gaze on his want of hair;
On bended knee he hath glued his eye
To the lock! The KEY is there!

But he stareth in with all his soul,
Like the ghost the gods desise,
That glares for ever through some small hole
In the gate of Paradise.

I marvel much how he keeps so fat,
And what is his lordly fee;
But what I really feel flattered at
Is his kneeling down to ME!

A bailiff stout is a noble sight,
While I am a poet small;
And yet - hath he not this very night
Knelt down in my dusty hall!

I'll spare - as a victor may - his life
And let him depart in peace,
Tho' I might have flung a paper-knife
And given his soul release!

An evil wind blows out of the north,
And the ghosts walk hand in hand;
The ARGUS rises in holy wrath,
And is hard to understand.

Ernest O'Ferrall