

..... The
Blind Soldier
and Other Poems



BY
JOHN LOCKE BRADFORD



THE
BLIND SOLDIER
AND
OTHER POEMS



By
JOHN LOCKE BRADFORD



To.
Mr + Mrs. D. G. Whidden
with kindest regards
from

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INTRODUCTION

ALL ye who read this humble book,
Frown not but bear with me a while,
Remembering that verses grave
Are often written with a smile;
And though the subject sorry be,
And to the joyful reader brings
Few merry thoughts to cheer him up,
—The world is full of sorry things.

Please do not scan these faulty lines
With criticism in your heart;
And if you find you can't approve
Of all, at least approve of part.
Just try to find a pretty thought
Somewhere: Look not for faulty verse;
And if at best you find it bad;
Be sure, dear friends, it might be worse!

THE BLIND SOLDIER

GOD, how hard I struggle and fight
To free myself from eternal night,
That I may see the morning light,
—The morning light.

Before my eyes old mem'ries dance;
If only I might have one chance,
I'd rest content to merely glance;—
—Dear morning light.

Nature, for me, has closed the door
On things I loved and saw before,
On things I'll see—ah nevermore,
Oh morning light.

But far ahead, I see the goal,
I count the years that onward roll,
For I have light within my soul;—
The Heavenly light.

“THE OLD HOMESTEAD”

Lockeport, N. S.

WITHIN, the embers brightly glow,
And tint my pallid face:
And on the mantelpiece, the clock
Ticks on with steady pace.

The flick'ring of each burning coal
Sends shafts of dancing light
Across the hearth rug, back and forth,
Dispersing shades of night.

Into each corner, dimly lit
Dull yellow by the lamp
The ruddy rays fast forward go
Into the foeman's camp.

The clock strikes on the mantelpiece;
Somewhere, an infant cries;
Upon a sofa, half in sleep,
A wearied sailor lies.

And in a rocking chair, with chin
Upon her breast, there sits
A white haired lady with her yarn,
Who rocks, and sighs, and knits.

Above, the rooms are cold and still;
Right still and cold each room;
Ay, cold and still, in silence like
The silence of the tomb.

Upstairs, where years and years ago,
Sweet childish voices rang
In merriment as children played
And romped and chaffed and sang.

Those were the days of youthful hope
And childish love affairs;
The good old days of childish joys,
Aloof from worldly cares.

Lost in the years that forward drive
The cowards with the brave
Through all life's stormy seasons to
A cold and cheerless grave.

Yet, do they live in memory,
If not in flesh and blood,
To ride along the endless years
Like sticks that ride the flood.

The same old lights still twinkle from
Each window in the town;
The same tide rises on the beach:
The same tide settles down.

The same bright sun shines on the sea
That shone in years gone by;—
At night, the same old smiling moon
Rides in the same old sky.

Not much has changed, that one can see,
Except that friends have gone;—
Have sailed to some far-distant Port
Where sunset meets the dawn.

Cranberry Island still stands out
Against the distant blue.
The many sheep that roamed its shores
Have dwindled down to few.

Its former owners lie secure
Beneath their mossy mounds,
Upon the hill that overlooks
The mainland's sloping grounds;—

That run down to the margin of
The little sandy beach,
Where year by year the driftwood piles
Beyond the Ocean's reach.

They hear no more the thund'rous roar
Of breakers on the shoal;
They lie so deep, they do not hear
The fog-bell's mournful toll.

On these estates they passed their days,
Each man the other's friend;
On these estates their bodies lie,—
Still, at the journey's end.

And there the little cabin stands
Built many years ago,
Upon the drifting sandy slopes
Where barren grasses grow

Upon the Northern section of
The rocky Island shore;
The South wind only enters now
Its long forsaken door.

Bull Island rears its bulky form
From out the restless deep;
Its owner of a year ago
Now lies in peaceful sleep.

And Carter's Light still twinkles bright
Above the ocean's floor;
The briny waves break into foam
Against its Island shore.

And 'round the Thrum Cap lines of waves
With mighty force strike home
Against its walls to fall again
Mid clouds of spray and foam.

From old Spy Rock, may well be seen
A force in constant motion,
Embodied in that heaving mass
The great Atlantic Ocean.

Old Lockeport, once a prosperous Port,
A prosp'rous Port remains;
But where are all the pioneers
Who walked its shady lanes—

Where now are all the prosp'rous men
Whose ships the four winds drove
Around the world?—tradition now,
Is all their treasure trove.

Its heroes once of commerce all
Have made themselves a name;
And one by one, have pass'd along
The halls of wealth and fame.

Its founders of the long ago,
Those giants of the past,
Have vanished into unknown realms
And found their rest at last.

Their name has lingered with the town;
Their images are thrust
Deep in the earth, where worldly hopes
Are mingled with the dust.

A PASSING CLOUD

I SAW a little cloud
A-drifting in the skies;
But as I looked, it vanished
Before my watchful eyes.

Its shadow lingered with me,
A ghost within my mind,
Like visions of the old friends
Who've left the world behind.

I pondered how its passing
Resembled man's career:—
So long and weary, yet so short,
So full of joy and fear.

And well it served its purpose
To demonstrate to me
How many still are with us
Whose forms we cannot see.

* THE NORTHLAND

OH take me back to the Northland,
Beneath the Polar Star;
Where the cold North wind is blowing,
—A blowing from afar.

Where the ice-bound Arctic Ocean
Gives off a mystic glow;
And a silent moon broods over
A wilderness of snow.

Where the Northern Lights are playing,
And swinging in the sky;
As the Great God Jehovah flings
His opals from on high.

Where ravenous wolves are howling
Along a lonely trail;
And herds of Reindeer forward press
Against a Northern gale.

In the vast and silent Northland,
Where brave men live and die,
And o'er their tombs, the swaying pines
Forever sob and sigh.

To the land of deathlike silence,
Land of the Midnight Sun,
Land of the creaking dog-sledge,
The snow-shoe and the gun.

* Written in San Antonio, Texas, May, 1920.


To the land of lonely Trappers,
Land of the Golden Fleece;
To the land of many wonders,
Land of eternal peace,

Where many moose and polar bears
Their lonely vigils keep,
Beside the graves of mighty men
Wrapt in eternal sleep.

Ah, take me back to the Northland,
Where brave men do and dare;
And when the Northern Lights are bright
I want to die out there.

WINTER IN FLANDERS FIELDS

IN Flanders Fields our men lie dead
Who for their country fought and bled;
And all the crosses, row on row,
Are buried deep beneath the snow
That lies upon their earthen bed.
They are The Dead. The winds that blow
Disturb them not who lie below,
Disturb them not who nobly bled
In Flanders Fields.
The earth that once with blood was red,
Torn up with iron shells and lead,
Is cleansed with sparkling drifts of snow,
Though now no scarlet poppies blow
Over the graves of the sleeping dead
In Flanders Fields.



“THE FROST KING”

ALAS, dear friends, the Frost King has arrived
Clad in the North Wind from the Polar Zone
With all its driving snow and hail and sleet,
And yet, methinks, he travels not alone;


For in his icy chariot, aglow,
By Reindeer drawn, who neither stop nor pause;
Unless my sight deceives me, I espy
The merry form of dear old Santa Claus.

His cheeks are like the roses in the Spring;
His nose is like the cherry in the Fall;
And in his bags of woven Reindeer hair,
He brings a little gift for one and all.

And soon, I know, he'll make his yearly rounds
Of all his friends, and bring them Christmas cheer,
And when he finds that death has claimed a friend;
Poor Santa Claus will shed a bitter tear.

Because, you see, our dear old Santa Claus
Lives on forever while the ages fly:
And so, it grieves him very much to see
His best acquaintances grow old and die.

But Santa wastes no time about his job;
His work is finished all by Christmas dawn,
And ere the sun has risen in the sky
Old Santa feeds his Reindeer and is gone.



Our friend the Frost King stays with us a while
To grip us in his cold and icy hand;
He whirls his frosty mantle 'round on high,
And sprinkles snow and ice throughout the land.

For he, the Frost King, rules alone, supreme,
A lonely and a frozen hearted King;
But you should see him abdicate the throne
Whene'er he meets the Queen of Golden Spring,

Who comes to bring the sunshine and the rose,
Who comes in all her glorious array
To beam upon his frigid countenance,
And chase the dazzled Frost King far away.

Nor does she give him time to pack his things,
But calls upon the Sun, her father bright,
Who frowns upon him from his lofty throne
And roasts the Monarch Cold with all his might.

The Frost King flees before his hot attack,
And leaves behind him all his garments gay
On which the merry sun shines clear and bright,
Until they all are melted quite away.




MARTHA

The Story of a Horse That Fell in Action
During the Great War.

I SAT upon my trusty steed,
My gallant steed, my noble steed;
And as I waited there I stroked
My Martha's glossy, silken mane:
And taking from my leathern pouch
A sugar lump that I had saved,
And forward leaning in the saddle,
Felt her take it from my fingers,
Felt her eager lips a-trembling
For the last time as we waited,
—Waited for the trumpet signal
That would send us speeding forward
—Forward to the foeman's forces:
—Perhaps into eternity.

Then, the trumpet blast was sounded,
And I felt my horse's body,
All her muscles moving swiftly,
Bear me ever forward, forward:
And I heard the rush and clatter
Of the heavy hoofs that pounded
Madly on the clay beneath us:
—Heard the shoutings of defiance
And the oaths of maddened Soldiers,
Faintly, as a man who's dreaming.



Then, I felt my Martha stagger;
Felt her muscles twitch and tremble:
Felt the speeding hoof-beats slacken;
Felt her knees beneath her sinking;
Saw her life blood swiftly flowing;
Saw a pool of crimson spreading
Where she sank upon the ground.
Saw the sinking sun reflected
In her blood upon the ground.
Saw her wild eyes madly starting,
Blood shot in their sockets rolling;
Saw her straining muscles twitching,
As the death cloud gathered 'round.

And as the sun sank in the hills,
I stood beside my trusty steed,
My gallant steed, my noble steed;
And I watched the love light fading
From her kind eyes, sadly staring;
And I think she knew my sorrow,
Read the meaning of my tear drops,
As the mists closed in around her;
As I watched my Martha dying:
Watched my Martha slowly dying,
—Dying with the sinking sun.

"LAMENT OF A LONELY SOUL"

FRIENDS, my abode's just off the road,
A mile or so from here;
Upon a hill, where all is still
Except my heart, I fear.

My eyes are red with tears unshed;
My heart is long since numb.
I watch the road from my abode,
For one who does not come.

He sailed away, one summer's day,
Across the windy sea;
I sit and nod, and pray that God
Will send him back to me.

I don't believe that he would leave
His Mother all alone;
And so I sit, and nod and knit,
While summer breezes moan.

And seem to say, "some time, some day,
You'll meet your son again."
But I must wait, and ever pray,
And rack my weary brain.

Some say I'm queer, because I hear
His voice ring in my ears;
Alone they leave me home to grieve,
And shed my bitter tears.

I see his eyes up in the skies
In ev'ry star that gleams;
And every night, he comes to kiss
These poor lips in my dreams.

I'd like to sleep in slumber deep,
Where sweet dreams n'er depart:
Nor wake again to feel the pain
Of my poor aching heart.

Curs'd be the war that made me poor;
That robbed me of life's fun;
For what is gold when one is old
And hasn't any son?

Oh, what is life when all is strife,
When sorrow slaughters joy:
When death has claimed and killed and
maimed
Your only darling boy?

You would not care, or wish to share
With me my lonely part.
There's one thing, friend, you cannot mend,
And that's a broken heart.

If I in death could feel his breath
Upon my cheek once more,
I would with song then pass along,
And softly close the door.

“SKYWARD”

SKYWARD to a distant star
I turn my wand'ring gaze afar;
There I see a twinkling light,
Twinkling ever clear and bright;
And around it, coursing free,
Like a City by the sea,
A million twinkling specks of light
That seem to rule the silent night.

Yet, there is one, quite out of tune
With all the rest:—the barren moon
That stands aloof and quite alone,
Its smiling face like graven stone:
Its winning smile, so bright and clear,
Fills Lovers' hearts with goodly cheer.
And children who know nought of grief,
Of't think they see its shining teeth,
Or see its form with laughter quake;
—Its fat cheeks into dimples break.

Yet, there are some whose failing sight
Is less accustomed to the night;
Among them those who, growing old,
Have long since spent youth's dreamland gold;
Who see his smile without the cheer,
But see instead a mocking sneer;
Who wish again for strength and youth,
And chance to find life's golden truth;
Whose hearts are filled with longing pain
That they might live their lives again.

“THE DEAD”

'T WAS here in Flanders Fields I died,
'Tis here I wish to lie;
Here with my comrades, side by side,
—With comrades, thigh to thigh.

'Twas on this sacred ground mine eyes
Fast closed in slumber deep;
I charge you, do not break the ties
Of comrades lost in sleep!

Our souls can span more oceans, far,
Than mankind ever dreams;
Our eyes are in the morning star;—
In every star that gleams.

We are the living!—You the dead!
Though our poor bodies lie
Deep under fields that once were red,
Yet shall we never die.

So do not delve beneath this mound
Where worldly troubles cease,
But leave our bones in hallow'd ground
—In quiet and in peace.

“SENORITA”

AH, my little Senorita,
How I love your raven hair,
Falling like a silken framework
'Round your pretty face so fair.

Ah, my little Senorita,
How I love your flashing eyes,
Which, black as coal yet gleam to me
With opal tints of Tropic skies.

Ah, my little Senorita,
How I love your ruby lips:
Ruby like the wine a Monarch
In his Palace slowly sips.

Hear me, little Senorita,
Hear me while I play a tune;
Sit with me beneath a palm tree
While I play and softly croon.

Hear me, while I sing my love songs;
Watch me with your lovely eyes,
While I waft my songs of passion
And defiance to the skies.

Love me, little Senorita,
And the whole world will be thine;
Love me, little Senorita,
And the heavens shall be mine.

Love me, little Senorita,
And my songs shall reach the sky;
Say me nay and there is nothing
Left your Senor, but to die.

Love me, little Senorita,
And the whole world I will give;
Love me, little Senorita,
For your Senor wants to live.

You are smiling, Senorita:
—Now I know your love is true;
Si, si,—Caramba! I will buy me
An Adobe House for two.

“A KISS”

NOW see if you can tell me this,
What, Oh, what's the shape of a kiss?
But perhaps my question's not quite fair,
So give me one, and we'll call it square.

LAMENT OF AN ARMENIAN REFUGEE

THERE is no pity in this wicked world
Where men live but to die;
Curs'd be the day that in it we were hurled,
For life is all a lie!
Bless'd be the day when we like worn flags furl'd,
Are one by one laid by.

There is no mercy on this tainted earth,
Where all men smile and hate;
Curs'd be the hatred hidden neath their mirth,
And may that curse be great!
E'en though a man can prove his worldly worth,
He cannot read his fate.

There is no laughter in this sorry life,
Where men and women smirk,
And talk, and plot, and stir up human strife
Where joyous thoughts would lurk;
Where sorrow, sharper than the sharpest knif
Is their reward for work.

And none may win out in this sorry race,
Though each may play his part;
Faster and faster grows life's quick'ning pace,
No matter where we start;
And our reward is either black disgrace,
Or worse,—a broken heart.

Some think they find a little glad respite,
But some hearts still must ache;
Some in the darkness seem to see a light
And follow in its wake;
Some work and struggle on with all their might;—
Some give, and others take.

There is no love within this sorry world,
And I would gladly rend
The lips that with a mirthless smile are curled,
Or, with an honest friend,
If such there be, stand by this suff'ring world
And face the bitter end.

Perhaps, somewhere there is a peaceful land,
Where labour honest folk.
But I can only smell on every hand
The fumes of battle smoke,
Where poor Armenia and her noble band
Bow neath the Turkish yoke.

THE GREATEST ARTIST

YOU often hear folk say of one,
"He is the greatest artist living,"
Referring to a painter great
Or to a singer praises giving.

Yet, are they most forgetful folk,
Thus speaking of their human kind;
To me, at least, it seems quite plain,
They do not bear their God in mind.

A PEON'S LOVE SONG

OH, the Mexican moon is shining bright,
And the Artist's skill defies;
The Mexican moon is silvery white,
And illuminates the skies.
And from over the hills and far away
I can hear the jungle cries.

Oh, the Mexican moon lights hill and dale,
And our tents are gleaming white,
And from distant lagoons, a mournful wail
Breaks in on the tropic night,
And if you could see both mountain and vale,
You would see a wondrous sight.

A Peon is sitting under a palm
With his eyes closed as in sleep;
But the song he's singing is not a psalm,
Though solemn his thought and deep;
Yet his voice is strong and his features calm
As he squats in a huddled heap.

He twangs his guitar as his love songs rise,
While his heart beats loud and fast,
And he fervently blinks his cat-like eyes
While plans are moulded and cast
Within his brain, as sweet visions arise
Of enemies dead at last.

And as he sings on, he pictures his foe,
And stops to feel for his knife;
He pictures his heart, and a wound below,
That will cost the man his life:
And chuckles with glee, as he plans the blow,
And covets the victim's wife.

The Mexican moon has sunk out of sight;
And the sun is fierce and hot;
An adobe house white stands clear and bright
And a Peon there lies shot.
Yes, this is the songster, who sang in the night
And death on himself has brought.

And the wife he coveted, tall and slim,
Stands with a face that is grave;
For her heart is sad, and she grieves for him,
And weeps for the stricken knave.
Her tears are not shed for the Peon grim
But for the soul that was brave.

The Minstrel's song had haunted the night,
And at coming of the dawn
The husband arose in the hazy light
And buckled his holsters on;
So she followed him out and watched him fight
Until his strength was gone.

With labouring breath at the coming of day,
Sore wounded, she saw him fight
Till her husband filched his poor life away
With his gun that glistened bright;
And her heart went out to the man who strove
And died in a hopeless fight.

THE REFUGEE

DEEP shadows falling over hill and vale,
Filling the valleys with a darkening gloom,
Stir in me here, upon the lonely hills,
A shrinking from a vague, but certain doom.

Vast are the hills and valleys that I see,
With gloomy caverns deep, and meadows broad;
But whither shall I wend my weary way,
Perchance to hide my guilty face from God?

Who knows a place where I may dig a hole,
And hide within, far down, life's bitter cup,
Deep under mother earth, with all my sins,
And God not come again and dig them up?

Where lies the dungeon, dark and deep enough,
In which to cast my conscience ere I flee
Afar from it, into a distant land,
So far, that it shall never follow me?


Who knows a future vast enough in which
To cast aside the shackles of the past,
And leaving them behind, begin again,
From where long since we left off striving last?

And if from all the sorrows of this earth,
I sought out my release in death, and fled,
Would not Almighty God stretch forth his arm,
To me, and raise me to him from the dead?

And when we strike the trail that leads us out
From travail under loads of grief untold
To carry to the grave the lead of life,
What then, becomes of all life's yellow gold?

Man cannot hide his shameful face from God,
And efforts to retrace life's steps are vain;
The road is long, but when we reach the end,
We shall not travel over it again.





THE VETERAN

O H, I'm a Veteran of the war,
Oh, I'm a Soldier bold;
Although the story of my deeds
Has never yet been told.

I fought upon the soil of France
Just after war began;
In each retreat, I found my feet,
And swiftly then I ran.


I was a Flying Officer;
I made a famous flight
From Paris to the Channel Shore:
I ran throughout the night.

Oh, nobody can me accuse,
Of righteous duty shunning;
For I in France have spent four years
Continually running.

And all the medals that I won,
I cannot here repeat;
Except that they awarded were
For valorous retreat.

For conduct quite distinguished, I
Was sentenced to detention,
And therefore, could not fail to be
Awarded "Special Mention."

The stress of those unhappy days,
Has left me sick and sore;
I'm fighting still, because you see,
I've married since the war.



I thought that I had quite atoned
For all my former sins;
But now I am the Father of
A pair of fighting twins.

TARNISHED TINSEL

O H, it's practice that makes perfect,
In any art or vice;
Though many formal practices
Are anything but nice.

A pretty star-shaped beauty spot
Is rather cute and quaint,
Upon a lady's face, but oh!
How I do loathe that paint.

Over the use of powder-puffs,
I do not muchly grieve;
Though more in place on lady's face
Than on a poor man's sleeve.

Although the ladies like these things,
There's one thing I must say;
I hate to see a fairy face
Quite ruined in this way.

If we must spend with painted face,
Our poor devoted lives;
No wonder that so many men
Are glad to leave their wives.

Before I wed, I want to know,
Though I am far from Saint,
Just how much girl I'm marrying,
And how much more is paint.

“THE WISDOM OF A LILY”

A LILY once said unto me
One gorgeous summer's day:
“Lo, I have come into this world,
A little while to stay.”

“I am no use to anyone,
Except that I am fair,
And I would look quite lovely in
Some handsome lady's hair.”

“But even so, if I can cheer
A lonely human heart,
E'en though I die, I will have played
A good and noble part.”

And hearing this, I stopped to think
What I myself had done;
If I had ever tried to cheer
The heart of anyone.

And I confess, that lily white,
Most beautiful to see,
Taught me a lesson that has brought
Great happiness to me.

“THE LAST POST”

HE sat, fast writing at his desk:
A man of eighty years;
Who knew the burdens of this life:
Who knew its smiles and tears.

He sat, fast writing at his desk,
And stormy grew the night.
He did not see the form that stood
Behind him, gleaming white.

He did not see the peaceful face,
Nor see the pearly throat,
Nor see the outstretched wings of her
Who watched him as he wrote.

He did not see her drawing near:
He did not feel her breath
Upon his cheek as her white wings
Encircled him in death.

And on the morrow, he was found
Still sitting, by a friend,
Who joyous was because this man
Was faithful to the end.

We need not grieve one little bit,
E'en for the dearest friend,
Who dies as this man died,—at work
And faithful to the end.



“THE END”

A WHITE hair'd man lay dying,
Stretched out upon his bed:
With a pillow white as snow
Beneath his snowy head.
His friends in silence round him,
Harken'd to what he said.

And when his voice fell silent:
Sounds came on the breeze,
Like a mighty hurricane
Sweeping through the trees.

And those who stood around him,
Heard the thunder peal;
Heard Death's speeding chariot;
Heard each rumbling wheel.

Heard the panting of the horses;
Heard the creaking gear;
Felt the room around them tremble,
And were fill'd with fear.

His head sank on the pillow;
And while the storm fled by
Loud shrieking in the tree tops,
They heard his parting cry,—

As the driver drew his spirit
Up beside him in the car,
And his foaming steeds sped onward
To a far off twinkling star.